

International VIEWPOINT

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International VIEWPOINT

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Mikhail Gorbachev's speech: a new mystification of history



Statement by the
United Secretariat
of the Fourth
International
November 6,
1987

MIKHAIL Gorbachev's speech on November 2, 1987, on the 70th anniversary of the Russian Revolution contained serious accusations against Leon Trotsky, chair of the Petrograd Soviet at the time of the revolution, chair of its Revolutionary Military Committee, responsible for the technical organization of the October insurrection, founder and leader of the Red Army, leading member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of the USSR and of the Council of the People's Commissars for many years.

Of course, we do not challenge anybody's right to make an extremely critical judgement on the theoretical conceptions, the political opinions and the organizational behaviour of Leon Trotsky at different periods of his life. History will make the final judgement in this respect. No one — not even Stalin with all his bloody repression — could prevent this debate taking place.

Stalin's school of falsification

Gorbachev's judgement on Leon Trotsky however uses well-known methods (curtailed quotations, untruths and accusations flung out without a shadow of proof and so on) from the school of historical falsification founded by Stalin.

These methods become obvious as soon

as the statements are contrasted with the relevant documents.

Gorbachev says "Trotsky...displayed excessive pretensions to top leadership in the party, thus fully confirming Lenin's opinion of him as an excessively self-assured politician who always vacillated and cheated."

Reference to Lenin's Testament

This is obviously a reference — although not explicit, and we understand why not — to Lenin's letters to the Twelfth Congress of the CP(B) of the USSR, considered as the Testament of the founder of Bolshevism. Gorbachev refers to the same document in his judgement on Bukharin.

This Testament¹, while it does reproach Trotsky for "excessive self-assurance and excessive preoccupation with the purely administrative side of the work", does not contain any of the other judgements evoked by Gorbachev. If one member of the party leadership could be accused by Lenin of having "excessive pretensions to top leadership" and "vacillating and cheating" it is in fact Joseph Stalin himself, whom the Testament proposed

should be removed from his post of general secretary.

Not only does Gorbachev hide this incontestable truth — he who considers, and this says everything, that Leninism triumphed in the party under the leadership of Stalin — but he passes over the Testament's main judgement on Trotsky ("the most capable man in the central committee"). He thus makes totally incomprehensible the proposals made by Lenin to Trotsky in his last letters of a joint political fight at the Tenth Congress of the Soviets and at the Twelfth Congress.²

Gorbachev adds, "Trotskyism was a political current whose ideologists took cover behind leftist pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric, and in effect assumed a defeatist posture."

Trotsky accused of "defeatism"

The excommunication is pronounced without a single example of a "defeatist" position of Trotsky and Trotskyists. There is a very simple reason for this: there is none.

Was it "defeatist" to propose in 1923 a new course of democratization of the party and state, in terms which Gorbachev himself seems to be using in his present campaign for "democratization" and *glasnost* in the USSR?

Was it "defeatist" to propose in 1923 a gradual industrialization of the Soviet Union which would have made it possible to spread over 10 years the effort of "socialist accumulation" that the country had to make in a rushed and bloody way (forced collectivization) between 1928 and 1933, at the cost of immense sacrifices inflicted on the population and terrible social and political tensions?

Was it "defeatist" to sound a warning in 1930 about the mortal danger represented by the rise of Nazism in Germany, for the German working class, the USSR and for the world proletariat; to call insistently on the German CP, the Communist International and the workers to prevent Hitler taking power, through a correct united front policy from top to bottom between the German Communist Party (KPD), the German Social-Democratic Party (SPD) and the trade unions?

Was it "defeatist" to denounce the terri-

1. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 36, Lawrence & Wishart, London & Moscow, 1966, p.593.

2. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 45, Lawrence & Wishart, London & Moscow, 1966, p.607.



ble consequences of the 1937 purges for the Red Army's capacity for action? To warn against Stalin's criminal confidence in the non-aggression pact signed with Hitler's Germany in 1939, which explains the lack of political and military preparation of the USSR for the Wehrmacht's invasion on June 22, 1941?

Gorbachev concludes "It was essential to disprove Trotskyism before the whole people, and to lay bare its anti-socialist essence".

Once again an excommunication without being able to cite a single "anti-socialist" act or idea of Leon Trotsky. And for good reason: he remained until the last day of his life, despite everything, faithful to his convictions as a revolutionary Marxist, as a communist. Just as, despite everything, he maintained his position of unconditional military defence of the Soviet Union against imperialism.

On the subject of Stalinist repression, Gorbachev states: "There are still attempts to turn away from painful matters in our history, to hush them up, to make believe that nothing special happened. We cannot

agree to this. This would be disregard for the historical truth, disrespect for the memory of those who were innocent victims of lawless and arbitrary actions."

However, while anathematizing the political positions of Leon Trotsky, the general secretary kept silent on the completely false slanderous accusations which have been made over the last thirty years in the USSR and elsewhere against the founder of the Red Army, his supporters and his allies. These accusations are still echoed today in the Soviet Union: that he was an agent of Hitler and Mikado; that he met Rudolf Hess; that he plotted with foreign powers to break up the territory of the Soviet Union. Trotsky is alleged to have plotted and organized terrorist acts against the leaders of the party and the Soviet state and so on. These calumnies have been judged as "proved" by Soviet tribunals, in particular those of the three notorious "Moscow Trials" (1936-38). Everybody now knows what these proofs are worth.

Moscow trials accusations a tissue of lies

But, on the other hand, what is really proved is that the assassination of Leon Trotsky on August 20, 1940 in Mexico was the work of a GPU agent. The accusation of the "Moscow Trials" was a tissue of lies and the assassination of Leon Trotsky a vile crime: this is the only real "historical truth".

Gorbachev announced in his speech that a commission would be formed for "examining new facts and documents pertaining to

these matters". But why is a commission necessary to seek out the "historical truth"?

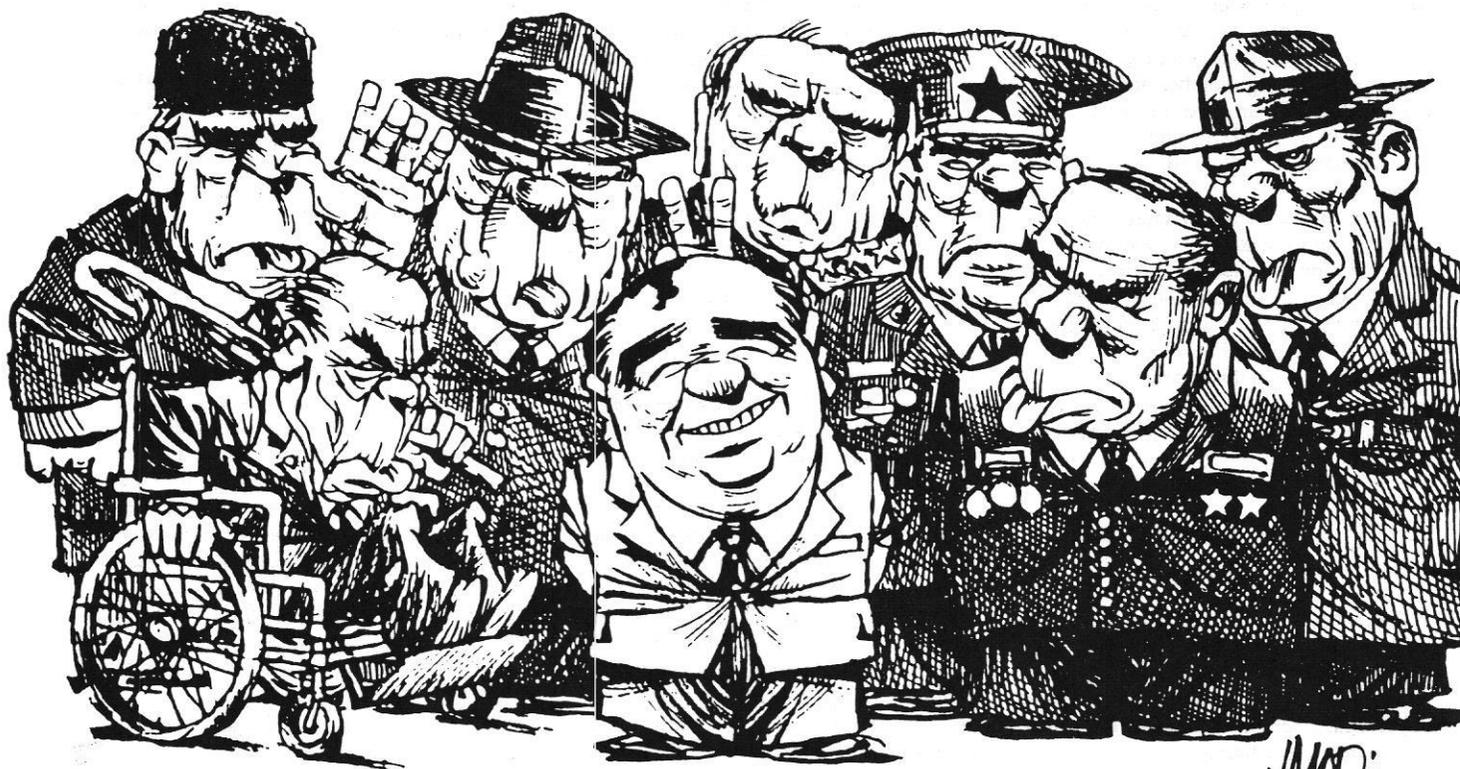
Do not the whole Soviet people have the right of access to the same documents? Do they not have the right to judge on the basis of the evidence and not on the basis of "truths" revealed by an official commission? Do they not have the right to see all the documents which support the different judgements on Trotsky and Stalin and the other party leaders in the period concerned?

Soviet people have right to judge for themselves

If Gorbachev and the leadership of the Soviet CP are so sure that their positions are right let them allow the mass publication of the works of leaders of the Bolshevik Party such as Trotsky, Bukharin, Preobrazhensky and others! Let them give Soviet citizens the right of access to their own history! Let them have the courage to accept a public debate in the USSR between historians of the October Revolution and of the Soviet state from the entire world! Let them publish for all their citizens Khrushchev's report to the Twentieth Congress, a report that to this day has remained "secret" in the USSR!

As the Soviet historian Yuri Afanasyev stated "We are entirely dependent on the past, because it is on this past that our society, all its structures and ourselves were formed".

So, without *glasnost*' on the past there can be no real *glasnost*' on the present! ★



AFTER THE CRASH...

A profound change in the world situation

WHY DID the world's stock markets crash almost simultaneously on October 19? Is it the herald of a new great depression, comparable to 1929; or is it rather a repetition of the 1974-75 or 1980-82 recessions? And what will be the effects on the world political situation, West and East, in the imperialist heartlands and in the dominated countries?

Ernest Mandel answered these and other questions at a public meeting on the crash held by the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, French section of the Fourth International, on November 3 in Paris.

ERNEST MANDEL

THE WORLD SITUATION has undergone a very profound change. The capitalist system suffered a very severe blow on October 19. This turning point is a genuinely global one, because at the same time we are seeing the development of a crisis in the capitalist countries and a particular crisis of the system in those countries dominated by the Soviet bureaucracy.

These two processes taken together are creating a world that has little in common with the one that came into being after 1945, or after Yalta, as is sometimes said.

The first notion that has to be cleared away is the claim that there is a separation between what has happened on the stock market and what is happening in what some commentators call the real economy. Supposedly, the stock market was in an unhealthy state, and that is why it experienced a drop, but the real economy is healthy and therefore the economic outlook is not bad. This is totally illogical.

To comprehend how illogical this notion is, you only have to look at two key figures on the market losses. In the United States alone, \$1,200,000 million have been lost in the space of two weeks, more than the third world debt built up over 20 years. In two weeks, stock holders in all the imperialist countries have lost \$1,600,000 million dollars, which is equivalent to 80% of the national debt of the United States, the richest and most powerful country in the world.

You only have to take these two figures to see that it is totally absurd to believe that this is simply a stock market phenomena

without any impact on the economy. All the serious economists — not just Marxists, but all those who do not swear by "the power of positive thinking" — have pointed out that such losses are certainly going to mean a fall in consumption. The yuppies are going to buy less Jaguars and BMWs. That is all right for them, but not for the Jaguar and BMW factories or for the workers in those factories. A cut in consumer spending, including on luxuries, is going to be reflected in a drop in employment.

Much more important than the drop in consumer spending, the stock market losses are surely going to lead to a reduction in plant investment. On this question, there is another myth that needs to be exploded,

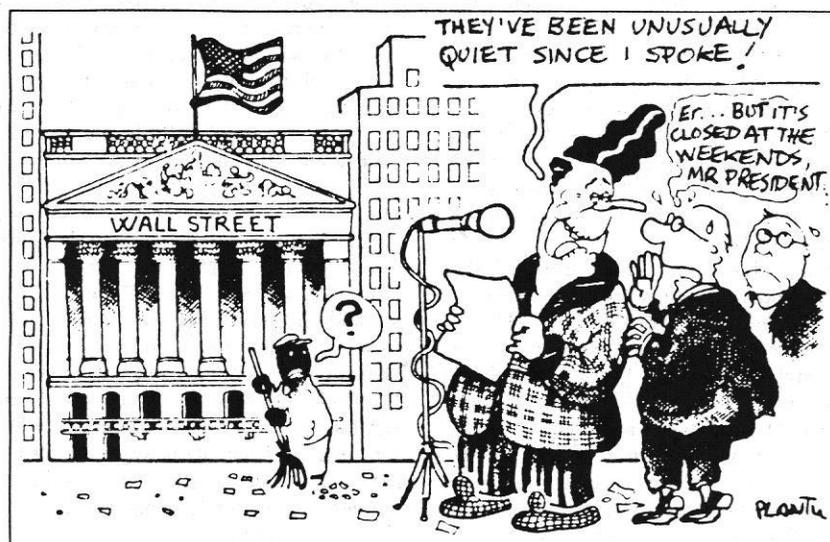
the notion that the losses caused by the fall in stock prices are only paper losses, accounting losses, because no one has to sell stocks that have fallen too low. Leaving aside the fact that a lot of these stocks have been sold, that the losses have been taken, the commentators forget rather easily that these are the stocks of very real industrial, banking, transport and other firms. They represent a not insignificant part of the assets of these companies and, as a result of the losses suffered on the stock market, these companies are finding the relationship between their assets and debits upset, which means that their possibilities for getting credit and financing investment have been severely cut back.

Exchanges had reached absurd, irrational levels

So, it is simply absurd to claim that what is happening on the stock market is detached from what is happening in the real economy. But it is also necessary to examine the other aspect of the problem. Not only does what is happening on the stock market have consequences for the real economy, but the causes of this have nothing to do with a purely stock market phenomena.

It is being said, and it is formally true, that the immediate cause of the fall in stock market values was the rising rate of interest in the United States in the weeks and months preceding October 19. The average rate — if you can talk about an average, because there are many different interest rates — went from 7.5% to just over 10%.

There is a rule, to be sure a very theoretical one, that the price of stocks on the market is the capitalization of dividends, the incomes of these stocks in comparison with the average interest rate. There is an automatic movement: if interest rates rise, stock prices fall. It is also true that some stock exchanges, especially Tokyo, Hong Kong and New York, had reached totally absurd, irrational levels. On the New York stock exchange, prices had risen to the point where



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the average dividend no longer paid more than 2.5% interest. In Tokyo, prices had risen to the point where the turn on stocks was only 1.5%. These two percentages are lower than you would get from just depositing your money in a bank.

Continuing to buy stock in these conditions no longer made any sense from the standpoint of possible returns. It was a purely speculative operation, unrelated to the return on the stocks. So technically you could say that a fallback was inevitable.

First crash in all capitalist countries

Some people have also light-mindedly suggested that the use of computers tended to amplify or accelerate the movement. At a certain moment, the operators no longer saw anything but the screen. The screen said "sell," and so everyone sold. That is a rather facile explanation. The computers could at most amplify a movement that had other causes than the shortsightedness of inexperienced young people employed in buying and selling shares.

