

international
VIEWPOINT
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**Ireland: Peace
at any price?**

Israel State terrorism

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All good things must come to an end...

As we announced last month, we are obliged to raise our subscription price. Despite impressive fund-raising efforts in 1995, and a reduction in price following our shift to a Greek printer, International Viewpoint is still losing money.

This is no surprise. Other left wing magazines orient content and price to a single national market. We serve a global audience, from a modest office in Paris. And we have always adapted our price to the standard of living in the countries where most of our readers live. The prices given below are part of a plan to bring our deficit under control, without cutting the unique service we provide. There is no alternative.

A number of readers will not be able to afford the new rates. To compensate for this, we need those of you who can afford it to give more than the published subscription rate. Or to pledge a regular sum to help the magazine reach militants in other countries.

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The editors

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Lebanese blood oils Israeli elections

The real terrorists in southern Lebanon are the Israeli occupation force and their local mercenaries.

Three invasions and eighteen years of occupation of the border zone have only fortified the Lebanese resistance.

Salah Jaber



THE PALESTINIANS ARE NOT THE only victims of the Zionist enterprise. So are the Lebanese. Over the last few years, their degree of suffering has become comparable to that of those Palestinians in Jordanian and Lebanese exile, who have suffered the most atrocities, adding to their uprooting. Lebanese suffering is often forgotten: many messages of solidarity during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 failed to mention the host population among the victims. .

The creation by force of the Zionist colonial state in 1948 involved only marginal incursions into South Lebanese territory. But the country immediately faced the influx of tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees, uprooted, expelled and penniless.

These refugees formed a very specific element in the rural exodus which generated, in the 1950s and 1960s, massive slums round the country's major towns. Particularly the capital, Beirut, which became the home of half the population.

Lebanon stayed out of the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. But the country paid a higher price for the Arab defeat than any other country. This was because Lebanon, with Jordan hosted most of the bases and positions of the various Palestinian armed forces. These forces increased rapidly after the 1967 defeat. They came to represent a state within the state. In Jordan, King Hussein soon repressed the Palestinian resistance in the

terrible 1970 "Black September" blood bath. Israel put sharp pressure on the Lebanese government to do the same. In December 1968, Israel destroyed a number of aeroplanes at Beirut airport as a warning, thus beginning a long series of military interventions.

The problem was not a lack of desire from the part of the Lebanese government. And certainly not an exhibition of steadfastness. The reality was that Beirut was quite unable to impose its control on the Palestinian resistance on Lebanese territory. It tried, on several occasions, particularly in southern Lebanon, from where the Palestinian commandos organised their missions into Israel, and from where they fired shells across the border.

The weakness of the Lebanese army, compared to the forces controlled by King Hussein of Jordan, was one factor in the government's impotence. Another was its own lack of cohesion, faced with a population which, in its majority, felt deep solidarity with the Palestinians. This feeling was shared

by most Muslim Lebanese, and the left-wing component of the Christian population.

The 1969 agreement between the Lebanese army and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) imposed restrictions on Palestinian activities in most of the country, but accepted their relative autonomy in the south of the country, which came to be nicknamed "Fatahland," after Yasser Arafat's organisation, the dominant faction in the PLO.

Collective punishment

South Lebanon became the regular target of Israeli artillery and airborne destruction. The aim was to destroy the Palestinian bases, but also, simultaneously, to try to turn the local population against the Palestinians. This formed part of Israel's well-established policy of imposing collective punishment, in the occupied territories as well as Lebanon, since 1967. Each intervention across the border into northern Israel, and each rocket attack provoked a deluge of iron and explosives. Directed not just against the presumed point of origin of the Palestinian



resistance, but any neighbouring Lebanese villages. This violence was invariably accompanied by the air-distribution of thousands of leaflets exhorting the villagers to expel the fighters operating in their zone.

Without results. The civilian population, mainly Shi'ite Muslims tending to support the left in Lebanese politics, remained in solidarity with the Palestinians. Israel was unable to undo the virtual Lebanese-Palestinian osmosis in organisational and military affairs.

Israel's first invasion

In 1972 Israel escalated the conflict, invading southern Lebanon for the first time, then withdrawing, leaving behind it a stain of death and destruction. The Israeli threat to the Lebanese government increased. It became clear that, if Beirut did not take the Jordanian road in managing its "Palestinian problem," Israel would occupy southern Lebanon, adding yet another Arab territory to the trophy list assembled in 1967.

Beirut was also under pressure from the United States, and their local protégés, the Lebanese Phalange Party, the hardest force on the reactionary Christian right. The Lebanese government intervened against the Palestinians again in 1973, but failed to achieve its goals. The Lebanese army was obliged to suspend its military operations against the Palestinian camps, out of fear that the conflict would spread to the Lebanese population. The pro-Palestinian faction of the population had been mobilised.

Civil war

It was in this context that the Phalangists launched the Lebanese civil war. Twenty one years ago. The rest is history. Kissinger's Lebanese operation was a fiasco. The Lebanese army exploded. The local allies of Israel and the United States were almost defeated. Until their two patrons reluctantly allowed Syria to intervene in 1976.

The Palestinian military presence in southern Lebanon was by now greater than ever. The decomposing Lebanese state no longer had any control over the region. The PLO, its leftist Lebanese allies, and the Shi'ite Amal movement were in charge. Syria guaranteed a semblance of order in the rest of the country. But Israel refused to allow

Damascus to send troops any closer to Israel than a 'red line' marked by the Litani river.

The only solution left for the Zionist state was to try to solve the problem by itself. In 1978 Israel again invaded, driving everything before them, right up to the Litani line, 40 km into Lebanese territory. Israeli troops tried their hardest to "cleanse" the territory, before international pressure (UN Resolution 425) forced them to cede their place to a UN force, which took up a buffer position between Israel's self-awarded "security zone," and the rest of Lebanon, north of the Litani river.

Israel created a puppet Lebanese military force in South Lebanon, completely subordinate to the Israeli troops which remain in the zone (on the basis of regular incursions, rather than the maintenance of fixed bases). The resulting situation is a *de facto* annexation of a band of southern Lebanese territory by Israel, with a locally-hired mercenary army. In other words, a similar situation to the way Israel imagines the future of the "autonomous" Palestinian areas in the West Bank and Gaza.

This virtually annexed "frontier strip" actually increases the insecurity in northern Israel, rather than reduce it. Israel now faces not only Palestinian guerrilla operations, but the resistance of Lebanese anti-occupation forces. Even worse for Israel, the creation of the "security zone" has counteracted what disaffection towards the Palestinians Israeli collective punishment and PLO bureaucratic behaviour had provoked among the Shi'ite villagers of southern Lebanon. Popular resentment against the Zionist state continued to rise.

Peace for Galilee

In 1982, the Begin-Sharon government invaded Lebanon for the third time. Operation "Peace for Galilee" took Israeli tanks as far north as Beirut. The Israeli army almost neutralised the Palestinian forces in Lebanon, and weakened and disarmed most of the Lebanese left. The country paid a terrible price: 20,000 dead, and huge material damage. All of this could only increase hostility towards Israel.

The Zionist army was obliged to withdraw from Lebanon in 1985, in a move

generally perceived as its first "defeat". But this withdrawal was not the result of Palestinian military activities, but the Lebanese resistance. 1985 also saw a "camp war" between the Palestinian camps and the Lebanese Shi'ite militia Amal, sponsored by Syria. But the traditional role of the left as the vector of social and patriotic radicalisation against Israel was taken up, in a deformed way, by a new, Islamic fundamentalist Shi'ite organisation, Hezbollah. With strong support from the Iran of the ayatollahs.

Hizbullah managed to impose itself, at the price of violent confrontations with both Amal and the left. Like most of the region's Islamic fundamentalist organisations, Hezbollah developed a significant popular base, thanks to its social policy and activities. Financial support from Iran was obviously a great help. Hizbullah also enjoyed at least the tolerance of the Syrian regime, which had no intention of abandoning the Iran friendship card this side of a global settlement with Israel and its American sponsors.

Fortified with a semi-mystical spirit of sacrifice, Hizbullah proved a more effective combatant than the PLO had been. Particularly since Hizbullah is completely at home in southern Lebanon.

The war of attrition in southern Lebanon is now ten years old. With periods of truce, like the aftermath of the 1993 Washington-brokered accord. But also with moments of Israeli escalation of the conflict. Of which the current attacks are the strongest example so far. Whatever agreement puts an end to the current hostilities, the security of northern Israel will not be secured as long as Israel refuses to withdraw from southern Lebanon. Only a total withdrawal will allow the defusing of the resentment which Hizbullah has channelled, and permit the Lebanese army to take responsibility for effective control of the zone, in the framework of the Pax Zionista-Americana which is being installed across the region.

Israeli Premier Shimon Peres knows all this. But he could not resist the temptation to ensure his re-election later this month, even at the cost of a holocaust consuming hundreds of Lebanese civilians, and driving hundreds of thousands into exodus. He did so with the understanding and sympathy of western imperialism. Except for the mediated Qana massacre, which the west considered "regretable". As we saw in the Gulf War, "no blood on TV" is an important part of modern imperialist wars ★

Three Jerusalems?

Walid Salem describes the population's reaction to Hamas' suicide operations against Israel, and the repression of Islamic fundamentalists by Jasser Arafat's 'security services'.

Following the Hamas suicide attacks, the Israeli occupation forces erected barricades around each Palestinian town, and forbid our movement from rural zones into the towns. This closure was similar to the one imposed from 1948-1967, when Palestinians needed the permission of the Israeli military authorities to travel from one village to another. The total closure has been lifted, but it can be re-imposed at any time. The Taba Accords are making day-to-day life in Gaza and the West Bank more and more difficult.

The re-liberalisation of movement does not, of course, include our movement between the West Bank towns and Jerusalem. Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza have been forbidden from entering Jerusalem since 29 March 1993. Since then, Israel alternates between a partial and a total closure of Jerusalem. The partial closure allows a small number of Palestinians to enter Jerusalem, providing that they have a special permit issued by the Israeli military authority. Total closure bars even these Palestinians from Jerusalem. Israel considers Jerusalem to be the unified capital of Israel, and intends to isolate it from the West Bank, so as to facilitate its annexation.

The number of Jewish residents in East Jerusalem grew to 160,000 in 1995, compared to 155,000 Palestinians. In other words, a majority. Not to mention the 140,000 colonists in the West Bank, and 55,500 in Gaza.

The situation in Gaza is catastrophic since the latest shutdown. Fifty-five percent of the working population is unemployed. The 900,000 Palestinians are crowded onto 60% of the territory, while 55,500 Jewish colonists occupy the remaining 40%. Gaza (360 km²) has the highest population density in the world. There is not enough industry and agriculture to satisfy the elementary needs of the people. The only solution is to

go work in Israel. So the closure means increasing famine.

This latest closure cost Gaza residents over \$6 million every day. Seven patients died after their transfer to Israeli hospitals was refused. One woman had to give birth in the queue at the Iriz security gate: after four hours of labour, her baby was born dead.

As for the economic ("Paris") agreement, signed after the Oslo accords, Israel still refuses to respect its conditions, notably concerning the exportation of Palestinian products to Israel, Egypt and Jordan.



● Israel has demanded that the Palestinian authority smash Hamas

After these latest Hamas attacks, the Palestinian Authority (PA) negotiated with Israel to establish a list of people who would be arrested. The PA wanted to arrest Hamas' military leadership, but leave the political leadership intact. But Israel insisted on the arrest of all the movement's political activists too. They told Arafat that if he did not satisfy them, Israeli troops would enter Zone A (see article below) and do it themselves. The PA negotiated for a while, to save face, and in the hope of reaching an agreement with Hamas' political leadership. But, several days later, the PA found a way out. They "discovered" that a new secret Hamas organisation was attempting to de-stabilise the PA, and assassinate leading personalities. Their hunt for Hamas militants was therefore presented as a response to Hamas' hostility to the PA,

rather than a response to Israeli pressure.

Israel also demanded that the PA arrest 13 militants of other currents, including Ahmed Saadat, a Ramallah-based member of the Political Bureau of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Arafat did as requested, though the PA announced publicly that the 13 were arrested "to protect them from the risk of Israeli-sponsored assassination."

If he keeps obeying these Israeli diktats, Arafat risks being transformed into a simple state prosecutor acting under instruction from the Israeli Minister of the Interior. We can now see that Israel does not want to see an independent authority in the

West Bank, but a second Antoine Lahd (chief of the pro-Israeli militia in southern Lebanon).

● How has the Palestinian population reacted to these latest arrests?

There have been a few protests. Detainees' families have organised several sit-ins in front of the prisons and offices of the Red Cross in towns controlled by the PA. Demonstrations against the detentions at the university faculty at Naplus-Najah were brutally repressed by the Palestinian police.

● Have these arrests paralysed Hamas?

They have certainly dealt the movement a hard blow. The PA has uncovered arms caches, arrested militants, and collected a lot of information about the movement. But Hamas has already been politically weakened by the four splits which the PA has engineered over the last six months. Some

members split off to form three small parties (Islamic Front, Islamic Struggle Organisation, Islamic National Salvation Party), in each case after negotiations with Arafat. And, of course, there have been splits provoked by the internal divergences of the movement. The Gaza leadership of Hamas has adopted a "pacifist" line as far as the PA is concerned. But the West Bank leadership is divided between a group which is opposed to the PA as such, and a group which would welcome reconciliation with the PA. The external leadership, in Jordan, is very opposed not only to Israel but also to the PA.

One new development is the split in the Hamas military leadership between the Izdin Al Quassam brigades and the Followers of Yehya Ayash. After the second attack, Izdin Al Quassam announced that these actions represented the reaction to the assassination of Yehya Ayash. The next day, the Followers of Yehya Ayash announced that Izdin Al Quassam had no right to announce an end to operations, and said that they would continue.

So this is a difficult moment for Hamas.



Are these arrests a temporary measure, or is this a real attempt to eradicate the movement? The PA clearly won't release the military wing of Hamas, nor a part of the political wing. But the rest?

This still isn't clear. The Palestinian Authority doesn't respect any law. The various repressive bodies have total liberty to arrest whoever they wish, there is no legal limit on preventative detention, the courts and the judges hold night-time sessions, and both "judges" and "lawyers" are military officers, with no connection to the legal world.

The Council which was elected on 20 January 1996 has not modified this situation. It has not adopted legal rules of conduct which would be binding on the Palestinian Authority.

● **How has the Palestinian Human Rights League reacted to these arrests.**

This is an organisation founded by the Palestinian regime. But the presence of real jurists has brought it into partial conflict with

the Palestinian Authority concerning the application and respect of the laws. The League challenges certain arrests, and monitors a number of cases. Like the Palestinian Human Rights Information Centre in Jerusalem, the Human Rights Centre in Gaza, and the Gaza Institute for Rights and Justice.

There are initiatives for the creation of a human rights defence body which would include representatives of the various human rights bodies, and certain reformist personalities in the Council: those who are willing to say yes to democracy and no to repression. Bodies of this type have been established in Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

● **How has the Palestinian left reacted to the suicide attacks?**

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) supported these latest operations, considering them to be a form of intensification of the anti-colonial struggle. The left's recent activities have centred on two axes, organisation of meetings to protest the closure, and mobilisations and press conferences to demand the liberation of the latest detainees.

The two fronts are also trying to bring together all nationalists, including those in Fatah, to establish an "honour charter" fixing the conditions governing arrest, and eliminating violence and counter-violence in society.

In January the left boycotted the elections to the Council. But it does not exclude the possibility of contacts with members of the new council, where there is a joint interest in protecting democracy. The general goals remain the maintenance of the struggle against occupation, and for the consolidation of democracy.

In organisational terms, the PFLP has grown stronger these last three months, organising a new section in Gaza, starting to work on the question of detainees in Israeli prisons, and on issues of democracy. Recent regional conferences in Gaza and the West Bank have re-dynamised the organisation somewhat. The PFLP is stronger than the DFLP, though the second organisation is more homogeneous in organisational terms.

● **What is the future of the Palestinian Authority?**

In the coming months we will have the negotiations on the final status of the occupied territories. Talks are supposed to start on May 4th, but they will probably be

● **The Wrath of the Generals**

Michel Warshawsky explains why the war in southern Lebanon has flared up.

Hizbullah is a resistance movement in southern Lebanon. It is essentially shi'ite, and, unlike Hamas, has close links to Iran. Hizbullah is the strongest, best armed, and militarily speaking, the most efficient element in the struggle against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. The Israeli army has been ill at ease ever since Israel signed its accord with Hizbullah two years ago. This accord forbid both sides from bombing the civilian population, in Israel and in Lebanon. This put Israel in a difficult position, since the

accord did not forbid Hizbullah and the other Lebanese resistance organisations to continue their guerrilla activities in the Israeli security zone in southern Lebanon, which they justly consider to be Lebanese territory subject to Israeli aggression.

So the accord obliged the Israeli generals to live with this guerrilla activity, without being able to take the measures they considered necessary to combat Hizbullah and the Lebanese resistance. In other words, without being able to put pressure on the civilian

population in Beirut and northern Lebanon.

The resistance in southern Lebanon has been very effective these last 12 months, so the Israeli army began to feel that they had been put into an impossible position by the politicians. Israel was on the defensive, they felt, and there was a constant trickle of victims.

Of course, the Hezbollah offensive is the result of Israeli provocation and flagrant violations of the accord. ★ Michel Warshawsky works with the Alternative Information Center in Jerusalem

delayed until after the Israeli elections on 26 May 1996. These final status negotiations will deal with the issues of refugees, Jerusalem, the Israeli colonies and the Palestinian prisoners.

Israel will allow (selectively) family regroupment, but refuses totally the return of the four million Palestinian refugees. Only 1,500 refugees were allowed to return in 1995, out of the 6,000 which Israel pledged to accept under the Oslo accords.

Israel continues to claim the "unified and indivisible" city as its capital. All they are willing to negotiate is the joint management of the city's holy places (Christian, Moslem and Jewish) by a commission with Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian, Saudi, Moroccan and Vatican representatives. Arabs in East Jerusalem may have some cultural autonomy, and the Arab language would be taught in the separate Palestinian schools. They would also have the right to a municipal government, linked to the Israeli municipality.

Israel has, however, indicated that the Palestinians are welcome to build a new Jerusalem, outside the current city limits. The origin of this tasteless joke is Jordanian King Hassan's recent statement that "we need three towns named Jerusalem: an international Jerusalem incorporating the holy places, an Israeli Jerusalem, and a Palestinian Jerusalem."

A Likud (conservative party) victory in the upcoming Israeli elections will not change the current situation. And Labour proposes annexing 11% of the West Bank (along the Green Line separating "Israel" from the "occupied territories"). Over 70% of the settlers live in this 11%. Labour suggests that the rest of the West Bank be attached to Jordan in a kind of confederation. In other words, the Palestinian entity will have purely symbolic sovereignty. Any such Palestino-Jordanian political confederation would be linked in an economic confederation with Israel,

The situation is fairly black. The only way out is to stop the Oslo process, and to choose a strategy which has some chance of enabling the Palestinian people to establish their national rights. The first such option on offer is the military, Hamas strategy. A negative plan, which blocks any Palestinian campaign to persuade Israeli public opinion to accept a bi-national Palestino-Israeli state: which, after all, is the only just solution to the conflict.

The second strategy is the refusal of the Oslo accords through the non-violent mobilisation of the Palestinian masses, in an

attempt to create a new balance of forces on the ground. This also means mobilising the Jewish population. It means working together as two peoples who live on the same territory, and must create a bi-national state.

