

International VIEWPOINT

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INSIDE:

HAITI

Duvalier's thugs
massacre election

POLAND



Referendum blows up
in the generals' faces

YUGOSLAVIA

Strike movement
deepens

KANAKY

New challenge for
independence fighters

MALAYSIA

Protests mount over
police crackdown

CANADA

Anglo-bourgeoisie
rewrites history

1987 INDEX



MIDDLE EAST: **IMPERIALISM AND THE GULF WAR**



Lebanon: Economic ruin sparks mass revolts

Contents:

HAITI 3

THE GENERAL election on November 29 was called-off after mobs of "Baby Doc" Duvalier's thugs massacred voters in the polling stations and on the streets. The army either turned a blind eye, or actively supported the atrocities — *Arthur Mahon*

POLAND 5

ARTHUR Wilkins looks at the repercussions of Jaruzelski and Co's defeat in the referendum for economic reconstruction and "democratization".



YUGOSLAVIA 8

WORKERS are resorting to industrial action in Macedonia and elsewhere to defend themselves against wage cuts and closures — *Michele Lee*

LEBANON 10

A MASSIVE economic crisis in this war-torn state has already sparked off riots and the first united workers' response to the collapse in their living standards. *Zafer*, a member of the Lebanese section of the Fourth International, explains events to date

MIDDLE EAST 12

WAR and economics always go hand in hand, and this is as true as ever for the present imperialist intervention in the Persian Gulf. *Salah Jaber* explains the economic and political motivations behind the Iran-Iraq war

KANAKY 20

FRANCE has turned to a hard-line colonialist policy trampling on the aspirations of the native Kanak people. *Claude Gabriel* and *Vincent Kermel* look at the new challenges now facing nationalist fighters in the FLNKS

CANADA 23

RENE LEVESQUE's death has focused attention on the fight for self-determination and political independence for Quebec. *Susan Caldwell* reports

MALAYSIA 24

POLICE have carried out the biggest crackdown ever seen of social and political activists. *Barbara Wentworth* explains why international solidarity is now so important



Around the world 21

- Moscow Trials Campaign
- Ireland ● USA ● Sweden

1987 INDEX 27

The next issue of IV will appear on January 25, 1988. We wish all our readers a happy new year of struggle!

International VIEWPOINT

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The army and Duvalier's thugs massacre election

ON THE DAY of the general election, November 29, supporters of deposed dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier and the army acted with a brutality and force that stupefied many people. The bloodiest massacre took place in a Port-au-Prince polling station. The commando group, made up of soldiers in civilian clothing, seemed to have deliberately chosen this polling station because of the large numbers of foreign journalists there. The killers wanted to impress public opinion, to declare their determination to the whole world.

ARTHUR MAHON

ATACKS OCCURRED all over the country. The inhabitants of the village of Verrettes had to take refuge in the mountains while the army fired on the presbytery with heavy machine guns.

International reactions were not slow in coming. The United States cut off both its economic and military aid. But it seemed to be looking for a *modus vivendi* with the ruling military council, who had already announced that new elections would be organized under its auspices. However, some Democratic representatives demanded that an "inter-American peace force" be sent. Ottawa and Bonn also claimed to be partisans of forming — in the framework of the United Nations — a "force responsible for assuring the security and freedom in a new election". Already in September Arthur Schlesinger, an ex-advisor to John F. Kennedy, went so far as to propose "an international rescue mission" and "some form of disinterested (sic) international administrative supervision".

Mass movement has matured in last months

In Haiti itself there is no doubt that there will be many new developments in what is already an extremely complex situation. A determining factor will be the development of the combativity of the masses. Events in the week running up to the elections have shown that, at least in the capital, the mass movement has matured a lot since this summer's mobilizations. [See IV 125.] After criminal arson at a popular market in Port-au-Prince, many districts decided to take in

hand their own defence. In some areas, thousands of people have been involved in self-defence tasks. This represents a considerable amount of experience that can enable the Haitian left to pose the problem of violence in new ways.

Self-defence movement attacked by army

The army immediately banned the formation of these self-defence brigades. It made the district of Carrefour-Feuilles pay a high price for the exemplary role that it played in the self-defence movement. On November 28, 46 people from that district were slaughtered at Fort Dimanche, and other executions were reported to have taken place the next day. The following week, the army began new arrests in the same district.

The reformist leaders steered clear of any orientation in favour of self-organization and self-defence. For months they have explained that all the problems would be solved by the November 29 elections. Compounding the effects of terrorist actions and past failures, the consequences of this policy may be grave.

"Take out the old crop of manioc and clear the ground!" — that is, get rid of the National Government Council (CNG) root and branch. Monseigneur Romélus, the bishop of Jérémie, raised this call in June 1987. It gave its name to a campaign against the CNG known as "Operation Manioc". But these strikes and demonstrations were not sufficient for getting rid of the CNG. With the benefit of imperialist support, gun in hand, the CNG held its own

against its adversaries. It faced a strong but unarmed and weakly-structured movement which its so-called coordinators — the Group of 57 organizations — wanted to keep in safe channels. At the beginning of September, Bishop Romélus was to again raise the slogan "Clear the ground" via the elections.

Thus the wishes of the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) were fulfilled. At the beginning of September they had launched an emotive appeal for Haitians to take the electoral road: "People of Haiti, let us start out with freedom of conscience and determined hearts, voting cards in hand, towards the peaceful conquest of our only reason for being: to root out dictatorship forever..."

Would it be heeded? On September 5 the newspaper *Le Matin* again noted: "The population's contempt for the CEP is evident" and regretted the latter's "dangerous isolation". And on September 10, the paper predicted: "Now, only a mobilization of democratic organizations has the strength to change the position of the people", who were still hostile to elections being held under the rule of the CNG.

Without analyzing the reasons for the failure of the first "Operation Manioc", the petty-bourgeois organizations rallied one after the other to the new slogan of Bishop Romélus and the standard of the CEP. But after the assassination of one of the candidates for the presidential election they concluded, realistically, that holding elections with the CNG still in place would be impossible.

However, for these organizations, participating or not in the elections was not a simple tactical matter. Their avowed objective was to get the CNG to yield to a deluge of votes. To make this perspective credible, they had to portray the CNG in a new light.

So, on September 17, the National Front for Collaboration — set up by the Group of 57, the Autonomous Confederation of Haitian Workers (CATH) and other organizations — proposed a "security pact" to the CNG.

Constitution only a scrap of paper for CNG

The leaders of this Front, who shortly before had been calling the CNG a "fascist junta", now demanded that the CNG demonstrate "its will to install a climate of peace and security in the country". They let it be believed that it could, as they demanded, disarm the Macoutes [Duvalier's gangsters], put an end to repressive actions by military or para-military groups and guarantee candidates' security. So for the sake of "encouraging the people to participate in the elections" all the lessons of this summer's massacres were wiped out. The CNG had shown that as far as it was concerned the constitution was only a scrap of paper. But, no matter: "Today", a Front statement proclaimed, "we have a crucial weapon: the constitution of March 29, 1987".

Before and during the election campaign, kidnappings and murders continued unceasingly. Their aim was to terrorize the population. These actions continued the pattern set by massacres in the shantytowns and at the time of last summer's demonstrations. At the same time, the perpetrators — gangs composed of army personnel and Tontons Macoutes — carried out break-ins. General Namphy's own chauffeur was killed during his nocturnal activities; he was executed by the people of a village where he was getting ready to commit some offences.

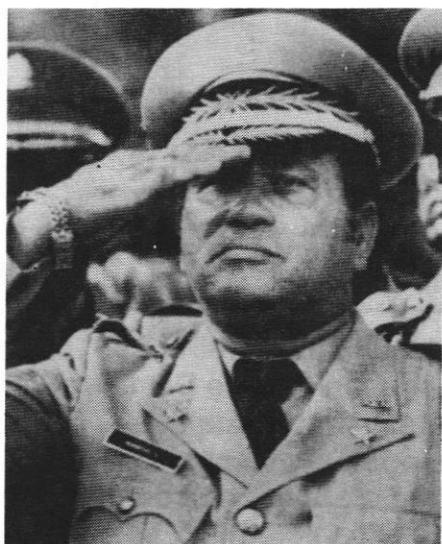
Prisoners of the generals

How can these gangs be disarmed and the roots of Duvalierism ripped out? And what should be done about the army? None of the candidates confronted these fundamental problems seriously. And when yet again one of them — Yves Volel — was murdered by plain-clothes police in front of the headquarters of the Criminal Investigation Bureau, the response was extremely timid. If the presidential candidates had acknowledged that it was impossible to achieve democracy with the army as it is, that would mean admitting that if they won they would become prisoners of the generals, and admitting that all their fine promises about agrarian reform or defending human rights were only hot air.