What is more important is the ultra-rapid internationalization of the fall. This is the first time we have seen a stock market crash in all the capitalist countries.

In 1929, the crash hit just Wall Street; the other markets were hit only after a certain delay. This time, the delay was not even 24 hours. The internationalization of liquid or quasi-liquid finance capital, the stock market speculation that followed the internationalization of capital and the emergence of multinationals represent the principal form of organization of capital in the age of late capitalism.

All these remarks are pertinent, but fundamentally there is a question that links the stock market to the real economy and which links an analysis of the crash to that of the present capitalist epoch. And here I think that the Marxists are the only ones who offer more than a superficial analysis.

Since the beginning of the long wave of depression — that is, from 1974 and the start of the first generalized recession in the international capitalist economy since the second world war — we have entered into a period characterized by an average growth rate less than half that of the preceding 25 years. This is reflected by a constant rise of unemployment over all the conjunctural ups and downs. In the imperialist countries alone, 40 million people have no jobs.

During this long depressive period, the accumulation of capital has, of course, continued. There is no such thing as a never-ending crisis. There are always periods of recession followed by periods of upturn. We had a recession in 1974-75, and another in 1981-82. We had an upturn after that recession that lasted from 1983 to 1986. But what strikes observers or analysts who take more than a superficial view is that over all these upturns, productive invest-

ment in new factories has not followed the cyclical upturns. Here I mean productive investment in the broad sense of the term. Not just in manufacturing, but also in telecommunications, transport, electricity, gas and infra-structural projects. There has been less and less productive investment.

A study has just appeared in Germany, whose merits have been applauded by the very conservative US publication *Business Week*, showing that despite the lowering of taxes, despite a sharp increase in profits in 1982-87, productive investments by the big German firms are barely half what they were in the early 1970s.

There has, thus, been an enormous over-accumulation of capital that has not been invested productively, and the reason for this is simple. Enormous surplus capacity, enormous real or potential overproduction, is weighing down on the market. There are already too many cars, too many airplanes, too many electrical appliances, and in these conditions no one is going to play around adding more enormous factories to those that already exist. I am not talking about small factories or workshops but factories of the same type and scale as those that were the driving force of the post-war expansion.

The capitalists had hoped (and many ideologues, even in the workers' movement, repeated this hope) that new products and new industries such as computers, personal computers and robotics would take over from cars, electrical appliances and building, because it was these latter industries that played the essential role in impelling the post-war expansion. But all you have to do is look at the production and sales figures in the new industries to see that there is no question of this. Barely 10% to 15% of homes have personal computers and just 2% to 3% of jobs have been eliminated by robots.

Over-accumulation of commodities

These industries and products are not taking up the slack, and in these conditions, with the over-accumulation of capital — or more precisely the over-accumulation of commodities and the impossibility of selling them — a good deal of capital remains in liquid or semi-liquid form, chasing placements other than production. That is the answer to the mystery.

In fact, aside from some small dealings, works of art and things like that, there are not a lot of alternatives for placing \$100,000 million, \$200,000 million or \$300,000 million a year. I say a year because that is the scale. You cannot place \$300,000 million dollars a year in Monet or Breughel paintings or in gold; that is not possible. There is only real estate and the stock market. There are no other outlets for that kind of money. And so the wealth of new capital has been flooding into these areas for many years.

This is what explains the dizzying rise in the prices of stocks and in land and housing in most of the world's big cities. This is still relatively moderate in Paris. In Tokyo, it is five or ten times worse: a room in Tokyo costs as much as a house or a luxury apartment in Paris. These price increases have nothing to do with any economic return or economic rationality. They are simply the result of the fact that enormous capital has flowed into these markets, and through the operation of the law of supply and demand prices are shooting up.

There is a fourth link in the argument: the contradiction that is moving to the center of the international capitalist economy. The United States continues to be the world's main market. It alone accounts for almost 40% of the capitalist world's imports. A good part of these liquid or quasi-liquid holdings have flowed to the United States, simply because there was no other opening. You can hardly see the oil sheikhs or the Japanese capitalists investing \$300,000 million dollars in Norway or Tanzania, where there is nothing to buy on that scale.

US dominance undermined for a decade

But, at the same time, the competitiveness of US industry or, more precisely, the dominance of American imperialism in the capitalist world, has been irrevocably and constantly undermined for more than a decade. We were the first to point to this. And we were laughed at. Some people even said that we were agents of American imperialism because we told the truth. Today, the facts are obvious. No one doubts them any longer.

I will give one figure to show how rapid this decline has been. Between 1981 and 1986, the US share of world exports dropped from 20% to 13.8%. Never before in the history of capitalism has there been such a rapid decline. If you look at Britain's decline, it stretches over several decades. Such a decline in five years is extraordinary. Of course, Reagan is responsible for part of this, but it is still extraordinary.

Here we are at the center of an analysis of both the structure and the cause of the stock market crash. This situation means, and this is the contradiction, that foreign capital rushed to the United States at the very moment that a permanent deficit set in to the US balance of trade. The Americans are importing more and more and exporting less and less. (Of course you have to keep a sense of proportion. A country like France, for example, would be very happy to have the US's export figures.)

Taken together, this flow of capital into the United States and the growing American trade deficit led inevitably to two results: The first was the continuing decline of the value of the dollar against other currencies. Once again, this was inevitable. Americans need more yens, marks, Swiss francs and Dutch guilders — even a few

French and Belgian francs — to pay for their imports. Thus, the demand for foreign currencies rises more sharply than the demand for dollars, and the dollar drops.

However, at the same time the Americans need foreign capital to cover this deficit, because they have practically no more currency reserves to pay the bill. If they did not get foreign capital they would be reduced to the humble position of a mere Peru or Brazil, not to say Poland — they would be bankrupt, unable to pay for their imports.

They have to attract foreign capital, and accomplish this with a national currency of declining value. So, they had to set interest rates substantially higher than those obtained in Tokyo, in Frankfurt, in Zurich or Amsterdam. US interest rates include what you could call an insurance premium against a devaluation of the dollar to the order of 3% to 4%. You have here a quasi-automatic mechanism.

It is well known that those who have the most to gain from these movements of reorientation, of restructuring of international capitalism, are Japanese finance capitalists exporting capital to the US. They are doing this at the rate of \$140,000 to \$150,000 million a year — \$12,000 million a month! This shows the world we are living in. Such a volume of capital exports has never been seen before in the history of capitalism, even at the peak of the British empire. In August of this year, this figure fell abruptly by 90%, from \$12,000 million to \$1,100 million. That produced a panic on Wall Street and in Washington.

The Japanese might not continue to cover the deficit in the American balance of trade. They began to withdraw from the New York stock exchange. This was the result of interest rates rising from 7% to 7.5%, and as a result stock prices on Wall Street collapsed. Here you can see how the purely technical mechanism of the stock market is linked not only to the structural features of late capitalism, but to the shift in the inter-imperialist relationship of forces, with all its consequences.

The fall of the dollar has sometimes been presented as a sort of conspiracy by US imperialism to punish its partners and competitors and to re-establish its balance of trade. From a purely technical point of view, the results are not convincing. It is true that

when the dollar drops, exports become easier. But it is also true that imports become more expensive. While the effect on imports, notably oil imports, into the United States is immediate, the effect on exports comes only in the medium-term — and sometimes recedes altogether to a distant horizon.

The effect can be the opposite of that intended. The trade deficit can increase despite the fall in the dollar. That happened in August and September, and frightened the market specialists, the speculators. This is one of the psychological explanations of the October 19 drop in stock prices.

However, there is a more important,

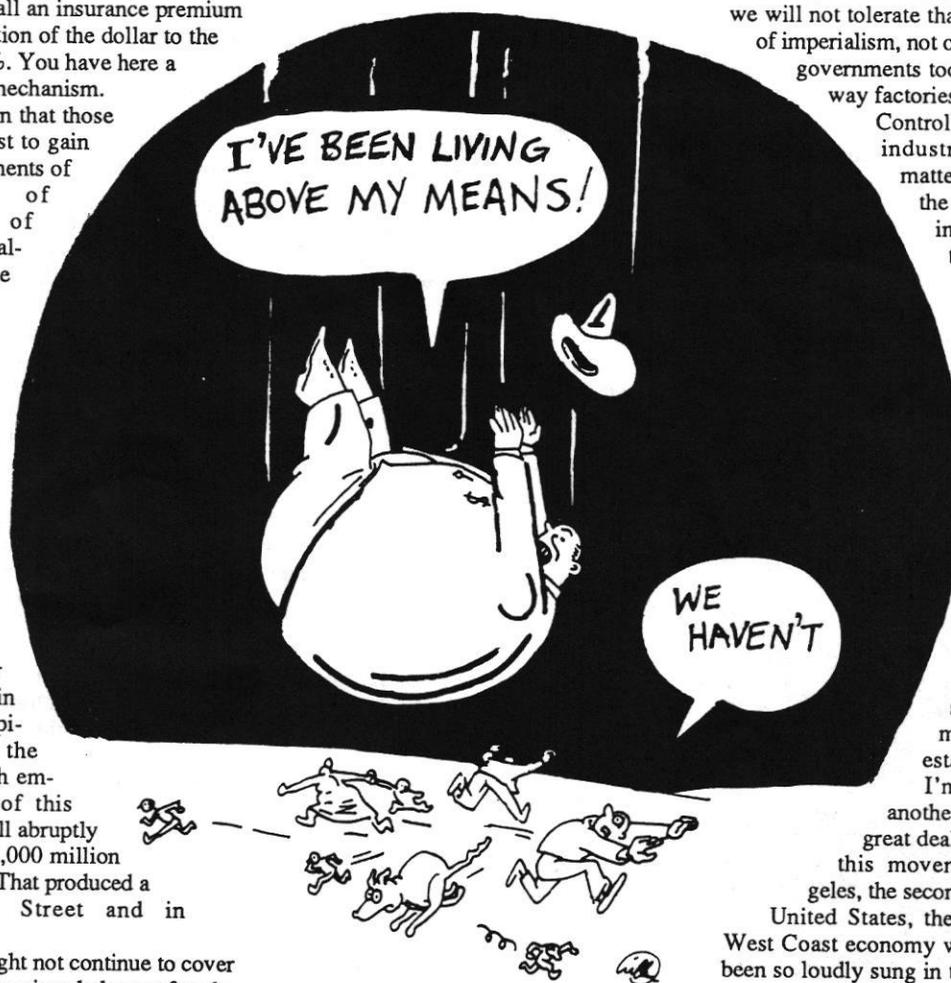
not in the epoch of imperialism. Nor do I think that there has been a deliberate US policy of facilitating the purchase by foreign capitalists, not only of factories producing needles or sewing machines, but also missiles and even nuclear missiles' components. Why should they do that? They would have to be totally crazy to do such a thing. Moreover, they are not doing it.

The proof of this is that the Japanese managed to buy the biggest bank in the United States. It is the first time in the twentieth century that such a thing has happened. It's OK for the banks to go. But when they wanted to buy Fairchild, which is one of the high-tech arms and electronics factories, the US administration said, "no," we will not tolerate that, we are in the age of imperialism, not of *laissez-faire* when governments took no interest in the way factories were used.

Controlling your own arms industry is no trifling matter for imperialists in the world we are living in. The conclusion that flows from this is that the placement of foreign capital in factories is still largely blocked, not by the market but by the intervention of the US government. Not by deregulation but by regulation. So, this enormous mass of capital floods into financial instruments, the stock market and real estate.

I'm going to give you another figure that says a great deal about the scope of this movement. In Los Angeles, the second largest city in the United States, the heart of the new West Coast economy whose praises have been so loudly sung in the French and European press, 75% of the big buildings are today foreign-owned, and that is only a sign of the times if the Americans let the dollar fall. This trend is growing and threatens to produce fundamental shake ups in the structure of monopoly capital on an international scale.

In this sense, from a structural point of view — which is much more important than a conjunctural analysis of the stock market phenomenon that the stock market crash points to — it would be premature to say that it reflects a restructuring of big monopoly capital in some key countries in the opposite direction of the one that took place in the early 1970s. To characterize the policy of Prime Minister Thatcher and



more structural aspect than this formal one. When the dollar declines, exports are stimulated, but at the same time all the real assets in the United States — factories, stock, land, buildings — become cheaper for foreign capitalists. Japanese, German, Swiss or Dutch capitalists today can spend 40% less than they did two years ago to buy the same factories, stock, land or buildings in the United States.

That is, behind any plot by US imperialism to let the dollar fall — which I don't believe in — US imperialism would have to be following a half-witted policy of deliberately selling off their assets to foreign capitalists. I don't believe that, especially

President Reagan, people have talked about a wholesale de-industrialization of Great Britain and the United States.

In the epoch of imperialism, de-industrialization carried all the way means a loss of military and economic power. What if you let your missiles be built in South Korea or Taiwan? Can you see the United States depending on a socially and politically unstable South Korea? So, this trend must be reversed, and the enormous devaluation, the enormous loss of value, of finance capital since October 19 marks the beginning of this restructuring. The pendulum is going to swing back, and it is no secret to say that this will be accompanied by political changes.

A certain political personnel have conducted this de-industrialization and offered this windfall for speculators, but another political personnel is going to carry out a policy leading in the opposite direction. In the United States, the Republicans are going to lose the coming elections. I think, without claiming to be a prophet, that the right is going to lose the presidential elections in France. For the same reason, I think that if there were elections in England today, Thatcher would lose them, and that social democracy, with its semi-liberal allies, those who embody the neo-Keynesian policy, are generally going to rise again.

After ten years of misadventures, of an all-out free enterprise offensive, the neo-free-enterprisers are on the ropes today. In history, there has rarely been a shift in the



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spirit of the times, in the dominant ideology of the ruling class, as fast as the one we have seen in the last two weeks.

Here are two examples, I could give a dozen. On the front page of the *International Herald Tribune*, exactly eight days ago, on October 26, there was an article reprinted from the *New York Times* — these are the two main US newspapers, 100% bourgeois. The article started with the following extraordinary phrase, which a month ago no social democrat would have dared write: "The world risks being thrown into a grave depression; everything depends on whether the uncontrollable forces of the market will throw us into chaos or whether reasoned and reasonable intervention by governments will get us out of this impasse." That is the classical statist credo in a period of crisis. Where is faith in the market?

"Great English revolution" flops after crash

I will give you a second example: Poor Mrs Thatcher had the bad luck to announce at the Tory congress three weeks before the crash that the great English revolution had arrived. For the first time there would be more small shareholders than union members. [There are around 10 million trade-union members.] Today, small shareholders would rather be union members in order to avoid the losses that they have taken! But Mrs Thatcher's government, imprudently, without foresight, without looking at what was going to happen on the stock exchange, even though it was a big market operation, incautiously launched the privatization of the biggest nationalized British company, British Petroleum (BP). They set the subscription price at 330 pence a share, and everybody jumped at it. It would be a bonus in comparison to the price of the shares on the market — not very large, but around 10%.

Much more incautiously, a whole gaggle of courtiers, bankers and financial intermediaries on the international scale jumped to get the commission on the sale of the issue, the big money. In exchange for a 2% commission, they told the government that they would guarantee 330 pence per share. And then October 19 came along, and BP shares collapsed on the London stock exchange and then in Wall Street. They fell to about 260 pence, a staggering loss for the guarantors of 70 pence per share, a total loss of nearly \$2,000 million.

Then what did we see from the great admirers of the market laws, these great opponents of state intervention? They jumped on poor old Thatcher, "We're not playing any more, we were counting on a rise not a decline; you have to break the contract. We want our thousand millions, the government has to save us, otherwise it means bankruptcy." It was a wretched spectacle. This government let hundreds of thousands of small shareholders go down without in-

tervening to save them a penny. But when a few big banks risked losing \$2,000 million, it naturally intervened.