● The next step of Arafat's contract with Israel is the modification of the Palestinian National Charter

The Palestinian Authority is trying hard to keep its promise to Israel in this matter. The Taba Accords specify that the Charter must be modified [to remove any phrases challenging Israel's alleged right to exist as a separate state with secure borders: Ed.] within two months of the first meeting of the

Council of the Palestinian Authority. The Charter can only be amended by a 2/3 majority in the Palestinian National Council (PNC) [exile parliament: Ed.].

Arafat can get his majority: he has opted the members of the Council of the Palestinian Authority into the PNC with precisely this aim in mind. But, if he doesn't get his 2/3 majority to amend the existing Charter when the PNC meets in Gaza, Arafat will simply propose a new Charter or similar document. You can be sure that this new text will include no mention of armed struggle. ★

Walid Salem was interviewed for IV by Sonia Leith

The Contribution of Ernest Mandel to Marxist Theory

Seminar organized by the Ernest Mandel Study Centre
Amsterdam, July 4-6, 1996

Speakers: ● **Jesús Albarracín and Pedro Montes** (Economists, Bank of Spain): The theory of late capitalism as a Marxist interpretation of post-WW2 capitalism ● **Robin Blackburn** (Editor, *New Left Review*, London): The place of Ernest Mandel in the history of Marxist political thought ● **Alan Freeman** (Economist, University of Greenwich): Economic dynamics: Mandel's legacy ● **Michael Löwy** (Sociologist, CNRS, Paris): Ernest Mandel as a revolutionary humanist ● **Francisco Louça** (Economist, IESG-University of Lisbon): Ernest Mandel's contribution to the theory of long waves of capitalist development ● **Charles Post** (Historian, City University of New York): The theory of bureaucracy ● **Catherine Samary** (Economist, University of Paris XI): The conception of the transition to socialism ● **Enzo Traverso** (Political Scientist, University of Amiens): Ernest Mandel's vision of the relation between capitalism and barbarism.

All introductions and discussions in English.

For information about inexpensive accommodation and entrance fees and for registration forms (reservations necessary: due to space limitations only a limited number of people can attend): contact EMSC c/o IIRE, Postbus 53290, 1007 RG Amsterdam, The Netherlands. E-mail: IIRE@Antenna.nl Fax: (31 20) 6732106. © 6717263

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Turkey's military accord with Israel

The recently-signed Turkish-Israeli military accord is transforming the balance of forces in the Middle East. This new pro-imperialist axis, with a democratic facade, competes with the Irano-Syrian axis: out of favour with imperialism, but without the vaguest of democratic credentials. The main victims of the growing tension between these two axes are the Palestinians and the Kurds: held in hostage by both sides.

Erdal Tan

TURKEY AND ISRAEL HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ON good relations. But "Moslem" Turkey used to be more discreet. The Ankara regime had no desire to confront the Arab world by publicly renouncing solidarity with the Palestinian cause. But now that Israel has signed an agreement with the PLO, Turkey has dropped its mask. Turkish leaders are scrambling to visit Israel, signing a succession of economic, political and now military accords. The United States is overjoyed to finally see the concrete realisation of the alliance.

Damascus and Tehran are rather less enthusiastic about these developments. They are the main targets of the new alliance. Even Egypt (a state completely compromised by its collaboration with Israel) has expressed regrets.

At the same time as the Israeli air force began bombing Hizbullah and civilian targets in Lebanon, twelve Israeli fighter planes arrived at an air base in South-East Turkey. Their mission, according to the Turko-Israeli military accord, is "a programme of training flights". In an unusual move, Turkey has

refused to condemn the Israeli raids, regretting only "civilian losses", and reaffirming the "right of each state to defend itself against terrorism by any and all means, including [activities] beyond its own frontiers." Over the last twelve years, the Turkish military has made numerous incursions into northern Iraq to attack bases of the Kurdish nationalist guerrilla movement PKK (Workers Party of Kurdistan).

Turkey's rapprochement with Israel, to the detriment of Syria, is in part linked to the struggle against the PKK, whose leader Abdullah Öcalan ("Apo") and general staff are based in the Syrian capital Damascus. The PKK also has camps in Lebanon's Bekaa valley, which is controlled by Syria. This has infuriated Turkish leaders, who have repeatedly asked

Syria to stop supporting the Kurdish guerrillas. Damascus has consistently denied any PKK presence, and reminded Turkey of Syria's (unsuccessful) demands for an international agreement giving their country a greater share of the waters of the Euphrates river, which is heavily dammed in Turkey, before it runs into Syria.

The Turkish desire to "teach the Syrians a lesson" crystallised when Damascus mobilised the Arab League against Turkey's Project GAP for building giant dams and hydroelectric power stations in South

East Anatolia, as well as a canal irrigation system supposed to quadruple agricultural production in the Urfa valley. What better than an agreement with

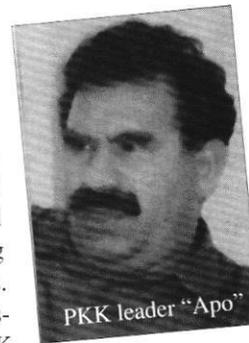
Israel, Syria's sworn enemy?

Turkish newspapers report that Ankara recently presented Syria with an ultimatum: cease all support for the PKK immediately, or Turkey will carry out military operations on Syrian territory. An adventurist wing in the Turkish state, particularly among the general staff, is ready to go a long way, even at the risk of provoking a war between the two countries.

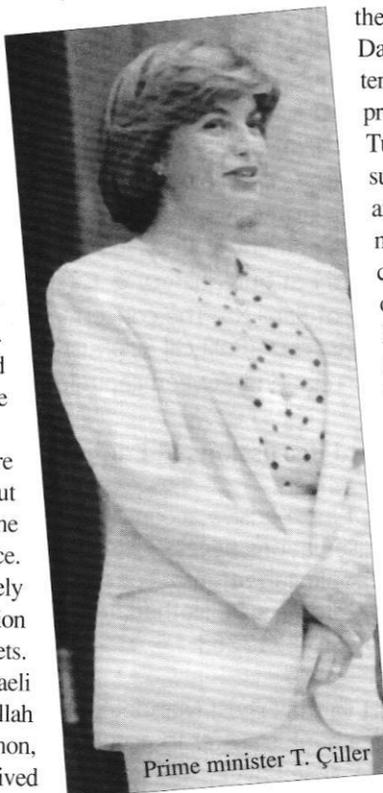
The Kurdish question has been a central preoccupation of the Turkish regime for more than ten years: the war has claimed 20,000 victims over the last 12 years (according to official sources, the dead include 11,000 PKK militants, 3,000 Turkish soldiers, and 4,000 civilians). The conflict costs \$7 bn. every year, not counting the social

and economic consequences: the collapse of the traditional economy in the Kurdish region, particularly animal husbandry; unemployment; the exodus of the Kurdish population which crowds into the poorest districts of the large towns in western Turkey; and so on. The war has also caused the political de-stabilisation and moral degeneration of society, with a serious rise in racism and nationalism. There has been a proliferation of death squads and Mafias. Systematic human rights violations (assassination, torture, press censorship, generalised repression in the Kurdish villages).

All this has "damaged the image of the country abroad," and delayed Turkey's integration into the European Union. The military itself has been touched by the perverse consequences of its war: maintaining a massive 250,000 man conscript army in the South East has hindered the Generals' projects for modernisation, by soaking up the funds which could have been used to buy sophisticated weapons and create a professional army. What is more, the



PKK leader "Apo"



Prime minister T. Çiller

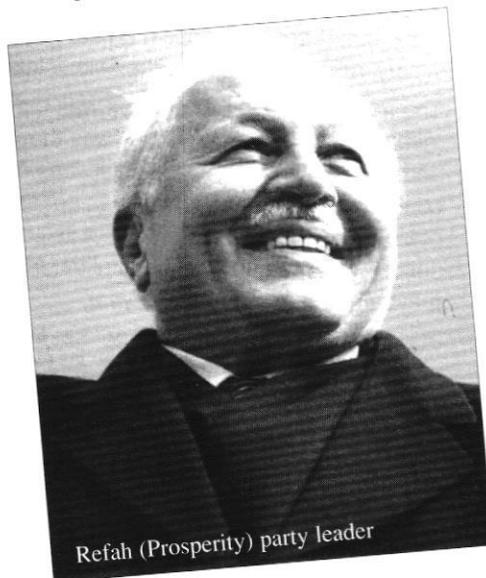
Kurdish question is now being exploited by all of Turkey's neighbours, in their various disputes with Ankara. In other words, the non-solution of the Kurdish question is a direct menace to the stability of the regime, which is increasingly split between the advocates of a continued "strong hand" policy, and a faction which wants to calm the problem through cultural, administrative, democratic and economic reforms.

This debate re-emerged during on 9 April, when the army killed more than 160 "terrorists" at a cost of 40 soldiers in the Diyarbakir/Bingöl region. This was the bloodiest clash in the last 12 months. Public opinion was shaken. Particularly since the PKK had announced an unilateral ceasefire in December 1995, and the new Turkish government had promised a series of "reforms." Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz had promised to abolish "within three months" the "Emergency Powers Law" in force in the Kurdish region, and to "liberalise" several repressive laws on freedom of expression. Yilmaz recently embraced in public the writer Yasar Kemal, who had been imprisoned for "unacceptable" opinions. The Minister of the Interior even promised to authorise Kurdish language teaching (though only in private schools). He also suggested that the public television station TRT-GAP could broadcast partly in Kurdish (though his suggestion was for "public information" propaganda, rather than general programming). PKK leader Apo even wrote to Prime Minister Yilmaz proposing a peaceful arrangement in the framework of respect for the "unity and integrity of the Turkish state".

In such a context, the army operation surprised everyone, and provoked wide criticism in the bourgeois press. After the obligatory crocodile tears for the "martyred soldiers, fallen for the motherland", the press unleashed an attack on the military General Staff of unprecedented virulence. The leading dailies *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet* questioned the "timing" of the operation, and, noting the high number of soldiers lost, speculated that there had been an error in the command structure. A number of editorialists went further: "For years now, every spring, the General Staff affirms that the PKK is on the point of total liquidation. And each time, we realise that this is false. Doesn't this prove that military means alone cannot solve the Kurdish question?" The country's largest circulation daily, *Sabah*, went even further:

"the military option solves nothing... The General Staff should be accountable for its actions... Is it worth sacrificing so many soldiers to kill a hundred PKK militants? Certainly not!... The terrorism of those who want to appropriate a monopoly on patriotism is revealed to be just as dangerous as the terrorism of the PKK!" This is the first time that the media has made such an open challenge to the army's claims of efficiency and the state's political line in the Kurdish question. This reflects public opinion's frustration with the endless bloody war, and in particular the bourgeoisie's desire to cut their losses and withdraw from the "Kurdish mess," whatever the cost.

The army will therefore be obliged to accept a number of reforms, or find itself dangerously isolated. The paradox is that this situation comes at a moment when the army has never had a greater political weight (given the extreme fragility of the civilian regime). Of course, this will not mean the end of repression. For



the army, "the Kurdish question is one thing, the PKK is another". So necessary reforms could easily be combined with a lightning attack to re-establish the army's image. Scenarios include bombing raids on the PKK camps in the Bekaa valley, and an attempt to assassinate Apo in Damascus.

Flirting with Israel may be the Generals' way of preparing the justification for such actions. It certainly explains Turkey's sudden support for Israel's intervention in Lebanon. But there is another motivation. Iran.

Tehran has been increasing its influence on the Kurdish leaders in northern Iraq. Iran also tolerates a number of PKK bases on its

own territory. The root cause of Ankara's discomfort, of course, is the whole logic of the United States' policy in Iraq since the end of the Gulf war. The very existence of an autonomous Kurdish entity in northern Iraq, free of all control from Baghdad, creates a de facto base for an independent Kurdish state: something Turkey wants to avoid at all cost.

Turkey supported the US against Iraq, but has not been able to convince their ally to lift the embargo against Saddam Hussein's regime. Ankara also accepts the deployment in the south east of the multinational Operation Provide Comfort force, which continues, at least symbolically, to threaten Baghdad and "protect" the Kurds.

Turkey's relations with the Kurdish leaders in northern Iraq, Talabani and Barzari, have proved complex and contradictory. The approach has been to alternate the carrot and the stick. This has not stopped PKK presence and influence from growing. The Iraqi Kurds have neither the means, nor really the desire, to stop the PKK. Turkey's repeated incursions into northern Iraq have essentially aimed at destroying PKK bases near the frontier.

Turkey's relationship with Iran continues to decline. Two months ago, while most of the region's rulers assembled for the great "anti-terrorist" summit in Egypt, the Turkish police arrested a number of Islamic fundamentalists, accused of having assassinated anti-clerical journalists in 1990. Those arrested claimed that they had been trained in Iran, and that they had acted under the orders and with the support of Iranian diplomats accredited in Ankara. Four Iranian diplomats were asked to leave the country.

No-one questions the existence of Islamic fundamentalist terrorist groups likened to Iran, but the timing of the "discovery" of this particular circle is extremely suspect. For its part, Iran responded by "uncovering" a "Turkish espionage network", and requesting the departure of four Turkish diplomats accredited in Tehran.

Iranian Foreign Minister Velayarti is due to visit Turkey soon. Discussions will include the question of PKK camps in Iran and northern Iraq, and the Turko-Israeli accord. This diplomatic escalation could stop there if the two capitals can agree on a new set of ground rules. Otherwise, the degeneration of the relationship cannot be excluded. This would mean, initially, a few major assassinations or bombings, in Istanbul or in

the tourist resorts on the west coast. These attacks would be attributed to the PKK or to Hezbollah (the group backed by Iran). Turkey would then retaliate at the border with Iran, or in northern Iraq. Military co-operation with Israel would be stepped up.

Sabre-rattling in the East is combined with a more pacifist tone towards the West. Turkey has proposed dialogue with the Greek government on a number of issues concerning integration with western Europe. The aim is to reduce the number of borders on which there is tension.

For the first time, Turkey no longer seems interested in the reactions its policies provoke in the Arab world. Indeed, the new policy is one of "cutting" ourselves off from the Arab-Islamic world. And of erecting a strong barrier between the "higher interests of the nation" and the internationalist political sympathies of Turkey's Islamic fundamentalists. There are increasing exhibitions of anti-Arab "state racism." Including the Minister of Culture's ridiculous ban on "belly-dancing to Arab-sounding rhythms," now considered to be "opposed to the Turkish national identity."

The authors of this new foreign policy are the soldiers. Turkey's diplomats and politicians are usually more prudent. The Generals have been able to impose their line by exploiting the extreme weakness of the civilian regime. After the Çiller government fell in September 1995, the country went through months of governmental crisis, solved only by the formation of the Yilmaz/Çiller government in March this year. Three months separated the December 1995 general elections from the formation of a government able to win a parliamentary majority.

The army had been alarmed by the impressive score realised by the Islamic fundamentalist Refah Party in December 1995. The Generals repeatedly stressed their determination "to protect the non-clerical, Kemalist, modernist Republic against the middle-age, obscurantist agitation of a handful of fundamentalists." The army seems determined to break the political power of the Islamists, whatever the cost.

In such a context, an open conflict between Turkey and the islamo-Arab world would put the Refah Party in a difficult position: Either adopt a low profile and lose ground politically, or enter into frontal opposition to the "national" policy, and risk being perceived as "traitors to the motherland

and its national interests". If so, the Generals would not hesitate to outlaw Refah, as they did with the Kurdish nationalists two years ago. Though, since Refah is much bigger than the banned Kurds, things might not go so smoothly...

It was the army which sabotaged, behind the scenes, the initial attempts by the conservative ANAP (Motherland Party) of

Mesut Yilmaz to form a new government in coalition with Refah. Military opposition forced Yilmaz to ally with the outgoing government of Tancu Çiller's DYP (True Path Party). The resulting coalition is a minority government, which only had a majority thanks to the support of the nationalist-populist DSP (Democratic Left Party) of Ecevit. ★

● Electoral fragmentation

The general elections on 24 December 1995 have revealed deep political instability. The fundamentalist Refah (Prosperity) Party won most seats, though much less than the combined vote of the country's two conservative parties (separated by leadership conflicts rather than programmatic differences). The two social democratic parties won slightly more votes than Refah. The fascist MHP won 8% of votes, which was not enough to take seats in parliament (seats are divided proportionally between parties which score at least 10% of the national vote).

The far left presented a number of candidates on the Kurdish nationalist Peoples' Democracy Party (HADEP). This party won 16% in the Kurdish region (scoring 40-50% in a number of towns) but only 4.2% of the total vote.

The fragmentation of the vote weakens all the political forces. Refah is the largest party, but its score disappointed the Islamic leaders, who counted on a sweeping victory, ruling alone or together with Islamic "submarines" in the other parties.

The real struggle in this election was for leadership of the conservative block. Neither Yilmaz nor Çiller can be happy with the result: they scored the same as each other, and less than in the previous elections. The military has forced them into an unhappy coalition government, but this has not stopped them fighting each other. The coalition could easily explode as a result of its internal problems. Unless the generals were seriously angry with such a situation, they would have to hold new general elections: maybe before the end of the year.

The traditional right has lost one million electors to the far right since the municipal elections of March 1974. Compared to the legislative elections in 1991, the situation is even more alarming. Back then ANAP and the DYP scored 51%, and the fascists and fundamentalists totalled 17%. In December 1995 the traditional right vote fell to 38%, while the fascist/fundamentalist vote rose to 30%. In comparison, the total social democratic vote fell from over 30% to less than 25%.

In such circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the state apparatus, particularly the police and the army, has won relative autonomy, and established itself above the control of civil power. The coming months will tell whether the adventurist sections of the military will be willing to take the country into a real military confrontation, and whether civil society and the political parties will accept this without resistance. The workers' movement and the Kurdish nationalists are weak. For the moment, predictions are for a turbulence and polarisation of society between the army and the fundamentalists. [E.T.]

Party	vote	seats
MHP (fascist)	8	—
Refah (fundamentalist)	21	158
ANAP (Led by Yilmaz)	20	125
DYP (Led by Çiller)	19	135
DSP (Soc-Dem, led by Ecevit)	15	76
CHP (Soc-Dem)	11	49
HADEP (Kurd nationalist/left)	4	

Not Peace, but an imperialist offensive

On June 10th, all-party talks on future political structures in Ireland will mark a new phase in the Irish conflict. They will almost certainly begin with Sinn Fein excluded until the Irish Republican Army (IRA) reinstates its ceasefire.

John McAnulty

THE EXCLUSION OF REPUBLICANS GIVES US one indication of the nature of this new phase — the fact that the talks will be preceded by elections to a new partitionist assembly gives an even more striking indication of the major setback that has been inflicted on the Irish working class.

Within the “standard model” of the Irish peace process put forward by the republican leadership and large sections of the left, this makes no sense whatsoever. This analysis indicates that the British are beginning a gradual process of withdrawal and are willing to negotiate a transitional arrangement that will eventually lead to a united Ireland.