The lawyer Gérard Gourgue, a Front candidate, maintained that a "strong democratic wind" was blowing through the army, from the ordinary soldiers to the highest grades. René Théodore, candidate for the United Party of Haitian Communists (PUCH), who said that the country's problems could not be resolved by the simple act of voting, called for barely more than "submitting to parliament an administrative bill relating to the armed forces that would point out their established constitutional role, eliminate the notion of 'the enemy within', highlight the question of honour and establish respect for the dignity of servicemen from the first day of their training".

Lacking an alternative, Haitians took literally the slogan "Clear the ground through the elections". Many went to vote on November 29. And when the CEP cancelled the ballot three hours after polling started, the masses found themselves disoriented and feelings of frustration ran high. Political leaders and the churches had failed the Haitian people as they had done in March during the referendum on the constitution. Then they had deceived people about its content — it had been sold as a "liberal", and even "popular" document.

It need only be noted that all the candidates for the presidential elections have to be "householders", and that military officers "cannot be dismissed, taken off active duty, discharged, or given early retirement except with their consent". René Théodore



CNG leader General Namphy (DR)

and Monseigneur Roméus were the first to mislead the Haitian people about the meaning of the referendum. According to the reformist leaders, the adoption of the constitution would allow the page of Duvalierism to be turned once and for all.

Immediately after the referendum, the military took action against peasants who had invaded land belonging to a Canadian congregation, inflicting many casualties. Their officers invoked the article of the new constitution calling for the defence of private property. Then, in June, also citing an article in the constitution on union activity, the CNG banned the CATH.

Without doubt, the Haitian bourgeoisie overestimated its strength, when, at the last minute, Article 291 was introduced. This article excluded from public office for ten years a number of categories of people, notably those "notoriously known for having been, with excessive zeal, artisans and supporters of the dictatorship during the last 29 years."

Duvalier's henchmen eliminated from election

This Article was a time-bomb that exploded on November 2. That day, the CEP published a list of presidential candidates who had passed the test of Article 291. Out of 35 declared candidates, 12 of Duvalier's henchmen had been eliminated by the CEP. Some former collaborators with the dictatorship, such as ex-ministers and secretaries of state Marc Bazin, Hubert de Ronceray or Lamartinière Honorat, remained in the running. On the other hand, the most sinister Duvalierist figures were thrown out of the electoral race. In response, ex-general Claude Raymond declared: "We have the power behind us, we will win whatever the cost". The same evening, the CEP's office was set alight with flame-throwers. In the days which followed, election offices, party headquarters and candidate's houses were attacked. The capital was under a de facto curfew

from 9pm, and every day there was talk of a coup d'état.

What has been called the "democratic sector" had by and large underestimated the Duvalierists' strength and their position in the army. The latter play an important role in the administration, among the local officials in the countryside and especially among garrison chiefs.

For example, the tactical battalions of the Dessalines barracks are completely loyal to their chief, Jean-Claude Paul. A real hardnut, he is linked to an international drugs network. His wife was arrested in Miami and the American police also have a warrant out for him. He is very hostile to the US, and has threatened to shoot Marc Bazin, a candidate supported by the US in the presidential election.

Tontons Macoutes active in army

Since February 7, 1986, Paul's battalions, like those at Fort Dimanche, have integrated a number of Tontons Macoutes into their ranks, and these gangsters have played a key role in all the repressive actions that they have conducted since this summer, whether at Port-au-Prince or in the provinces. Along with the Criminal Investigation Bureau, they have provided a large part — if not the majority — of the commandos that have been in action these past months. In July, hours of discussion were necessary before the officers of this sector would sign the document reiterating the army's support for the CNG. However, not only did the CNG let them carry on like this, but they completely covered up the officers' activities. Essentially because it shared the same project — to put a brake on the mass movement.

To achieve this objective it reckoned that an alliance with the army and the Duvalierists was indispensable, the traditional bourgeoisie not possessing the necessary internal resources. The United States has not succeeded in Haiti in building a force able to carry out its political and economic projects. But the Duvalierists are deeply rooted in Haitian society and make up a large part of its administrative and managerial personnel.

Thinking wrongly that the Duvalierists were only a leftover from the past, the "democratic sector" misread the import of the actions staged after the CEP had eliminated the Duvalierist candidates. It saw them as the final death throes of a movement condemned by the march of history.

In the week running up to the elections, following the publication of the list of candidates for the legislative and senatorial elections, the attacks doubled in intensity. But CEP members and the "democratic sector" leaders preferred to close their eyes and ears and instead affirm their conviction that the Tontons Macoutes would retreat in front of the mass of two million Haitians registered on the electoral lists.

"We cannot let a handful of people prevent the elections being held. So, a word to the wise is sufficient!" asserted the CEP's president, while Monseigneur Roméus begged the Tontons Macoutes to "Seek rather to do what is good and beautiful, be humble, change your behaviour, start afresh and things will be better for you".

Reformist leaders ignored danger

The reformist leaders refused to listen when the Duvalierists said: "Without us, there will be no elections", and even talked about civil war. They refused to see what was going on inside the army. The number of generals went up from two to five, and will soon be 16, allowing the Namphy/Regala duo to clinch their control of the army thanks to a flood of hundreds of promotions. At the same time, military salaries have risen considerably. And on November 6, General Namphy — assuming the prerogatives of a president of the republic — designated himself "commander in chief of the Haitian armed forces". He noted that, therefore, in accordance with the constitution, he would effectively be the real leader, and that the president would be only a nominal one. Hardly anybody denounced this outright power grab.

In fact, at that moment, the leaders of the National Front for Collaboration were not only confident about the future, they were almost euphoric. This was because they were convinced that their candidate, Gérard Gourgue, was going to win the elections — perhaps even in the first round. They failed to realise that it was this very factor that was going to finally sweep away any final hesitations that the army might still have had. ★

ALAN THORNETT's book on workers' struggles in the British car industry from mid-1950 to the 1970s was reviewed in IV 130, but we forgot to give readers details of how they can order the book!

From Militancy to Marxism is published by Left View Books, London, 1987, £9.95/\$16.95 post free surface mail worldwide.

It can be ordered from: Left View Books, BM Box 3956, London WC1N 3XX, GB.



Referendum blows up in the generals' faces

THE JARUZELSKI REGIME suffered a grave setback on November 29. The Polish people were expected to vote in the referendum for the government's so-called Second Stage of the Economic and Political Reform. They did not, and thereby denied legitimacy to the team in power. The regime officially recognized its defeat the following evening.

ARTHUR WILKINS

VOTING WAS on two questions. The first was, "Do you favor full implementation of the program for radical reconstruction of the economy presented to the Diet [parliament], which aims at a clear improvement in the living conditions of the society, knowing that this will require a difficult period of rapid changes over two to three years?" According to the official tallies, only 44.5% of registered voters replied "yes."

The second question was, "Are you in favor of a Polish model of thoroughgoing democratization of political life, with the goal of reinforcing self-management, broadening citizens' rights and increasing their participation in the running of the country?" Only 46.26% of registered voters replied "yes" to this question.

The remainder of the electorate answered "no," or abstained (there was a high abstention rate, 32%). Neither of the two questions got the 51% "yes" vote of registered voters required for adoption by the recent referendum law.

This was the first referendum in Poland since the one in 1946 that legitimated the establishment of the bureaucratic dictatorship. The situation today is very different. The 1946 referendum was a success for Stalinism thanks to a gigantic falsification of the results and police terror, but not only for these reasons. At the time, the bureaucratic regime was still on the ascendancy. It

benefited from the anti-capitalist transformations that had the support of the masses. The bureaucratic regime today is on the decline. Undermined and torn by contradictions, its system of ruling over the working class and society, as well as of running the national economy, is breaking down.

Referendum result also a blow for the Kremlin

Six years after the crushing of the 1980-81 Polish revolution, six years after the normalization of the regime, and despite the absence of independent legal mass organizations and political opposition, despite an extensive atomization and depoliticization of the society, the authorities have proven incapable of getting even passive acceptance of their policy by a majority of Poles.

The negative result of the referendum is not only a blow for the Polish bureaucracy in general and for its "reform" wing, represented by the "enlightened" Jaruzelski team in particular. It is also a blow for their protectors in the Kremlin, the Gorbachev leadership, since Jaruzelski is one of their main allies in the satellite countries of the "socialist camp." As for the experts of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, they hoped that through the economic reform and political liberalization Jaruzelski would be able to create the conditions for extracting from working people

the gigantic sums essential for payment of the debt to the Western banks.

World Bank campaigns for "yes" vote

The World Bank joined openly in the campaign for a "yes" vote in the referendum. Its director, Eugenio Lari, sent the following message through the official Polish Press Agency: "Poles should support the program of reforms presented by the government; this is a historic opportunity for the Polish people." (*Polityka* 45, November 7, 1987.) Moreover, before the referendum, Jaruzelski met Cardinal Glemp and submitted to him the program for the "second stage of the reform." It seems that he got, if not tacit approval, at least the benevolent neutrality of the church hierarchy.