Climate changed in space of a few days

There was official intervention by the Canadian and US government to save some big brokerage houses. In Canada, the biggest risked losing more than 1,000 million French francs. Finally there was a compromise with a part of these losses being absorbed by the Bank of England. This is how much the climate changed in the space of a few days. The creed of the market economy, the free enterprise virtues of egoism and "enrich yourselves," all dissipated, and the singers of its praises went back to their Keynesian and neo-Keynesian amours, supplicating governments and public authorities, as General de Gaulle said, to "do their duty."

But there is a glaring contradiction in this appeal for public intervention, a painfully obvious basic absurdity. All the governments in the imperialist world are raging at the United States, demanding that it put an immediate stop to its deficit spending. While the United States, as monetarist as it is and as conservative as Mr Reagan is, was the first to apply a neo-Keynesian policy of expanding global demand to get out of the 1980-82 recession. In fact, budget deficits are the most classical form of neo-Keynesianism — deficit spending, increasing demand or the volume of money, it all comes down to the same thing.

Obviously, you can argue about how this deficit spending is allotted. Here the neo-conservatives get their own back. It is essentially military spending, gifts to the rich through tax reform. Spending on public works has been cut back. Today, half of the bridges in the United States are no longer safe because there has been no investment in public works for years.

In the area of social spending, they have been more careful about medical insurance, which is as sacrosanct in the United States as it is in Europe. Aside from Medicare and Medicaid, they have slashed social spending, as have conservatives throughout the world. But overall, especially in view of the expanding military budget, there has been an increase in demand, in the volume of money. This produced both the economic upturn, from which all capitalist countries benefited, and the swollen American domestic market that attracted not only capital, but especially commodities. These goods are not only Japanese and German, and to a lesser extent Italian, French, British and Belgian, but also commodities from a whole series of semi-industrialized third world countries — Brazil, Mexico (to a degree), South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong. Today, all these countries have a balance of trade surplus with the United States.

One of the least understood and most irrational aspects of the way the capitalist

economy functions today is the celebrated question of the third world debt, a debt that will never be repaid; no one disputes that. But even the very onerous service on this debt can only be paid if the countries concerned have a trade surplus with the imperialist countries. Where else would they get the dollars to pay it? This means that in insisting that the interest be paid, the United States, the IMF and the World Bank are insisting that the deficit in the US balance of trade increase. But if today the United States say "that's it, the deficit has to end," the whole marvelous mechanism that has kept the international capitalist economy a fraction of an inch above water over the last five years will grind to a halt, and it will sink.

If there is no longer a budget deficit in the United States, the American domestic market and US imports will shrink. That will mean an end to German and Japanese expansion. It will mean an end to interest payments by South Korea, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and so on. And recession will spread from the United States to all the capitalist countries.

This is inevitably going to happen in 1988. And it will be a recession in worse conditions, much worse for the international capitalist economy, than the 1980-82 recession. Because while inflation has been on the decline for the last five to seven years, it is inevitably going to rise again, at least in the United States. Perhaps also in Germany and Japan, but certainly in the United States. And from the United States it is going to spread to all the countries of the third world, where already high inflation will be accentuated. It will also reach the weaker capitalist countries such as France, Italy and Britain.

There are a whole series of reasons for this. Today, the US government has done something that is economic nonsense. It wanted to lower interest rates at any cost to halt the fall in the stock exchange. It had some success, but in order to do this it inflated the monetary mass. And if you inflate the monetary mass with an already devalued money, obviously you revive inflation, and the interest rate will go up again.

Attempts to avert an international recession

The Japanese have already virtually stopped buying American paper and in particular, they stopped buying US Treasury Bonds in August. This month there will be another issue of Treasury Bonds, and if the Japanese prove reluctant to buy them, interest rates will go back up by a point, two points, or more. When the rate of inflation is already 5%, you can see the results that will ensue, in addition to higher prices for imports. The two will combine.

The question is posed of replacing a US budget deficit with a German and Japanese expansion to avert an international recession.

This does not seem very realistic for two reasons. First of all, if you look at Germany's domestic market, in what is perhaps the most solid imperialist country today, the country has a population of 60 to 65 million. That cannot replace the market of 240 million in the United States. Germany cannot import the same volume as the US from Brazil, the United States, South Korea, Taiwan and Mexico. The second reason is that Germany and Japan have themselves experienced a parallel evolution, and their productive investments have been very, very limited, even in Japan.

No recognized world-wide authority over capital

The big Japanese firms have practiced financial placement, speculation, quick profits at the expense of production. The last big wave of investments was in color TV. They flooded the world with these gadgets, but now that is over. There is no equivalent new impulse. So, they have thrown themselves into financial operations. In these conditions, the Japanese domestic market, with wages 40% lower than in Europe, cannot absorb a major volume of commodities.

But there is a deeper reason — the internationalization of capital, of speculation and the stock exchanges. Underlying this are big international firms producing on a world scale, which are not matched by a world state that could do what Roosevelt could in the United States, or Churchill in England, or de Gaulle in France. There is no recognized authority that has the power to impose its authority worldwide over capital.

Capital continues to be politically and militarily fragmented into states with varying degrees of independence from each other. This reflects fundamentally private property, competition and the use of the state by factions of capital organized nationally to defend their own, particular interests. We are watching a tragic spectacle for the capitalist world, a real spectacle that you can see in the papers. They shout wildly that we are all in the same boat, but they prefer it if their neighbors fall into the water before them! This is what has dominated the international monetary and political scene since the beginning of the long depression.

This is true even in Europe, where it is clear that the only solution for the European capitalists is finishing the construction of a European economy, transforming the European currency unit (ECU) into a real currency. This is the only solution for averting a grave recession. But even for the Germans and French, who are ready to have a common army and to pool together a few miserable thousand million dollars, "Yes, but..." remains the watchword.

Even this absolutely necessary unification will not take place in a period of crisis. In a period of crisis, competition, contra-



dictions, inter-imperialist competition sharpens. I am not saying that the Common Market is going to collapse, but the status quo will remain. They will be unable to take the big step forward that they need to, if only to avoid a grave recession.

So, I will end with three questions. The first is the scope of this recession, which is inevitable because of everything that has happened over recent years. It will probably come at the beginning of 1988. But the time is not so important. Marxist analysts have never been able to predict exactly what an ounce of gold will be worth on January 13, 1988. We are concerned with general trends, not with making predictions.

Will this inevitable recession be more or less of the same type as the 1974-75 one or the 1980-82 one, or will it be much graver? It is still too early to answer this question. The chain of the capitalist economy has broken at its weakest link, the stock markets.

Two other links are now threatened. A series of brokerage houses and commercial banks that immersed themselves in stock market speculation on a grand scale and have overdrafts of tens of millions of dollars, which governments and central banks may or may not bail out. Probably, they will be bailed out, although it is hard to tell to what extent. That will be decided in the coming weeks.

The other weak link is a series of countries threatened by bankruptcy. These are

above all in the third world, but not entirely. Some imperialist countries are in debt up to their ears and, as soon as the recession comes, they could find themselves in very grave difficulties. Already it is clear that simply the fear of a recession has touched off a drop in raw materials' prices that is hitting some third world countries very hard. And the onset of the recession will have a very severe effect on the exports of countries such as Brazil, where the recession has probably already begun; South Korea, which is still in full expansion; Taiwan and Hong Kong, which are still in full expansion and can fall into recession overnight. Several of these countries may find themselves unable to meet their payments.

Threat to big multinational firms

A third decisive link is that a series of failures starting in the financial sector could extend to some big multinational industrial and mining firms. This is possible. I do not predict it, but it is possible. This possibility arises as an immediate consequence of the stock market crash. The financial soundness of some of these firms was shaken overnight. If their sales, their turnover, drops, they could go over the brink.

These three links have not yet broken. But they could. And if they do, this crisis will be a very grave one. If they do not, it will be a repetition of the 1980-82 crisis. Let us not forget that the 1929 stock exchange crash did not lead to a collapse of production in the same year. It took three years to arrive at an unemployment rate of 30% to 35%. Today also, the deterioration of the capitalist economy could stretch out over several years, through successive phases of recession, stagnation, new recession.

The second question is the social consequences of all this. I have pointed to three successive links, after the stock exchange. I did not add the one that interests us the most, which interests the workers, the popular masses on an international scale. It is the finances of social security. They are in a bad state in every country. This is the cumulative result of 15 years of depression and mass unemployment. There has been an attempt to straighten this out, because the bourgeoisie, to say nothing of the reformists, know perfectly well that this is where the most explosive material lies, where the masses might fightback the hardest. These are the people's important gains, especially health insurance and pensions.

But if the finances break down totally, if state resources shrink because of the recession, I think that this link is going to be threatened. I am not saying necessarily that it is going to break, but there is a direct connection between the economic and social crisis. Today, there are 31 to 32 million

officially registered unemployed in the imperialist countries. The real figure, cited by the BIT [International Work Bureau], is nearly 40 million. All governments have played around with the statistics, removing people who are still alive, kicking and looking for work.

We have to realize that together with the families of the unemployed, this represents nearly 100 million people just in the world's richest countries. If this figure increases by 10% or 15% in the coming recession, we are not so far from a very grave crisis, despite social security, despite unemployment insurance.

Another frightening figure, that few people know about, is that in the imperialist countries as a whole almost half the unemployed are no longer receiving benefits. They are living off charity. There has been talk about a new poverty. This is absurd, because there is nothing new in this poverty. It has always existed. But what they want to designate by this term is impoverishment, the worsening of poverty in countries such as Portugal, Spain, southern Italy and France — and also in Britain. This is worse in France than in the Scandinavian countries or in Germany. There are differences among countries. But the general trend is already grave.

I think that we were right to underline the fact that, as in 1929, the first effect of all this on the working class, on the workers' movement, on the capacity of the workers for fighting back, is not positive. That is clear. If there is a mass of unemployed, if there is fear of unemployment, and if there is fear of impoverishment, the first reaction (especially in the absence of a well structured, conscious trade-union movement confidently organizing a fightback, a movement that has managed to establish or reestablish the unity of working class forces — and we find this nowhere) — in these conditions the first reaction will be rather a fragmentation of resistance: everybody for themselves.

As the crisis takes on more definite form, as the bourgeoisie's political and ideological offensive is discredited, as it is being discredited today by the crisis, things can change. They may not change quickly. After 1929, we had to fight five years for such a change. It was only in 1934 that the workers began to fight back in Europe, in France and in Austria. No one can make any predictions today. But the response is going to come. That seems absolutely certain, and those who still harbor any illusions about a general revival of the capitalist economy or a soft landing to the long depression followed by a new expansion in the medium-term are wasting their time. After this grave stock market crisis, it is clear that that is out of the question.

The bourgeoisie's confidence in its own future, in its own destiny, its own economy may have been more shaken than the illusions of the reformists and the workers. A deep and broad expansion of this economy in the coming years is totally excluded. It would take a profound change in the situa-

tion, a very grave defeat of the working class, a radical change in the Eastern bloc countries for this confidence to revive, for the market to be able to expand, for investments to regain the rate of the 1950s and 1960s.

I will conclude with a third problem. We are in a new world situation, owing to political, economic, moral and ideological shake ups. But there has not yet been a social upheaval. It is clear that this may take time, but the four areas in which there have already been shocks are important enough to justify using the term "a new world situation."

The tragic irony is that this is not fortuitous. It is the historical price that we — and above all the Soviet working class — pay for the crimes of Stalinism.

The tragic irony is that at the very moment when imperialism is going into one of the deepest, if not the deepest, crises in its history and when confidence in the market economy has been profoundly shaken in the West, not to mention third world countries, the virtues of market mechanisms are now being extolled in the Soviet Union. Expanding market mechanisms is presented as the only recourse and only solution to the grave systemic crisis gripping the USSR and its satellite countries. This systemic crisis is so undeniable that it is now acknowledged openly and frankly by the leaders themselves.

Effects of crisis on USSR regime

Two terrible statistics, cited by Gorbachev himself in his book, capture its gravity. First: one-third of working hours in the Soviet Union are wasted. Second: there are four times more tractors in the USSR than in the USA, but the USSR produces less wheat than the US. This leads to constant shortages that force the Soviet Union to spend thousands of millions of dollars each year importing wheat from capitalist countries.

These two figures suffice to prove that the crisis is one specific to this regime. The theoreticians who claim capitalism has been restored or that state capitalism exists in the Soviet Union are at a loss to explain this. Stock exchanges have collapsed in all the capitalist countries, but not in Moscow or Peking. There's another economy there, that's clear. Anyone who cannot see this is denying reality. These economies are not playing the same game, according to the same rules, in the same structure.

That does not mean that the USSR's is a perfect economy that functions well. It has its own crisis, its own problems. The Soviet leaders are more or less powerless to deal with them, and don't know which saint to invoke — although they know they mustn't invoke comrade Trotsky, as we've just seen! They are completely disoriented and there will be no big changes. This year, the growth rate of Soviet industry has



"Jake - come back - Jake - the market's rising - Jake..."

fallen below the level it had reached in Brezhnev's last year. There is a lot of noise, which is good; a good deal of openness, which is even better; some *glasnost*, which is insufficient. But little has really changed, and nobody predicts real changes in the months and years ahead.

So what do we mean when we say that the world situation has profoundly changed, or is changing profoundly? As I said, we have seen a long period of retreat of the world revolution, that ended with the fall of Mussolini in 1943. We then had a long, partial rise of the social revolution — complicated, not clear cut and less conscious than that after 1917, but important all the same. The Chinese revolution, the victory of the Cuban revolution, of the Vietnamese and Nicaraguan revolutions — all that has created a different world from 1940, from that of Hitler and Mussolini, and others of the same ilk.

US and USSR proletariats no longer on sidelines

But this slow rise of the international movement has been weighed down by a tremendous handicap, the fact that the two biggest working classes in the world — those of the USSR and USA — have been out of the game for 40 years. That is more than a quarter of the world working class, and its most concentrated contingents — 135 million proletarians in the USSR and 115 million in the United States — who were on the sidelines.

The crisis in itself doesn't change that. Gorbachev alone will change nothing. But the crisis sets changes in motion. Gorbachev has been a trigger and an amplifier for movements whose development means that in the next ten years these two great proletarian concentrations will no longer be spectators on the sidelines.

That is a fundamental change, giving us great hope for a continuation, growth and generalization of workers' action, of the proletarian revolution, of socialism as defined by Marx: the rule of freely associated producers. ★



FROM MILITANCY TO MARXISM

A personal and political account of organizing car workers

Alan Thornett

Left View Books, London, 1987

THIS BOOK is the first part of a trilogy that Alan Thornett is writing on the workers' struggles and trade-union organization in the key sectors of the British car industry, in particular the Morris assembly plant at the British Leyland factory in Cowley near Oxford.

This first volume covers the period from the mid-1950s to the first half of the 1970s. The second will cover 1974-79, and the third will analyze the phase in which the Conservative government and the new Cowley management unleashed a brutal attack against the gains of the workers and the trade-union movement.

Alan Thornett, born in 1937, began working in the car industry in 1959. For about a quarter of a century he played an important role, first as a shop steward and later as an organizer of his local district of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) and finally as chair of the 5/55 union branch and the Shop Stewards Committee in the Oxford region. It was the target of attacks and reprisals both from the bosses and the trade-union bureaucrats. In 1982, he was fired.

Thornett joined the Communist Party in 1959. He left it in 1964, after adopting revolutionary Marxist positions. He was active for ten years in the Socialist Labour League, Gerry Healy's organization. Subsequently, he belonged to other organizations identifying with Trotskyism. In May 1987, as a member of the *Socialist Viewpoint* editorial board, he participated in the unification of the

magazine with *International* to produce a new journal, *Socialist Outlook*.

In his preface, he writes: "I have tried to bring into these pages not just the politics of the shop floor, but some of the richness of life in the factory as well. I have tried not to trivialise factory life, as is so often the case, by reducing the thoughts of the workers to a crude reaction to management."