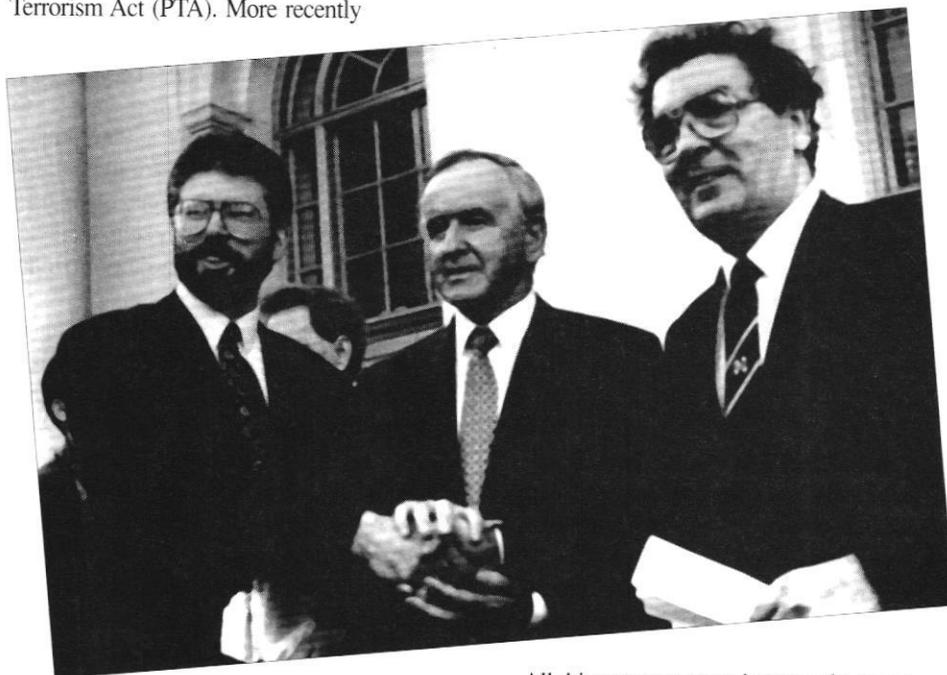
Yet Britain has held the line through 18 months of ceasefire and through the Canary Wharf bomb in London and the resumption of IRA military activity. The British justified the delay and the demand for “decommissioning” — effectively a political demand for an IRA surrender — on the grounds that the process must have the support of everyone and that the unionist parties would not participate otherwise.

The period of the ceasefire was marked by a whole series of provocations. The only step taken towards the release of prisoners was the restoration of remission rates that the British had earlier removed. Only a few republican prisoners were returned from England, and for those that remained conditions were made harsher and more punitive. Private Lee Clegg of the Parachute regiment, convicted of the murder of a Belfast teenager, was released in circumstances which essentially endorsed the

right of members of the state forces to kill with impunity. Sectarian Orange marches were forced through Catholic areas by state forces while republicans were batoned off the streets. Even the much heralded economic “peace dividend” faded away in a welter of “investment conferences” while major cuts were made in funding for community projects.

Even before the break-down of the ceasefire the British had indicated the sort of democracy they were contemplating by renewing the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). More recently

official party lists drawn up by the government. This ensures that the small loyalist paramilitary fronts will gain seats without any electoral support and establishes the British government’s right to licence parties. After initial suggestions that Sinn Fein would be excluded, the British have left the smaller and more politically vulnerable Irish Republican Socialist Party off the list. One SDLP representative wondered aloud why the British didn’t save everyone a lot of trouble and simply announce the result of the election straight away!



a new law was rushed through the British parliament which gives more or less unrestricted powers of stop and search to the police. Two unionist members of the local police authority were dismissed by the British secretary of state after they proposed cosmetic changes to the brutal and sectarian Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC).

Now the process is to move forward through elections in the occupied area, the existence of which all the nationalist parties oppose, to establish an assembly which they all oppose. In a step reminiscent of the worst days of European absolutism the British have imposed a party list system — based on

All this was necessary because the peace process was founded on one gigantic illusion — the illusion that Britain was leaving Ireland. In the run-up to the ceasefire British ministers repeatedly said that they had no selfish, strategic or economic interest in Ireland. Socialist Democracy (Irish Fourth Internationalists) stood almost alone in arguing that the British were lying and that Britain remained an imperial power with major economic and strategic interests in her oldest colony.

The formulation of British disinterest was supposed to be contained in the Downing Street declaration, jointly signed by London and Dublin just before the ceasefire.



In the declaration, for the first time ever, Britain used the term self-determination in relation to Ireland. Again we were almost alone in pointing out that the term was immediately negated by enshrining a veto for the Unionist minority in the occupied area to continue the partition of the country.

Following the ceasefire London and Dublin negotiated the “Framework document” as the concrete expression of the Downing Street declaration. This made it clear that partition would remain, but by advocating a few cross-border talking shops it allowed the illusion that the proposals were a stepping-stone to a united Ireland. Tellingly the British accompanied the publication of these woolly proposals in the occupied North with very detailed and specific proposals on the creation of a new local assembly. Just how seriously the British took the framework document, essentially the maximum programme for bourgeois nationalism, was shown when, a week after publication, political development minister Michael Ancram announced that the British would welcome fresh ideas to solve the crisis!

An insight into British strategy was given by a throwaway remark by foreign secretary Douglas Hurd after the signing of the Downing Street declaration. Asked if he thought the republicans would “buy” the ceasefire, he replied “I hardly think it matters”

The reality for the British was that their “peace process” was in fact a major imperialist offensive designed to force a new

capitalist stability and roll back all the gains of the anti-imperialist struggle. They had won from Dublin agreement in principle to support the establishment of a reinvigorated partition and, in addition, to rescind the historic aspiration of the majority of the Irish working class for unity by removing all claims to a united national territory from the constitution.

In addition they had greatly constrained the effects of the republican armed campaign. The difficulty in attacking state forces had led to the militarist strategy broadening the number of “soft targets” considered legitimate and a new concentration on military adventurism in England. The main effect was to isolate republican supporters.

Further the British had built up the Loyalist death squads and these were able to strike at will in nationalist areas, carrying out a number of sectarian atrocities. The IRA had no credible defensive strategy, and when they attempted to carry the fight into loyalist areas the result was civilian casualties, which further weakened their support.

The British were willing to make minor concessions that would help the republican leadership in from the cold. But the price would be republican surrender: the only measure that would allow the imperialist offensive to roll on.

As the peace process ground to a halt the Clinton administration stepped in. A visit by the President helped reinforce the British line and served as a platform for the Mitchell Commission. The Mitchell report (released in

February) was linked to a “target date” for all-party talks.

In the event, this report was overshadowed by the British decision to sideline the report, scrap the target date, and propose elections which would have the effect of fixing in stone the outcome of the process — the return of a modified local assembly with a built-in sectarian majority.

In fact, its proposals simply moved the date for an IRA surrender from before the talks to during the talks. The proposals, if put into effect, would have forced the disbanding of the IRA. It dismissed any attempt to bring state weaponry into the equation, despite the many atrocities by these forces and their association with the right-wing death squads. Above all the report ignored all the issues of an all-Ireland dimension. It makes clear that a revamped partition is what is on offer.

So the ceasefire ended with two proposals on the table. One from the British government and one from the Mitchell commission. Both demanded the surrender of the IRA and both signposted a return to a modified Stormont (the old regime that ruled a web of sectarian discrimination and privilege).

The whole sorry process was helped by a sharp move to the right by the republican leadership. They wanted out of the cul-de-sac of the militarist strategy, but their new political strategy rested on a whole series of illusions.

The first such illusion was in British imperialism itself. It is quite clear that the republicans believed that Britain was preparing to withdraw from Ireland. After all, the British themselves said that they had no “selfish or strategic” interest in Ireland! Yet Sinn Fein found itself unable to sign up to any of the proposals on which the “peace process” was based.

Alongside the illusions in British imperialism ran more general illusions in the United States and the European Union. Internal documents consistently argued that these forces would support a democratic solution in Ireland and force Britain to toe the line. In order to believe this the republican leadership had to close its eyes to the role of the US as the main force for the suppression of democratic rights on a world scale, its constant invasion and manipulation of small countries and the key role Britain has always played as American imperialism’s most dependable ally.

An even more worrying indication of the republican leadership’s political evolution

has been their tendency to praise the middle East "peace process," particularly the role of Yasser Arafat, and look to it and him as a model. Martin McGuinness of Sinn Fein was repeating such praise only days before the ceasefire broke down.

The fact that the republicans held on as long as they did is testimony to the greatest illusion of all — the illusion of the existence of a "nationalist family". Both publicly and in internal documents the Adams leadership put forward an alliance with bourgeois nationalism as representing an alternative weapon to the traditional militarist strategy. Unfortunately republican illusions in the Irish bourgeoisie are just as traditional and just as incorrect as their faith in militarism, with the disadvantage that this alliance immediately puts them on the same side of the barricades as the direct oppressors of the majority of the Irish working class. In fact the whole peace process was a process of watching the "nationalist family" crumble to dust. As the ceasefire drew to an end the bourgeois parties were all entering negotiations with the British proposal for a unionist assembly at the top of the agenda. The formal expression of the family — a forum meeting in Dublin over the past 18 months — produced a final report which trashed the demand for self-determination and left Sinn Fein out in the cold, unable to sign up.

The end of the ceasefire in no way resolves the problems for republicans or ends the confusion and illusions. The bombing campaign is itself based on the assumption

that Britain is willing to leave Ireland. If it is in Britain's interest as an imperial power to stay then lost trade and tourism and bills of £150 million for bomb damage will make no difference.

Even now the leadership cling to the Irish bourgeoisie. Their latest analysis, outlined by Gerry Adams at this year's Sinn Fein Ard Fheis, indicates that the family would have survived if it had continued to be led by the populist Fianna Fail party rather than the slightly more openly pro-imperialist Fine Gael party!

Adams went on to suggest that the difficulties they face are due to a British Tory government with a tiny minority being dependent on unionist support. He didn't explain why the Labour Party and the British establishment as a whole would vote against the government in a crucial vote, as they did over British arms sales to Iraq. In fact leading establishment figures warned Prime Minister John Major not to play party politics with the Irish question. They have remained silent since, indicating that the government's stance is essentially based on the interests of British imperialism.

Sinn Fein continue to make their main call for all-party talks with restrictions. Again, if Britain is leaving then Sinn Fein can fight their corner within all-party talks as a minor party. If Britain is staying, then the talks will achieve nothing.

All the recent remarks by the republican leadership indicate that the link between military and political action is the demand for talks. Now London and Dublin have provided a fixed date for all-party talks, June 10th. This in the context of a partitionist election, with the "nationalist family" lined up with the British and Unionists in ruling out any democratic solution and with the Mitchell proposals at hand to turn the screw on the republicans at every turn.

The republican leadership's response to the collapse of their strategy has been to reassert it. A new Fianna Fail government in the 26 country state, a labour government in Britain, and all would be well. Without explicitly recognising the damage and demobilisation within their own movement they accommodate to it with a new and even more violent lurch to the right. The latest catchword is realism. As Gerry Adams told the Ard Fheis; "there is no way that Sinn Fein will be a party to any restoration of that kind of institution [Stormont]. Our preference would be to boycott both the election and the elected body. However, we live in the real

world. We will be guided therefore by whether it is necessary to defend our vote or uphold the rights of our electorate."

So with a partitionist election and assembly imminent, held under the most undemocratic rules ever dreamt up by the British, where the only real issue will be the legitimacy of the new institution, Sinn Fein are to leave the decision on a boycott to their seniors in the bourgeois Social Democratic and Labour Party!

One is reminded of the critical voice of the Palestinian Edward Said, who, discussing the Middle East "peace process", says "advocates [of the process] say 'we had no alternative'. The correct way of phrasing it is, 'we had no alternative, because we either lost or threw away a lot of others, leaving us only this one.'"

Veteran republican Bernadette McAliskey has called for a republican congress to map a new road forward. The republican leadership can't support this proposal without breaking from their bourgeois partners. Yet the opportunities are there. While the republicans counted single percentage increases in recent bi-elections in the 26 counties of the south, Joe Higgins of Militant Labour came within a few hundred votes of taking the Dublin West seat on a wave of opposition to local tax increases. Major public service unions have rejected recent pay deals and threaten the cosy national agreement between the government and the trade union bureaucracy. The Dublin capitalists are the weak link in the present offensive. Present republican policy prevents them from attacking that link.

On a broader front all the signs are that British attempts to persuade unionism to make even the most minor concessions will fail. The election of David Trimble as the new unionist leader means that at each opportunity the unionists select the most hard-line option. Despite attempts to portray him as a moderate, Trimble has remained on the streets, supporting the right of sectarian gangs to march through nationalist areas, while at the same time denying the right of republicans to march at all. He intends to build the new Stormont while sabotaging any talks. The British have shown no willingness to impose anything on the unionists and the freer the hand of the local nationalist bourgeoisie, the less pressure the British will be under. Imperialism will deal with symptoms rather than cause and their settlement will become more ramshackle and unstable. ★

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Collective efforts to find a lasting settlement

Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams outlines his party's strategy over the last 18 months, and the obstacles which have been placed in its way

THE LAST THREE YEARS HAVE BEEN MARKED by significant advances in our collective efforts to find a lasting political settlement which would allow us to leave the conflict and divisions of the past behind us. Political dialogue has been at the core of these efforts and political dialogue must be at the core of these efforts and political dialogue must be at the core of any new agreed political arrangement among the Irish people. Over the last three years there has also been frustration and anxiety as obstacles have been erected, primarily by the British Government, obstacles which have delayed the process and created a variety and intensity of crises; obstacles which, as Dick Spring has said, threaten to "dissipate the momentum" for peace.

That frustration is presently at its most intense, as the result of the British Government's refusal, after 16 months of an IRA cessation, to allow all-party peace talks to begin. The British Government still sees the peace process as a device by which it can achieve the political objectives which they failed to achieve militarily in 25 years of bloody conflict.

This is contrary to the spirit of a process which seeks to be inclusive and requires the building of confidence and trust to a point where our common responsibility guarantees a positive outcome to the peace processes. Underpinning this critical objective is the essential need for all sides to accept the respective democratic credentials of the others, and to move to all-party talks where an agreement can be forged. Democratic dialogue and negotiations are the litmus test of a viable peace process — it is the only way

to achieve an agreed political settlement and therefore a lasting peace. 16 months ago the IRA cessation transformed the political climate, creating the best opportunity since Partition to resolve the conflict in Ireland. It would be criminal if this opportunity were squandered by a British Government putting itself in hock to nine Ulster Unionist Party MPs. The Irish peace process does not belong to the British Government. In fact, it was the efforts of nationalist Ireland which brought about the



present opportunity for peace.

In the development of the Irish peace process, the most important discussions were clearly those with John Hume, out of which a set of core political principles were agreed as the basis for a proposal to move us out of conflict and towards negotiated settlement. The Hume/Adams proposals outlined a number of basic principles, a process and a dynamic which we each agreed could create the conditions for a complete cessation of violence and the establishment of lasting peace in Ireland. The Hume/Adams proposals, which became known, generally, as the Irish Peace Initiative, galvanised Irish national opinion North and South and focused the two governments on the issue of peace in Ireland, in a manner unparalleled since the mid-eighties.

The Irish Peace Initiative of 1993 was

based on the reality that there can be no internal settlement within the Six-Counties, that any settlement must be based on the right of the Irish people to national self-determination and, crucially, that a new and lasting agreement could only be achieved through all-party peace talks led by both governments. This initiative prompted the IRA to state that, if the political will existed, or could be created, the initiative "could

provide the basis for peace." The Downing Street Declaration emerged against that background in December 1993. In the Declaration, the British Government certainly addressed some of the elements essential to the construction of an effective peace process in a way which it had not previously done. In particular the two governments committed themselves to all-party talks as the means to a new political agreement among the Irish people. The subsequent clarification provided to Sinn Féin by

the British and Irish governments reiterated this point and helped to move the developing peace process a step further. Sinn Féin pointed out that the dynamic necessary to move us all out of conflict could not lie in a public declaration alone. This dynamic had to be found in the principles, framework, time scale, procedures and objectives of a peace process and particularly in negotiation — in all-party peace talks.

Through dialogue between the Irish Government, the SDLP, Sinn Féin and key elements of Irish-America, a consensus of views and opinions was developed across a number of key political areas fundamental to the resolution of the conflict in Ireland on the basis of democratic principles. Key to this was the agreement that inclusive negotiations among the democratically mandated parties and led by both governments was the only means to secure an agreed and democratic

settlement.

The need also to address a number of areas of immediate and practical concern to Northern nationalists, including parity of esteem, equality of treatment and equality of opportunity was recognised. The commonality of view on the core democratic positions coupled with a commitment to put these into effect, represented an unprecedented focus by nationalist and democratic opinion in Ireland and abroad, on the resolution of the conflict and on the way to achieve this.

It was the efforts of nationalist Ireland which created the peace process and brought about the enormous opportunity which we now have. The Sinn Féin peace strategy, the Hume/Adams dialogue, the Irish Peace Initiative and the IRA cessation generated a new political climate in which, for the first time since Partition, there was a real prospect of a negotiated settlement and a lasting peace. The peace talks necessary to realise this potential have, however, not yet begun. The entire logic of a peace process is that rough substantive all-party peace talks we arrive at a peace settlement which removes the causes of the conflict and takes the guns, forever, from Irish politics.

All-party peace talks should be initiated as a matter of urgency and within an agreed time frame. The nature and structure of those talks should ensure the efficient and urgent examination of all of those issues required to move the process forward. The three broad areas which need to be addressed are:

- political and constitutional change;
- democratisation;
- demilitarisation.

The forum for dealing with all of these issues is of course inclusive and comprehensive negotiations. All-party peace talks should therefore commence without further delay.

For years we were told that the IRA was the problem, the block on process, that the British could not move because of the IRA, but that in the context of an IRA cessation a negotiated political settlement which addressed and resolved the causes of division and conflict was possible. The IRA cessation created the space for the new approach which, it had been argued, could more effectively deal with the causes of conflict and division. We are now almost 16 months into the IRA cessation but we do not yet have peace. We do not even have peace talks. On the contrary we have the British telling us that the old agenda remains intact: exclusion of Sinn Féin, discrimination against our electorate and the precondition of an IRA surrender. This not only denies Sinn Féin and our voters the right to negotiate the future of our Ireland, but denies that right to the rest of the Irish people also...

Britain is now renegeing on its commitment. The British government is clearly acting in bad faith. The reality is that the British do not want peace talks. They are afraid of peace talks because peace talks... require change. Political, constitutional, economic, cultural and legal change. Real peace talks demand that the British address the whole range of issues which they have failed to address up to now. Peace talks demand action to address the failure of past and present political structures; action to redress the injustice of Partition; action to reverse the apartheid, the discrimination and the inequality at the heart of the Six-County state. Peace talks require positive and

effective action to make equality of treatment and parity of esteem a reality, real political movement to create new political structures agreed among and acceptable to all the Irish people.

A peaceful strategy for change, for achieving democracy and justice has to deal directly and effectively with the realities of injustice and inequality. It cannot be dependent on the willingness of the British to change. The British cannot be allowed to sit on their hands. The British have no right to squander the present, unprecedented opportunity for a negotiated settlement. Their inaction and negativity demand positive and effective action from those who seek a negotiated settlement in Ireland. The peace process does not belong to the British Government. It belongs to the Irish people. It is the responsibility of the political representatives of all the Irish people to move the situation forward — even in the face of British negativity.

There is a historic responsibility on the Dublin Government to take the initiative and to present the British Government with the Irish democratic position and to persuade John Major to play his full part in developing the Irish peace process into a negotiated political settlement: a new Irish and Anglo-Irish dispensation for the new millennium.