The defeat of the bureaucratic regime in a popular vote and above all the recognition of this defeat are unprecedented events in the "socialist camp." Why did Jaruzelski admit his setback, when he could have falsified the returns in the referendum by adding a few per cent more positive votes? There were three reasons for this.

First, in so doing, he would have been obliged to claim that a majority of Poles accepted the perspective of a sharp drop in their standard of living. A gross falsification of the results would then have led to a rise in social tensions and increased the dangers of a mass explosion. Secondly, such a falsification might have been opposed by the still influential conservative forces in the bureaucratic apparatus, who see a danger to their position in the schemes for transforming the economic system and also balk at a political liberalization of the regime. Finally, a false victory in the referendum would have put Jaruzelski in a difficult position with the World Bank and the IMF. The latter would have been able to step up their demands on the basis of the purported support of the Polish society. In all, falsifying the results would have exposed the regime to a combination of threats from every quarter.

The government's program of reforms was also rejected by the working people for three reasons. First, they realized that any reform carried out by this regime could only mean a brutal attack on their standard

of living. That is, supporting the "program for reconstructing the economy" meant accepting the sharpest rise in prices ever seen in People's Poland (an average of 110% for necessities, as announced by the government). This would have plunged still more of the masses into the destitution already suffered by a quarter of the population.

Secondly, working people have no confidence that the bureaucratic regime will carry out any reform or promise, and so they could not take seriously the proposal of a "Polish model of democratization." On the one hand, Jaruzelski courts citizens with the idea of "socialist pluralism," and on the other he rules out not only the right to form independent political parties, but even trade-union pluralism. Jaruzelski says that he is ready even to consider the possibility of a legal "socialist opposition." But at the same time, he announces from the outset that he excludes legalizing the "anti-socialist opposition," that is, *Solidarnosc* and more generally any real opposition.



The announcement of the proposed price rises was accompanied by that of a meeting of the Committee for the Defence of the Country (KOK). Since 1981, the year that this sinister extra-constitutional institution was set up, every Pole knows what a meeting of the KOK means — a threat to establish a state of war if the masses react too sharply to the price increases.

Working people fear increased poverty

Thirdly, broad layers of working people feel instinctively that the introduction of a radical market reform in the Polish economy will be a great threat to everything that remains of their social gains — that it foreshadows greater poverty, harder work, sharpened social inequalities and increased insecurity.

Igor Lewy, editor of the independent journal *Robotnik* and one of the founders of the recently established Polish Socialist Party (PPS), wrote a few months ago: "It seems that the Polish version of *perestroika* will fulfill the dreams of some people by its free-enterprise character and the extent of the re-privatizations. We will then have an enlightened market communism in which — under the protection of tanks, as well as of the leading role of the party and its inter-



national alliances — limited companies and other corporations will spring up like mushrooms, and social protection for the disadvantaged will be considered as another 'error of the past.' It is in that framework that we will have to live and act... The cost of the Polish road to capitalism that Jaruzelski and his team want to take in order to save the 'socialist camp' from bankruptcy has to be calculated and weighed up before it is too late." (*Robotnik* 123, May 1987.)

With regard to the referendum, the National Executive Commission (KKW) of the union *Solidarnosc* made the following declaration on October 25:

"No one can take the rulers at their word"

"Everyone wants the country to democratize, for the economy to be based on the sound foundations of the market, for individuals' success to depend only on their work and their abilities... Unfortunately, we cannot forget that the people who govern us are the same as those who six years ago instituted a state of siege to crush the democratic aspirations of the Polish society...

"No one can take the rulers at their word. We need real political, social and economic guarantees. Will the referendum be accompanied by guarantees? The answer to this is clear: It will not." (*Bulletin d'information Solidarnosc* 178, 1987.)

The KKW did not call for a boycott of the referendum or for voting "no," but rather limited itself to calling for a passive abstention, in conformity with the idea expressed by Lech Walesa: "It's the West that's interested in referendum, we Poles are ignoring it." (*Libération*, December 1, 1987). *Solidarnosc* may think correctly that the result of the referendum represents a success for it, but insofar as its leadership is specifically concerned, this victory is a highly ambiguous one.

In his first comment on the referendum results, Walesa did not consider it useful to talk about a defeat for the regime but limited himself to noting that the vote testified that "Polish society is deeply divided." He judged that it was "imperative" that *Solidarnosc* and the government appeal "jointly" to the people to "save Poland," because "time is running out." His main political



advisor, Professor Bronislaw Geremek, considered: "This a setback for everybody, because the authorities have compromised the idea of a referendum and of reform." (*Le Monde*, December 2, 1987.) Other opposition leaders — Adam Michnik, Jan Litwinski, as well as Zbigniew Bujak — declared 24 hours after they learned of the results that they were "still stunned" and unable to "understand what happened." They asked for some time to find an explanation for the "totally unexpected" and "very grave" situation. (*Libération*, December 2, 1987.)

"Radical market reform of the economy"

Another sort of response could hardly be expected, inasmuch as the Solidarnosc leadership's present program for economic reform is close to what Jaruzelski wants to put into practice. It represents a radical modification of the program adopted at the First National Congress of Solidarnosc in 1981, which called for "the introduction at all levels of management of a self-management and democratic reform and of a new socio-economic order that would combine planning, self-management and the market." At the same time, he declared that "the reform must socialize planning" and "the central plan must reflect the aspirations of the society and be freely accepted." (*Tygodnik Solidarnosc* 29, 1981.)

The present program of the Solidarnosc leadership is a "radical market reform of the economy," which "must lead to the re-establishment of a genuine multi-sectoral [mixed] economy," and "assure equality of all forms of sectors of ownership, and limit the role and function of the state in the economy, restoring the fundamental role to the market mechanisms." (*Widnokrąg* 6/7, 1987.) Central planning was no longer envisaged.

According to the leadership of Solidarnosc, the deeper and deeper and more and more irreversible crisis of bureaucratic planning in Poland, the USSR,

and in other countries of "actually existing socialism" testifies to the historic collapse of the planned economy.

Opposition to Solidarnosc leadership

But the more the social situation of the masses worsens, the more the government seeks to impose its economic reform, the more a feeling of opposition to the orientation followed by the Solidarnosc leadership has developed among a section of the union's leaders. The first open attack against this orientation came in the spring of 1986 from Andrzej Slowik, chair of Solidarnosc in Lodz. Last December, his criticisms were taken up by 22 members of the National Commission elected at the 1981 congress. In an open letter to Walesa in September, they wrote:

"The union has no clear program common to all its members, and it reserves very little space in its declarations and its actions for material social problems. This threatens...to cut the leading bodies of the union off from their base in the factories. Everyone is well aware that Solidarnosc has to be a social movement, but it would make a grave error if it also let itself no longer be seen as a union.

"A social movement...neglecting the classical trade-union tasks would lose a large part of its social base within the country and the support given by foreign unions and trade-union confederations. Solidarnosc could no longer be considered as the representative of workers' interests, and it

would cease to be an important factor in the evolution of Polish internal affairs." (*Bulletin d'Information Solidarnosc* 178, 1987.)

In addition to Slowik, other historic leaders of Solidarnosc in several industrial regions signed this letter. They included Andrzej Gwiazda and Anna Walentynowicz in Gdansk, Marian Jurczyk in Szczecin, Seweryn Jaworski and Zbigniew Romaszewski in Warsaw, Mieczyslaw Gil in Nowa-Huta and Lech Dymarski in Poznan.

"Solidarnosc is going back into the factories"

Lower Silesian Solidarnosc leader and also a founder of the PPS, Jozef Piniór, demanded in September the adoption of the following orientation:

"Solidarnosc is going back into the factories, it is with the nameless ones, those who are tied to the assembly line, with those who are in the very depths of oppression and poverty. Its vocation is to defend the oppressed. This vocation will not be abandoned in exchange for a warm place in a sacristy nor for the free market." (*Robotnik* 129, September 1987.)

The question that is posed is whether all the Solidarnosc leaders who declared for such a position will be able to unite their forces and convince the others, who at the moment are dazzled by the deceptive glitter of the market economy.

The Jaruzelski regime will certainly continue to implement its economic reform program. That is what the Diet decided in the wake of the referendum. The price rises will be spread out over time, depending of course on the social resistance the regime runs up against.

But, at the same time, the crisis of the regime will continue to deepen, and this will tend to open up possibilities for the Polish working people to regain confidence

in their strength and in their ability to resist. In

Le Matin de Paris on December 2, Jacek

Kuron predicted:

"We have to expect increased social agitation." ★



Strike movement deepens

ON NOVEMBER 17, Macedonian steel workers took to the streets of the capital city Skopje in the largest demonstration of workers' anger seen in the republic since the war.