Further on he explains that he has written the book as a tribute to the hundreds of activists who are the "unsung heroes of the labour movement" and "hardly recognized by the official union movement". They not only faced the daily pressures of the extremely tough work on the track, but also the problems of organizing the union in the face of management attacks.

He also stresses the militant leadership that existed in the plant by the 1960s, that was "prepared to take initiatives and lead struggles both in defence of the workforce and in order to improve wages and conditions."

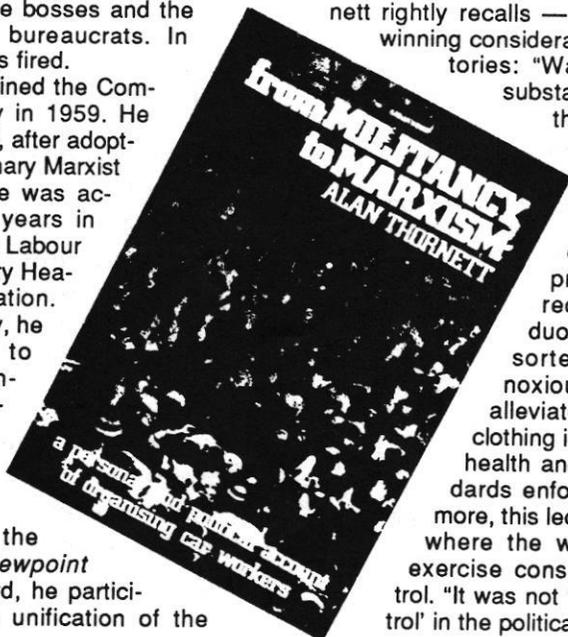
A detailed but gripping analysis

Thornett has managed to achieve his goals. His book is an extremely detailed but at the same time gripping analysis of a long series of struggles at different levels that had a great influence on the British workers' movement. He provides all the facts on the birth and development of the shop stewards' movement, its objectives, struggles and organizational forms.

For example, Thornett writes about the 5/55 TGWU branch in the Oxford region, which unquestioningly played a vanguard role in the 1960s and early 1970s in mobilizing rank and file militants.

The car workers' movement — Thornett rightly recalls — succeeded in winning considerable partial victories: "Wages went up substantially and, at the same time, the quality of life of the workers.

Working conditions improved beyond recognition, arduous jobs were sorted out, obnoxious conditions alleviated, protective clothing introduced and health and safety standards enforced." What's more, this led to a situation where the workers could exercise considerable control. "It was not 'workers' control' in the political sense, but it



was an important step towards it."

There are other significant passages, for example Thornett highlights very clearly the role played by the bureaucratic leaderships of the Labour Party and of the trade unions, including those who were considered on the left. He shows how they consciously misled the masses, making apparently radical speeches when they had already made backroom deals with the government and the bosses.

A lack of political answers in the movement

Their only concern was to get their capitulations swallowed without provoking too great a reaction. Among the most scandalous episodes was in May 1968 during a very sharp struggle around the policy of wage control, productivity increases and limitations on the right to strike that the Wilson government wanted to introduce. Barbara Castle, first secretary of state for employment and productivity in the Labour government, took her holidays in the luxurious yacht of Charles Forte, a wealthy employer and a determined enemy of the trade unions.

Finally, Thornett is not unaware of the limits of the movement in which he participated, and even of its vanguard. He emphasizes the case of very important militants who did not move beyond a purely trade-union outlook, and who, because of their lack of a political perspective, after having led very bitter struggles, ended up collaborating with the most conservative wing of the trade-union bureaucracy.

Thornett writes that generally "the shop stewards have been more militant than the officials, and have been closer to and more responsive to the members, but at the end of the day they have often lacked the political answers to the problems. Most significantly, they lacked an adequate approach to the challenge of unemployment, of factory closures, of 'bankrupt' companies and non-viable industries."

The next two volumes from Alan Thornett are eagerly awaited and should be as interesting as the first. In the last 20 years many revolutionary Marxists have participated in important struggles in the car industry.

If some of them wrote books like Thornett's about Fiat in Turin, Mercedes Benz in Stuttgart, Volvo in Göteborg, Seat in Barcelona or Renault in Billancourt, this would be a very valuable contribution to the history of the workers' movement and a precious lesson for the struggles of today and tomorrow. ★

Livio Maitan

AROUND THE WORLD



INTERNATIONAL

Moscow Trials Campaign update

THE CAMPAIGN to "Clear the names of the accused in the Moscow Trials" has been collecting signatories from all the world (see IV 129 for full appeal and list of signatories). Below is a list of the latest supporters, followed by an article on the rehabilitations by a leading member of the Belgian Communist Party.

Latest signatories:

- Argentina:** Guillermo Almeyra.
- Belgium:** Michel Davaivre, FGTB; Jeff Sleeckx, MP; Claude Dejardin, MP, vice-president European Assembly; Prof. Leo Apostel.
- Brazil:** Antonio Angelo Maschera, MP; J Oliveira, MP; A Preto, MP; Flavio Koutzii.
- Canada:** Michael Cassidy, MP.
- Chile:** Prof. Luis Vitale.
- France:** Henry Hirsch; Thérèse Lagoutte; Paul Parigot; Luc Roy; Prof. Benjamin Stone; Antoine Vitez, film producer; Jean-Paul Zana; R Prager. Prof. Yves Sertel.
- Italy:** Rossana Rossanda, ed. *Il Manifesto*; Dario Fo, playwright and producer; Franca Rame, actress; Fulvio Aurora; Aldo Natolie; Edgardo Pelligrini; Andrea Rivas, director Radio Popolare.

Brussels demonstration

TWO hundred people responded to the call of the POS/SAP, Belgian section of the Fourth International, to demonstrate in front of the Soviet embassy in Brussels on Saturday, November 7.

A delegation delivered the international appeal for the rehabilitation of the Moscow Trials' victims to the Soviet ambassador. ★

The campaign is appealing for further signatories of individuals or organizations, and financial donations to extend the appeal. Write to the Moscow Trials Campaign, c/o Michael Löwy, 34 rue des Lyonnais, 75005 Paris.

Netherlands: Maurice Ferares, secretary artists' and musicians' union.

Portugal: Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho; Jorge Sampaio, MP, pres. of Socialist Parliamentary Group; Pezarat Correia; Fernando Loureizo, nat. sec. CGTP; Manuel Alegre, MP; Sottomayor Cardia, MP; Lopes Cardoso, MP; Arons de Carvalho, MP; Helena Cidade Moura, ex-MP; José Luis Nimes, MP; Eduardo Pereira, MP; Nuno Grande; Maria José Lopes; Francisco Louça.

Senegal: Prof. Samir Amin.

Spanish state: Mario Onaindia, MP, Euskadiko Esquerria.

Sri Lanka: Butty Weerakoon, gen. sec. Ceylon Workers' Federation.

Uruguay: Raul Sendic, leader MLN (ex-Tupamaros).

USA: Prof. Egbae Ahmed; Prof. Rosalyn Baxandall; Abraham Bloom, National Board Grey Panthers; Mary Boger; Prof. Walter Cohen; Dr. Louis Harap, Ph.D.; Bill Henning, vice-pres. CWA Local 1080; Assoc. Prof. James Kavanagh; Conrad Laynn, NAACP attorney; Harold Leventhal, producer; Raymond Markey, treasurer NY Public Library Guild Local 1930; Asst. Prof. Craig Reinerman; Morris U. Schappes, editor *Jewish Currents*; Asst. Prof. Ellen W. Schrecker; Juliet Ucelli; Prof. Alan Wald; Prof. Emeritus George Wald, Nobel prizewinner; Stsn Weir, publisher. ★

Belgian CP statement

UNDER THE headline "Demands for a review of the trials are increasingly being made. With just reason", leader of the Belgian Communist Party (PCB) Jan Debrou-

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were wrote an article on the Moscow Trials in the PCB's Flemish journal, *De Rode Vaan* [The Red Flag], on October 15, 1987.

He began by putting down all the pretexts used during many years in the CP in order to confuse the issues. "In the communist ranks," he wrote, "we have had more than our fair share of losing ourselves in generalizations and abstractions.... On the basis that it is better not to stir up old troubles."

He continued by denouncing Stalin's dictatorship, which "demanded the death sentences and the executions" with the consequence that "most of the leadership, the leaders of the October revolution, did not survive the trials....The victims were first and above all communists."

The author refutes the accusations of sabotage, terrorism, treason and so on. "Most of the time, if not always, it was only a question of political differences." Even if these divergences were fundamental and serious ones. "But the differences, the battle of ideas, even around the questions of the temporary hardships or where the final responsibilities lay, did not pose the question of personal honour. They should not raise the question of personal honour. Neither should they be resolved in an atmosphere of criminality, or be taken to tribunals, to interrogation cells or in front of a firing squad.

"Political preference has not gone to Bukharin or Trotsky; it is not a matter of whether they were right or wrong," he concluded. Jan Debrouwere, as a member of the PCB's political bureau, has thus taken a step forward. But this gesture would

make more sense if the PCB, the party as a whole, took the same position. ★

[From *La Gauche*, newspaper of the POS/SAP, Belgian section of the Fourth International.]

SENEGAL

Electoral code denounced

FIVE Senegalese opposition parties have again denounced the electoral code, five months before the presidential and legislative elections, mainly because it allows all kinds of fraud before, during and after the count.

During a public meeting on September 26 in Dakar, a spokesperson for the Senegalese Democratic Alliance (ADS) — an informal structure grouping five of the fifteen opposition parties — denounced the policy of President Abdou Diouf, who "gives a democratic image of the country to the outside world, whilst strangling possibilities for democratic expression inside the country."

The ADS is comprised of the Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS), the Democratic League (LD-MTP), the Union for Popular Democracy (UDP), the Workers' Socialist Organization (OST, Senegal section of the Fourth International) and the Revolutionary Movement for New Democracy (MRDN).

The opposition spokesperson attacked the "laxity" of the electoral code, in particular that unused voting cards were distributed to sympathizers of the ruling Socialist Party. He denounced the fact that electors

could vote without presenting identity cards, the absence of opposition representatives from polling stations, the optional use of polling booths and the lack of announcements of the results at each polling station.

Lastly, the opposition demanded the lowering of the electoral age from 21 to 18, and the possibility of Senegal nationals abroad being able to vote. ★

GREECE

Spartakos republished

THE JOURNAL of the Greek section of the Fourth International, *Marxistike Seispirosi* (Marxist Regroupment) reports in its September/October issue on the reprinting of an early publication of the Trotskyist movement in Greece.

Soon to be issued is a reprint of the collection of *Spartakos*, which was published from July 1930 to September 1932. This makes accessible for study and debate one of the sources for Greek social and political history in the inter-war period. *Spartakos* appeared in January 1928 as a monthly magazine "of Marxist-Leninist theory and action."

It was published by the "Greek Communist Party-Opposition," which came out of a conflict in the party after the fall of the Pankalis dictatorship and allied itself with the Opposition in the post-Lenin phase of building the USSR.

With its fifth issue, *Spartakos* took the form of a four-page fortnightly and later of a weekly paper. ★

WE ALSO SEE a strong differentiation in the Latin America-wide structures of the Catholic Church. On the one hand, the Latin American Conference of Bishops (CELAM), controlled since 1972 by a Colombian team, is distinctly conservative. It has waged a furious battle against liberation theology. On the other hand, the Latin American Conference of Members of Religious Orders (CLAR), which includes the Jesuits, Franciscans, Dominicans and other orders, does not hide its sympathy for the ideas of the new Latin-American theologians.

Divisions also appear in the church in the individual countries. The best known example, obviously, is Nicaragua, where there is a split in the church between many priests, members of religious orders and lay people who support the revolution. Three priests hold ministerial posts, Ernesto and Fernando Cardenal and Miguel d'Escoto, but the hierarchy around Cardinal Obando y Bravo is closely lined up with the contras and Reagan's policy.¹

In El Salvador in 1980, one bishop, Monsigneur Alvarez de San Miguel, was an army colonel, while another, Monsignor Oscar Romero, denounced the crimes of the military and solidarized with the people's movements. Shortly afterward, Romero was murdered by the death squads.

Four tendencies in the Latin American churches

Four tendencies can be distinguished within the Latin American Catholic churches:

- A rather small traditionalist semi-fascist current, for example the Brazilian "Tradition, Family, Property" group.

- A powerful conservative current hostile to liberation theology and linked to the ruling classes, represented by Monsignor Lopez Trujillo, the chair of CELAM, for example.

- A reformist, modernist current prepared to defend human rights and support certain social demands. This is the position that predominated in the Puebla Conference in 1979.

- A small but influential radical current close to liberation theology, which supports the workers', peasants' and people's movements. Its best known representatives are bishops and cardinals such as Mendez Arceo in Mexico, Pedro Casaldaliga and Paulo Evaristo Arns in Brazil, Proaño in Ecuador and so on. Within this current, the most advanced section is the one represented by the Christian revolutionaries, the Christians for Socialism movement and other tendencies that identify with Sandinism, Camilo Torres or a Christian Marxism.

It is evident, therefore, that the division in the church amounts to more than the traditional vertical one: those on the bottom — the people's Christian movements, the

base communities and Christian trade unionists — against "those on the top" — the hierarchy, the summit of the institutional church. It is also horizontal, running across the church from the conferences of bishops to the diocesan clergy, the religious orders and the lay movements. However, it should not be forgotten that these are differences within an institution that despite everything remains united, inasmuch as its religious objectives are not reducible to political or social ones.

Mass influence of radical current

The new and surprising element is undoubtedly the radical current and the mass influence it wields, notably in the Brazilian Church. Two examples indicate the extent to which the Brazilian Church has changed its position in the confrontation between classes.

Gregorio Bezerra, the Brazilian communist leader, tells in his memoirs how at a rally in a village in the north-east in 1946 (the CP was legal at the time), he was threatened by a fanatical crowd led by a local priest, shouting "Death to communism, long live Christ, the king!" He had to take refuge in a police station.

Thirty-five years later, exactly the opposite happened. During the auto workers' strike in 1980, a trade-union demonstration in São Bernardo (in the industrial suburbs of São Paulo) was attacked by the police and they had to seek refuge in a church. The bishop opened it up to them. Several sections of the Brazilian Church have thus gone over lock, stock and barrel to the other side of the barricades in the conflict between the capitalists and the landlords and labor.

The change among Brazilian Christians began even before Vatican II (1962-65). From the beginning of the 1960s, the Christian University Youth, influenced first by Emmanuel Mounier's personalism and Father Lebrez's humanist economics, evolved rapidly toward socialist ideas. This led to the formation of People's Action, a Marxist-inspired organization, in 1962. A few years later (1968-69), a group of Dominicans organized an underground support network for Carlos Marighela, the leader of the ALN, a Castroist armed organization. The monks suffered brutal repression. They were imprisoned and tortured.

Similar events have occurred in other countries. The best known, of course, is the case of Camilo Torres who joined the National Liberation Army (ELN), the Colombian Castroist guerrillas, in 1965. His martyrdom had a profound political and emotional impact on Latin-American Christians, giving rise to a current identifying with his legacy. In Chile in 1969, the JUC and the Christian Democratic Youth formed the United Marxist People's Action Party (MAPU).

Christian liberation America

THE POPE's visit to Chile in April 1987 was a landmark in the Catholic Church today.

religious orders — such as André Borel, who was shot by police in 1985 in his home in the south.

taken a stand on the side of the oppressed.

In spite of this, and the fact that the Church is

(moderately) opposes the dictatorship, it has

called on Christians to seek reconciliation with Pinochet and on the

side of the oppressed.

While in the past the Church in Latin America had the appearance of being a homogeneous

clearly no longer corresponds to the reality of the

country, we find diametrically opposite

For example, in Argentina, by its silence, the Church

condoned the misdeeds of the dictatorship.

Today, it is playing a role of "forgiveness" for the criminals in

against the "real danger" of the dictatorship.