In early December 1995 the two governments launched the "twin track" approach with the declared aim of reaching all-party peace talks by the end of February 1996. Despite the fact that this twin track approach was no part of the discussion and negotiations which preceded the IRA cessation, Sinn Féin declared our willingness to engage positively in this approach, on the basis that it would remove the preconditions to dialogue and move us all into the

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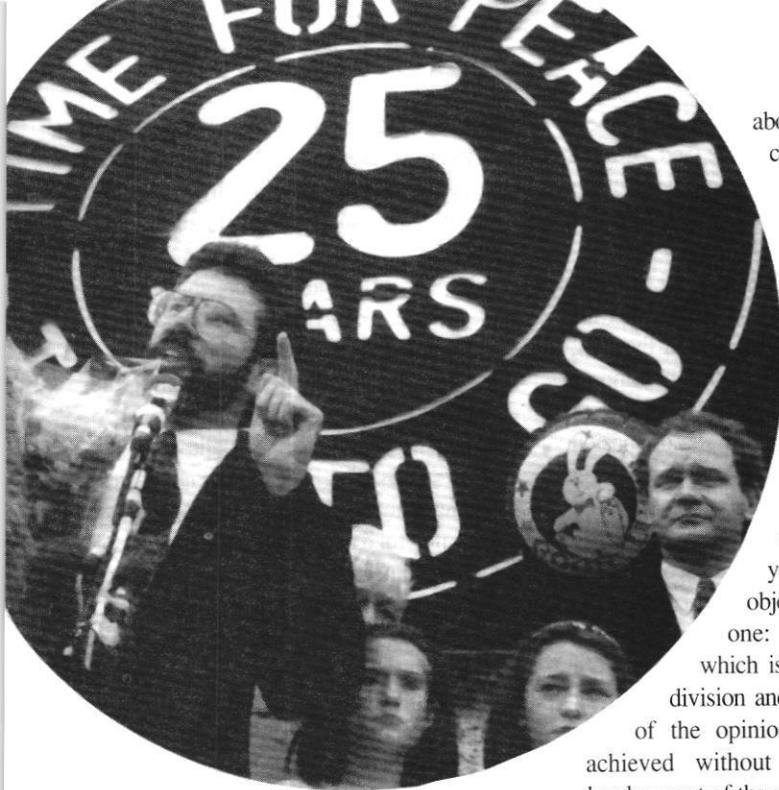
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 **BLOCK LETTERS PLEASE**



negotiations phase of the peace process. As the Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister), John Bruton, pointed out, the twin track approach would be a waste of time if it failed to remove preconditions to all-party dialogue. The International Commission headed by George Mitchell has already completed much of its work on the arms issue. The two governments need now to match the energy and urgency of the international body and move speedily to prepare the ground for the commencement of all-party talks. There is absolutely no reason why inclusive negotiations cannot commence immediately among parties with an electoral mandate.

Given the urgency of this situation, it is essential that peace talks commence as soon as possible. The delays and stalling have already destabilised the peace process unnecessarily. It is now time for a full engagement on all sides. It is of course the democratic right of any party to refuse to attend if they so wish. But such a refusal to engage in democratic negotiations cannot be turned into a veto which denies the rest of the political parties the right to commence the dialogue. Such a veto is clearly undemocratic.

The old order has failed. It sought to divide and oppress our people. Our diversity, which should have been a source of joy and strength, was, instead, manipulated and used to perpetuate and entrench injustice and discrimination. The imperative of peace demands that we move beyond this phase of the peace process. Peace can only come

about when the causes of conflict are addressed.

In the context of the Anglo-Irish situation peace can only be achieved through a political solution. And this can only be found through inclusive all-party talks.

When we embarked upon our peace strategy more than eight years ago, Sinn Féin's objective was an ambitious one: to resolve a conflict which is rooted in centuries of division and mistrust. No one was of the opinion that this would be achieved without difficulty. With the development of the peace process comes the responsibility of participation. We all have to play our full role in moving the peace process forward. To achieve that essential element requires collective partnership which seeks to uplift and consolidate and plan the management of the negotiating process to a successful conclusion. Peace cannot be built unilaterally. The refusal of the British Government and the Unionist parties to engage positively in the peace process undermines its potential to remove the causes of conflict and, logically, if the causes of conflict remain then there cannot be a lasting peace.

The British Government and the Unionist parties should stop making excuses for not talking and start making peace. Sinn Féin has repeatedly demonstrated our commitment and our determination to take risks to advance the peace process. We have brought the full extent of our influence within the republican constituency to bear in creating and sustaining for 16 months this opportunity. The question now is whether the others are prepared to move beyond the failed policies of the past. ★

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Networking

The editor's selection of Internet news and addresses.

British base details on WWW

Sinn Féin have described as "nonsense" reports that the Party has launched secret information about British military installations onto its Internet web site. *The Times* recently alleged that "a terrorists' 'crib sheet' giving detailed information about MI5 installations and military bases in Northern Ireland, together with RUC stations, has been posted on the Internet. Police are studying the entry placed by Sinn Féin supporters on a site run from within an American university. In Britain the information could contravene the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the Emergency Powers Act and the Official Secrets Act, but police are powerless to act. Anti-terrorist officers in London are concerned at the detail and breadth of the material, as well as its propaganda value. The site also includes fund-raising appeals."

According to Sinn Féin, "The document referred to is *The British Military Garrison in Ireland*, first published by Sinn Féin in September 1994 and distributed widely in Ireland and abroad. All the material contained in this document was in the public domain for some time prior to its publication. The purpose of publishing it was to inform the general public of the nature of Britain's military involvement in Ireland following the IRA's cessation in August 1994 and was widely covered in the media. The stories emanating from London and quoting unnamed 'security sources' are a deliberate attempt to mislead and misinform. A visit to our web site will clearly show that Sinn Féin uses the Internet to put forward our policies on a wide range of issues and to highlight Britain's continued interference in Ireland."

For more information
<http://www.serve.com/rm/sinnfein>

Contributions to this column should be sent by e-mail to
100666.1443@compuserve.com

Interview with Bernadette Devlin McAliskey

The "peace process" strategy of the Republicans was based on an alliance of all Irish nationalist parties, including bourgeois forces such as the Social Democratic and Labor Party, and the Dublin government.

It was aimed at forcing the British to make concessions in the direction of equal rights for the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland and of developing cross-border links between the two parts of Ireland.

The initiation of the IRA bombing campaign reflects the crisis that this strategy has entered.

Gerry Foley spoke to Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, a leading spokesperson for the last quarter century of the various mass movements that have developed against the system of British domination in Northern Ireland.

● Why did the cease-fire break down?

Bernadette Devlin McAliskey: There are two main causes. First, you have an external one. The cease-fire was called with the belief that within some definable period of time it would bring about some form of dialogue that would involve Sinn Fein in direct negotiations with the British government. And 18 months later that had not happened.

Second, there was an internal reason for the breakdown of the cease-fire. I don't see it so much as a breakdown as a calculated decision by the leadership of the IRA. If you go back to the announcement of the cease-fire, it was received with great enthusiasm by the Republican rank and file. It was presented as a victory. Basically, people went along with



this out of loyalty to the leadership. This was despite the fact that at no stage had the rank and file, indeed anybody in the organization below the leadership, had any knowledge of the long-term negotiations that led to the cease-fire. There was a belief in the initial stages that a breakthrough had been made through a secret agreement. But that was not true.

In fairness to the Republican leadership, Gerry Adams [president of Sinn Fein] and others said at the time that there was no secret deal. Yet the thing did not make sense to the

people unless there had been a secret deal. And so you went from one theory and expectation to another, with people hanging in and hanging in, and then disillusion starting to set in. So, I think finally the leadership took a calculated risk in the Canary Wharf bombing in order to reassert its own authority within its military ranks. In my opinion, they made the assessment that if they did not move at that time they were heading toward a real possibility that some element of their own organization or people who had drifted away from it would, out of frustration, make some military move on their own.

The bomb was a spectacular warning shot over the bow of the British. Canary Wharf is a prestigious area. It had a lot of glass. And on a Friday evening, with due care and attention, they would have hoped not to have killed anybody. But you end up with a major bomb and two people dead. And, of course, politically it is impossible to tell where breaking the cease-fire will lead.

● In the United States, nobody in the movement really knows what the Republicans are doing.

BDM: That's not any different here. The Canary Wharf bombing might have resolved an immediate tension within their own military organization. But the Republicans remain caught up in the logic of the process they started. As far as the public is concerned, they shifted the aim of the Republican movement from a 32-county Ireland (socialist or otherwise) to all-party peace talks for an agreed Ireland. And the IRA cease-fire was called on that basis. So, people are confused about what the Republicans are doing, since they must have known that a return to military actions would not get them back to the table easily without their being confronted again with the whole issue that was brought up at the beginning—that is, nonviolence and decommissioning [disarming of the IRA]. Now, of course, the Republicans have got their date for their all-party peace talks [on condition that the IRA renew the cease-fire]. But they haven't come up with a new cease-fire, so people are

confused as to what their goal at this point is, as to what their strategy is.

● **An editorial in the Andersonstown News [the main community newspaper in Republican West Belfast] a few months ago said that it didn't do any good to get people out to demonstrate for vague demands such as peace talks; that it would make a lot more sense to get them out to campaign for concrete demands.**

BDM: It reflected a very real discontent within the broad Republican Movement. Following the H-Block hunger strikes of 1980-81, you had the IRA as the military representation of the struggle, and Sinn Fein as its electoral representation. But at the community level, you had all kinds of people working on an economic agenda, a social agenda, a political agenda, and a human rights agenda. The lines weren't clearly drawn between who was in what section of that movement, and so some Sinn Feiners were involved in the mass organization work; some people in the mass organizations may have been in the IRA.

But once the Republican movement got into secret negotiations and was putting that forward as the Sinn Fein party position, there didn't seem to be a strategy for continuing that broad grass-roots movement. Everything revolved around decommissioning or not decommissioning, a date for all-party peace talks, the shape of the table, and so on. So, people started to worry that the issue of basic human rights, the issue of discrimination in employment, and all sorts of broader issues, such as minimum wage legislation, the extension of the European 48-hour workweek, women's issues, all the issues that had been a vibrant part of the life of the community, were being sidelined.

Sinn Fein were taking people out onto the streets to demand all-party peace talks now, when in fact prisoners were still being denied their basic rights, and at same time, the grass roots, not knowing what the strategy was, were paralyzed, prevented from acting independently of Sinn Fein because they didn't want to be rocking the boat. There

were a number of demonstrations that characteristically, in Northern Irish conditions, led to confrontations with the police, because the police arrived and beat people up. Then, Sinn Fein's allies in the SDLP and the Irish government would call on them to stop this form of "irresponsible protest." Their argument was that we were now into negotiations, and people had to understand that such matters were the business of political parties and political leaders.

● **A recent opinion poll**



suggests that a majority of the Catholics would accept internment [mass roundup and imprisonment] of all known and suspected Republican activists "for the sake of peace."

BDM: Sinn Fein was an integral part of creating a dynamic that they cannot control. They created the slogan "give peace a chance." They created the initial demand for peace talks. But they had no basis for determining or even having an influence on which issues those peace talks would take place, because they were allowing the Irish government to play their hand for them. So they have actually, unintentionally, disempowered the Republican community, who are confused about what's happening.

On the opposite side, they empowered a whole layer of people who are now very active against them. They have empowered a very broad spectrum of Irish America [that is, the Irish American politicians and bourgeois institutions] whose interest is in peace at any price, and they certainly have opened up the way for a lot of propaganda by the southern

state. So, in this context, the rulers can justify internment on the basis of terms of "what else can you do?" when the Republicans have a date for peace talks, when everybody in the country is wearing white ribbons, when they're even talking about holding a referendum here for peace.

● **What can be done?**

BDM: It's very difficult position. My difficulty, quite honestly, is that I have a hard time comprehending how the Republicans could fail to see how deep the water was that they were getting into. The first step in was failing to reject decisively the parameters of the Downing St. Declaration [the British document that prepared the way for the cease-fire; it talked about self-determination for the Irish but limited this right to the framework of Northern Ireland, where there is a built-in pro-British majority]. Finally, the Republicans said they were opposed to it, but by that time they had already been working within its framework for six months. I think that the Republicans have gotten themselves in an irreversible position. I don't believe that a return to military operations is an effective option. I think that if they go back to military operations within the climate that they themselves were a party to creating, then military defeat, for the first time in 15 years, becomes a very real possibility.

● **But what about a return to mass campaigns?**

BDM: The real question, of course, is how do you build the mass campaigns within current context, because the fundamental context that we're looking at is that there is still an expectation on the part of the broad base of the nationalist community that the present negotiations, when they get started, will somehow lead to a peaceful and fair settlement. Now, that is not the case. What is very clear from all of those talks is that we are looking at the solution which the British put forward in 1972, some kind of power sharing between the two power blocs [nationalist and Unionist], a referendum to determine the balance between the populations every 10 or 15 years, and such economic and commercial cross-border trade links as are required by the end of the century economic necessities of the European Union. No more and no less.

That is what we are going to get. And we are in no position to prevent it happening.

● What about the discussion in the Republican movement?

BDM: Over the 18 months, the problem has been the stifling of discussion. Within the broad movement, not just Sinn Féin as a party, that has led to a lot of hostility. This logic is not unfamiliar to yourself and the socialist movement in America. When people are unable or unwilling to defend their political position politically they defend it by making attacks on the personality of the individual who is challenging their political position. There's been a lot of that kind of thing, which we not have seen since the 1970s. And that has been quite painful for people who have struggled over 25 years together. The net effect has been that people simply do not discuss their differences. What is basically happening is that people who become disillusioned, or begin to see that the thing's not working, just walk away. In order to ensure that they can put on a good show for the British-American media, Sinn Féin has to mobilize their troops. And so, all the people who are totally loyal to the leadership, regardless of the debate, will be brought to the ard-fheis. But that in turn denies the leadership any real feedback as to what's happening in its grass roots.

● So, it's a show conference you're expecting.

BDM: Yeah. And the difficulty of that is that while it may be tactically necessary, it denies the leadership the collective wisdom that comes out of debate. In my opinion, the Republicans are making a serious misjudgement of their importance to the "peace process." The whole momentum has reached a point where if the IRA does not produce a cease-fire, Sinn Féin will not be allowed into the all-party talks. But if Sinn Féin is left out of the all-party talks, that will not be a big obstacle because the Irish government and the SDLP will go on ahead and negotiate without them. Alternatively, if there is a cease-fire, Sinn Féin will go into the talks, but at some point they have to walk out of them or buy into the agenda [i.e., a revamped version of the status quo] and take responsibility for it.

● Is there no alternative?

BDM: I think that the way forward is first of all to make an honest assessment of where

we are. I think we should hang onto the cease-fire. The special repressive legislation is still on the books, but we can initiate mass action and continue campaigning against that. If we don't go back to war, there's less chance of everybody being slaughtered. And therefore, there will be people to take the campaign forward. I think Sinn Féin should get out of the "peace process." Our presence in this process can do nothing to affect it. Our campaign should be based upon insuring that whatever mechanics they put on this country,

we will demand equality of citizenship, as long as we are citizens here, we will demand equal opportunity, we will demand our national identity, we will demand our fundamental human rights, and begin to build a political campaign around that. I think we can begin to build a political movement raising fundamental social, class, and national issues, and one that is free to do that because it not tied to the apron strings of the Irish government and the Hibernian [bourgeois nationalist] alliance. ★

Radical unions call for Euro counter-initiative

There are 20 million officially-registered unemployed in the European Union and 50 million people living below the poverty line. Each of us could become a victim of this situation. Social cleavages are deepening, unemployment and poverty put each individual in a precarious situation, worsen working conditions of those still in a job and push wages and social benefits down. This situation is intolerable.

In Turin, the European Union started a discussion on its future, which will be completed at the inter-governmental conference in Amsterdam next year. Our greatest fear is that either the discussions will be limited to the institutional questions or that, behind the rhetoric about employment as a priority, measures will be taken which make jobs still more insecure. Everything leads us to think that the social questions which are major concern of the people in our countries will not be dealt with.

A radical and resolute policy of a fight against unemployment is necessary. This policy must, as an urgent measure, make it possible for all the unemployed and those living in poverty to live decently, which means the right to housing, the right to an adequate income... We cannot accept a society in which unemployment continues. We reaffirm the need for full employment and thus the creation of new jobs, in particular in sectors like health, education and environmental protection, which answer social needs. The reduction of mass unemployment means, in a period in which there are big gains productivity, a massive reduction in working time, without loss of wages.

For these political proposals to be heard, there has to be a mobilisation of all, women and men, those with jobs and without, farmers, students and the retired, living in Europe. We propose that a broad-based action against unemployment be organised at a European level at the time of the Inter-governmental Conference. Possibilities include; a European conference; joint initiatives in all the major European cities; marches by unemployed and workers across Europe for two months coming together in Amsterdam in June 1997. We propose that we discuss these proposals in each country and that we meet again during the next Inter-governmental Conference in mid-June 1996 in Florence, Italy, to decide together on an action against unemployment.

Marizio Poletto CGIL/Unemployed Information Centre, Piedmont and national leadership (Italy), Giorgio Sasso CGIL/Unemployed Information Centre, Turin (Italy), José María Olaizola Albeniz, General Secretary of the CGT (Spain), Uwe Wolf, Express/Socialistisches Büro (Germany) Christophe Aguiton, Frederique Pasquier, Thierry Temime, Agir Ensemble Contre le Chomage (France)

Major's Irish Offensive

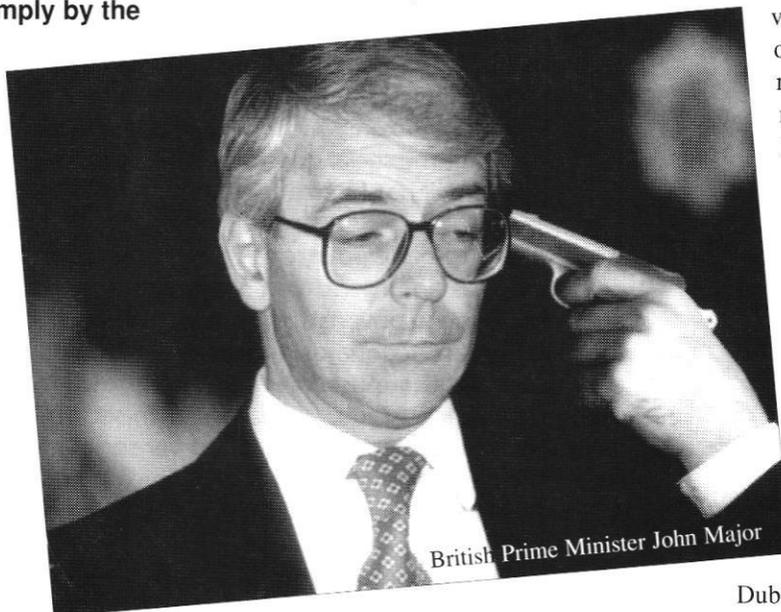
“ We have no strategic... we have no economic interest in staying there” So said Patrick Mayhew, the British Minister responsible for Northern Ireland, in an interview with *Die Zeit* in 1993. When the IRA declared a cease-fire in August 1994 they had been led to expect direct talks with the British within three months. After 18 months of growing frustration in the ranks at British delaying tactics, the cease-fire ended with the Canary Wharf bomb in February 1996. The British (and the Unionists) could have had a deal at any time over those 18 months. That they chose not to is not to be explained simply by the Tories dependence on the Ulster Unionist Party in a series of crucial votes in Parliament, nor by the distraction of the sea of troubles which beset Major, clinging to power after 17 years in Government. It is a symptom of a more fundamental fragmentation in the Conservative Party and the British State itself.