MICHELE LEE

ON THE PREVIOUS day, the workers had been informed by their workers' council that their wages would be cut since the enterprise was making losses (all this in accordance with the current federal law on loss-making enterprises).

When the workers protested, they were advised to elect delegations from every shop and negotiate with the management. Instead, they marched the following day to the building housing the city assembly and the republican government. Estimates of the number involved vary from 3,000 to 10,000. The steel workers' march was joined by workers from the local glass-making factory and by city employees, as well as by workers from several other enterprises and a considerable number of Skopje citizens. The march was led by furnace men: the steel furnaces had recently been shut down, leaving 1,500 men awaiting redeployment.

"We want a wage, not charity!"

The workers complained that they were not responsible for the parlous state of their enterprise: the government's recent decision to increase the price of steel products by a mere 60% (in a situation of roughly 180% inflation), while raising the price of electricity by 69%, meant that the steel works would have to be closed down, leaving 12,000 people without work. The steelmen wanted the federal government to allow steel prices to rise by 113% and the wages of those involved in direct production by 100%. The demonstrators shouted: "We want a wage, not charity!"; "Those who live off our work should also share our fate!"; "Down with the government!"; and "Out with incompetent leadership!" They also demanded the dismissal of their managers.

At first, the functionaries refused to appear before the crowd and the tension rose steadily in the square before the assembly building. Finally, the presidents of the city party committee and of the Skopje commune assembly emerged through the door. In the absence of any sound equipment, the dialogue began with those in the front lines, but very soon the functionaries' explanations produced a wave of shouts and protests all round.

A loudspeaker was then brought, but the workers demanded that the whole area be properly wired for sound so that everybody could hear and participate. They refused to send in a delegation and began to pelt the two representatives of the authorities with rotten fruit and vegetables. Two hours later a proper sound system was installed, which allowed this particular and novel public debate to proceed.

Steelmen win wage increase

However, despite the fact that night fell and it began to rain, the demonstrators refused to disperse until their demands were satisfied. The Macedonian republican government then went into an urgent session, with the result that the workers' demands were largely satisfied: the steelmen's wages were to be raised to the Yugoslav average for the industry, those on low incomes would have their wages doubled, and the value of work points would be raised by 50%. Only then did the square empty.

A qualified worker explained to the Belgrade *Politika's* correspondent that, although he had been working in the steel works for 24 years, and although he and his comrades were over-fulfilling the norm, he earned no more than 120,000 dinars a month [about \$32]. Yet he had a four-member family to support, including a grown-up daughter who has been unemployed ever since she left school seven years ago. Talking to the press, the workers complained about the lack of self-management, the high salaries of the functionaries and their own low living standards.

Within two days of this demonstration, the steel workers were followed by aluminium workers in a march through Skopje streets. Stopping before the republican assembly building, the Alumina workers shouted that they were not responsible for the bad state of their enterprise, for which they blamed the previous management, the leadership of the Skopje commune and the current federal government. They demanded that their enterprise be made financially secure and that their wages be doubled.

Once again, their demands were largely met.

The following day, November 22, workers employed in the oil refinery, the local dairy and glass and timber factories, as well as electricity workers, went on strike. They, however, remained within their enterprises, so less is known about their demands. In another Macedonian town, 2,500 workers employed in the Bitola mining and electricity generating complex refused to accept their October wages, saying that the management had reneged on a wage agreement: despite increased production, their wages had been cut. A commission was set up to investigate their demands.

Industrial unrest has not been confined to Macedonia, however. On November 20 miners in the Bosnian commune of Tuzla went on strike. Two pits, employing 3,200 workers, were involved. The miners demanded a 100% wage rise, five tons of free coal per year and equal wages for disabled miners. Their October wages had ranged from 150,000 to 180,000 dinars. Five days later the strike was still on — the management having offered only a 30% wage rise. The Tuzla miners left their mines, stopped buses bringing in new shifts and also potential strikebreakers, and asked the men to join them.

Here are the comments of some of the local functionaries. The party secretary: "This is not a normal strike — it is an anti-social action. Workers from other pits are being encouraged to join in." A technical director: "This should not be allowed to carry on." President of the Tuzla commune assembly: "This is not a social but an enemy action. It has nothing to do with self-management." Members of the management complained that they did not feel safe among the strikers. According to *Politika* on November 25, the management is threatening to close down the two pits if the strike continues.

Authorities intimidate the workers

There are currently many examples of the authorities' intimidation of workers. On November 20, the Bosnian republican government declared that the enterprise Agrokromerc, whose management was involved in the recent notorious financial scandal [see IV 131], would be closed down, laying off its 12,000 workers. The republican minister for agriculture is on record as saying that the workers were also to blame for the scandal, and hence must pay with the loss of their jobs. The Agrokromerc workers have not recovered from the shock caused by the sudden demise of what had appeared to be one of the most successful of Yugoslav enterprises — not sufficiently, at any rate, to organize mass protest meetings or demonstrations. Part of their problem has been the sudden arrival of real hardship, including hunger, not to speak of the collapse of the regional economy.

The case of the Labin miners in Croatia is particularly instructive for understanding the extent of vindictiveness demonstrated by management towards striking workers. Last spring these miners maintained the longest strike in post-war Yugoslav history [see IV 123]. Faceworkers from the pit Ripnda, whose action sparked off the strike, warned at the time of misinvestment in that pit. One result however of their action has been that the pit has now closed down as unprofitable. This means that 320 miners are currently without a job, awaiting transfer to other pits in the Labin mine. But the management controls the transfers, and it is using this control as an instrument of revenge against strike leaders.

Movement will grow in scope and militancy

Take the case of Ahmed Kavvic, a 38-year-old miner, who has spent half his life working in the pits of the Istrian coal mine. Once the strike was over, he was immediately suspended from his previous job as a work team leader. During the strike Kavvic had been elected to head a commission, established by the miners themselves, over and above their treacherous workers' council, to put their point of view and negotiate a settlement. The commission was important in shifting the balance of power within the enterprise in favour of the pit workers. After the strike, however, through a few "technical organization changes", the management restored its control and is now using its power of redistribution of jobs to remove the workers' natural leaders. Kavvic is set to lose his job altogether.

A manager told a NIN correspondent: "Why should we employ this troublemaker rather than somebody who will be prepared to go underground whenever instructed?" As a result Kavvic has not even felt able to complain, either to the workers' council or to the court of associated labour, for illegal dismissal from his previous post. The Labin miners, exhausted after a two-month strike and now also fearing unemployment, are unlikely to be able to mount another strike in the near future, even to protect workers under threat.

Unemployment — that is, the policy of closing down "unprofitable" enterprises — has been a powerful stick with which to beat workers in general, and militant workers in particular. For example, Jadraska Zeljezara, a steel works near the port of Split, was recently closed down only in order to shed workers, in particular those who had organized strikes and mass meetings against the closure. It has recently re-emerged under a new name, but some 400 workers are left on the dole.

Recent events, beginning with the Labin miners' strike of last April and May, show that we are dealing with a real strike movement in Yugoslavia, which is bound to grow in scope and militancy. But just as the

workers are learning new lessons in this now open class war against its bureaucracy, so too is the bureaucracy.

In fact, the workers are faced with a war of attrition, in which today's victories can only too easily become tomorrow's defeats. Hence, the workers will have to learn new techniques and forms of self-organization: their weakness today resides in their inability to create more permanent structures, capable of policing agreements or consolidating gains of common action.

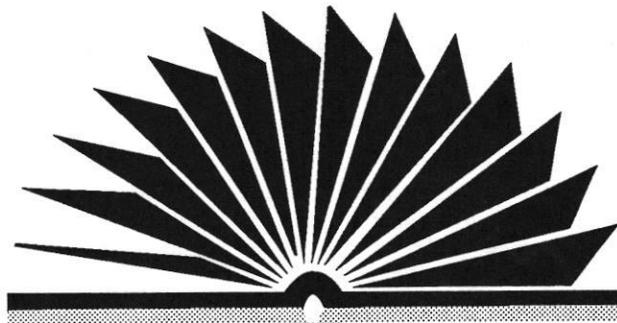
Yugoslavia's decentralized economy and body politic is an effective obstacle to the kind of vertical/horizontal integration within the industrial branches on the Polish model. Instead, forms of organization and types of action more appropriate to the Yugoslav system will have to be found. Most likely, workers will have to create workers' councils and local state assemblies of their own — gaining control simultaneously of the enterprises and the local state administration, by extending their activities from the factories into the neighbourhoods.