Likewise, in Colombia, the Church has supported

the oligarchical system, which it has defended

and the struggle against atheistic regimes.

In Brazil, after 1970 the Church decided to take

today it continues to support workers' movements

and the movement of the people.

MICHAEL L...



Unity and in Latin America

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ntytown of La Victoria — have
e poor and the exploited.
e Chilean religious hierarchy
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Latin America could give the
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In the context of the innovation that followed Vatican II, all of this ferment finally shook up the church throughout the continent. At the Medellin conference of Latin American bishops in 1968, new resolutions were adopted for the first time denouncing "institutionalized" violence and proclaiming solidarity with the people's aspiration for "liberation from all servitude."

This process of radicalization — which was uneven and had its ups and downs — that was to lead to the development of liberation theology did not originate in the top echelons. It was not a maneuver by the hierarchy. Nor did it come exclusively from the popular base. Rather, it moved from the periphery to the center of the institution. The social categories or sectors that were the breeding grounds of renovation were all in a way marginal or peripheral to the institution.

Lay movements the first to radicalize

The first to move were the lay movements — Acción Católica, the JUC, JOC [Christian Young Workers], the people's education movements, the Christian peasants' movements and so forth. They were followed or accompanied by lay experts working for the church (sociologists, economists, urban planners), foreign priests (notably French and Spanish, or Basques) and members of the religious orders — Jesuits, Dominicans, Franciscans, Maryknolls [Catholic Foreign Ministry of America], Assumptionists and so on.

Little by little, a part of the diocesan clergy and some bishops were caught up in the radicalization. So, at the start of the 1960s, a growing number of Christians were joining actively in the people's struggles, reinterpreting the Gospels in the light of these practices, and sometimes finding in Marxism an alternative to prevailing injustice.

Similar phenomena developed in other regions of the third world, and even in Europe and the United States, but on a much smaller scale. The exception was the Philippines where there was a mass movement [see page 18].

Latin America is par excellence the Catholic continent. The great majority of the population is immersed from birth in Roman Catholic religious culture. But at the same time it is the weak link in the Catholic chain, because the increasing economic dependence and mass poverty, the deepening of social contradictions and the victory of the Cuban revolution have given rise to a wave of popular struggles and attempted revolutions that has not ceased from 1960 until today. It was in these conditions that breaks would occur, and that a whole section of the church would come over to the cause of the poor and their fight for liberation.

Vatican II undoubtedly contributed to this evolution, but not directly because the

Council's resolutions did not go beyond modernization, *aggiornamento*, a liberal opening. But by shaking the old dogmatic certainties, this opening made the Catholic culture permeable to new ideas and to "external" influences. In opening to the modern world, the church could no longer avoid the social conflicts afflicting this world, notably in Latin America.

It was in this context that many church intellectuals in Latin America — Jesuit theologians, lay experts, students — finally became attracted, like most intellectuals on the continent, by Marxist analyses and propositions.

Liberation theology did not create this change; it is the product of it. More precisely, it is the expression of a whole social movement reflecting the involvement of Christians in neighborhood associations, unions, peasant leagues, people's education centers, in left political parties and in revolutionary organizations. This movement, which might be called "Liberation Christianity," appeared in the 1960s, well before liberation theology. But the latter, by giving it a legitimacy and a doctrine, helped to spread and advance it.

By the end of the 1960s, the theme of liberation began to occupy the minds of the more advanced theologians, who were dissatisfied with the prevailing "developmental theology." But it was in 1971, with the publication of the book by Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian Jesuit and former student at the Catholic universities of Louvain in Belgium and Lyon in France, that liberation theology really emerged.

A profound challenge to church doctrine

In this work, entitled *Liberation Theology — Perspectives*, Gutierrez advanced a certain number of challenging ideas that were to profoundly shake up church doctrine. First of all, he stressed the need for breaking with the dualism inherited from Greek thought. There were not two realities, a "temporal" and a "spiritual" one, or two histories, one "sacred" and the other "worldly." There was only one reality, and it was within this human and temporal history that redemption, the kingdom of God, had to be achieved.

It was wrong to wait for salvation to come from on high. The biblical exodus showed us "humanity forming itself through a historical political struggle." It thus became the model for a salvation that was not individual and private, but communal and "public."

What was at stake was not the souls of individuals as such, but the redemption and

1. Since they refused to yield to the Vatican's demands that they leave their governmental posts, these three priests were suspended *a divinis* by Rome in January 1985. On the church in Nicaragua, see IV 97, April 21, 1986.





liberation of an entire people.

In this perspective, the poor were not objects of pity or charity but the subjects of their own liberation. The church had to cease to be a part of the system of domination. Following the great prophetic tradition and Christ's example, it had to take on the powerful and denounce social injustice.

What did this mean for Latin America? According to Gutierrez, the poor people of the continent were "in exile on their own soil," but also "in exodus toward their redemption." Rejecting *desarrollismo*, "which has become simply a synonym for reformism and modernization" — that is, for limited, timid and ineffective measures that would only aggravate dependence — the Peruvian theologian proclaimed unhesitatingly:

"Only the radical destruction of the present state of affairs, a deep-going transformation of the system of ownership, the coming to power of the exploited class, a social revolution, will put an end to this dependence. Only this will make it possible to go over to a different kind of society, a socialist society."²

Continent-wide meeting of Christians for Socialism

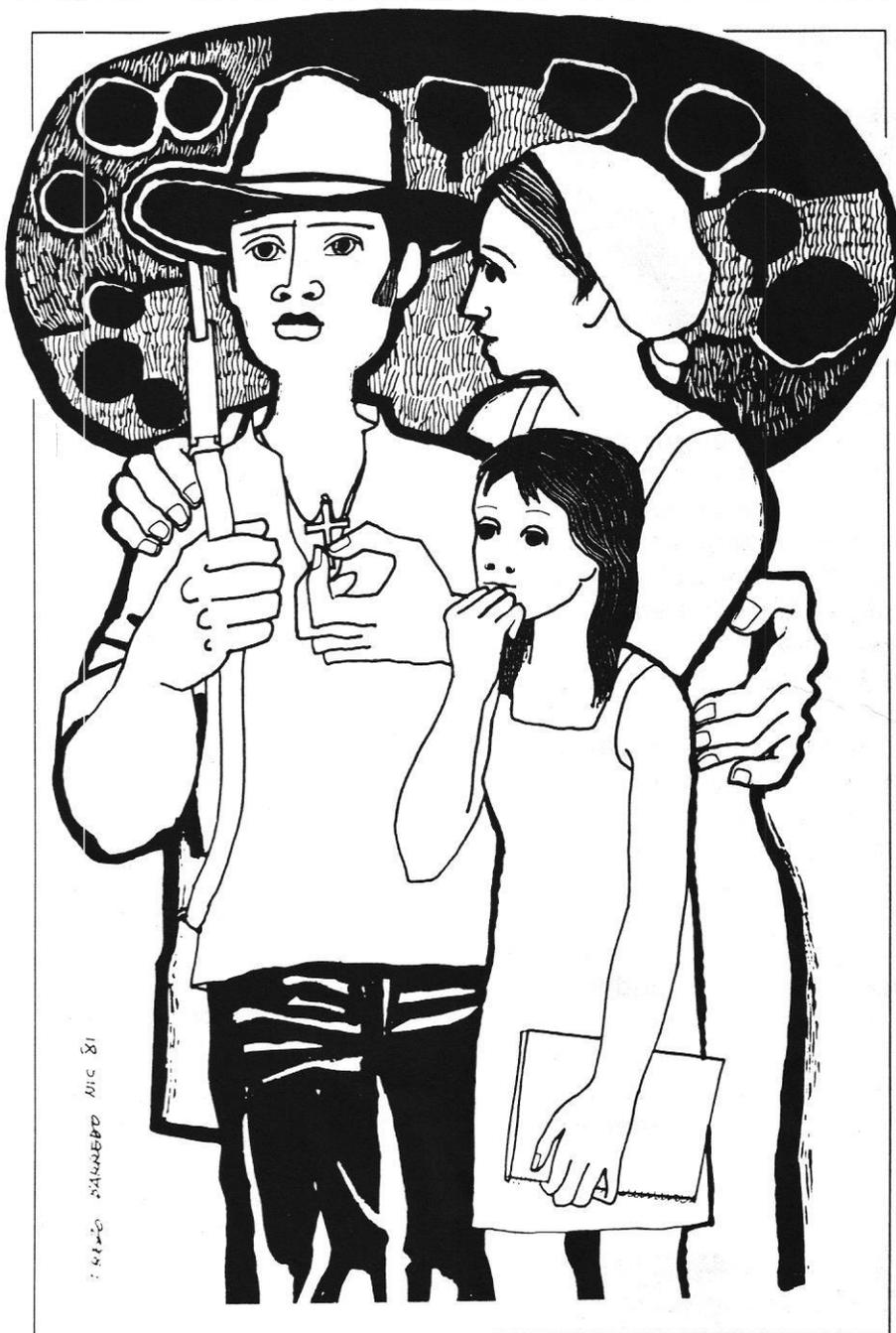
This was a much more radical position than what was advocated at the time by the dominant currents in the Latin American left.

Shortly after, in April 1972, the first continent-wide meeting of the Christians for Socialism movement was held in Santiago, Chile. It was inspired by two Chilean Jesuits — the theologian Pablo Richards and the economist Gonzalo Arroyo — and supported by the Mexican bishop Sergio Mendez Arceo. This ecumenical movement, including both Catholics and Protestants, pushed the logic of liberation theology to its conclusion, that is, to an attempt to make a synthesis between Marxism and Christianity. This soon got them banned by the bishops.

The 1972 conference's final resolution proclaimed their support for the struggle for socialism in Latin America. One of the paragraphs of this document explained the dialectical relationship between faith and the revolution in the following way:

"The real and living presence of faith in the heart of revolutionary practice produces a fruitful interaction. Christian faith becomes a critical and dynamic leavening for the revolution. It reinforces our struggle for a total liberation of society rather than for a mere transformation of the economic structures.

"Thus, through committed Christians, the faith makes its own contribution to building a society qualitatively different from the present one and to the burgeoning of the new human being. But revolutionary commitment also has a critical and moti-



vating function for Christian faith. It criticizes the open or subtle forms of complicity between the faith and the dominant culture throughout history....Committed Christians become intensely aware that the needs of revolutionary practice...oblige them to discover the central themes of the ideological message.

"A real part in the process of liberation"

"The real context for a living faith today is the history of oppression and the struggle for liberation and against oppression. In order to place ourselves in this context, however, we have to take a real part in the process of liberation by joining parties and organizations that are authentic instruments for the struggle of the working

class."³

At the Latin American bishops conference in Puebla in 1979, there was a real attempt at a crackdown. CELAM, the organizer of the meeting, banned liberation theologians from participating. Nonetheless, through the intermediary of some bishops, they exerted a real influence on the debates.

The resulting compromise was summed up by the famous formula "the church's preference for the poor," which was ambiguous enough for each current to interpret it to suit itself.

Finally, in 1981, the Brazilian Franciscan theologian Leonardo Boff set the cat

2. G. Gutierrez, *Théologie de la libération — perspectives*, Brussels, Lumen Vitae, 1974, pp.39-40.

3. *Christians and Socialism. Documentation of the Christians for Socialism Movement in Latin America*, New York, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1975, p.173.

among the pigeons with his book *Church, charisma and power*. In it he condemned the authoritarian power system in the church; the intolerance and dogmatism of institutions such as Holy Congregation for Doctrine and Faith (former Holy Office of the Inquisition); the "Christian cult of the papal personality," which he compared to that of the general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party; and the opportunism of the church as an institution toward the victors, whoever they might be. This iconoclastic work got him silenced for a year by the Vatican.

Trying to meet the challenge, Rome responded in 1984 by an Instruction on some aspects of "liberation theology" signed by the Holy Congregation for Doctrine and the Faith led by Cardinal Ratzinger. It denounced liberation theology as a new heresy based on the use of Marxist concepts. The reaction of the Latin American theologians and of important sections of the church, notably in Brazil, forced the Vatican to throw off some ballast.

In 1985, a new and more positive Instruction appeared. It was entitled "Christian Liberty and Liberation," and borrowed some themes of liberation theology, but "spiritualized" them by stripping them of their revolutionary social content. Parallel to this, there was a certain retreat on the part of several Latin American theologians, whose writings became more moderate or less marked by Marxism. It was a real political and spiritual confrontation, a decisive one for the future of the church. But neither of the two players wanted to take the risk of provoking a break or a schism.

Whatever the outcome of this battle, liberation Christianity, with the assistance of committed theologians, has already profoundly shaken up not only religious life but also society and politics in Latin America.

Burgeoning of Church Base Communities

In the church, the great change has been the burgeoning of the Church Base Communities (CEBs), especially in Brazil, where they embrace several million Christians, but also, on a lesser scale, throughout the continent. Base communities are small groups of people in the same poor neighborhood, shantytown, village or rural area who meet regularly to read the Bible and discuss it in the light of their own experience of life. Gradually, these debates and activities have broadened, generally with the help of progressive clerics, and they have begun to take on social tasks — literacy courses, forming cooperatives and various kinds of mutual aid.

Frequently, the CEBs coordinate their activities and give rise to social movements — struggles for housing, electricity and water in the shantytowns, struggles for land in the countryside. And in certain cases, the experience of these struggles leads to poli-

tization and to several leaders or members of the CEBs joining class-struggle parties or revolutionary fronts.

The experience of the CEBs has given a new quality to the social and political movements that they have fostered — roots in the daily life of the popular strata and in their concrete concerns, an encouragement to self-organization at the base, as well as a distrust of political manipulation, electoral verbiage and state paternalism. This has sometimes had a negative side-effect, a radical "basism" leading to a rejection of theory and to hostility toward the vanguard groups. There is a debate over these questions among the theologians.

Role of Christians has been decisive

In any case, several of the new mass movements that have developed over the past ten or fifteen years in Latin America have their origins in liberation Christianity. This is true particularly in Brazil. The movements in defence of human rights, the neighborhood committees, the trade-union oppositions, the landless peasants' movement and finally the Workers' Party (PT) itself have derived a good part, if not the bulk, of their cadres, members and mass support from the CEBs, the church's parishes and the radicalized Christian currents.

The Christians' role has been decisive not only in the social and political movements but also, in Central America, in the revolutionary movements. In Nicaragua, the base communities, the Delegates of the Word (community leaders charged with administering the sacraments), the Revolutionary Christian Movement, the Solentiname Community founded by Ernesto Cardenal and the Center for Education and Agricultural Advancement have been among the Sandinistas' main social bases.

Several commanders of the revolution, such as Luis Carrion, a member of the National Leadership of the FSLN, came from these Christian movements. The case of Father Gaspar Garcia Laviana, who joined the guerrillas in 1977 and fell in battle in December 1978, is relatively exceptional.

But many priests and members of religious orders, in particular Jesuits such as Fernando Cardenal and Maryknolls such as Miguel d'Escoto, supported the FSLN and helped in bringing about its victory in 1979.

In El Salvador, it was the Christian Peasants' Federation (FECCAS), which was set up in the 1970s with the encouragement of the progressive clergy, that formed the mass base of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) in the countryside.

In the cities, Christian activists coming from the base communities are numerous among the leaders of the people's organizations and the victims of the military repression, such as Juan Chacon, one of the

five Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR) leaders murdered in 1980.

In Guatemala, the moving testimony of Rigoberta Menchú is representative of a series of native communities converted to the revolutionary cause by liberation Christianity, even if for the moment the massacres perpetrated by the armed forces have managed to block this process of radicalization.⁴

For a long time, the problem of an alliance with the so-called Christian left sectors has been part of the tactical concerns of the workers' and Marxist movement in Latin America.

During his trip to Chile in 1971, Fidel Castro talked about the possibility of moving from a tactical to a strategic alliance between Marxists and Christians. However, today, after the Central American experience and also to a certain extent the Brazilian one, it is no longer necessary to talk in terms of an alliance but rather of organic unity. In fact, Christians are already an essential component of the revolutionary movement and even of its Marxist vanguard.