**David Coen
April 16th 1996**

The British knew at the time the cease-fire was announced that the Republicans had drawn well back from their historic demands of a negotiated British withdrawal and Irish unity. The Republican leadership had not gone so far as endorsing the Downing St Declaration or the later Framework Document, agreed between London and Dublin, which made explicit Britain's guarantee to the Unionist minority on the island that there would be no united Ireland without their consent. But it was

quite clear that if they were allowed into negotiations they would have to work within the framework of the Unionist veto. A document put to the 1995 Ard Fheis (Annual Conference) of Sinn Féin spoke of the likely internal settlement which would emerge from talks as a “transitional” arrangement on the road to eventual unity.

The bitter historical irony was that the 1921 agreement with the British which had partitioned the country in the first place, was sold on the basis that it was a stepping stone to unity. IRA leader Michael Collins who led the delegation which signed the Treaty with the British was killed in the Civil War which followed a split in Sinn Féin over the Treaty. Recent



British Prime Minister John Major

graffiti in Republican areas of Belfast have reminded Gerry Adams of Collins' fate.

The IRA's only demand when announcing the cease-fire was a place in negotiations and this, combined with the knowledge that the Sinn Féin leadership had to some extent already accepted an internal settlement, enabled the British to pressure the Republican leadership to accept the corollary to this abandonment of the armed struggle and the handing over of weapons. As one Sinn Féin member put it angrily, “the British were seeking to win by diplomacy what they had failed to win in

the war” — namely the defeat of the IRA.

As the cease-fire progressed and the British put up a series of barriers to Republican participation in talks it became clear this was no mere softening up exercise in advance of negotiations. Of course, the more the Sinn Féin leadership could be forced to concede in advance, the easier would it be for the British to broker a solution favourable to themselves when the talks did happen. But there is also a significant section of the British security and military apparatus which wants a rematch with the IRA. For them the purpose of the “peace process” was to divide, isolate and then inflict a military defeat on the Republicans. This view has an echo in Dublin where one source spoke recently of the need to “eradicate the cancer of republicanism from the island of Ireland”.

A whole series of British initiatives were calculated to provoke Republicans. Private Lee Clegg a British soldier imprisoned for the murder of a Belfast teenager was released and later promoted. There was no release of prisoners even though many have served more than 20 years in British prisons. In fact, conditions for prisoners got worse, as reported by a delegation of

Dublin TD's (Members of Parliament). Marches by the sectarian Orange Order were driven through Nationalist areas by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC).

In February, John Major side-stepped the US Senator Mitchell's Report on the decommissioning of arms in favour of elections to a new Northern Ireland “Assembly” favoured by the Unionists. More importantly, he went back on an agreement with Dublin that there would be all party talks by the end of February. It was clear he was going for a break.

The bomb which ended the cease-fire was a message to Major that he could not

split the IRA. At the same time, it was a serious mistake by the Republicans. Peace was popular. During the cease-fire even the most rabid anti-Republicans were forced to admit that Major was the main obstacle to negotiations but the bomb put the onus back on the IRA. It allowed a hysterical wave of anti-republican sentiment particularly in the South. If, people asked, 25 years of war had not forced the British out, what was the point in resuming the armed struggle? The IRA may have preserved its unity but the “pan-nationalist alliance” so painstakingly constructed between Sinn Féin, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), Dublin and Irish American worthies has fractured. Getting back into talks, which apparently remains the Republicans objective, will mean even bigger concessions to these forces in the future.

Major has now promised all party talks in June after the elections. He has won the reluctant support of the SDLP, Dublin and the Clinton Government. He holds a strong hand. Elections in the North will form the basis for negotiations. The outcome is thereby clearly signalled as internal, i.e. within the existing boundaries. There will be no concessions to Irish unity. Dublin will be offered some loose role as guarantor of the rights of Nationalists in the Six Counties in return for giving up its historic claim to jurisdiction over the whole of Ireland. Sinn Féin participation will mean an IRA cease-fire and the early handing over of weapons. If they don't take part, the settlement will be imposed over their heads. Political isolation could lead to big military defeats.

But Major's negotiating skills should not conceal the weakness of his position, nor should the spineless “me-too” -ism of the British Labour Party under Tony Blair, who has backed the Tories on this, as on other issues of domestic and international politics. In previous crises of de-colonisation the British ruling class were able to impose a solution even if that meant sacrificing a section of their own class in the interests of the class as a whole. Major is incapable of doing that in Ireland without dividing the Tory Party from top to bottom.

Hence, John Major's dependence on the 11 members of the Ulster Unionist Party at Westminster. Not only are the Tories divided on a series of issues, but Major is much less capable than his predecessor, Margaret Thatcher, in holding the party

together behind his central projects. But he knows very well that important elements on the party right — right wing populists, English nationalists and xenophobics, are strongly pro-Unionist.

In 1985 Thatcher, much against her own unionist instincts, signed the Anglo Irish Agreement, because she recognised that it was politically necessary to involve the Dublin Government in order to stem the rise of Sinn Féin. Aside from Major's much narrower majority in Parliament, there are



reckoned to be about 20 Tory MPs who are die-hard unionists and who take their political lead on Northern Ireland as much from Ulster Unionist Party leader David Trimble as from Major. The election defeat which the Tories seem certain to face before mid-1997 is likely to lead to an outbreak of bloodletting and internal feuding in the Conservative and Unionist Party not seen since the 19th or early 20th centuries. The splits reflect fundamental divisions in the British ruling class about the long term strategic interests of British capital. Put crudely, the question is this: Does it lie with closer integration into the European Union or with continuation of trans-Atlantic links with the US? In general, big capital favours EU integration, while smaller domestic capital is against. The problem is that the Thatcherites who have led the Tory Party for 20 years and who now dominate it are

virulently anti-EU. A small group of them are willing to risk defeat of the Government in order to oppose European integration.

Major's Parliamentary difficulties are also interesting for the light they cast on the splits in the ruling class as a whole on the question of Ireland. In a post Cold War world they have less of a strategic interest in Ireland. In the *Die Zeit* interview mentioned earlier, Mayhew bemoaned the economic cost: “3bn for 1.5 million people”. Nobody believes for a minute that the British are willing to spend such sums year after year to protect the “democratic” rights of the Unionists. Not even the Unionists — despite the close historic ties between themselves and the Conservatives.

While the British may have no strategic or economic interest in remaining in part of Ireland they have a political interest in defeating Irish Republicanism because of the threat it has posed historically and continues to pose to British rule in Ireland. In that sense, Sinn Féin and the IRA can never concede enough: they must be eradicated without any prospect of being revived. This desire is shared by the Dublin ruling class who have had a number of shocks as a result of the war in the North. The most recent, in the early 1980s saw the rise of Sinn Féin following the Hunger Strikes threaten to combine dangerously with the economic crisis and destabilise the Southern State.

Of course terror on the scale required to obliterate Republicanism is not politically possible so close to home, though the policy was implemented in more distant colonial struggles such as Aden and Kenya and by the French in Algeria. That is not to say that a low-level variant was not used in Ireland with “shoot to kill” and the use of loyalist terror gangs. It may or may not be surprising that the last die-hard exponent of this policy in Ireland was Labour Northern Ireland Secretary Roy Mason in the late 1970's.

The critical move away from this occurred in 1985 with the Anglo Irish Agreement. The Tories under Thatcher who had until then resisted any encroachment on British “sovereignty” in the North of Ireland, came round to the view that since the IRA could not be defeated militarily, they needed to enlist the help of the Dublin Government to politically isolate them. It was this which laid the foundation for Dublin's key role in both the Downing Street Declaration and the Framework



Document setting out the terms on which the British wanted to stabilise the Northern statelet.

Sinn Féin's strategy in the pan-nationalist alliance with Dublin and the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) has been to press Dublin (and they would prefer Fianna Fail over Fine Gael) with the help of the American Irish lobby to lever concessions from the British. Such concessions as the British are willing to make — and there has been little enough of these so far — will be in the context of strengthening partition. They have not given up their desire to defeat Republicanism, merely changed tack in the belief that the Dublin ruling class can do it more effectively.

While the Canary Wharf bomb showed they could not split the IRA, it is very difficult to see how a dangerous split can be avoided if the leadership continues along its present course. There are historic precedents for British intervention in support of pro-British elements in Ireland. The Civil War following the 1921 Agreement which partitioned the country was fought between two factions of Sinn Féin one of whom received military help from the British. It is the British interest in a split in the IRA, if not outright civil war, in pursuance of the desire to inflict a once-and-for-all defeat on the Republicans which is the most likely cause of a "bloodbath" in Ireland today.

One of the odder sights in the recent history of Ireland has seen the British build massive military fortresses along the border between North and South of Ireland at the same time as the Single Market, and the consequent dismantling of trade barriers, came into existence. At the very time when the border opened economically the British determined to close it militarily. Clearly, a solution along the lines advocated by John Hume of the SDLP would make sense from the point of view of both the London and Dublin Governments, if only Major was capable of enforcing it on his Europhobic right wing.

This political paralysis extends not just to Ireland but also to other national

questions within the British state which threatens to blow it (and the Tory Party) apart. And it is precisely atrophy which threatens Major's plan for Ireland. If he concedes the principle of local government in Northern Ireland he can hardly refuse it in Scotland. The Labour Party favours a Scottish Parliament because they believe it will save the union by heading off the pro-independence Scottish National Party. It is quite likely that the opposite will be the case, as the Scottish bourgeoisie decide to throw in their lot with a dynamic west European capitalism rather than remain tied to a declining British one.

The truth is that for all Margaret Thatcher's boasts of putting the "great" back into Great Britain, her 10 year reign was a managed decline and pulling back from the pretensions of empire. Euphoria over the Malvinas ("Falklands") war, the permanent seat on the UN Security Council, the "special relationship" with the US and the US sponsored "nuclear deterrent" could not disguise the relative economic decline over a long period. The problem was and still remains one of finding a military and political role to match its lowlier economic status in the world.

It is unlikely that the British ruling class will seriously divide over Ireland although there are historical precedents for that. The fault lines are more likely to be along questions such as the relationship to the EU and to the US. However it is not impossible that the Irish question could loom larger in the lowered horizons of post imperial Britain, even if only as the detonator to the explosive tensions building up within the British state since the early 1970's.

Military defeat would be unthinkable: British overseas interests rely for their security on the perceived military might of the British state. Anything which weakens that, even in a minor colony such as the North of Ireland, would be extremely dangerous. The stakes in are higher than might first appear.

In the post-war de-colonisations, the Labour Party, with the help of the US, was willing to step in and do what the Tories were incapable of doing, pulling out. "New" Labour under Blair seems totally incapable of providing options for the ruling class.

There has been very little criticism of Blair's position from inside the Labour Parliamentary Party. Former shadow

Northern Ireland Secretary Kevin MacNamara has criticised Blair's support for Major's planned elections on May 30th. MacNamara's successor Mo Mowlam has carefully cultivated the Unionists and rarely criticises the Tories. In fact, one of MacNamara's main criticisms was that the Unionists were getting so much reassurance from Labour that they could drive a harder bargain with Major and the Tories on issues such as whether Sinn Féin should be allowed into negotiations. The Chair of the Socialist Campaign Group of Mps, John Austin Walker, attended the recent Sinn Féin Ard Fheis in Dublin and spoke in a personal capacity. Nearly 30 Labour MP's voted against the renewal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act against the advice of the leadership. The same number opposed a piece of legislation rushed through Parliament by the Tories which allows the police to cordon off and search people entering or leaving an area without having to show reasonable cause. Shadow Home Secretary, Jack Straw, promised Labour Party support simply on the basis of Intelligence reports, further strengthening his right-wing populist image.

Unity by consent, which has been official Party policy since the mid 1980's has been abandoned in practice as Blair and Mowlam talk of creating "a level playing field" for the negotiations between Unionists and Nationalists.

What has changed, even since the beginning of the current phase of the struggle, is the context. The British state is decaying from within as the economic and political crises become entwined. Ireland has sometimes been the cause of splits in the British ruling class, often the catalyst for long and bitter battles. It is as incapable of imposing a solution on Ireland as it is of finding a way through the problems which beset it on all sides.

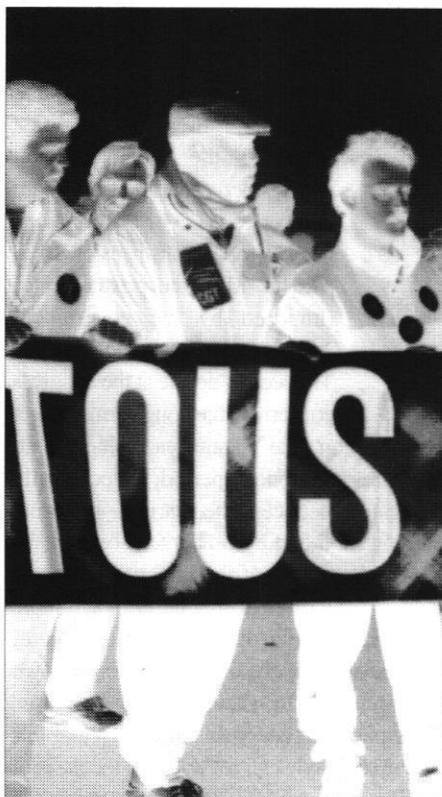
Labour is no more capable than the Conservatives of imposing a solution, even with the assistance of the Dublin ruling class. It may even be less able as the Tories "rally to the flag" in a desperate effort to win the next general election and little Englandism grows on the Tory Right. The one certainty is that the new "settlement" will go the way of previous British efforts: the long struggle between Irish Republicans and British imperialism will continue.

For socialists, the demands remain: for British withdrawal and self-determination for the Irish people. ★

Trade union recomposition

Less than one in ten French workers is in a trade union. In the private sector, the ratio is closer to one in twenty. And yet, the country's labour movement has not only proved its militancy, but generated new forms of struggle and organising that should be an inspiration to militants in other countries.

Dominique Mezzi



FRANCE HAS A LOWER RATE OF TRADE UNION membership than any other OECD country. And the number of days lost to industrial action in recent years was one of the lowest in Europe. And yet, the country was shaken by a massive public sector strike in November and December 1995. Events in Paris and Marseilles threw the French and European bourgeoisies into a panic. And raised the left's hopes that we were seeing the

start of a new cycle of strikes, and a new kind of social movement, which could oppose the Maastricht system and its dictatorial convergence criteria, by putting forward the social and democratic demands of the working population.

This massive mobilisation will surely be followed by at least a modest increase in union membership. But we are starting from very low. The trade unions have lost 50% of their members over the last 20 years. The Communist-dominated CGT has lost over 65%. Only two million French working people are members of trade unions, from a total workforce of 19.5 million.

- CGT General Secretary Louis Viannet now admits having exaggerated his federation's membership figures in the past. The new official claim, for 1993, is 630,000 members, including 160,000 senior citizens.

- The (Catholic inspired) CFDT only has 515,000 members

- Force Ouvrière (FO, closer to the Socialist Party) has about 375,000 members.

- The General Confederation of Cadres (CGC) has about 111,000 members, and the (Christian, moderate) CFTC has about 93,000.

- In 1992, the National Education Federation (FEN) had 300,000 members. But following a split, the most dynamic force in the sector is the Unitary Trade Union Federation (FSU), which has more than 150,000 members.

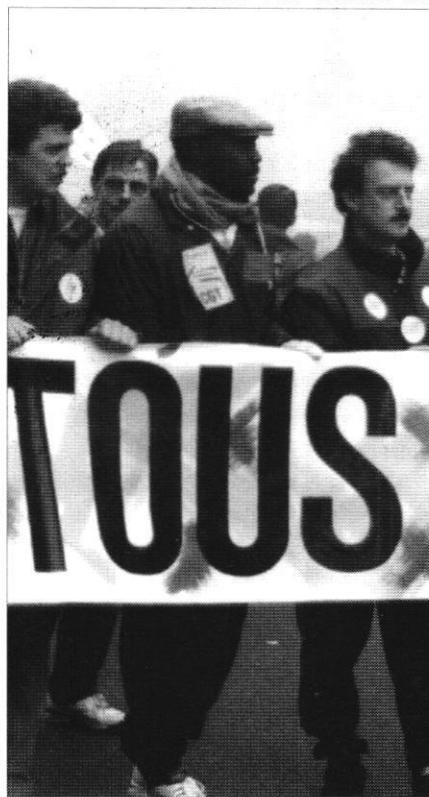
- The other non-federated unions are grouped in two poles. The most dynamic pole is the "Group of 10", which now brings together 18 independent unions, notably SUD-Post Office/Telecom (10,000) and the tax-collectors union SNUI (20,000). Moves are underway to form a federal body within the next 12 months. This pole is likely to be joined by recent dissidents from the CFDT, who have formed the 2,000 strong SUD-Rail union.

The second "independent" pole, the

National Union of Autonomous Unions (UNSA), has a similar conception of trade unionism to the leadership of the CFDT. Its main components are the teachers' union FEN, and the civil servants' union FGAF. And like the CFDT, UNSA is now wracked by debate about the end of the strike.

The need for a thinking unionism

November-December 1995 was possible because there was an undercurrent of silent social revolt against the ravages of neo-liberalism. But also because our crisis-ridden trade union movement was flexible and



permeable enough at the local level to absorb and express the unitary and democratic demands and expectations of hundreds of thousands of people.

The major confederations were no longer able to impose a direction on the movement in an authoritarian way, and thus channel our social aspirations. To survive, the big confederations must now recognise the transformation of the labour force, the democratic aspirations which have been clear for some years now, and the capacity for

innovation in workers' demands and collective action.

The workforce's general culture is high. Women workers expect that union and movement structures and activities will enable their voices to be heard. Younger workers refuse to obey union advice "from on high" without discussion. And, despite their social and political exclusion, and despite the negative view they often hold about trade unions, groups of unemployed workers are also looking for new forms of self-help and support, and for a new collective ethic in the NGO-associative sector. A system which really listens to people. All this has implications for the confederate function of the major organisations.

Not surprisingly, the part of trade unionism which is working is the part which is in phase with these unitary aspirations and the new spirit of combativity. And which harnesses, rather than dis-parages, the collective intelligence of the working population. Those unions, across the spectrum, whose guiding principles are intelligence and self-organisation, as close to the base as possible, are growing in size and influence.

This is what explains the particular success of SUD and the FSU. It is what animates the active search for new strategies among a current in the CGT, as well as a wide range of militants who recognise the failure of their old projects.

This is the kind of trade unionism that most CFDT militants would like to see. Which explains why confederation leader Nicole Notat, who has decided to support the "enlightened" wing of the employers and the government, has now so firmly barricaded herself inside a bureaucratic bunker. She knows that the greater the democratic debate inside the CFDT, the more fragile her position will be. The same is obviously true about the Stalinist and ex-Stalinist conglomerate at the core of the CGT. This is a current on the defensive, and without a clear orientation, but with a monolithic tradition, which targets the feeling of isolation, and the need for protection of the most dominated sectors of the working class. This has created a trade union culture where militants are

unused to democratic debate, which they find rather de-stabilising. Here too, opening the windows to a breeze of debate threatens to de-stabilise the bureaucratic core of the federation.

Obviously, even a "professional," corporatist style of trade unionism could also be close to the principle of direct control by the workers. Though the "efficiency" of such unionism would be measured in quite different criteria. Such unions would hardly seek to participate in a new, vaguely defined project of social transformation. This kind of approach is in evidence across the board,



from the secondary school teachers of the FSU to SNUI, and the newly-unionised "feminine" professions like nurses.

Maybe trade unionism has been slow to re-consider professional and sectoral questions, and the way they inter-react with the general demands of the working population. Professional problems are not "just" sectoral demands. They are really-experienced situations, work conditions, hierarchies, technology, and a range of other questions which the employers have devoted much more attention to than the unions.