A major problem lies in the intelligentsia,

which shows little if any interest in the often desperate workers' struggles, committed as it is in its vast majority to further market liberalization. This means that, for the time being, workers will have to go it alone — until they can capture, say, at least one large industrial town and run it themselves, lock, stock and barrel. Only then might the myopic mood of the intelligentsia change.

Workers today enjoy the advantage of a relatively open press which, by writing about their strikes often with a good deal of sympathy, prevents them from being nipped in the bud by local organs of repression. The workers, therefore, have a real interest in the current struggle waged within the party between liberals and hard-liners, since the party of course ultimately controls the media. The Yugoslav system still remains formally committed to party-worker alliance, and its media will continue to highlight the increasing number of points where this alliance is no longer working — provided that the hardliners do not step in to stop it. ★

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Economic ruin sparks mass revolts

THE DISASTROUS SLIDE of the Lebanese economy has accelerated in recent months. A clear index of this is the plunge in the value of the local currency, in a country where most consumer goods are imported.

In response to this situation, mass riots broke out in August, and in November the Lebanese General Confederation of Labor called an unlimited general strike. For the first time, Lebanese working people united across confessional lines against the collapse of their standard of living.

Zafer, a representative of the Revolutionary Communist Group (GCR), the Lebanese section of the Fourth International, gave the following interview on these new developments to Ariane Merri in early December.

COULD YOU describe how the mobilizations against the economic crisis developed?

You have to go back a bit to understand what has happened. The start of 1986 was marked by a very major event — the battles in East Beirut for control of the Lebanese Forces between the pro-Israeli Samir Geagea and Hobeika. At the end of 1985, under Syrian auspices, Hobeika signed a tripartite agreement with the Shi'ites of Amal and Walid Jumblatt's Druze to "solve the Lebanese problem."

This accord was favorable in every respect to the interests of the Syrian regime. That is why the reactionary Christians — the Phalange and the part of the Lebanese Forces led by Samir Geagea, and we should include the pro-American president, Amin Gemayel, with them — were all against it.

On January 15, very violent battles in the Christian redoubt brought a considerable reduction in the influence of Hobeika and also, by ricochet effect, in that of the Syrians. Assad's forces intervened massively in Beirut in February 1987, while all the attempts to rebuild the relationship between Amin Gemayel and Damascus failed. In early June 1987, the assassination of the premier, Rachid Karami, himself close to the Syrian regime, strained their relations still more.

10 It seems that from now on it will be very difficult to envisage a resumption of rela-

tions between the president and the Syrians, all the more because, it has to be remembered, this is the last year of his term. In a few months, there will be new presidential elections. The government is totally paralyzed, and it is unquestionable that this paralysis has had a major influence on the economic problems. Such difficulties obviously have an autonomy from the political problems, but the governmental crisis is one of the causes, if not the only one, of the collapse of the Lebanese pound and of the acceleration of the economic crisis.

This eclipse of the currency is not a new thing. It started in the summer of 1984, but in recent months the depreciation of the national currency has accelerated to a dizzy rate. Today, the a dollar is worth 500 Lebanese pounds, and the process is not over. In 1984, a dollar was worth four pounds. It is not hard to imagine what consequences this has had for the Lebanese people. Until this summer, the popular masses did not respond to this constant depreciation. They were stunned.

But at the end of August, people started to move. There were three spontaneous demonstrations in the streets of Beirut. A crowd smashed the shops of the money changers and more generally those of the rich merchants, whom the people accused, often rightly so, of speculating in commodities. Clashes occurred between the Syrian forces and the population, and dozens of demonstrators were arrested.

After these demonstrations, we saw more or less organized actions by the working class. The Executive Council of the CGTL, the confederation of the Lebanese unions, met and began to envisage the possibility of a general strike. A national conference was called for the end of the month. On its agenda were the collapse of the pound and the economic crisis in general. On September 22-23, demonstrations organized by the unions took place simultaneously in East and West Beirut.

The national conference at the end of September 1987 decided to call an unlimited general strike for November 5. Several demands were put forward. The main one was for a sliding scale of wages. But there were also political demands, such as a call for the unification of Lebanon and the elimination of the confessional militias. The state was also called on to take control of the ports, which are now in the hands of the confessional militias.

Moreover, the teachers in both the public and private sectors decided on a general strike for October 20 in support of their own demands. Wages, of course, were an issue, but also firings in the private sector. This strike lasted until November 2, but the teachers made only very partial gains that in no way changed the wretched conditions in the profession.

The general strike started on November 5, and extended to all sectors of wage earners in Lebanon. From the outset, pressures were exerted by the Lebanese bourgeoisie as a whole, without any distinction between the various religions. Syria is also experiencing a catastrophic economic situation, and the Syrian government feared that strikes and demonstrations might prove contagious. The mobilization lasted about five days, and ended with an enormous demonstration of more than 100,000 people coming from both sectors of the capital. Demonstrations took place also in every city of the country: in Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre and so on. But after the central demonstration, the CGTL Executive Council met and called for an end to the general strike.

■ Who dominates the Council politically?

The chair, Antoine Bechara, is close to the Phalange. But the Phalangists are by no means the only political force in the CGTL. You also find trade-unionists linked to the Lebanese Communist Party, the representatives of the National Federation of Blue- and White-Collar Workers. The CP is not a negligible force in the working class, and a lot of people did not expect them to call for an end to the general strike. In fact, the party is the prisoner of its alliances, notably with Walid Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), and more generally with the Syrian regime.

So, the strike ended without the government making the slightest commitment to take steps that might stem endless fall of the Lebanese pound and the constant decline in the buying power of wages, which

can no longer meet people's most elementary needs.

■ **Has the depreciation of the pound been reflected in a galloping inflation?**

Definitely. You might even say that the price increases have exceeded the fall in the pound. This is a result of speculation, but also merchants anticipating a further drop in the currency. So, prices have continued to rise at a frantic rate.

■ **Let's go back to the demonstration you talked about before. That was the first time we have seen masses of people surmounting the confessional divide — a massive rejection of the war.**

We have now reached a situation of real destitution for a very broad layer of the population. A lot of people can no longer get even a minimally adequate diet or afford medicine or doctors. A large proportion of the people are in that situation. There is certainly a new development, a coming together of people of different religions who now realize that everyone is in the same boat. But it needs to be stressed, and this is very important, that these people who are demonstrating, who are going on strike, have no leadership or organizations ready to pursue the fight to the end.

When the CGTL decided to call the strike, when it called on the population to strike, the people placed their confidence in it, after they had lost their confidence in the confessional political parties — even in the left parties, including the CP. But when you look at the way the general strike ended, you can understand why the people felt disillusioned. They had placed their confidence in the CGTL, which was not a party to the confessional warfare. But the leadership of this workers' organization showed that it also was in the pay of the Lebanese bourgeoisie. This does not mean that the people do not want to move again, or that there will not be other explosions of mass anger. It is difficult today to predict exactly how they will express their feelings.

■ **Is there no structural reason why the state of the Lebanese economy should improve?**

None, quite the contrary. I think that the situation is going to get worse. There is no reason for the deterioration to stop. The mass movement has been largely spontaneous until now, and when the organizations intervened it was to go against the workers' interests. Likewise, on the political level, it can be said that there is no solution to the problems Lebanon has been experiencing.

The cleavage in the government can only widen between now and the presidential elections, and we can even expect a new flare-up of clashes among the various forces. In particular, when you consider that the anger of the masses represents a danger for the Lebanese bourgeoisie as a whole, the bourgeois forces have every reason to resort to more confessional battles to divert the outrage of the population and its refusal to tolerate the consequences of the crisis. From now until the elections, which may take place before next summer, things can evolve. This depends on relations between US imperialism and the Syrian regime. If there is an accord between them, we can expect to see a certain military lull. Otherwise, we can expect a new explosion.

It is hard today to make precise prognoses for the coming months. Lebanon is a country where the situation is very fluid and where foreign influences, both from other states in the region and from outside pow-



ers, are decisive.

■ **What is the state of the "war of the camps"?**

Some months ago, the war between the Amal movement and the Palestinian camps was halted by the Syrian forces. But now it seems we are seeing a resumption of the fighting, although partially and feebly, in the Sidon region. It seems likely, however, that the Syrian region, which influences the Amal movement, does not want the fighting to become general, especially since nothing indicates that Amal would have the upper hand. The Assad government fears that such fighting would lead to Yassar Arafat's forces gaining wider influence. Moreover, the Soviet Union's pressures on

Syria to put an end to these battles might be mentioned. According to all appearances, the calm should continue. Of course, this also depends on a whole series of factors, such as the relations between the various Arab regimes, between the Syrian regime and the Gulf states, the evolution of the Iran-Iraq war and so on.

What is more, it is not always the Amal militias that have started the fighting in the camps. Sometimes it is Arafat trying to regain the upper hand, or simply resuming the fighting for eminently tactical reasons that have to do with the relations between the PLO and Syria and the regional context.