Theoretical challenge of Marxist Christianity

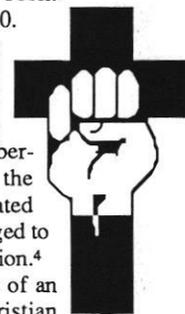
There could be long arguments about the philosophical enigma, or theoretical challenge, that Marxist Christianity represents from the standpoint of dialectical materialism. What counts is what happens in the real world, and the Marxist Christians exist. This is an undeniable social and political fact. Not only do they exist, they often bring a moral sensitivity to the revolutionary vanguard, an experience in "grassroots" work among the people and a utopian vision that can only enrich it.

What attracts radicalized Christians to Marxism is not only its scientific value as an analysis of reality but also and above all an ethical rejection of capitalist injustice, an identification with the cause of the oppressed and an active participation in their revolutionary struggle for emancipation.

Of course, only a minority have been able to cross this threshold. The possibility for masses of Christians following this example depends also on the attitude of non-believing Marxists, on whether it is open or sectarian.

Whatever the results of the Vatican's current offensive against liberation theology, and it cannot be excluded that it will score some points, the position of Christians in the class battlefield in Latin America will never be the same as it was before the emergence and flowering of liberation Christianity. ★

4. Rigoberta Menchú is a Guatemalan Indian peasant who saw her entire family massacred by the army. She wrote a book describing the development of the peasant organizations, their fight for the land and the terrible repression in the years of the dictatorship.





Revolutionary Christians in people's war

THE ONLY country in Asia where Christianity became deeply rooted, the Philippines, is also the only country in the region (except for South Korea) where Catholic clergy and lay people are playing a role comparable to that of their fellow believers in various Latin American countries.

Marxism in the Philippines originally had an anti-clerical stamp. Overall, the Catholic hierarchy has been conservative. But the church is too involved in society for it not to reflect the big social and political conflicts.

SONIA RUPON

A RADICAL CURRENT emerged at the end of the 1960s, leading to the formation in 1972 of Christians for National Liberation (CNL). After the imposition of martial law in 1972, the CNL, together with the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), formed the National Democratic Front (NDF), an underground revolutionary movement engaged in armed resistance. Lasting collaboration of an unparalleled sort was thus established between Christian activists and a Communist party of Maoist origin.

The hierarchy has also assumed a direct political role in the recent period. After years of tension and "critical collaboration" with the dictatorship, the church emerged as the main national institution in competition with the army and the administration. In view of the grave crisis of the regime, which began to worsen in 1983, the bishops played an active role in the overthrow of President Ferdinand Marcos and the victory of Corazon Aquino.

Christianity was brought to the Philippines in the baggage of the Spanish colonization, and Christians collaborated closely with the colonialists. Friars became an integral part of the state apparatus, and the religious orders amassed wealth through the *encomienda* system, which the Spanish set up throughout the islands.¹

Overall, the imposition of Christian ideology on the people was successful. It was resisted only by some animist tribes [those worshipping animals as gods] in the northern mountains and by the Muslim population in the south, which to this day continues to hold fast to its own political

and cultural identity. Acceptance of Christianity went hand in hand with accepting colonial rule.

If church policy sometimes involved a certain criticism of the state, that was only to facilitate maintaining the Spanish colonial yoke. "Native" Christians had no place in the personnel of the ecclesiastical institution, and that was to be the source of various struggles in the church itself — struggles to achieve freedom, religious equality and "Philippinization" of the church. One such battle for religious liberty marked an important chapter in the history of the country. It was waged by three Filipino priests — Gomez, Burgos and Zamora — who were garotted in 1872.

The struggle for the "Philippinization" of the church was led notably by a Filipino nationalist priest, Gregorio Aglipay. Since Rome refused to grant his demands, he headed a schism that gave rise to the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (Independent Philippine Catholic Church).

Struggle for liberation from Spain

The struggle for liberation from Spain, which was expressed in hundreds of peasant rebellions over the three centuries of colonial domination and culminated in the revolution of 1896, therefore had a strong anti-clerical character. The abuses of the monks and of religious intolerance were key sources of discontent.

However, it has to be understood that these struggles, even those that had a special religious content, were never against

Christianity as such. Filipinos believed that their hunger for reforms was in the spirit of Christianity. Their rebellions and demands for transformation of the society were often expressed in profound Christian terms and symbols. That does not mean, however, that their Christian faith was the only wellspring of their desire for reforms. Politics, faith and the church as an institution closely interacted.

Protestantism introduced by Americans

When the Americans took over the country, they exploited the population's religious outlook. They introduced Protestantism and new religious congregations that adroitly outdid the Spanish orders in carrying out their express function of propaganda for American democracy. The role of the church changed in form, but it remained the captive of colonialism. And when questions such as the American military bases, land tenure and cultural identity came to the forefront in the 1950s, the church never took an active stand on such problems.

The emergence of a revolutionary current within the church in the 1960s was not a mere reflection of liberation theology in the Latin American church. It was based on very old struggles that had a certain national democratic character. In the 1960s, this current developed within the context of a growing radical movement.

The call for nationalism and the search for a Filipino culture and identity opposed to American imperialism set the framework for similar search for relevance and a Filipino theology among religious Filipinos. This quest did not have an anti-Christian character. On the contrary, its aim was a relevant, Filipino Christianity.

During this time, student radicalization expressed itself in mass work. Kabataang Makabayan (KM), an organization of young Filipino Marxists and nationalists, was formed in 1964. It devoted itself to mass work in the countryside in farming communities. Many young priests and seminarians who had to go into these poor communities as part of their religious education, found themselves confronting these activists and their questions. These experiences in the communities stimulated thinking on social questions in theological circles.

While the KM organized its young student activists, the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) provided the ideological and political structure for a whole layer of middle-class Christian activists. The FFF dealt with the land question, and therefore the problem of the peasants. At the same time, it had as guidelines social principles drawn from the papal encyclicals. In Protestant circles, it was the Student Christian Move-

1. Patterned after the Latin American model, the *encomiendas* were not land grants but administrative units for the purpose of exacting taxes from the natives.

ment (SCM) that initiated debate in the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP).

This period marked a turning point in the consciousness of many Christians, who had grown tired of the Church's ineffectual moral pronouncements. They felt an urge to go out and organize the communities of farmers and workers.

The student movement reached its peak at the beginning of the 1970s, a period of rallies and big mass protests that came to be known as "First Quarter Storm." The religious groups were also obliged then to take clear positions, the bone of contention among them being fundamentally what attitude to take toward radical ideas. Some groups, the "radicals," adopted the National Democratic line (that is, one close to the orientation of the Communist Party). Others, the "moderates," opposed any idea of revolution, and rejected Marxism, advocating a Christian alternative. Since that time, they have been known by the name of social democrats.

Undefined ideological position

However, this social democracy did not then have a well-defined ideological line. It was essentially a reaction against the radicalization of the church by the National Democrats. According to an interview given by Mar Cononigo, today a leader of the social-democratic movement: "We started a reformist movement in the pre-martial law years. In the early 1970s, the need for an ideological line became more apparent, because we were being infiltrated by other forces, the radical left."²

Others made different choices, as did the Christian Student Movement. It accepted the ND line, but remained a Christian organization. It should be stressed, furthermore, that some of the original positions taken by certain groups were by no means final. In later stages, some "moderate" groups, such as Xi Rho, joined the radicals. In 1971, the SCM officially adopted the ND line, and joined the MDP, the national alliance of National Democratic mass organizations.³

On February 17, 1972, the Chris-

tians for National Liberation (CNL) came into being. It was made up of "Filipino Christians who had opted for national-democratic revolution as the only viable way of building a just and humane social order in the Philippines. This event was important because it was the first time in the history of the Philippines that church people formed an organization willing to collaborate with the Communists in an armed struggle against the government."⁴

Together with the Communist Party, the CNL was one of the founding organizations of the National Democratic Front (NDF).

Martial law was declared six months after the formation of the CNL. This was the regime's response to the growth of the mass movement and the growing radicalization in the country. It also meant a tightening of political and economic control. Christian activists were not spared from the arrests, torture and assassinations systematically perpetrated by Marcos's henchmen. The regime, however, was careful not to stick its nose too deeply into the church's affairs. So the latter was the only legal institution able to speak out against the regime's policy of curtailing human rights.

In the mid-1970s, owing to a need to concern itself more deeply with worsening social problems, church pastoral work moved on from community development to building Christian Base Communities (CBCs) through applying community organizing (CO) principles. "Priests, sisters and lay pastoral workers who lived among the people were the first to see that martial law in 1972 meant bigger problems — the encroachment of transnational corporations in the countryside, the continuous and systematic violation of human rights by the military and the worsening of the economic crisis...

"Struggling against the limitations imposed by the institutional church, these progressive churchmen went to the people, immersed themselves in organizing the people and offered their services and resources."⁵

It was on the basis of these lines of work that the experiences of the Latin-American churches were much appreciated and studied.



Open stand for people's struggle

Building base communities was not only a change in the type of the pastoral programs that the church was used to. Since martial law had not yet touched the church's initiatives, this new pastoral work was a means for organizing communities. "What set the CBC-CO apart from the church's previous pastoral strategies is its clear and open stand for the Filipino people's struggle against all forms of oppression. It is in fact committed to giving back political rights to the people."⁶

Through these Christian Base Communities, local people could discuss and analyze their struggles in the light of their Christian faith, and work out their lines of action. These base communities used various

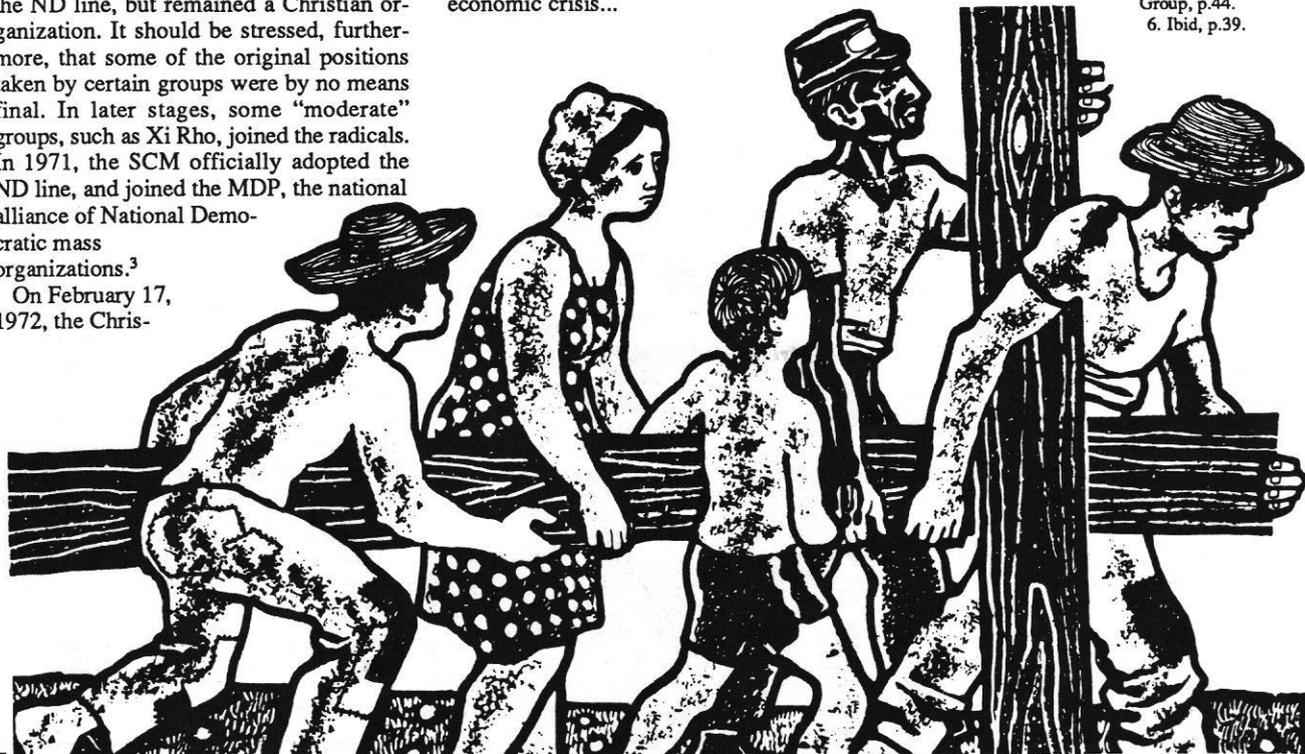
2. James B. Goodno, "Social democrats: the history lesson," *In These Times*, September 16, 1986.

3. Edicio de la Torre, *Touching ground, taking root: theological reflections on the Philippine struggle*, Philippines: Institut Socio-Pastoral, 1986, p.89.

4. Exequiel Augustin, *Marxism, capitalism and the church*, Manila, Christians for National Liberation, p.53.

5. *Moving heaven and earth: an account of Filipinos struggling to change their lives and society*, Manila, CCPD-World Council of Churches and the Philippine Ecumenical Writing Group, p.44.

6. *Ibid*, p.39.





means — liturgy, Bible seminars, dramatic expression, and so on. The sudden growth of this pastoral program throughout the country, and the impact that it had on the Christian population was so strong that the government began to see the base communities as a threat to its power. It started to witch-hunt church workers, catechists and local lay leaders and to put increasing pressure on the hierarchy in order to divide the church.

The work done by the base communities in raising consciousness, in developing critical thinking and collective action surely contributed to the strength that the communities were to demonstrate in continuing protests, and finally in their participation in the events that brought down the dictatorship. With respect to the left, this work by sections of religious people often coincided with the mass organizing work done by the underground. It was inevitable that the left would be able to recruit in these communities both for legal work and for guerrilla warfare.

"In the beginning, the Christians for National Liberation movement had only a few pastors, priests and sisters for members; the majority were from the professional and the student sector. This was primarily due to the fact that at that time, revolution, and especially Marxism, were anathemas to most of the pastors, priests, sisters and deaconesses. Only a few then accepted these as a means for social reconstruction."⁷

Revolutionary mass movement of Christians

At the time of its second national congress in 1981, the CNL was to confine its membership to church people alone. "The CNL assumes the responsibility for developing a revolutionary mass movement of church people and Christians who identify closely with the Christian churches."⁸ The dictatorship's repression and the pressure brought to bear by the church hierarchy led many church people to identify with the objectives of the CNL, thereby enabling it to build its own organization and program.

The program approved at the congress laid the bases of the CNL as an organized group: "This commitment to the struggle for national democracy is the historic expression of our vocation to help build God's Kingdom. It is the political incarnation of our Christian faith at the present stage of the Philippines' history."⁹

It defined two general tasks. The first was the overthrow of the Marcos/United States dictatorship and the establishment of a people's coalition government. This was to be accomplished in collaboration with other national-democratic organizations. The second was the national-democratic transformation of the Christian churches, which was to be its specific responsibility in the NDF.

During this congress, the CNL also set a certain number of intermediate tasks, the most important of which was building a revolutionary movement of church people as part of the overall revolutionary mass movement. This work was to be focused around a certain number of issues — the role of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia, notably in the circulation of information; the need for making Christians more concerned about the plight of the workers and peasants; and the issue of internal church reforms, which had a direct bearing on the participation of Christians in the revolutionary mass movement.

Promoting revolutionary ecumenicalism

On the task of united front building, the CNL stressed the need for a shared political leadership. But at the same time, it recognized the leading role that devolved on the Communist Party of the Philippines because of its developed national and mass character. It pointed to the negative role of Christian chauvinism and to the need for promoting revolutionary ecumenicalism.