CGT 45th Congress

The congress took place during the ascendant phase of the strike, in early December. It was characterised by two passionate debates: what to do in the current mobilisation, and what project the CGT should propose for trade unionism as a whole.

A majority of delegates, particularly among railway and transport workers, had been directly mandated by general assemblies of their striking colleagues. They

were expecting the congress to produce a strong national orientation for the mobilisation. But General Secretary Louis Viannet's opening speech was completely out of phase. All he demanded was a "negotiating table." And all he promised was that the next national day of action would create the necessary "shock wave."

Four times during the congress, the leadership was interrupted by dozens of delegates, demanding to come to the microphone and appeal to congress to harden the tone, and call for a general strike. This was not a plan for the CGT to issue orders

from above, as might have been the case in the old days, but a desire by many CGT militants to take back to their local assemblies a proposal for a general strike, which could be discussed. A strike based on demands which would be carefully drafted so as to reach out to the private sector too. A key question here was the issue of retirement pensions: reversing the 1993 decision which increased the minimum number of years of contributions needed for a state pension from 37.5 to 40 in the private sector (imposed by the government without union opposition).

The second debate at the congress concerned the long term project for the union. The Viannet leadership had, in the pre-conference period, successfully navigated between the various sectarian currents, and had even adopted some of the critical comments of the minorities, such as the call for a more open approach, and more co-operation with the other confederations. Of course, everyone can give his or her own interpretation to such vaguely-expressed principles. But congress did clarify that this was no old-style call for unity on the basis of support for the CGT! And the confederation had participated, on November 25th, at the key 40,000 strong demonstration for women's rights. It is rare to see the CGT commit itself so much to any event or initiative for which it itself does not control all the key levers. Genuinely decentralised meetings were held in union branches. There is a real opening at the local level, and a new possibility for co-operation with other unions, associations, and organisations like the unemployment action group AC! or the anti-racist initiatives.

As for trade union co-operation, the CGT

made big efforts in 1995 to avoid the confederations' tendency to sabotage each others' events [by launching similar sounding initiatives on different days or in different places]. This meant that mobilisations began to have a true inter-union and inter-professional character. Concretely, by supporting FO's 28 November day of action (launched without consultation with the other federations), the CGT transformed what would have been an isolated event, with a negative effect on the mobilisation, into a dynamic reinforcement of the rising tide of the movement.

But Louis Viannet has been careful to set the limits of this new unity. Notably, it is clear that, for him, co-operation does not mean that there is now a common project. Each federation has its own characteristics. Lateral debate is not going to happen. And there is no reason to start talking about a new, pluralist super-confederation.

And, while pluralism is OK in the movement, there was no way Viannet intended to introduce such concepts in the selection of the CGT's own Confederation Bureau. On the contrary, several of his opponents lost their seats at this congress. So, while the CGT is more and more auto-nomous in the social and political spheres, and while the role of the Communist Party in the union leadership is less strong than before, the bureaucracy still has its own specific interests. It intends to profit from its re-established role as a social partner which the employers and government cannot avoid negotiating with. This is why Viannet refused to suggest that the strike could go as far as provoking the fall of the Juppé government.

This is a dangerous situation, and full of contradictions. The unitary line, often correct, often clashes with traditional bureaucratic methods, and a lack of imagination. Since the CGT is receiving relatively high scores in the current round of professional (workplace) elections, the leadership is happy to delay all difficult questions.

FO: the end of an epoch

In 1989 Marc Blondel was elected as General Secretary of Force Ouvrière. The debate at that congress was about a project to "bury" FO in a "recomposition" of the

leaderships of CFDT, FEN and FO, with the aim of isolating the CGT, with its "archaic" class struggle rhetoric. And letting the country's most combative union wear itself down in an isolated confrontation with neo-liberalism. Meanwhile, the unified and coherent face of modern trade unionism would negotiate the necessary compromises, more or less inspired by the German model. A model which has been idealised and misrepresented to fit the theories of the French would-be architects of the destruction of our trade unions.

Luckily, this plan has more or less



collapsed. The first phase was achieved, but came back like a boomerang to punish its authors. Phase one was, in effect, the violent exclusion from the teachers confederation FEN, of a large minority, considered to be too attached to "struggle unionism". The expulsion was achieved. But the cost was high; the determined resistance of militant, politicised structures in the unions, including in the (traditionally moderate and non-unionised) primary teachers' sector; creation of FSU, which, over the last two years, has confirmed its place as the main, most active trade union in the education sector. The FSU input into the November and December strikes was the most dynamic, their contingents were the largest in the education sector. Despite the handicap of unequal geographical presence across the country, FSU is in a key position to generate initiatives bringing the various unions together. Provided, of course, they can cope with the increasingly complex world of French trade unionism!

Blondel's election to the head of FO in

1989 was keenly supported by the 'Lambertist' current in the union. It is true that Blondel's victory blocked the right-wing current in FO. But the confederation is still caught between two different logics and strategies.

FO has traditionally seen itself as the "apolitical" and "independent" confederation: refusing the practices of the "Communist" CGT, and the pro-government and "pro-Vatican" manoeuvres of the CFDT. But, like the CFDT, FO has refused to develop any new trade union work towards the unemployed. It refuses any permanent

system of co-operation. And insists that it is impossible for FO to pretend to defend the "general interest." Trade union should confine themselves to salary questions, according to Blondel.

Not surprisingly, the space for FO to win and keep support among working people is shrinking. And the evaporation of the ideological underpinning of the old confederate divisions is hitting the union hard. Blondel and the FO apparatus have become obsessed with institutional questions, like FO's privileged role in the management of the social security system. Institutional questions which will hardly renew FO's membership and implantation.

Nevertheless, FO still has a capacity to resist the blows of this bourgeois government. The confederation's role in November-December 1995 contributed to the dynamic towards a general strike. Even though FO brutally cut any ideas which emerged concerning the structural regroupment of the trade union movement, "There would be no place there for me," Blondel admitted in a moment of candour.

The regroupment in question was a fusion of the CGT and FO. There is a movement of activists and shop stewards in both confederations working in this direction. An open letter published in Spring 1995 argued that the two confederations "are two branches from a common trunk." This regroupment of the two federation is actively supported by *Informations ouvrières*, the newspaper of the Workers Party [PT, dominated by the Lambertist current. Ed.] Though the Lambertists did not renew their proposals during the last FO congress. Nor, in fact, did they have much to say that differed from the Blondel leadership they criticise for "reformism."

The Lambertists' important position in FO has nevertheless contributed to the development of an anti-communist opposition current which won about 20% of votes at the last congress. Led by supporters of the Socialist Party (PS), this current is paralysed by its hostility to the CGT, and its outrage at Blondel's historic handshake with Louis Viannet (CGT) on 28 November 1995. Nevertheless, this current does have good positions on questions like the reduction of the working week, and the dangers of racism and fascism. It does carry with it a number of genuine trade unionists.

What future for Nicole Notat?

The CFDT congress in Spring 1995 confirmed the secure position of the leadership, and the inability of the opposition to present a real alternative leadership. But the congress also demonstrated that the base of the confederation rejects, on the basis of experience, the compromise-oriented, pro-employer strategy incarnated by General Secretary Nicole Notat. Notat took power in the union by force, and holds on to her position in the same way. Which leaves traces...

But, while it did not change its basic orientation, the CFDT did contribute to the increased activity and unity of the trade union movement. The common action with the CGT on 14 June 1995 raised, for the first time, the generalised reduction of the working week below 40 hours. The CFDT also participated in the 10 October one-day strike which, by its mass character and the spirit of broad co-operation of a range of forces, opened the possibility of a wider struggle. The confederation also signed the 30 October common platform for a common trade union front to defend the social security system.

The 180° turn came on 15 November, when Notat used a television show, to which she was invited along with Blondel and Viannet, to state her total support for the Juppé plan. If she had not done so, the Juppé government would have been paralysed almost immediately.

The enormous majority of honest CFDT members, including those who did not support the minority opposition, were shocked to discover that their General Secretary was ready to support a rightist government which was trying to impose anti-worker policies. Particularly since many CFDT rail workers had just begun a strike against government plans to cut the service, and reduce their pension rights.

Notat even created a "Vigilance

Committee," to ensure that Juppé did not cede in the face of "lobbies of all kinds." Notat's support proved to be a key element of Juppé's success. Particularly since the Prime Minister was increasingly threatened from within the conservative camp, by a faction which was enraged at the clumsy way he had enflamed the country.

The CFDT opposition, which for eight years has organised around the *Les Cahiers* bulletin (circulation 1,000), and which represented about 35% of delegates at the 1995 Spring congress, reacted quickly to Notat's treachery. Many CFDT militants began marching and picketing covered in stickers identifying them as "CFDT in struggle." On 7 November 600 shop stewards signed a public appeal "CFDT: Unity and Action", which was published in *Le Monde* and elsewhere. A national meeting of CFDT unionists opposed to Notat was held in Paris in January 1996. A petition demanding an extraordinary congress has begun to circulate in the confederation. It registered 17% support at the confederation's latest National Confederation Council meeting. And the interventions by a number of regional and sectoral representatives at the council meeting reveal a considerable malaise, even among those who continue to accept the legitimacy of the Notat leadership. This also explains Notat's visits to a number of "majority" regions: she is mindful of the need to re-establish her control.

Notat threatens to isolate her opponents in the traditional way. Her violent attacks on those CFDT sectors "in struggle" create a sentiment of frustration, which encourage individual and collective resignation from the confederation. At the same time, she has not hesitated to place a number of "problematic" unions under central control, or threaten them with expulsion.

The CFDT opposition is now structured around "Tous ensemble" (All together!) a large-circulation monthly newspaper. It almost seems that the true CFDT tradition, which made the confederation strong in the 1970s, is being re-born, to rebuild the CFDT of the 21st century.

Conclusions

This is a turbulent period for the unions. There are a range of possibilities. for a left intervention.

● going along with the legitimate anger of the members who consider that Notat is breaking our common home. This is the base of the decision of some militants to leave the confederation, and reconstitute, slowly, a tissue of inter-professional links on the basis

of the unions grouped in the "Group of Ten." The aim is, at a later period, to have an influence on the confederations, particularly the CGT. One thing is sure: a large number of rank-and-file CFDT members will not be able to support indefinitely the current situation, where they are obliged to struggle not just against the boss, but also against their own General Secretary.

● another possible strategy is to try to go as far as possible in the struggle to build a public current for debate and action within the CFDT. The aim would be to represent a pole of regroupment in the multiple differentiations which are and will develop in the confederation, including, at a different rhythm, in the private sector. This is the strategy which will permit us to organise the largest possible opposition. Provided, of course, that such an opposition current is open to the world outside the CFDT. Provided that it seeks to win new workers to its ideas, and proposes a project of a unitary trade union movement.

Moments of sharp confrontation are invariably moments of rapid growth of consciousness. Things move fast. Notat will hardly remain inactive. She cannot tolerate a real, prolonged democratic debate.

The new expectations of the working population, and the hopes many workers put in the renovation of the trade union movement, should help us to establish sophisticated local and national structures, which listen to the workers, and enable them to debate and decide. The ideal development would be if those in the CGT who want to see union unity tried to understand and empathise with the problems and preoccupations of militants in the CFDT. And if those in SUD tried to think and act as if they were a current within a larger, unitary confederation. CFDT members need to control their legitimate frustration.

In Italy the trade union confederations propose a single confederation in the hope that they will be able to isolate the radical sectors of the movement. That idea is dead in France. Here, the project of an unitary confederation expresses the desire to include everyone who wants to see a pluralist structure regrouping most of the unions which are oriented to action. ★

Note

1. Statistics are taken from a recent study by Dominique Labbé, a researcher at Grenoble University

Communist shell breaks

The French left has entered into a complex phase of debates and reclassifications. An exciting new challenge for the revolutionary left

by Christian Picquet

THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST PARTY (PS) is in the middle of a "programmatic reflection," punctuated by debates with other parts of the left. And the Communist Party (PCF) recently organised a series of "forums to invent the new future," which culminated in a meeting of 10,000 participants, in Paris on 2 April. PCF leaders were joined by representatives of the PS, the Citizens Movement (MS), the Greens and the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR).

The reactivation of the left is certainly connected to the approaching parliamentary elections (1998). The left may be exhausted after 14 years of "Socialist" President François Mitterrand. But the electoral victories of the right, in the parliamentary elections of 1993 and the presidential elections of 1995, have nevertheless revealed the divisions and weaknesses of the right wing. So the prospect of a left-wing government is increasingly plausible. And, of course, there are the numerous effects of the social movement which rocked France in November and December 1995...

The strikes and demonstrations at the end of last year stopped the triumphant boasting of the neo-liberals. December was an open accusation of the social consequences of the Maastricht construction of Europe. And proof of society's resistance to austerity measures. But there was no direct political expression of the movement. To the great shame of the traditional left parties.

The democratic character of the December struggles transformed the climate in the world of work. By encouraging a huge number of unitary meetings of rank-and-file workers, within and between the various sectors in struggle. Unfortunately, this upsurge did not transform itself into a movement towards a general strike. But the aspirations of the workers involved are finding another form of expression: through

the Spring professional (workplace representative) elections.

The big guns of the left have noticed. The Socialist Party of Lionel Jospin is distancing itself a little more from the dead-ends of the Maastricht process. Jospin has not challenged the single currency, or the timetable for economic and monetary union, but he has begun to demand that France's European partners present their "social credentials," including a Social Charter, a "guaranteed minimum European wage," and a tripartite "European economic government." This proved too little for the militants of December 1995, and a majority of delegates to the party's recent "Globalisation, Europe, France" convention approved a resolution, submitted by the small left-wing Socialist Left (GS) current, which challenged the Maastricht convergence criteria. The vote was not decisive enough to reverse party policy, but the warning to Jospin was clear. This is the first time such a strong challenge to Maastricht has been expressed in a party which has always seen itself as the avant-garde of the European movement.

The contradictions are even stronger inside the French Communist Party (PCF). Party leader Robert Hue's 1995 presidential campaign was only moderately successful in terms of mobilisation. And it was immediately followed by the loss of the Communist majority in a number of towns which have traditionally elected Communist-led councils. The December 1995 mobilisations have not reversed this clear tendency of decline in support for the PCF. Communist militants were very active in the movement, but their leaders refused to challenge the legitimacy of Prime Minister Alain Juppé's government. By failing to do so, the PCF demonstrated that it had no credible political alternative to offer, in the context of an important social radicalisation.

The point of implosion

Robert Hue's election as General Secretary marks the PCF's deep strategic crisis. All the benefits of the Left Union (with the Socialists) of the 1970s and 1980s went to the Socialists. And the subsequent collapse of the Stalinist system deprived the PCF of the international reference points which had

enabled it to maintain its domination of the French workers' movement. The party was not just gradually losing voters and members, but it could not find a way to win support among the young, and in the new, non-unionised sectors of the working population.

There seemed to be no way out of the party's crisis. An Italian-style social-democratisation would strip the party of everything which differentiates it from the PS, which is after all the largest section of the left, in electoral terms. The PCF apparatus has always been hostile to any refoundation project which recognises and seeks to overcome the double failure of social democracy and Stalinism. In order to survive, the party has to keep the crisis an internal affair, and present itself as occupying a distinct space from the PS. But it also has to face the risk that any further decline in its electoral score will threaten the existence of its parliamentary group. The combination of these contradictory interests led the party leadership to abandon the inflexible strategy of veteran party leader Georges Marchais, and seek, under Hue, a new dialogue with the Socialist Party.

Hue's job is a difficult one. He has to convince the PCF base, shaped by countless years of sectarianism, that the new overture is legitimate. And he has to wriggle out of the obviously junior position the PCF will occupy in any head-to-head or side-by-side comparison with the Socialist Party.

Hue's strategy has been to reassure the membership that he has no intention of resuscitating the Left Union of bygone days. And to invite "the people" to create the contours of the new left political structure. Hence his initiative for a series of discussions of the left, notably through the regional forums.

Exposing the membership of an organisation like the PCF to any kind of open debate threatened to provoke a severe shock in the apparatus of the party. The PCF apparatus had more or less resisted the shock-wave which followed the disappearance of the USSR (unlike the Communist-led CGT trade unions, which were shaken). There is, it seems, a real risk of "balkanisation" of the PCF, and bitter public factional struggles to

establish control of the party's regional federations and other bodies.

This is certainly what seemed to be looming during the forums of the last two months. While the official representatives of the party normally avoided any 'brutal' comments about the socialists, the audience did not restrain themselves. At the tribune, one praised pluralism, and implied that the method of debate was more important than the content of discussion. But from the floor, one openly attacked the balance of François Mitterrand's two seven year terms as president, and the PS's refusal to oppose itself to "the god of money."

Differences within the leadership were also visible. Some federations boycotted the forum project. And some leaders clearly marked out an anti-PS and anti-regroupment position. Communist Parliamentary group leader Alain Bocquet used the Lille forum to declare that he would not take part in any government which implemented policies favourable to the single European currency. A warning not just to the Socialists, but to some 'moderates' in his own party.

A neo-Stalinist opposition in the rank-and-file has recently formed, structured around a text signed by 300 leading PCF members. Written in the unique style of the 1930s, this proclamation bristles with anti-capitalist and class struggle terminology. And warns that "defeats of [certain] Communist Parties should not lead us to throw the baby of the October revolution away with the dirty bath water of deformations, sclerosis and abandoning of principles. We need Communist self-criticism, not consensus self-flagellation, which plunges the masses into confusion." The names attached include Rémi Auchédé, National Committee member and Member of Parliament for Pas-de-Calais, and the journalist Henri Alleg, the first white to be tortured by French parachutists during the Algerian war of independence. The main effect of this text will be to oblige all the components of the party leadership to take position. Georges Marchais, for example, has not yet publicly opened the hostilities.

Encouraging changes

The changing climate opens new, novel possibilities for dialogue and confrontation for the revolutionary left. Revolutionary Communist Party (LCR) leader Alain Krivine made a very favourable impression on the 10,000-strong crowd at the final forum, in Paris on 2 April, with his impassioned defence of radical change as the

objective to keep in view. One of the walls which separated LCR and PCF militants has fallen, for good. Given the significant influence which the PCF still holds on significant radicalised sectors of the workers' movement, and the obstacle which the party has represented to an effective recomposition on the left, this evolution is an important modification of the political landscape.

Tomorrow, PCF and PS leaders may propose some resuscitation of the Left Union. Given the extreme weakness of the Socialist Party's policies nowadays, the content of any such union will be extremely disappointing. The LCR, French section of the Fourth International, proposes something different. We have been directly involved in the discussions which have criss-crossed the left. And we have proposals for the whole left, for trade union militants, and those active in associations and community groups. We don't suggest the regrouping of all these components of the left whatever the cost. But we do think the time has come for a debate without preconceptions about the content of the alternative we must build in the face of this right-wing government.

The LCR proposals take as their starting point the major demands of the movement of November-December 1995. We need to establish the axes of a programme which would represent a rupture with neo-liberal disorder. In response to the Communist leaders hollow incantations about "the people," we suggest the creation of a nationwide network of local unitary collectives, charged with elaborating such a platform, and drafting a common charter for all those who wish to associate themselves with the project. These local collectives would then ensure that those who adopted the charter respect and implement it during their electoral campaigns and in the institutions of the republic.

The LCR's proposal hopes to demonstrate that it is possible to really change the balance of forces on the left. And to establish a credible alternative to the right, and defeat it in elections, without creating a "left" government which maintains conservative policies, as happened between 1981 and 1993. ★

Christian Piquet is a member of the Political Bureau of the LCR, French Section of the Fourth International.