■ **What role is Iran playing today?**

The Muslim fundamentalist currents, both Shi'ite and Sunni, have close relations with Iran. This is certainly true of the Hezbollah, the Shi'ite armed organization, which has a base in some regions, especially the Bekaa valley and the southern suburbs of Beirut. The Syrian regime is trying to weaken these currents, but so far there have not been any large-scale military actions against the Hezbollah or the other organizations linked to Iran.

For nearly two months now, we have been hearing talk about an operation to bring Syrian soldiers into the southern suburbs of the capital. But it is difficult to predict what may happen. Too many factors enter in. Anything is possible, especially in such a crucial year as 1988. The elections will be very important for the coming years. All the parties in the game want these elections to serve their interests best.

■ **What did the GCR do at the time of the mobilizations?**

You have to remember that we are a small group in the midst of a very difficult situation. Our influence, therefore, is limited. In the November 9 demonstration, we distributed several thousand leaflets, which were also signed by another far-left group, the Organization of Revolutionary Socialists (OSR). We put forward a certain number of demands, such as a sliding scale of wages and nationalization of the banks and foreign trade.

■ **What are your perspectives for the coming year?**

We are presently considering ways of intervening in the economic crisis. We are engaged in discussions with the OSR to try to arrive at common work, which, by unifying our forces, will enable us to have more of an effect on the situation. ★

Imperialism and the Gulf war

A FORMIDABLE imperialist armada is cruising the Arab-Persian Gulf and adjacent waters in a show of naval coordination on a scale unequalled since the last world war.

This is an array of almost 60 ships belonging to the US, French, British and Italian fleets, to say nothing of Belgian and Dutch mine sweepers. It includes three aircraft carriers. This concentration is also being indirectly reinforced by West German ships deployed in the Mediterranean to replace units of the US Sixth Fleet assigned to the intervention force.¹

SALAH JABER

WHAT IS the reason for this widespread sabre rattling? What is the motivation for massing these floating engines of war, with the US naval force alone costing a million dollars a day? Is it to help threatened populations? Is it to end a war that over seven years has taken the lives of well over a million people? No! Imperialist armies cannot be mistaken for rescue forces. They cannot serve any other master but capital.

In the present case, the primary concern of the imperialist centers is to guarantee "freedom of navigation" in the Gulf in the face of threats of overflows of the conflict between Iran and Iraq. In other words, their main preoccupation is to prevent any interruption of oil exports from the Gulf or of imports by the countries along its shores, which could have grave repercussions for the equilibrium of the world market. Moreover, this deployment of forces has the complementary effect of reassuring the Arab oil monarchies, which are closely linked to the economy of the imperialist countries and whose stability has been threatened more than ever this year by the fallout from the war between their two neighbors.

Immediately after the unleashing of the Iran-Iraq carnage, on September 23, 1980, the nine member countries of the EEC, six of which are taking part today in the military operation underway, stressed in a joint statement "the crucial importance for the international community of freedom of navigation in the Gulf, which must not be impaired in any way." In thinly veiled terms, this was the expression of the sordid cynicism of the imperialist governments about a war that to this day they have helped considerably to fuel.

From the outset, a limit was set. The hostilities had to stop short of harming the maritime trade of the non-belligerent states on the shores of the Gulf. Implicitly there was a still stronger prohibition of any attacks on these countries. Below this threshold, the Iraqis and Iranians could kill each other to their heart's content. It was not said aloud but was certainly on the imperialists' minds that the longer the conflict lasted, the better it would be for their interests. Indeed, in more than one way, the dragging on of the war has benefited both their economic and their political interests.

War and the economics of the oil market

Let us start with the imperialists' wallets, since that is where the hearts of the states concerned lie. The representatives of world finance capital have had three main economic reasons to celebrate seven years of carnage between the two Gulf belligerents. The first concerns the world oil market, and thus the overall health of the imperialist economic system. The second has to do with the arms market. And the third is related to post-war perspectives.

By disrupting Iran's oil production — which fell from 6 million barrels a day in 1978 to about 3.5 million after the Shah's overthrow — and by threatening the stability of the neighboring countries, which together are by far the main source of oil for capitalist Europe and Japan, the "Islamic Revolution" had provoked a panic on the world oil market. The tremor was made still worse by the fact that it came at a time when the imperialist countries' reserves were at a low point. The result was what was called the "second oil shock," the first



being the one that occurred in the wake of the October 1973 Israeli-Arab war.

Between January 1979 and February 1980, petroleum prices doubled and continued to rise that year, helped along by speculation. The predictable effect of the shock was that reserves were built up again to saturation point, and important energy-saving measures were carried out in the consumer countries.² At the same time, world oil production shot up. Sharply increased profit rates opened the way for exploitation of previously neglected deposits. By the same token, the price increases favored a turn to alternative sources of energy. It did not take any great guru to foresee that the elements combining to produce this flare-up were going to backfire.

In fact, already in 1980, the financial and oil experts were worried about the momentum that might be developed by tumbling oil prices, which they knew were inevitable. The projected fall was all the more threatening because the price rise had been so rapid and because the forecasts for the coming decade had accurately predicted a constant excess of supply over demand. The interests of the imperialist system demanded stopping this yo-yo movement and stabilizing prices over the long term at a level permitting continued profitability of North Sea and US oil production.

It was, therefore, imperative to keep prices from falling below the optimum level. From this standpoint, the war between Iraq and Iran could not have broken out at a more opportune time. Unleashed in September 1980, for a brief initial period it inevitably boosted prices by creating panic. Thus, at the peak in 1981, the price of basic crude oil was around 160% of its early 1979 level. But in the autumn of 1981 the

1. This is the first time since Hitler that the West German navy's warships have gone outside the Baltic-North Sea area.

2. For example, France's net oil imports went from 118 million tons in 1979 to 69 million in 1982!

decline in oil prices, for which the preconditions had appeared in 1980, began its inexorable course.

Oil, arms and political manoeuvring

In 1981 the effects of the war cut Iranian oil production to 1 million barrels a day and Iraqi production to still less (as compared with 3.5 million barrels in 1979) — that is, an overall reduction of 5 million barrels a day, more than a quarter of OPEC's production in the same period! Were it not for the war the price fall would have taken on the proportions of a collapse. That is, there would have been a slide comparable to the one provoked by Saudi Arabia in 1986 in the context of a war for price controls and production quotas. But, in the former case, the process would have been uncontrolled and therefore infinitely more dangerous and more difficult to stop.³

From 1981 to the end of 1986, a cessation of the hostilities between Iran and Iraq would have had a disastrous effect on the oil market. It would have brought on an abrupt increase in both countries' exports in the context of a worldwide glut. (It will be explained further on that this risk is much less today). The fear of this was described by Véronique Maurus, *Le Monde's* oil specialist, in an article on the September 23-24, 1984. The headline could not have been more eloquent: "The discreet 'If only it lasts!' of oil-business circles."

"Some people will talk about cynicism," the journalist wrote, "but it has to be recognized that the greatest fear of the oil operators — and of many producer countries — four years after the start of the Iran-Iraq war is an end to a conflict that everyone has become using to living with, and which to a certain extent solves problems by maintaining a long-term freeze of production capacities."⁴

There is hardly any need to demonstrate the interest that the world's main merchants of death have in the war between Iran and Iraq. Two recent estimates have put the purchase of military equipment by the two countries since the start of the war at \$30,000 to \$38,000 million for Iran and \$40,000 to \$45,000 million for Iraq. A more detailed report, published this year by the Disarmament and Arms Control Agency based in Washington gives the following figures for 1981-1985.

Bagdad reportedly imported \$23,900 million in military equipment, as against \$6,400 million for Tehran. For the period concerned, Iraq was therefore the world's leading arms importer, far surpassing Saudi

Arabia, which came in second place with \$15,000 million worth of imported arms. Coming on top of the Israeli-Arab conflict, the military buying frenzy touched off by the Gulf war greatly increased the Middle East's already considerable share of the world's arms imports. The agency's report stated that over the five years considered the region took an extraordinary 49% of the world's arms imports!

Nearly 40 countries are implicated in varying degrees in selling military equipment to one or the other of the Gulf belligerents, or both at the same time, which is the case for most of them. These countries include both bureaucratic workers' states and imperialist or dependent capitalist states — the USSR and the East European countries, the United States and the Western European countries, China, North Korea, Israel, South Africa, South Korea, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Brazil and so on.

Since the start of the conflict, all the imperialist powers have imposed embargos on deliveries of military material to both belligerents. The nature of these bans dif-

fer, one of the USSR's few internationally competitive products, thus made it possible partially to recoup some of what the Soviet bureaucracy has spent in its arms race with the Western powers. All this is linked to a certain Stalinist conception of defending the USSR, which involves enormous spending and a search for bourgeois clients and allies in the third world.