Along with its logical support for the armed struggle, its program gave an equal importance to international solidarity: "Our people's war is waged primarily in the Philippines, on the home front. But our international solidarity work, our struggle in the international front, is an integral part of our people's war."¹⁰

The CNL placed particular emphasis on the struggle for democratic reforms leading to a national-democratic transformation of the churches. This was separated into two levels. First, the political function of the churches had to be transformed. They had to cease being ideological and organizational servants of counter-revolution and go over to the service of the national-democratic revolution. Secondly, there had to be changes in their internal structures.

The CNL was a spontaneous formation, but when martial law was declared and the CNL itself had to go underground, it was obliged to rely on the CPP's underground

apparatus. During this process, close collaboration was established between the two groups. The CNL availed itself of the CPP's apparatus to protect its activists, and the CPP gained new cadres from the CNL.

However, the 1981 program and the specific role it assigned to the CNL in transforming the churches was not well received by some Marxist circles in the CPP. According to Ed de la Torre, a founder of the CNL and twice jailed under the Marcos regime: "This was not part of the traditional concerns of the Marxist circles of the CPP. But the latter faced an insoluble dilemma with regard to the church.

"It was difficult to get along with the church as it was, but it was just as impossible to destroy it. For some Marxists, the project put forward by the CNL was 'rightist,' for others it was 'ultra-leftist.' But given the dilemma they were in, they did not oppose this attempt to transform the church."¹¹

This historical relationship was the source of some tensions over the CNL's independent character, which are still to be resolved: "The CNL...had...an independent origin, and a lot of their members were 'unassimilable' in the party. Although members of the NDF, they were not sympathizers of the party in the process of being absorbed into it."¹²

Another problem that the CNL had to face in its development was an acknowledged theological weakness. Although it could be compared with the Christians for Socialism in Latin America, the CNL's starting points were more political than theological. In view of the attacks it was subjected to on theological grounds by both the Catholic hierarchy and the social democrats, solving this problem was urgent.

Cardinal Sin's support for Aquino

The social democrats were given a favored place in the government by Aquino, and they took advantage of this position of strength to establish themselves. However, it would seem that their very absorption into the governmental structures weakened their capacity for organizing and mobilizing, and that therefore they do not pose a threat.

The hierarchy, the government and the military have waged an unrelenting offensive, especially in the most recent period, to "tie down" politically involved church people. Before the national congregational elections on May 11, Cardinal Sin, archbishop of Manila, published a document entitled "A catechism on the involvement



7. Exequiel Augustin, op. cit.

8. Christians for National Liberation, documents for the Second National Congress, p.14.

9. Ibid, p.11.

10. Ibid, p.21.

11. "Who are the Volunteers for Popular Democracy?" Interview with Ed de la Torre, *IV* 110, December 8, 1986.

12. Ibid.



of priests in political activity," in which he said that "priests should not campaign for any political party or candidate."¹³ It also contained guidelines forbidding priests from joining or supporting organizations or movements advocating class struggle or violence.¹⁴

Sin is known for his unabashed support to Aquino and his mobilizing of the Church's resources on her behalf. Despite this particular pastoral letter, he could be seen on TV endorsing ten candidates of the government coalition parties.

In another pastoral letter dated April 22, he addressed Catholics in the following terms. "I must teach and guide you in the name of the Lord so that you may engage in politics in a Christian way....The church has the right and duty to be involved in the political dimension of life."¹⁵ He has been much criticized for his positions, even by his fellow bishops, many of whom do not seem to share his views.

Revolutionaries, however, are more concerned about the Catholic hierarchy's silence on the anti-Communist vigilante groups that are sowing terror, especially in the southern part of the country. These groups have been responsible for the murders of suspected communists and supporters of the New People's Army.

On this subject, Cardinal Vidal, chair of the Philippines Conference of Bishops, said: "We cannot deny our Filipinos who are afraid the right to defend themselves...We cannot outright condemn them [the vigilantes], although they must not use violence."¹⁶

The contradictions in the church complicate an already difficult situation for rev-

olutionaries, in which the Aquino government has declared an all-out war against the communists and in which the military continue to persecute priests and members of religious orders suspected of being communists. For example, on the island of Negros, army intelligence has produced a list of 35 sisters purported to be communists.

The pressure on the revolutionary clerics and church workers is undoubtedly greater than ever. However, it does not seem that they will retreat. In November 1985, just before the uprising, the CNL held "a consolidation activity to unify the CNL's fast-expanding membership nationwide...the delegates zeroed in on reaffirming their commitment to the national-democratic revolution."¹⁷

As a member organization of the NDF, which called for boycott of the snap election, the CNL was not present in the streets as an organized group when people's power changed the play of forces in the Philippines.

The repercussions of the debate that has been going on in the left have not spared the CNL. In fact, it is very much in the midst of this process of rethinking. Its future role undoubtedly will be a crucial one. ★

13. James Clad, "Politics of the cloth," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 18, 1987.

14. Candy Quimpo, "Can the Philippine Church withdraw from politics?" *Mr and Mrs*, April 10, 1987, p.8

15. James Clad, *op. cit.*

16. *Ibid.*, p.43.

17. "An affirmation of faith," *Libération*, February-March 1986.

The church and the Sandinista revolution



A MEMBER of the FSLN National Leadership and deputy minister of the interior, Luis Carrion Cruz, is one of those who joined in the revolutionary struggle in Nicaragua on the basis of their Christian faith.

He gave the following interview to Martha Harnecker. It was published in the August 1986 issue of the magazine *Encuentro*, published by the Jesuit-run Central American University in Managua.

CHRISTIANS have played a very important role in the Nicaraguan revolution. How do you explain the integration of this new force into the revolution. Is it the result of a change within the church, the Christian traditions of the Nicaraguan people, or the policy of alliances practiced by the Sandinista front? Do you think that it is possible to talk about a strategic alliance between Christians and Marxists?

First of all, it should be pointed out that in all popular struggles in Latin America Christians will play an important role, because our peoples are eminently Christian.

Here in Nicaragua, no political organization has ever been able to recruit a major section of the population by using the banner of Christianity. There has been, and still is, a small Social Christian party that has never had a political project of its own and has never been able to use the structures of the Catholic Church to develop its party work.



In this regard, up until the 1970s, Christians had no project, and did not participate in the political life of the country as Christians, even indirectly through a party claiming to be Christian.

After Vatican II, which ended in 1965, and in particular after the Medellin Conference in 1968, new currents of thought and action began to show up at the grassroots of the church. After that, the experience of the ecclesiastical or Christian base communities began to unfold, involving a change in the church's methods of work. The parish priests were no longer the only representatives of the church, and it began to create a grassroots church organization in which local Christians participated.

■ **What role did these base communities play?**

When these Christian lay people started to meet for community meditation, they began to talk not only about Christian themes but also about the economic and social problems afflicting them. You have to remember that all other forms of popular organization were repressed in Nicaragua.

In a series of places, leaders emerged from the Christian base communities. This situation was not the result of work planned by anybody. The initial impetus came from the Catholic Church itself, which encouraged Christians to concern themselves with the problems of the world — Vatican II and Medellin — and at a given moment, that coincided with the activity of the Sandinista front.

These Christian communities were formed by the people of the neighborhoods. In general, they were people of a certain age, who had some authority in the locality.

■ **And what happened among the youth?**

Something different, but which had the same roots. The best example is that of the university youth. At the beginning of the 1970s, the Catholic youth organizations, such as the Catholic Worker Youth (JOC) or the Catholic University Youth (JUC) no longer existed. Then groups of young people began to form, who met together to meditate on their way of life. What they did in practice was to reflect on the humane commitment of young people. This took the form of sessions of criticism or self-criticism around the reading of the Gospels and motivated by faith.

The substance of this commitment was real action on behalf of our neighbors, whom, in a certain way, we saw as the people, the poorest people. This phenomena developed in many high schools, and later reached the universities. The motivation engendered by the faith itself coincided with the intense political activity that there was in the universities at the time, and this accelerated the politicization of these



youth. They began to turn increasingly to overt political activity, even if they were not yet joining the student organizations led by the FSLN.

■ **Some of you went to live in the poor neighborhoods?**

Yes, that's true. In January-February 1972, our group of Christian students decided to leave our homes to go and live in a poor neighborhood in the parish of the priest Uriel Molina.¹ We combined living there, and the work that it involved, with our student lives. As a result, the incipient Christian student organization was weakened.

We wanted to live the ideal of the first Christian communities, which shared all their goods and lived in communion with the poorest, and in which everyone worked for the collective good. We wanted also to break from our family ties and comforts. Some of us came from quite well-off homes. We knew that a real commitment to the people's struggle meant sharing the people's poverty, its restrictions and all its life.

■ **Was it after the formation of these communities that the FSLN got in contact with you?**

Not essentially. The leadership of the Sandinista Front had already noticed that a new phenomena was occurring, that there was a generation of Christian-trained young students who had a certain degree of organization and a clear revolutionary political vision. The Front then envisaged integrating this movement in its ranks.

So, the first meetings between the leaders of this movement and the leadership of the Sandinista Front took place. The FSLN went over the head of the Revolutionary

Student Front (FER) and established relations directly with this group of Christians. That is how the first discussions got started.

For my part, when our contacts got underway, I thought that an alliance between our forces and those of the Sandinista Front was necessary. While preserving our identity, we could agree and do a lot of things.

■ **Did you think that it was necessary to limit yourselves to unity in action alone?**

Yes, in fact. The leadership did not openly oppose this position, but in practice it disappeared. As we began to integrate ourselves into the revolutionary struggle against the Somoza dictatorship, it became clear for us that we could not operate as an independent force.

Later, when some of us were already members of the FSLN, we understood the possibility for enormously broadening the Sandinista Front's influence, if we could organize these forces, which had only been half organized up until that time. According to what I learned later, Carlos Fonseca was the first to envisage this project.

■ **Why organize them in a Christian movement and not directly in the FSLN?**

Because we thought we needed a bridge organization that would make it possible to bring together a large number of young people coming from a background of Christian activism. Even if they had a great will to struggle, they still had reservations and doubts about participating directly in

1. Father Uriel Molina is currently directing the Antonio Valdivieiro Ecumenical Center, which publishes the magazine *Amanecer*.

Marxist organizations. The movement was very strong in Managua and Leon, the two university centers. Then, it very rapidly began to orient away from the universities, essentially toward the urban poor neighborhoods.

When this movement was formed, the analysis the Sandinista Front made of it was very rudimentary. We prepared three documents — one on the national situation, another on the responsibility of Christians, and I don't remember what the other was about. The first was fundamental. We analyzed the social classes in Nicaragua. We noted that the working class was a small and very dispersed sector. For that reason, we excluded the possibility of concentrating our forces there. We saw that the majority of the poor population was concentrated in the poor neighborhoods, and we concluded that the new movement had to be built there.

■ **The community experience in the neighborhoods must have strongly influenced that decision.**

Yes, indeed. What is more, our relationships, our links, our contacts were in those neighborhoods, because there was a certain relationship between the university young Christian movement and the base communities. We knew certain priests and lay leaders in the neighborhoods, and naturally the neighborhoods seemed a logical extension of the work of the Christian movement.

Our work in these communities accelerated the politicization that was underway. When we intervened in the neighborhoods, we did so as a Christian movement in which some activists belonged to the Sandinista front. The role of these activists was to bring the best, the most politicized cadres into the Front, but without taking them out of their community.

We left the universities to go into the neighborhoods where we started up work that was not essentially Christian. We began to do work aimed at organizing community leaderships, groups of young people in the neighborhoods, that is, to create an organized mass base to politicize it for the revolutionary movement.

Most of the time, we found already formed base communities, in which there were highly politicized people, people who were no longer in the stage of reflection but already in that of action. Very often, the leaders in these neighborhoods, the community leaders, the leaders of these youth movements, had come out of the ecclesiastical communities, out of these groups of young students that we had sent into the neighborhoods.

As Sandinista activists promoting this Christian movement, we were allowed a wide freedom of action. We were not told how to do our work or what structures to join. The Sandinista Front did not want to define the rules.

We were given great autonomy, despite the fact that we had only recently joined.

This enabled the movement to find its own forms for building itself in harmony with the character of its activists and those of the milieu with which they were in contact. Nothing was ever imposed. We never discussed philosophy or religion. We discussed the practical needs of the armed struggle.

The result of all this was the gradual incorporation in the ranks of the Sandinista Front of a very large group of Christian leaders or leaders from Christian backgrounds. They were respected people, who had authority as Christians and as community leaders, which at the same time offered the possibility for maintaining relations with large groups of Christians. The Christian Student Movement (MCU) lasted until the end, and always served as a channel for new people, who could more easily join this movement than the Revolutionary Student Front.

■ **Did the same thing happen in the countryside?**

No. It was different in the countryside. The church had built a much more solid and effective organization there than in the cities. A priest would have a much bigger following in the countryside than in the cities, thanks to what were called "Delegates of

the Word." These were almost always from poor peasant backgrounds, because in most cases it was in this layer that you found people prepared to devote themselves, with little pay, to this type of work. It must not be forgotten that very often the church backed public works in the countryside, bringing in water, collecting money for a school, or for building housing and so on.

A priest had 15, 20, 30 or 40 Delegates of the Word scattered around the parish. They carried out certain quasi-priestly functions, such as preaching, giving communion with wafers blessed by the priest and so on. When their number increased, the status of deacon was established. They represented a higher administrative level and oversaw a group of Delegates of the Word.

Through all this organization, a priest could have a very large following. In general, the Delegates of the Word also became politicized when they began to take up problems that were not exclusively religious but were material, concrete, political. And when they saw that the Somoza government failed to respond, except by distrust and sometimes by using the National Guard for repression, "in a natural way" they took the step toward involvement — and even establishing links — with the guerrillas.

The integration of the Christian base into the Sandinista Front in the countryside and in the neighborhoods, or into activities promoted by the Front, became massive at a certain moment. I think that the way that the Sandinista Front approached the question of the Christians in practice was not an insignificant factor in this. I think that it is important to stress that.

■ **Can you explain to me in detail what strategy the FSLN followed toward the Christians?**

The Sandinista National Liberation Front never fell into the temptation of shaping one policy and one style of language for Christians and another for the rest of the people. That would have been a veiled form of sectarianism. In the FSLN's experience, neither the people nor the revolutionaries themselves could be divided into Christians and non-Christians.

In the case of Nicaragua, Christianity may be either active, or simply a passive identification, but as a religious and cultural phenomenon it takes in the majority of the population.

The Somoza dictatorship's oppression, subjection to imperialism, the poverty, ignorance and disarray produced by capitalism, affected all of the people without making any distinction among religious beliefs.

The FSLN's work in its Christian base was no different from the work it did among the rest of the people. We called on everyone to struggle to overthrow the dic-





tatorship and build a new society.

On the one hand, Christianity is not a political program, and Christians do not form a homogeneous bloc in Latin America. They represent almost the entire society, with its contradictions, its class struggles, its heroes and its villains. The cross and the Gospel have accompanied some of the noblest enterprises in human history, and some of the vilest. Therefore, in such circumstances, it is absurd to talk in terms of agreements or alliances with Christians in general.

The policy of the FSLN was not that. We discovered the revolutionary potential and the progressive positions of many grassroots leaders of the Catholic Church, and we went directly to them to recruit them for the revolutionary struggle and for the Front, without going through any intermediaries or asking anybody's leave. We did not do that any more than we cooked up a pseudo-religious language to attract them.

It is obvious that when base leaders were recruited by the FSLN, they carried a revolutionary influence into the ecclesiastical bodies to which they belonged. Very often they tried to draw other comrades into revolutionary activity, appealing to them on the basis of their faith and religious convictions.

However, this language was that of genuine Christians, and at the same time, of genuine revolutionists; it was not an artificial creation of the FSLN. The official and principled position of the Front was one of the greatest respect for religious beliefs. It fought against manifestations of sectarianism and discrimination that might arise against believers.

■ You say "might arise." But did they not in fact arise in the practice of a lot of Marxist parties in Latin America?