Dutch parliament approves gay marriage

The Dutch parliament and cabinet are locked in a conflict over same-sex marriage. On April 17 the lower house of parliament voted that same-sex partners should have equal rights to marry, parent and adopt. The vote promised legal rights to thousands of Dutch lesbian and gay parents who today have none.

The 81-60 majority came as an unpleasant surprise for the liberal-social democratic coalition government. The cabinet had proposed to create a form of legal registration for lesbian/gay couples, similar to what exists now in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, but without rights to marry or adopt. Though most politicians in the Netherlands formally support lesbian/gay equality, the vote was denounced by liberal VVD party leader Bolkestein, Catholic Cardinal Simonis and others. The queen is also rumored to have expressed dismay.

Further towards the left, a discussion has begun about whether the institution of marriage should be transformed or abolished. The feminist Council on Emancipation suggests that it be replaced with individual cohabitation contracts. Lesbian and gay activists in the Green Left party and Socialist Workers Party are concerned that same-sex partners who now have health, pension, tax and other social benefits might eventually be forced to choose between marriage and losing their benefits.

The parliament's decision only requires the cabinet to appoint a commission and put forward a draft gay marriage law by August 1997. The cabinet is discussing whether to implement the motion at all, and if so how.

[PD]

The reactionary despair of the cheated



Jan Malewski explains what went wrong with the workers' movement which inspired a generation of self-management militants, and forced the collapse of Poland's Stalinist system

EMERGING FROM THE GENERAL STRIKE OF summer 1980, the independent self-managed trade union "Solidarnosc" was the political expression of an immense movement of social self-organisation around Poland's great regional industrial bastions. The roots of this movement can be traced to the collapse of a project of accelerated "Stalinist" economic development, based on the low rates of credit available on the world market at the beginning of the 1970s; the consequent beginning of a decline in the standard of living of the Polish people; and the popular feeling that this was largely attributable to the incapacity of the governing elites and their desire to preserve at any price their privileged social position. The defeat of this model of development discredited the bureaucracy of the party-state and pushed to the forefront an intellectual democratic opposition that had succeeded in building links with the workers' vanguard after the repression of the strikes of June 1976.

The model of society which Solidarnosc embodied was inspired by this sentiment and the strikers' experiences of self-organisation - an egalitarian society based on ideals of solidarity. The galvanising effect that the strikes in the industrial bastions had on the demands of the least powerful sectors (health, education and so on) was the immediate translation of this aspiration.

The aim was a society which would guarantee the dignity of the workers through a system of enterprise self-management, modelled on the August 1980 strike committees and the 1956 workers' councils. A society which would respect capability, without placing those with special skills higher than the others. The symbol of this egalitarian desire was the role of "experts" in the movement. Counsellors to Solidarnosc did not, generally, take part in the final decision making. Another illustration was the practice of nominating enterprise directors in the workers' councils.

This model was expressed in the language of the democratic opposition. The main currents of this opposition, some of which had their origins in the anti-Stalinist

left of 1956, rejected Marxist references, which they associated with their bureaucratic caricatures. Solidarnosc preferred to speak of the "societisation" (1) of the economy, and a "self-managed republic" rather than use the word socialism. But, despite the mediation of exclusively 'democratic' language, and the search for a terminology as different as possible from the "novspeak" of the bureaucracy, the model of society expressed through Solidarnosc in 1980-1 was, essentially, that of a radical democratisation of the existing social system and not that of an overthrow of its social fundamentals. It amounted to a challenge to "actually existing socialism" in the name of the values that its propaganda upheld.

A challenge that became increasingly radical to the extent that the bureaucratic regime showed itself incapable of satisfying the aspirations clearly expressed by the masses. For it not only amounted to a challenge to the bureaucratic regime - in the enterprises and at the local level at first, and then the state - but also and above all to their privileged social situation, the demand that they come down from their pedestal (small though it was) to become part of the mass.

This was, it should be noted, a demand considerably more radical than that of a return to capitalism. That particular demand appeared after the defeat of the movement. After having attempted to dam the dynamic of this movement through a project of economic reform that sought to structure the decisions of the councils of self-management through a set of market mechanisms and through the central power of the state - a project accepted by the union negotiators and challenged by the first congress of Solidarnosc, which imposed the primacy of democratic rank and file decisions - the bureaucratic leadership decided to break it through imposing the state of emergency. Its principal author, General Jaruzelski, would write ten years later: "We were hypnotised by the conviction that the central organs and experts of Solidarnosc did as they wanted. We overestimated their capacity to orient and manipulate the organisation. A social and political movement as powerful and radicalised as this. It carried its leaders more than these latter led it. That, certainly, did not justify them totally, but it is a fact. In December 1981 it reached its apogee".(2)

The state of emergency was, then, imposed to stop this dynamic. Its authors sought to preserve the chances of a future compromise with those who could embody the legitimacy of the social movement, while

decapitating its structures and seeking to break the link between leaders and rank and file militants - the democratic vehicle of the radicalism of the movement. The repression was not, then, blind. It was massive at the level of the enterprises, in order to extract the working class militants from their social milieu, to force them to capitulate or to emigrate and thus paralyse the movement by depriving it of its intermediary cadres.

If Solidarnosc was thus able to preserve the continuity of its national leadership and its intellectual supporters, at the level of the enterprises this continuity of cadres and accumulated political experience was broken. Rather than a mass organisation preserved in clandestinity, Solidarnosc became after a few years a network for the diffusion of ideology from its intellectual centres to a rank and file condemned to passive consumption.

Jaruzelski's coup had yet another impact; it was very largely perceived as the ultimate proof that change was not possible in the framework of the system, when a mass movement as powerful as this one - and Solidarnosc with its some ten million members had been powerful - could not succeed in humanising "actually existing socialism". At the same time, the formidable wave of solidarity that the attack on the Polish system had generated abroad, which had forced the Western governments to verbally and materially commit themselves to support for the Polish opposition, endowed capitalism with humanist virtues in the popular imagination.

The terrain was thus ripe for an idealisation on a mass scale of the capitalist option; the reins of intellectual self-limitation (3) were loosened and the clandestine publications of Solidarnosc quickly made up for lost time, inundating the movement with the neoliberal prose then in fashion in the West. It was in 1984-85, when the trade union movement was at its lowest point in the workplaces, that a first break with the project of the "self-managed republic" emerged among the leading circles of the clandestine Solidarnosc. In a report prepared at that time for Lech Walesa and entitled "Solidarnosc five years after August"(4), this break is clearly made under the rubric of "economic reform" and a return to the market economy, presented as the only "natural economy". In September 1985 the clandestine provisional leadership made public a document entitled "The economic demands of the TKK", which constituted a fundamental rupture with the choices of the first Solidarnosc congress. The

TKK postulated here the introduction of a market in capital and the privatisation of the enterprises as well as a guarantee of security for foreign investments in Poland.(5)

This economic orientation was also the culmination of the evolution of the positions of the majority of Solidarnosc leaders towards a solution of historic compromise with the bureaucracy, obtained cold, or alternately on the basis of a limited social mobilisation that would create the conditions for an agreement between the leaders of the opposition and those of the bureaucracy. This went together with an increasingly pronounced opening of the Polish economy to private initiative, under the aegis of general Jaruzelski, himself subject to the crushing pressure of the foreign debt. In 1988-89 when the social mobilisations resumed in the workplaces and turned, naturally, towards the symbols of Solidarnosc, the leadership of the trade union and the intellectual opposition were in the main convinced of the superiority of capitalism. As to the renewed rank and file of the union it no longer had the opportunity to experience a movement of self-organisation similar to 1980. Legitimate trade union structures were there, it was enough to fill them. The leaders came out of clandestinity with the status of martyrs and it sufficed to fall in behind them. The few historic dissidents among the Solidarnosc leadership were subjected both to state repression and ostracism by their former comrades - if they succeeded despite everything in making themselves heard, they appeared as those who divided and thus weakened the movement. The team around Jaruzelski, engaged in a profound market reform and involved in the first initiatives aiming at the privatisation of the economy, then became aware that in the absence of legitimacy it could not achieve its goals.(6)

This was also the signal given clearly by the IMF, which had taken an active part in the elaboration of the project of capitalist restoration. Only the political and social opposition could legitimise this policy in the eyes of the masses and thus furnish the guarantee of success demanded by the West. Bronislaw Geremek, one of the principal Solidarnosc experts involved in the negotiations with the regime, which culminated in the so-called "round table accords" in April 1989, reported that from January 1989 onwards the priorities of the regime shifted from the economic to the political front: "it appeared that the economic questions had been pushed back from the programme of negotiations, or in any case

that they had begun to play a secondary role. On the other hand the establishment of a link between the legalisation of Solidarnosc and the political acceptance of elections was pushed to the front rank". (7) During the partially free parliamentary elections of June 1989, the Solidarnosc leadership had supported the candidatures of the civic committees of Solidarnosc, with the effect of creating a confusion between the trade union emerging from clandestinity and a political elite in formation. The result of these elections had rather disturbed the projects which came out of the round table. General Jaruzelski lost any remaining legitimacy, and could no longer hope to remain in power with the critical support of the post-Solidarnosc opposition. He had to hand power to someone else. The leaders of the opposition, after hesitation, accepted to take charge of the government. In doing so, they established a parliamentary democracy. They adopted, with great conviction, the transformation of society under the tutorship of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The centre of political gravity shifted to the state institutions. The reconstituted Solidarnosc trade union passed into the background. Though it maintained its unhesitating support for government policies which, in the name of the necessary rupture with the dictatorial past, also prepared a rupture with the previous social relations.

Adam Michnik, one of the most brilliant theoreticians of the 1970-1990 period, now the editor of the country's largest liberal daily newspaper, does not hide: "the round table was preceded by two waves of strikes, in spring and in autumn of 1988. The strikers could rightly consider that it is thanks to them that the new system was successful. And yet these strikers became the first victims of the transformation. Prices increased dramatically. Real wages fell sharply. The inefficient large enterprises were condemned to internal restructuring or bankruptcy. Their workers discovered the threat of mass redundancies. Farmers felt threatened by the invasions of foreign products. The intelligentsia was hit by the brutal ending of state patronage. After the great euphoria, the great disillusionment appeared. The populist stereotype of the "unfinished revolution" and the "state divided up by robbers" was a reaction to this. In the absurd accusations there was however a rational kernel. The market revolution and privatisation inevitably signified a brutal growth of social inequalities." (8)

Inside Solidarnosc this populist

stereotype, to take up Michnik's term, would gain increasing support. The successive trade union leaderships could respond to the profound unhappiness of their members only with the argument of time; a little more patience and the future would be better. Subsequently, time having passed without improvement, those who accused the liberal currents of having protected "the communists", hence "stopping the reforms", emerged on top. Incapable of understanding that the form taken by the democratic victory was at the same time a social defeat of the workers, and utilising the stereotypes of the old regime (where the dictators and the privileged were the same and where liberty meant also an end to the unreasonable



"We liquidated the old nomenklatura, Father, but we didn't have time for anything else."

privileges that the bureaucrats had fraudulently granted themselves) the Solidarnosc trade union engaged itself in the struggle for "de-Communisation", demanding, at the same time the heads of the former party members, yet more privatisation, yet more market, in short yet more capitalism.

In the name of this ideology, the Solidarnosc leadership did not hesitate to divide the strike movements against the more brutal aspects of government policy, refusing to support them and thus leaving the ground free to the rival trade union OPZZ (originating from the official trade union movement of the declining years of the dictatorship), which it identified with "communism" (9) This drift was completed by a growing alignment with the most traditionalist and reactionary sectors of the Polish Catholic hierarchy. The electoral victory in September 1993 of the parties with roots in the old regime has accelerated this evolution. Since these parties continued the neoliberal policy - with, it should be said, a

more consistent social policy; real wages have begun slowly to rise and unemployment has slightly reduced - the enemy could at last be designated.

Once again, Solidarnosc showed itself capable of taking the head of the movements of social resistance, of organising workers' mobilisations and obtaining some successes. If today its strength can hardly be compared with that of 1980, its influence and its capacity for mobilisation being negligible in a private sector in full expansion (where union rights are scarcely recognised), it continues to be dominant in the big public sector enterprises that give it an imposing strike power.

The strike movement of May 1995 in the "Ursus" strike factory in Warsaw bears witness to this capacity and throws a spotlight on the political evolution of the most radical sectors of today's Solidarnosc. Ursus was a bastion of resistance under the old regime; in June 1976, the workers of this enormous factory cut the international Paris-Moscow railway line, thus unveiling their revolt in the eyes of the world. In 1980 it was again here that the strike movement commenced, at the beginning of July. It was a Ursus worker, Zbigniew Bujak, who was in the course of the 1980s the most symbolic underground leader of Solidarnosc. In the course of the 1970s the factory experienced an investment boom with the government's decision to make it into the biggest manufacturer of tractors in Europe, following the purchase of a licence from Massey-Ferguson. This immense workplace was never totally completed, but with the decentralisation of the financing of investments, Ursus fell heavily into debt in the course of the 1980s. Neoliberal shock therapy would sound the death knell for it like other public enterprises; Ursus was now to pay the state a "dividend" on capital (payable even in the case of deficit!) and a gigantic tax on wage increases. It was refused access to credit and lost its traditional markets in the east and even within the country, the peasants no longer having the means to invest. This policy was supported by the historic leaders of Solidarnosc at the factory, Zbigniew Janas and the aforementioned Bujak.

It was then that the leadership of the local trade union passed into the hands of a radical current. Its principal leader became director of the enterprise in 1992 with the support of Solidarnosc. The directors and the trade union tried to improve the profitability of the enterprise while simultaneously improving

the lot of the wage-earners; wages experienced a slow increase. But the factory, whose capacity of production is 70,000 tractors a year, could only sell around ten thousand. In May 1995, when bankruptcy threatened again, the enterprise being incapable of facing the increasingly pressing demands of the creditors (both bank and state), Solidarnosc called a strike. On several occasions thousands of demonstrators invaded the centre of Warsaw. As in 1976 the strikers cut the international railway. They were joined by

leaders of Solidarnosc, calling them thieves, traitors and, into the bargain, Jews, who they said should be sent to the gas chambers! The discourse of the Solidarnosc leader at Ursus, Zbigniew Wrzodak, took up themes well known from other times; attacks against "international finance" and the "red oligarchy", demands for "credit for Polish production" accusations of "crimes against Poland" formulated against the elites.

In an open letter to the procurator general,



contingents of miners, steelworkers and arms sector workers, also on strike at that time. They would face the police and the condemnations of the media.(10) Their demands were as follows : wage increases, access to cheap credit for the factory, cancellation of the debt to the state and social insurance, suppression of the control of wages, repayment of the VAT that the enterprise had paid for the components of its production. In short, starting from the economic reality of their own enterprise, an alternative model of economic development to the prevalent liberalism.

It was, however, on the ideological front that the strike was out of the ordinary. Anti-Semitism mingled with anti-Communism appeared in broad daylight. An effigy of the prime minister and member of the social democratic party (SDRP - which emerged from the former Polish Unified Workers Party, in power from 1944 to 1989), Josef Oleksy, decorated with a Star of David was burnt by the demonstrators. The latter also barracked the liberal ministers and former

W r z o d a k wrote in the following terms of Kolodko, the social democratic and very liberal economy minister; "the contempt shown by Gregorz Kolodko to workers who struggle for their own survival and that of their families, the lordly (11) arrogance worthy of an enriched vagabond and of a simple guttersnipe carried to the summits of power, his pretensions as an "economist" when his decisions are worthy of a simple speculator (12) - all this should be interpreted as a rotten provocation' seeking to produce an inevitable social explosion escaping any control, and subsequent to this a blood bath in Poland" (13)

This public reappearance of all that which is worst in the Polish political tradition is a pure product of the disarray of the workers, who do not understand how what they had experienced as their victory has escaped them. In the course of a few years their habits, all the know how necessary to get through everyday life, very many of their reference points and values have become obsolete. This terrain is particularly fertile for a conspiracy interpretation of history and a

falling back on "stable values"; faith, family, country. Welcoming to Ursus Jan Olszewski, (the presidential candidate whose programme was both traditionalist Catholic and in favour of a radical "de-Communisation" — he is a former prime minister whose government fell after he had denounced as communist agents several historic leaders of Solidarnosc including Lech Walesa (14). Z. Wrzodak presented him as a victim of "the Communist system, and their agents, directed by Mr. Walesa" (15). As a result, the Solidarnosc organisation in the Ursus plant decided to support the Olszewski electoral campaign (16). Olszewski won 42.7% of votes at the Warsaw region Solidarity conference, which was rather more votes than Lech Walesa collected.(17)

The Solidarnosc leadership is less extremist. It asked the Catholic hierarchy to mediate its attempts to facilitate a common electoral list for the traditional right. But in the end Solidarnosc decided to support Lech Walesa in the presidential elections. It distanced itself from the most vocal outbursts of anti-semitism, and tried to create a programmatic alternative. It even presented a draft constitution, based on "decomunisation," privatisation by distribution of shares, and enshrining a corporatist state structure, in which the budget would be adopted by a tripartite commission of workers' unions, peasants' unions, and representatives of the employers. They also proposed a draft law on privatisation and reprivatisation (which would allow proprietors expropriated after 1945 and their descendants 10% of bonds!) was also drawn up (the aim is to distribute property to all Polish adults) as well as another seeking to render the tax system "pro-family" and a draft reform of social insurance (tripartite management: employers, unions, consumer representatives).

All these projects are based on a corporatist vision of Polish capitalism and a conception of a society founded on the most traditional Catholicism and a narrow nationalism. Moreover, in August 1995 the president of the Solidarnosc union, Marian Krzaklewski, announced that Solidarnosc would organise a march on Warsaw - modelled on the Mussolini's march on Rome - if the law on the commercialisation of enterprises which had just been voted through the Diet was applied - this law being seen as an obstacle to "true privatisation". (18) At the 7th congress in June 1995 it was decided that Solidarnosc should be the name not only of a trade union but also, in alliance

with the political parties of the right, a great anti communist social movement with the goal of sweeping the left from power. As a consequence Marian Krzaklewski, elected as head of the union for the third time, then ensured the election to the leadership of Zbigniew Wrzodak of Ursus. (19)

Lech Walesa, who after a quarrel with Solidarnosc had renewed his links with the leadership, was heavily applauded when he said "our Solidarnosc revolution has been stopped half way... dreams of a benevolent and just state, rich and stable, remain unfulfilled... a narrow group of people enrich themselves and take in their hands the majority of key posts. The others - who are the overwhelming majority - get poorer and have to satisfy themselves with the crumbs from the masters' tables. Such is capitalism when it is built by the hands of the former Communists. " He appealed for the building of "a coalition of forces capable of carrying out the reforms" (20). In October, after an internal referendum, the leadership of Solidarnosc decided to commit the union to Walesa's campaign. This commitment seemed to go beyond the electoral campaign.

Following the announcement of the victory of the social democratic presidential candidate Aleksander Kwasniewski, Solidarnosc president Krzaklewski spoke of a new partition of Poland. In the days that followed the union organised a massive campaign seeking to have the result annulled, which gathered more than 600,000 signatures. Finally - and this is not perhaps an anodyne reference given the links Walesa has built up with the army leadership - in commenting on his defeat Walesa cited Marshal Jozef Pilsudski, architect of Polish independence in 1918 and founder of a strong state in Poland following a military coup supported by the trade unions in May 1926; "To be vanquished and not to give up is a victory. To win and rest on one's laurels is a defeat". He then left it to be understood that he could still present himself in an election, "perhaps even before it is due".