Oil monarchies funnel funds to Iraq

The only paradox is that in recent years the petro-dollars of the traditional clients of US and British imperialism have partially supported Soviet military industry. The oil monarchies, especially the Saudi one, have in fact funnelled several tens of thousands of millions of dollars to the Iraqi regime, which otherwise would have been forced to surrender for lack of financial resources to pursue the war.⁵

Moscow's supply to Iraq, however, has not been totally devoid of political "ethics."

For example, from the start of the hostilities until the Iraqi retreat in 1982, that is, as long as Bagdad's troop occupied a large sector of Iranian territory, Soviet arms shipments were halted. The breach was filled by French imperialism, which was already Iraq's second most important arms supplier before the outbreak of the Gulf war.

According to Jacques Isnard, *Le Monde's* military specialist (July 29, 1987), arms deals between France and Iraq amounted to about 50,000 million francs [about \$8,330 million] between 1980 and 1982. "This went so far that some factories, especially in the tactical missiles industry, devoted 40% to 50% of their annual production

entirely to meeting the needs of the Iraqi infantry alone!"⁶



fers. In the case of Britain, it is Jesuitical, banning only "offensive" or "strategically" important weapons. In the case of France, it has been partial, banning shipment of arms only to Iran. But recently, in the wake of the US arms shipments to Iran — the notorious "Irangate" — a tip of the iceberg of the immense international arms traffic with Iraq and especially with Iran has emerged in the form of "scandals": Luchaire in France, Borletti in Italy, the Iranian Purchases Bureau in London, Messerschmitt in West Germany, Noricum in Austria, Bofors in Sweden, the Zeebrugge connection in Belgium and so on.

The arms supplied by the USSR constitute by far the largest part of Iraq's weapons, including 75% of the airplanes and almost all the 5,000 tanks that Bagdad has. This puts Moscow out in front of the arms merchants who have fattened on the Gulf war. Sales of conventional military materi-

3. The relatively well controlled slide in 1986, nonetheless, cost former Saudi oil minister Ahmed Zaki Yamani his job. Moreover, the fact that this slide could take place at a time when the "tanker war" in the Gulf was in full swing shows clearly the extent to which the world surplus of supply over demand is now the dominant factor.

4. In this connection the attacks on ships in the northern part of the Gulf have paradoxically aided the shipbuilders! In a situation of endemic surplus capacity of the oil tanker fleet for several years, the possibility of getting rid of a few ships, while being paid damages by the insurance companies, has been much appreciated. This is all the more so because the increase of insurance premiums has been compensated for by rebates to importers from the exporting country.

5. Estimates vary considerably, but the real figure must certainly be more than \$50,000 million in grants and loans.

6. This has not kept the French government from "shutting its eyes" to French arms sales to Iran, including a half million 155mm shells supplied by the Luchaire company to Tehran's army between 1982 and 1985.

As for Iran's arms, most of them are US made. US arms merchants were by far the most important beneficiaries of the fabulous arms contracts that resulted from the Shah's delusions of grandeur before he was overthrown in 1979. Since then, especially in the period from the unleashing of the war with Iraq in 1980 until 1986, when the Irangate scandal broke out and when the terrorist actions organized by Tehran in Lebanon and France reached their peak, Iran continued to get 40% of its arms from Western Europe, according to Les Aspin, chair of the Armed Services Committee of the US House of Representatives (cited by *Newsweek*, September 21, 1987).

"Greed abhors a vacuum"

If you add to this the US arms and spare parts supplied by Israel⁷, as well as the direct and semi-direct (through Israel) US shipments in 1985-86 that were revealed by the Iran-Contra affair—whose military importance was crucial⁸—it becomes clear that the "imperialist camp" was the main supplier of the Iranian war effort until 1986. Since the end of that year, its share has declined substantially. The manifold embargos have been sharply reinforced as one "scandal" after another has broken out.

According to Aspin, China and North Korea are now supplying 65% of Iranian arms imports. The rest is provided by third world arms merchants, as well as international traffickers, whose role is precisely to get around embargos. As the same issue of *Newsweek* already cited aptly put it, "greed abhors a vacuum!"

There is also the lavish market that the two belligerent countries will offer the civilian industries of the imperialist countries once the war is over. Against the background of a world crisis of overproduction, of which today's stock market crash is the most recent and the most spectacular expression, such an operation is a traditional resort of imperialism.⁹ As Marx and Engels wrote in the *Communist Manifesto* 140 years ago, "The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them. And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand by enforced destruction of the mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones."

The tens of thousands of millions of petro-dollars poured into the hungry maw of the imperialist economies to buy arms during the seven years of the war offer only a foretaste of the gravy that will flow when Iran and Iraq settle down to reconstruction. When the import capacities of the richest and generally less populous of the oil producing countries have reached a saturation point in recent years, the fact that two of the most populous of the rich oil producers, and therefore those with the greatest capacity for absorbing imports, have been de-



stroying a considerable part of the investments they made during the first oil boom (1974-78) is without any doubt an excellent thing for the main imperialist exporters.

In May 1987, before the onset of the destructive fury displayed by the two belligerents over recent months, an expert estimated that "the cost of repairing the economic infrastructure of the two countries could amount to \$50,000 million for Iran and \$35,000 million for Iraq."¹⁰ If to these costs for "repair" you add the development plans of the two countries, interrupted by the war in the case of Iraq and by the "Islamic Revolution" in the case of Iran, you get an overall market amounting to \$200,000 million from now until the end of the century, assuming that the war ends soon.

Imperialists looking to post-war markets

The attitude of the imperialist powers toward this conflict is, moreover, in large measure determined by economic calculations concerning the post-war period. Of the two countries, Iran is the most promising potential client. It has 45 million people and 1,648,000 square kilometers of territory, as against Iraq's 15 million inhabitants and 435,000 square kilometers. As against Baghdad's astronomic foreign debt, Tehran's is negligible. After Saudi Arabia, Iran's oil reserves are the Gulf's largest, amounting to almost double those of Iraq, which themselves are considerable.

Finally, the country has enormous natural gas reserves. This could explain the benevolent attitude taken toward Tehran by Japan and West Germany — which were already well established suppliers of the Shah as well as of Iraq — and which, along with Italy, have remained the leading suppliers of civilian imports to Khomeini's Iran. The same went for Britain until this year, when Tehran started to threaten its most favored clients, the Gulf oil monar-

chies. In addition to strategic and political considerations, the size of the Iranian market was a major factor prompting Washington to court Tehran up until Irangate. Before 1979, the US was Iran's main supplier.

While Iran is certainly the most promising potential client, Iraq is nonetheless a very important future market, even if the heavy debt the country has accumulated to its Arab bankrollers casts a shadow over its promise. In fact, it is virtually certain that the Arab loans to Bagdad, and not only the grants, will never be paid back. Rather, they will be considered as a financial contribution by the oil monarchies to the war effort of an Iraq that constantly reminds them, with good reason, that it is their main bulwark against the spread of Khomeinism.

After all, these monarchies have also bestowed thousands of millions of dollars on Syria for a war effort against Israel in which they have no real interests at stake. On several occasions since 1982, they have even gone so far as to offer to pay damages to Iran in return for an end to the fighting.¹¹

7. An air bridge was established between Israel and Iran via Turkey in 1981. Moreover, according to the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, cited by Amnon Kapeliuk in *Le Monde Diplomatique* of October 1987, there was major traffic between the Israeli port of Eilat and the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas.

8. "Democratic Senator Wright said that 2,008 TOW anti-tank missiles and 253 Hawk anti-aircraft batteries were delivered, among other arms and spare parts. Iran's air and anti-aircraft potential (Donnell Douglas F4's put back in working order) was thereby considerably increased." (*Politique Etrangère*, Summer 1987). Military experts generally agree that the TOW and Hawk missiles provided to Iran by the United States contributed greatly to the successes achieved by Tehran's army in 1986 (seizure of the Iraqi port of Fao) and in early 1987. "Iraq lost 10% of its airforce in the past two months, and the outskirts of the city of Basra are littered with hundreds of destroyed Iraqi tanks. Mr. Robert Torricelli, a Democratic congressman from New Jersey, has said moreover that the American arms supplied to Iran in 1986 had a 'spectacular' impact on the course of the Iran-Iraq conflict. The Iraqis 'lost their only advantage in the fight,' Mr. Torricelli said regarding Iraqi airforce losses." (*Le Monde*, February 21, 1987).

9. See the explanation of this offered by Ernest Mandel in *IV* 129, November 9, 1987.

10. G. Salamé, in *Politique Etrangère*, *ibid.*

Moreover, if the war ended without a dismantling of the Iraqi armed forces, they would be the strongest of the Arab armies.¹² Such a position would not only be sufficient reason for cancelling Iraq's debts to the Arab countries, but also very probably for giving it new grants and loans for reconstruction.