Yes. The continent's reactionary sectors until now have tried with success to make religion an anti-progressive and even a counter-revolutionary force. In any case, the hierarchies have managed to block determined participation of the Christian masses in the revolutionary struggle. But we also have to recognize that the vanguard organizations have very often made errors that have contributed to reinforcing the distrust and fears built up over the centuries by our class enemies.

I think that in this respect the main task of the revolutionary leaderships in Latin America is to eliminate the obstacles and facilitate the integration of the extraordinary potential represented by the Christians into the revolutionary struggle. Religion is

a powerful enough ideological force either to hold back or to accelerate the development of the consciousness of the peoples.

To overcome sectarianism, revolutionary Marxists have to recognize that, interpreted positively, the principles of Christianity offer a moral basis for drawing people into the struggle against oppression and injustice. And this is not a philosophical consideration, but a historical fact. I myself, and I am no exception, came to the revolutionary movement on the basis of my religious convictions. I discovered Marxism later. Many other comrades joined in the struggle against the dictatorship in the conviction that their participation in revolutionary action was the only way to live their faith consistently. Their moral stature was not inferior to that of those comrades who came



to the struggle on the basis of another kind of ideological conviction.

Another problem to be solved is that of integrating Christian revolutionaries into the Marxist vanguards of the Latin American countries. As long as vanguard organizations keep their doors closed to Christians out of philosophical or ideological convictions alien to revolutionary practice and to people's class positions, it will be difficult to eliminate the distrust and suspicions of Christians that have been fueled by enemy propaganda and also by the sectarianism of a lot of revolutionary organizations.

■ Then you do not think that there is a contradiction between Christianity and Marxism?

I do not see any obstacle that can prevent Christians, without renouncing their faith, from taking up Marxism's remarkable conceptual tools to develop a scientific understanding of social processes and to orient their political work in a revolutionary way. In other words, a Christian can be at one and the same time a Christian and a perfect-

ly consistent Marxist. The problem of God's existence must not become a divisive factor among revolutionists who have the same point of view on all the other aspects.

In this regard, our experience is very rich in lessons. Many Christians have worked and continue to work in the Sandinista Front, and some of them are even priests. And I am not only talking about rank-and-file militants. Some are members of the Sandinista Assembly and hold high political responsibilities.²

Despite the struggle that has been waged within the Catholic Church, the Christianity of these comrades has not come into conflict with their revolutionary activity and their party discipline. But the FSLN has not been transformed into a battleground for

philosophic and religious debates either. A lot of things can be said about our experience. But what is for sure is that the Sandinista people's revolution has come out of it stronger.

I think that some Marxist vanguard groups have tended to see the progressive and revolutionary Christian groups as a rival force winning a section of their political clientele. I think that is an error. Avoiding this error was one of the FSLN's great successes. We linked up with the church base structures, not to take people out of them but to integrate them into the Sandinista Front as a stage in their political development, without that involving any block to their participating in the Christian bodies.

On the contrary, we left them in these structures so that this greater commitment would be transformed into political action. Their integration into the FSLN was never represented to them as a dilemma between their Christian faith and their activity in the Front. If we had posed the debate in those terms, we would have been left with a tiny number of activists. ★



2. The Sandinista Assembly is made up of a hundred members appointed by the National Leadership (the Nine Commanders of the Revolution). It is the highest consultative body in the FSLN.



“Christian women have to organize politically”



At the beginning of the 1970s, I was invited to a Bible circle in my congregation. We compared God's written word with what was happening in the society, and I saw how badly it tallied. We learned that we should not be ashamed of being poor, and that we were not poor because we were lazy, as we had always heard.

That was a difficult time for us. We got into personal conflicts. We were afraid of new knowledge that involved big changes for us. How would our husbands and children take it? What was a “Christian socialist”? But we learned and became stronger because we supported each other.

We understood that it was not enough to discuss, and we women together published a paper for laid-off workers. Everyone helped to circulate it. But then we came to the poor area around the station, where a lot of homeless people were concentrated. Most of them were unemployed, there were widespread abuses, and 80 per cent were illiterate.

There was not much point in circulating the paper there. Instead, we, the Women's Christian base group and political parties, started a dressmakers' cooperative and a lot of courses in economics and nursing.

The PRT participated in this work, and the comrades saw how important it was to organize and fight together. A front was built to defend the political prisoners in Cuernavaca. That was when I joined up with the PRT. I have never regretted it. There are great human resources in the PRT, and we old folks are well treated. We can be of use, even if we have less energy.

■ How has your involvement affected you and your family?

I am 48 years old. That is two years older than I realized. That came out when I applied for papers for my Nicaragua trip. I got married 30 years ago, and have had nine children. None of us had been involved in any struggles, but I already thought that it was important for women to determine their own lives. There were quarrels when I talked about such things.

It was not easy to leave the house. I had a very bad conscience many times. But as my insight into women's oppression increased, my self-confidence grew.

Now I dare to speak out, but I don't explode and shout the way I used to. I am not repressed any longer, I don't cover my head like in church.

I never left my family out of things. My children come with me to meetings, and now I have support for what I do. Besides, everyone in the family is taking part in the struggle now.

I think that it is important for Christian women who only go to church to let their faith lead them to involvement in society. Women have to organize politically to fight for their rights and take their responsibility in society. ★

A DELEGATE to the July 25-August 2 congress of the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT, Mexican section of the Fourth International), who came to the party from a Christian base organization, was interviewed by Marit Andersson.

The interview with this revolutionist, Laura, appeared in the September 3 issue of *Internationales*, the paper of the Socialist Party, Swedish section of the Fourth International.

YOU MADE a trip to Nicaragua in 1985. What were your impressions?

I managed to go with a coffee-picking brigade to Nicaragua. The PRT paid, and it was the trip of my life. I was able to see how the people were fighting against imperialism. They were suffering a lot, but at the same time they were so determined.

Contras came in, but they didn't come out again. How could they let them get out when they came in to kill? I met mothers whose children were burned to death by the contras, but they had not lost their spirit. They were determined to defend the revolution.

Another thing was that men were better in Nicaragua than here in Mexico. Men in Nicaragua are ready to go out and fight almost before their umbilical cords are cut. I got the impression that the revolution had changed human beings, given them a moral quality that has led them to love their work and their fellow human beings.

The men did not have a disrespectful attitude to women. Of course many traditions survive, but not the sexist shame. That comes from the fact that people love the revolution and there are women in it.

I felt at home in Nicaragua, but not in the brigade. The comrades felt I was too old. Of course, I could not pick us much as the others. The first brigades determined how many barrels should be picked in a certain time, and we did not manage to meet that norm.

But the most important thing is what we

“I have never regretted joining the PRT...they have great human resources”

do when we come home, how we work to build solidarity. I do a lot of solidarity work. Right now we are having a campaign called “A Flower for Nicaragua.”

In the brigade, we had military exercises. It was the first time I have seen a gun without being afraid of it. We learned how to carry out evacuations, handle weapons and clamber up and down mountains. We women did not have it any easier; we got the same treatment as men. I even got praise from the Sandinistas.

They say in the solidarity movement and in the PRT that I am too sensitive and that I have an idealized picture of Nicaragua. And of course I loved the people in Nicaragua already before I went there. The people in Mexico have not yet begun to fight, and I love any people that is fighting for its rights. We have to support the victorious people in Nicaragua. Mexico is the spitting image of the old Nicaragua, and we are going to need the Sandinistas' support in our fight.

■ How did you become a member of the PRT?

Hands off the Communist Action Party!

THE APPOINTMENT of a new prime minister in Syria on October 31 was just one indicator of the gravity of the economic and social crisis confronting the Ba'athist regime.

Mahmoud al-Zubi's appointment followed several months of an official campaign against corruption, marked by scandals, measures taken against almost a thousand people (including five death sentences) and the forced resignations of members of the government.

SALAH JABER



THE MILITARY-bureaucratic dictatorship of President Hafez al-Assad has only been able to survive since coming to power in 1970 thanks to aid from the Soviet Union on the one hand, and the Arab oil monarchies on the other. Syria's support for Iran in the Iran-Iraq war led to the Arab financial help accorded to the Ba'athist regime for the war effort against Israel being cut-off.

An explosive socio-economic situation

Iran's aid to Syria has not fully compensated for this loss, particularly as this aid has been irregular and accompanied by increasingly embarrassing political pressure on Hafez al-Assad, particularly in relation to Lebanon, where the Syrians and Iranians have different goals. This is why the tyrant of Damascus had to negotiate a shift in position on the Gulf war during the recent Arab summit in Amman, Jordan on November 7-11.

While waiting to see the tangible results of this bargaining, which has been going on for several months (a secret reconciliation meeting between the Iraqi and Syrian dictators was organized by King Hussein of Jordan last April, but led to nothing), the Hafez al-Assad regime has had to face an explosive socio-economic situation. with

unbridled inflation mounting alongside shortages, waste and embezzlements at all levels. The campaign against corruption had to be launched to calm the situation. At the same time, there has been a fiercely repressive campaign against the communist opposition (the Stalinist faction of Khaled Bekhdache, supported by Moscow, is allied with the regime, unlike the dissident faction of the "Political Bureau" led by Riad el-Turk, himself a prisoner since 1980).

Most dynamic force of the opposition

This offensive is particularly aimed at liquidating the Communist Action Party (PAC), a revolutionary organization which is the most dynamic force of the opposition to the dictatorship, and the most capable of expressing the dissatisfactions of the workers (see box). The PAC is also the left organization which has the most members in Syrian jails — almost 330 in all.

Alongside the vigorous protests of Amnesty International against repression in Syria (Amnesty published a dossier on torture in Syria in October), an international petition of solidarity with the Syrian communist activists suffering from repression, and particularly comrades of the PAC, will be launched. We publish here extracts from an information bulletin published by external representatives of the PAC to aid the organization of this vital campaign that the Fourth International has decided to launch. ★

Communist Action Party statement

SINCE LAST August the Syrian security services have been engaged in a campaign of arrests aimed at the Communist Action Party. This continuing offensive aims to destroy the party. It continues the long struggle of the security forces since March 1977, a few months after the foundation of the PAC. Since then, there have been around a dozen crackdowns against the PAC, all with the same objective: the definitive elimination of the most active left-wing opposition party in Syria, the party which has stood up the best to the general repression. Although more than 300 members and sympathizers have been arrested,

including most of its leaders, the party has been able to continue its political activity.

The present crackdown started on August 11 with the arrest of two members of the Central Committee of the party who have been hunted for several years: Akram al-Bunni and Wajih Ghanem. In the following weeks the security services arrested hundreds of people, most of whom were not in any organized political activity. Apart from those accused of belonging to the PAC, and kept imprisoned for this reason, dozens of others were kept as hostages so that their friends and relatives who were being sought by the repressive state forces would give themselves up.

It goes without saying that those detained have not had the right to any form of trial, and during the interrogations have been submitted to differing degrees of torture: from the most "banal" methods such as whippings, beatings or electrocutions to more perverse methods like sexual cruelty or the use of racks which cause paralysis or a rupture of the spinal column.

Serious injuries from torture

Several prisoners have suffered serious injuries from this torture, which is of course intensified when the victims hold out and refuse to give information that they are supposed to have. Wajih Ghanem for example had a paralyzed right hand and internal bleeding. Adnane Mahfuz was taken into intensive care at hospital after three days imprisonment. Akram al-Bunni had a damaged back. Lina al-Mir, a woman detainee, is in danger of dying from cardiac insufficiency.

Some considerations:

- The security services are for the first time in this crackdown raiding public places, aiming to create a climate of fear

- A large number of people, a majority women, are being held as hostages. This is the second time that this method has been used against the PAC since the wave of arrests in 1986 targetted on the party and the Palestine Popular Committees linked to it.

- The number of people arrested since August, including those who were released after a few days, tops 450. More than a third are still detained.

- Although the destruction of the PAC is undoubtedly the main goal of the crackdown, the aim is also to terrorize the population and the opposition as a preventive measure, faced with the brutal drop in the standard of living.

- Despite the scope of the crackdown and the violence of the torture, the security services have not succeeded in seizing the PAC's underground printshop. The last time it was seized was in 1982. ★

THE COMMUNIST ACTION PARTY

THE Communist Action Party (PAC) is a proletarian revolutionary oriented organization, founded in August 1976 as the Communist Action League out of Marxist circles that appeared in various parts of Syria from 1970. Its present name was adopted at its first congress in 1981. The PAC is independent from any States. It is in favour of building an international Communist movement, with the Fourth International as one of its component parts.

At the moment the PAC fights for overturning the dictatorship in Syria and for winning political freedom. With this immediate goal in mind it refuses all alliances with reactionary forces, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, in distinction from the orientation of the dissident fraction of the Syrian Communist Party (known as the "Political Bureau"). The PAC was the first organization in Syria to denounce the intervention since 1976 of President Hafez el-Assad's troops in Lebanon.

The PAC's publications are *The Red Flag*, its main journal; *The Communist*, its theoretical revue; *The Call of the People*, an agitational bulletin; and *The Proletarian*, its internal discussion bulletin. In addition, the PAC has published a number of pamphlets. ★

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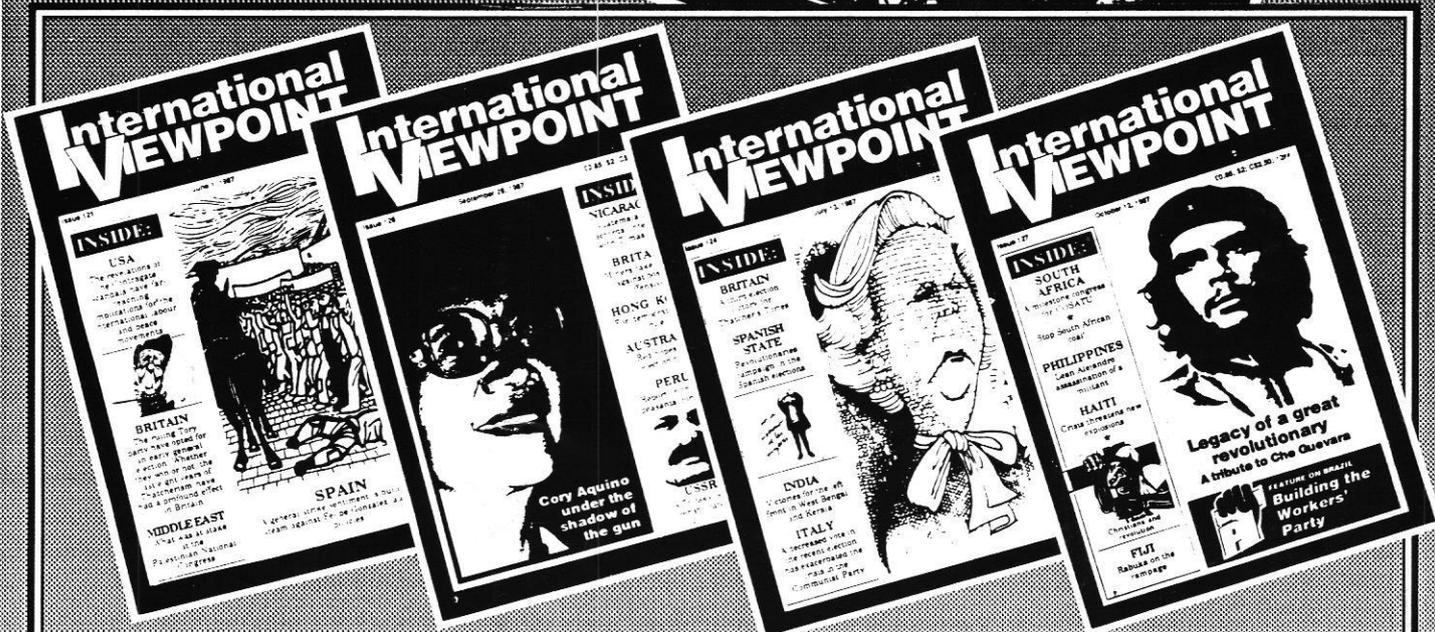
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