Neither Walesa, nor Solidarnosc accepted their defeat in the elections. They challenged the government and the social-democratic presidency on every conceivable point. Shortly before the ceremony transferring power to the new president, the outgoing team accused the social democratic Prime Minister Jozef Oleksy of being a Russian agent, forcing him to resign. In contrast, Lech Walesa was warmly received at the Solidarity headquarters. His return to

the Gdansk naval dockyards, where mass redundancies have been announced, as an ordinary electrician, testify to his desire to re-establish himself as the labour leader he was until his election as president. His political project is to unify the anti-capitalist right (Solidarity, Jan Olszewski's Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland, ROP, and the Christian National Union, ZChN), and then to add the liberal right (Union for Liberty, UW). "I give them five months to unite," Walesa has said. "If they come together, I will give them my blessing. If not, it is me who will be the motor." (22)

Notes

1. The Polish term "uspołecznienie", usually translated as "socialisation", is formed from the term "spoleczenstwo" ("society"), and thus has no common root with "socjalizm" (socialism). In our opinion this was the reason for the success of this term.
2. Wojciech Jaruzelski, "Stan wojenny diaczego" ("Why the state of emergency"), BGW Warsaw 1992, p. 390.
3. It is generally admitted that self-limitation - the term advanced by Jacek Kuron in 1980 - consisted in the first place in avoiding formulating over-radical demands on the political front (the "question of power" in particular). This is correct, but partial; the societal reflection was itself self-limited. Leszek Balcerowicz, one of Solidarnosc's economic experts from 1980, and subsequently minister for the economy in 1989-91, thus wrote later; "in 1980 and in the course of the following years, the self-management version of economic reform appeared as the best of possibilities. I was myself its partisan up to a certain time, without for all that having the illusion that it amounted to a worse solution than the private market economy" (L. Balcerowicz, "800 dni - szok kontrolwany" ("800 days - the controlled shock"), BGW, Warsaw 1992, p.146
4. cf. "Raport Polska 5 lat po Sierpniu" ("Polish report 5 years after August"), MSS, Warsaw 1985 (clandestine edition).
5. "Tygodnik Mazowsze" no. 141, 1985
6. Cf. Cyril Smuga, The consequences of historic failure, "IV" # 169, September 18, 1989.
7. Bronislaw Geremek and Jacek Zakowski interviewed, "Geremek opowiada, Zakowski pyta", Rok 1989 ("Geremek talks, Zakowski interviews, the year 1989"), Plejada, Warsaw 1990, p. 50.
8. Adam Michnik, "Teren zaminowany", ("Mined terrain"), in "Gazeta Wyborcza" (henceforth GW), November 21, 1995, p.18)
9. cf. our article "Workers struggles revive", "IV" # 235, September 28, 1992.
10. The commentator of GW wrote; "In a market economy there is no reason to

Solidarnosc is thus resolutely turning its back on any mobilisation of the workers in unity with the other unions to devote themselves to a fundamentally ideological conflict. It must take responsibility for a lasting division of the Polish working class at a time when this latter is on the defensive after the heavy defeats suffered since 1981. If the former Polish regime merited the sobriquet of "the country of the disconcerting lie" (as Anton Ciliga designated Stalinist Russia), decidedly the change of regime has not, for all that, made the lie disappear. ★

maintain a factory just because it is big and deserving. It must be useful and guarantee profits."† (May 27-28, 1995) As for Zbigniew Janas, historic leader of Solidarnosc at Ursus, he explained ;"even if the government cancels the debts, after one or two years, with this director and head of the trade union, debts will grow anew" (quoted by GW, May 20-21, 1995). For his part, the social democratic deputy Zbigniew Siemiatkowski explains; "Ursus should shake up the imagination of my colleagues of the Alliance of the Democratic Left (the electoral bloc of the social democrats, which also includes the OPZZ trade union) which regarded privatisation without sympathy. It is enough to compare what happened at Ursus with the situation in the privatised steelworks Lucchini [in Warsaw, and another historic bastion of Solidarnosc in the capital] (quoted by GW, June 2, 1995).

11. The term used in the original text is a word of polish slang borrowed from Yiddish ("houtspah").
12. Again the term used is borrowed from Yiddish.
13. "Teraz Ursus" of May 26, 1995, Solidarnosc factory bulletin .
14. Cf. Jan Malewski and Jaroslaw Wardega, "War at the sulmmit", IV # 234, September 14, 1992.
15. Quoted by GW, August 28, 1995.
16. In the first round of the presidential election Olszewski obtained 6.87% of votes expressed, coming fourth.
17. According to GW, October 19th, 1995.
18. GW, August 9th, 1995
19. Subsequently the presence of Wrzodak on the leadership of the union has been challenged under the influence of Lech Walesa, who did not find him "presentable" (cf. GW, December 11, 1995).
20. Quoted from GW, June 9, 1995.
21. Walesa won 62% of the votes of delegates at the congress against 23% for Olszewski and 10% for the President of the National Bank, Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, cf. Gazeta Wyborcza du 19 octobre 1995.
22. Quoted in Gazeta Wyborcza du 16 avril 1996.

book notes

Revolutions in a life

Richard Owens discusses four books by the South African revolutionary Baruch Hirson

Hirson, B: *Revolutions In My Life*. 1995. Witwatersrand University Press, 1 Jan Smuts Avenue, Johannesburg, 2001, South Africa.

Yours For The Union: Class and Community Struggles in South Africa. 1989. Zed Books, London and Witwatersrand University Press.

Hirson, B and Vivian, L: *Strike Across The Empire: The Seamen's Strike of 1925: in Britain, South Africa and Australasia*. 1992. Clio Publications, c/o 13 Talbot Avenue, London, N2 OLS.

Hirson, B and Williams, G A: *The Delegate For Africa: David Ivan Jones, 1883-1924*. 1995. Core Publications, c/o 13 Talbot Avenue, London, N2 OLS.

Baruch Hirson's *Revolutions in My Life* is a very moving human, honest account of his life as a revolutionary. The Revolutions of the title refers not to social revolutions but to the revolutions in his own life, that took him from the close-knit community in which he was brought up in to the acts of sabotage that resulted in his spending nine years in jail. He begins each chapter with an account of his experiences in jail, and then goes back to an earlier part of his life; as if reliving those experiences during the long years in jail. It is a book devoid of comfortable certainties.

Baruch gives us a moving sketch of South Africa as he saw it as a child. It is fascinating to follow his intellectual development toward revolutionary Marxism, breaking out of the rarefied atmosphere of white South African society. His dedication to research can be understood in the light of his determination in those early years to make sense of his world. In his late teens, Baruch discovered politics within the radical wing of the Zionist movement, the Hashomer Hatzair, a movement that encouraged extensive reading.

The drive among the Zionist youth to educate themselves was no doubt the result of the dominance of fascism in much of Europe at the time - and the increasing support for fascism among whites in South Africa.

Baruch comments on the dearth of information available to him and his comrades; the necessity of developing an analysis under these conditions must have contributed to his independent, inquiring mind. The problem for him and for the revolutionary left was that there was not a strong tradition of Marxism in South Africa - or a long history of working class struggles. Moreover, because of the paucity of literature in South Africa, they were not even able to learn from many of the earlier experiences within the left.

Thus the experiences of David Ivan Jones (1883-1924), the subject of Baruch's and Gwyn Williams' biography *The Delegate For Africa*, was largely unknown to Baruch in the 1930s and 1940s. This fascinating character left Wales, his place of birth, because of ill-health and in 1910, after staying in New Zealand for a couple of years, went to South Africa. He had first proclaimed his socialist convictions while still in New Zealand, but it took him some time to break completely with the paternalistic and racist policies of the South African Labour Party. He quickly became involved in the struggles, including the (mainly white) miners' strike of 1913 which ended when British troops fired upon the strikers, killing at least twenty and wounding up to 400. He broke with the SALP over their support for the War and was one of the earliest to call for the establishment of a Third International; he was later a delegate to the Comintern, as the title of the book indicates.

It was during the war years that Jones began to stress the importance of developing black working class organisations. *'We give increasing attention to the native workers not because they are natives but because they are workers.... Our concern with the natives and our faith in them is our concern in them as workers, as potentially the revolutionary proletariat.... Constituting as they do the big majority of those who do the work of the country, we want the native workers to realise that it is their historic mission to bring about the emancipation of Labour. Everything is marking time for them. We also want the white worker to realise this.'*

One of the problems that Jones was tackling in this article was the problem of how revolutionaries should relate to national

liberation struggles; a difficult issue that also troubled Baruch and his comrades.

One important trade union struggle that took place just prior to Baruch's time, was the seafarers strike of 1925 which he and Lorraine Vivian have described in *Strike Across the Empire*. This strike broke out initially in Britain when the head of the National Sailors and Firemen's Union of Great Britain, without consulting his members, offered the employers a 10% wage cut. The strike by the seafarers against both the employers and their own union leadership, was soon all but crushed. However they then extended the strike and the seafarers, when they reached South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, refused to set sail again. They had transformed their struggle into 'one of the few strikes of the twentieth century to have international dimensions' and the strike lasted for over one hundred days, causing massive disruption since international trade, and even communications, was dependent upon shipping in those days. *Strike Across the Empire* is a record of this struggle as it unfolded in the three continents and the support that the British sailors found there.

Baruch's *Yours For The Union* is a study of the wide range of struggles that took place in the 1930s and 1940s in Transvaal, the industrial heartland of South Africa. The period after the depression of 1929-1932 was one in which the economy of South Africa flourished. The resulting shortage of labour led to the passing of the 'Native Bills', an attempt to systematically channel and control African labour. This period saw the birth of African trade unions. In spite of the rapid expansion of industry both before and during the War, the battle to form trade unions was fought under extremely difficult circumstances. The task was made more difficult because much of the left, including the Communist Party and the African National Congress, supported the War — and so opposed trade union activity during that period. One of the key figures in building the union movement was the Trotskyist Max Gordon, who was responsible for setting up six trade unions before the war as well as the Joint Committee of African Trade Unions (with approximately 15,700 members) of which he was secretary. Another sector of

struggle was that in the townships. Here the women played an important role and this is where the greatest success was achieved. The battle of the residents of the Alexandria township (near Johannesburg) in 1943 is one of the events described in this book. They fought against the threat to remove them to a more distant location and also against a decision to increase the bus fares, which they could ill afford on their meagre wages. They decided to boycott the busses; this involved, over a period of seven weeks, 15,000 people walking 9.5 miles to work and the same distance back again in the evening. Members of the Trotskyist group, the Workers International League, played a leading role in this struggle which, against massive odds, was largely successful. Baruch also examines the rural struggles which were influenced by the experiences of those who had worked the cities; and finally, the domestic workers and their battle to get organised.

In terms of tangible gains, these struggles achieved little. However, Baruch does note that in this period '*tens of thousands of workers had been organised, and even more had taken part in rallies, demonstrations and strikes. Some unions won notable victories and a tradition of struggle was established.*' This is a detailed, insightful record of a formative period in the fight for the emancipation of South African labour and a history that will be invaluable to the revolutionary left, especially in the new South Africa.

In *Revolutions In My Life*, Baruch describes his experiences in the Workers International League of which he became secretary and political organiser. He saw at first hand the appalling conditions under which the Africans lived when he went into African townships like Alexandria to sell the newspaper. This organisation had more support in the trade unions than did the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa of which Baruch had earlier been a member. The WIL worked in the Progressive Trade Union Group which included nearly half the trade unions in Johannesburg. These unions were very poor, with only the richer unions being able to afford a typewriter; at the same time most of them were heavily bureaucratised. Work in the trade unions progressed well until the end of 1942 when new war-time restrictions were placed on the unions. In the ensuing struggles, divisions within the unions, together with mistaken policies, led to defeat and a downturn of the trade union struggles which in turn spelled the end of the WIL, especially after the collapse of the Timber Workers strike in 1945. The immediate reason for the collapse of WIL was that some of the leadership

retired to study theory. Dispirited by this collapse, Baruch returned to university.

The increasingly repressive nature of the South African regime and especially the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, led Baruch to conclude that sabotage was the only way forward. He became a founding member of the National Committee of Liberation which had that perspective. With hindsight, Baruch says of this policy: '*The socialism to which we aspired could only be brought into being by an organised working class, and our action was taking us in the opposite direction.*' He goes on to say that '*we failed to take into account ... that the state had just inflicted a major defeat on its political opponents and it would take time for people to return to active struggle*'. They adopted the strategy of sabotage shortly before the African National Congress did and one of their successful targets was the blowing up of electricity pylons. However, the inevitable happened and Baruch was arrested. Ironically it was the tight security in the NCL that prevented Baruch from checking on the significance of a breach of security — and this led to his arrest.

These books are all important records of the struggle in South Africa. Baruch is an excellent writer and a committed researcher and his books are invaluable both for the international movement and for the left in South Africa today. *Strike Across The Empire* and *The Delegate For Africa* are not available through book shops, but can be ordered by post from the addresses given above.

Chris Harman,
Economics of the Madhouse
Bookmarks 1995 pp.111, £3.50,
ISBN 1-898876-03-7

There has recently been increased interest in Britain in ideas challenging market orthodoxy. Paul Ormerod's *The Death of Economics* and Will Hutton's *The State We're In* reached beyond academic

economists, but were limited by lack of engagement with Marxist ideas. Chris Harman aims to fill this gap.

Harman edits the paper of the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP), *Socialist Worker*. His book is a lively introduction to Marxist economics. It highlights the irrationality of the market and gives a good account of Marxist views of exploitation and crisis.

There are some problems. Orthodox economics is rather caricatured. Harman relies on the SWP's theory of state capitalism and the permanent arms economy. This sees the post war boom as caused by increased arms spending. A richer view, such as that of Ernest Mandel, would also stress technical change and class struggle. However, the book should succeed in stimulating interest in Marx's critique of capitalism and we should all be grateful for this.

Andy Kilmister.

**The Secret Files
Britain, WW2 and the Sama
Samajists**
Young Socialist Publications,
Columbo, Sri Lanka, 1996

Wesley S. Muthiah and Sydney Wanasinghe have dug through mountains of secret files documenting British persecution of Ceylonese anti-war freedom fighters, finally released by the Public Records Office, London, under the "50 Year Rule". This edited selection shows how the British imperial government persecuted, suppressed and incarcerated the leaders of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (one of Asia's strongest anti-Stalinist revolutionary parties) because of their opposition to the war.

To order send a UK cheque for £9.95 + £1.10 postage to Wesley Muthiah, 27 Belmont Ave, Palmer Green, London N13 4HD Telephone +44 181 882 3423

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Zapatista international meeting

Ulises Martinez Flores

The American continental preparatory meeting for the Zapatista-sponsored Inter-continental meeting planned for 27 July-3 August was a great success. Participants began the continental discussion on the full range of joint activities which will help us rid ourselves of neo-liberalism from the Canadian north to Tierra del Fuego at the southern tip of Latin America. In his opening message, Zapatista sub-Comandante Marcos stressed the day-to-day struggle of the workers, peasants and the poor of the Americas, in order to demonstrate the necessity of a regroupment of all forms of resistance, at the continental and the intercontinental level. He also denounced the military aid which successive US governments have given the Mexican government, to support the war against the Zapatistas. Foreign "fighter-bombers, combat helicopters, tanks, spy satellites, military helicopters, military counsellors, and agents of a range of intelligence services" demonstrate clearly that "the Zapatista challenge is a global challenge," Marcos said.

The 300 participants, from Canada, the USA, Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Porto Rico, Ecuador, Brazil, Peru, Chile, Uruguay and Argentina, deliberated in five commissions; economic, political, social, cultural and indigenous people.

Economy

The commission stressed the importance of creating ways of organising civil society in committees of dialogue for the analysis and solution of common problems; for the putting into place of production co-operatives and marketing networks, bringing together town and countryside at the international scale; creation of popular banks, administered in a different way from the dominant norms. Participants heard how, in many indigenous communities, a tradition of collective property has resisted centuries of private property relations.

Politics

We must recognise the crisis of traditional left-wing parties and organisations. We need to build a new political schema, which takes account of new forms of organising, and which understands our power as "the capacity to act" on the base of alternative values to individualism and utilitarianism.

A long list of general propositions was drafted, with the aim of harmonising actions to be held across the continent on May 1st. The central demands were the reduction of the working week, withdrawal of the Mexican army from Chiapas, freedom for political prisoners, and the truth about the continent's "disappeared".

Culture

Neo-liberalism's culture effects are based on a system of dominant and dominated cultures and cultural forms. The ideology is presented as the one truth. The historic memory of whole peoples is stripped away. Responses must include democratisation of the mass media, and the transformation of the media into multi-ethnic and pluri-cultural means of expression for our peoples. In countries like Mexico, education should be in the hands of each community, since it is a part of each people's right to self-determination.

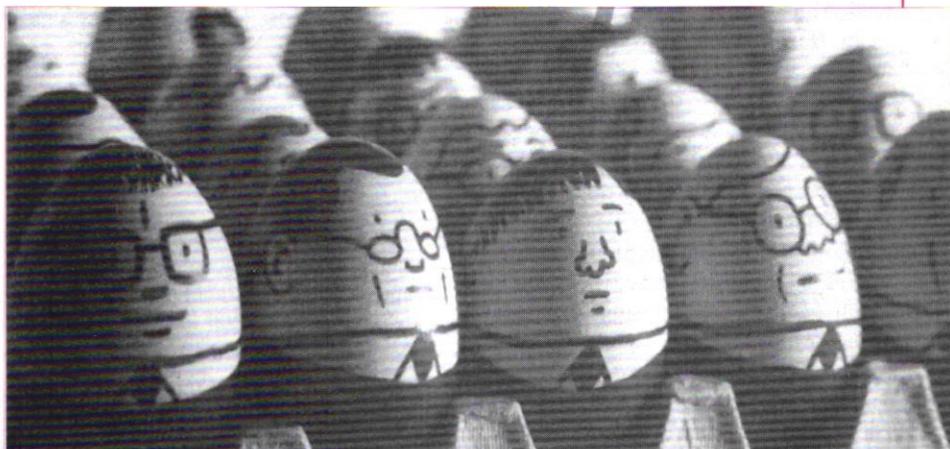
Indigenous peoples

There is a world of difference, in ethnic terms, between the indigenous peoples of

North America, Central America, and the Andes zone. But there was no problem in exchanging experiences of struggle. All denounced the ways neo-liberalism obliges indigenous peoples to emigrate, and to sell their culture, while governments appropriate the collective labour of the communities they claim to be protecting. There was also discussion of the numerous US-based sects, which profit from misery and poverty, and explode traditional communities in their own, often financial interests.

In his closing speech, Marcos thanked all those who had spent three days "on wooden benches, bathed alternately in rain and in sweat, menaced by a vigilant military aircraft, hassled by the immigration officials, and worried about the scorpions which troubled our nights". Delegates go home to continue the preparations for the July intercontinental meeting.

Similar preparatory meetings are scheduled for Berlin at the end of May, and Tokyo and Sydney in early June. ★



● There is another way!

"We, women and men, have gathered at La Realidad, in Chiapas state, the place where rebellion and hope go hand in hand. We have come from all four corners of this, our America, in response to the call of the moral authority which the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) represents... By our participation, we demonstrate our support for the development of a new dimension of international solidarity and resistance to the neo-liberal storm which is beating down on the whole world... Yes! There is another way! A path which is not decided by the power of money, but by the satisfaction of the needs of our peoples. The struggle against neo-liberalism carries within itself the construction of an alternative project in the economic, social, political and cultural spheres..."

Final Declaration, April 1996