This is the outcome that French imperialism has put its money on. Profiting from the war, it has become Iraq's main Western partner.¹³ In this respect, it has used the cover of a certain Gaullist policy of flattering the Arab countries, which gained it a position in their markets out of all proportion to its role in the Iranian one, even in the Shah's time.

French imperialism has gone so far as to grant credits to Iraq amounting to \$6,000 million, half of which are non-military credits. Paris's calculations and the resulting entanglement led it in 1983, the most critical year for Bagdad, to lend the Iraqi army five Super-Étendard fighters taken from the French navy! The Iranian "inspired" hostage-taking and terrorist attacks against Paris are simply reprisals for French involvement on the side of Iraq.

Broader economic interests at stake

The economic interests of world finance capital, properly understood, have been a fundamental factor in the capitalists' de facto encouragement of the Iran-Iraq war for more than six years. But they could not in themselves be decisive, independently of political and strategic conditions. The latter are themselves a concentrated expression of broader economic interests. For example, a war against two wealthy partners of world imperialism (say, between the Shah's Iran and Saudi Arabia) could have the same economic advantages for capital, but be disastrous for the stability of its domination over both countries and that of the regional and global relationship of forces between imperialism and all the forces opposing it, including notably the USSR.

US imperialism is the kingpin of world imperialism's military system. It determines what strategic and political considerations are most important in such cases, especially in regions that fall within its sphere of direct intervention.¹⁴ From this standpoint, how have the Gulf war and its continuation served Washington's designs?

First of all, let us look at this from the Iranian side. The Iraqi offensive in September 1980 came in the nick of time for the United States. The latter's domination of Iran was in ruins after the February 1979 revolution, and on top of that after November 1979, it had been confronted with the problem of the occupation of its embassy in Tehran and the kidnapping of its diplomatic personnel. The US operation in Tabas in April 1980 aimed at liberating the hostages from the "nest of spies" had failed

lamentably.

In fact, the main result that Washington could hope for from the entry of Iraqi troops onto Iranian soil, aside from a very hypothetical overthrow of the Khomeini regime, was to reactivate Iran's dependence on the United States.¹⁵ The cornerstone of this dependence was not the economy but rather the army that the Pentagon had built up for the shah and which Khomeini had inherited.¹⁶

In 1978, when the Shah's political bankruptcy became evident, Washington centered its Iranian strategy on the imperial army (a military government headed by General Azhari was formed in November 1978). It has continued to do so. Already in February 1979, the army was the terrain on which a compromise was reached between Washington and Khomeini. Both parties shared the same concern for saving the army from the breakup that threatened it.¹⁷

Until the embassy affair, Carter had supplied spare parts for the Iranian army for its war against the Kurds. The Iraqi invasion was then to give this army a chance to pull itself together and refurbish its image. The Islamic regime freed and reintegrated the Shah's army officers who had been "purged" in the aftermath of the February revolution.

"In October 1980, a month after the start of hostilities, Washington informed the Iranian government that it was ready to support it, to lift its sanctions and to provide weapons and spare parts in exchange for the handing back of the hostages."¹⁸ In fact, if the spectacular turn-around by Tehran that Carter may have dreamed about did not take place, the fact remains that the embassy affair was settled in January 1981 in conditions that seemed unimaginable before September 1980, and were a great boon to the big US banks. On February 2, 1981, the leading US business magazine *Business Week* wrote eloquently: "Except for the hostages, the banks appeared to be the major winners in the deal." The magazine even quoted a former administration official to the effect that it was the banks that "profited in the end from the hostage taking!"

US government complicity with Iran

In reality, the main US quid pro quo in the deal, without which the whole thing would have been absurd, was kept secret in the interests of both parties. It was the green light given by Washington to Israel for deliveries of US arms and spare parts to Tehran through Turkey.¹⁹ For the US equipped and trained Iranian army, such supplies had a vital importance.

Besides its calculations about the future role of the Iranian army, the US government found a justification for its tacit complicity with Iran in the war in its convergence with the Khomeini regime over anti-communism and hostility to the

USSR. This was a major consideration for Washington's strategists. Both parties supported the Afghan Mujahadeen against Moscow and Kabul's troops. In 1981, the pro-Soviet communist Tudeh party was forced underground in Iran. The resumption of Soviet arms shipments to Bagdad in 1982 was to confirm this trend.

Soviet diplomats expelled

In February 1983, on the basis of intelligence transmitted by the British services, the Tudeh party's infrastructure was destroyed, its leaders were arrested, along with hundreds of other people.²⁰ At the same time, 18 Soviet diplomats were expelled. Washington's tacit and unavowed complicity with Iran had, of course, its ups and downs from 1981 to 1986.²¹ The main phase of tension over this period was between October 1983 and the end of 1984.

This phase was marked by the following events: the blowing up of the Marine headquarters in Beirut and the resumption of activities and seizures of hostages organized or "inspired" by Tehran; "Operation Staunch" launched by Washington in January 1984 to halt arms sales to Iran by its allies; Iran's overstepping the limit mentioned at the beginning of this article — in response to Iraqi attacks on its commercial shipping, Tehran sent its Phantom F-4 fighters against ships serving Kuwaiti and Saudi ports; and finally a very dissua-

11. In 1985, the figure of \$50,000 was cited in this respect.

12. The Iraqi army has been considerably reinforced and toughened up in seven years' fighting against a numerically superior enemy.

13. In third place before the war, after Japan and West Germany. See above on the subject of French arms sales to Bagdad.

14. Corresponding to the Pentagon's six major military commands, including CENTCOM (Central Command), which is in charge of the "crisis crescent" extending from Pakistan to Somalia through Egypt.

15. Washington could not be unaware of the fact that in September 1980, no reactionary force in Tehran was able in the short term to replace the Islamic regime. Moreover, far from bringing this regime down, the Iraqi invasion was to serve to the highest degree to reinforce it by eliminating all its real or potential adversaries.

16. The oil factor, in this respect, offers a considerable margin of autonomy, permitting, for example, the survival of a Qadhafi.

17. Very many accounts and testimonies confirm that this compromise was taken up directly in negotiations.

18. Chapour Haghghat, *Iran, la révolution islamique*, Complexe, Brussels, 1985, p.190.

19. The crash of a cargo plane in Turkey in July 1981 exposed these secret shipments.

20. Thanks to the defection of the Soviet vice-consul in Tehran.

21. Prisoner of its own ideology and the feelings of its popular clientele, as well as of the broad Iranian masses, the Khomeini regime has constantly kept up violently anti-American rhetoric, to which the United States has replied in kind. For those who might still take these exchanges of invective for the expression of the real policy of both governments, it might be noted that the anti-Zionist, or even anti-Jewish, talk of the Iranian regime is no less violent than its anti-American talk, but this did not prevent the long collaboration that has now come to light between Israel and the Iran of the ayatollahs.

sive intervention by the Saudi airforce — it would be more correct, to say the Saudi-American airforce — against the Iranian airforce.

A truce between the two parties following this escalation led in the spring of 1985 to a full-blown resumption of their unavowed collaboration. This was the episode that was to lead to the Irangate scandal in the autumn of 1986. The policy followed, with Reagan's blessing, by the CIA-National Security Council (NSC) group of Casey, MacFarlane and Poindexter was in no way dictated by any humanitarian concern for obtaining the release of the American hostages held in Lebanon. It was the logical continuation of the line of conduct described above, which started shortly after the Iraqi invasion in September 1980.

"It is in US interests to support the Iranian army"

This approach, which involves relying on the ex-imperial army, still has its defenders in the US establishment, as well as among the Iranian reactionaries. Questioned by *Newsweek* (March 16, 1987) about the opportuneness of continuing relations between Washington and Tehran, Ali Pahlavi, nephew of the deceased Shah, gave this lucid response. "It is in American interests to continue to supply spare parts to Iran — not to get the hostages out of Lebanon, but to support the only institution in Iran that is still on the side of the free world: the Iranian armed forces."

If Iraq's offensive against Iran in September 1980 came in the nick of time for Washington, as explained that was essentially because it made it possible to renew Tehran's military dependence on the United States. That is the reason for Washington's offers of support to the Islamic regime made immediately after the invasion. Unless that is understood, it is impossible to grasp the underlying coherence of US policy; it would seem utterly absurd. This is a major inconsistency in a certain superficial, black-and-white view that Iraq has served as a proxy for the United States, which wanted it to win. This way of looking at things is totally out of line with very stubborn facts — Washington's role in arming Iran and Moscow's in arming Iraq.

In fact, US imperialism no more wanted a victory by Iraq in 1980-82 than it wants one by Iran today. Washington's attitude has been quite well summed up by Kissinger, who said in early 1984 that the ideal outcome for the United States would be if both belligerents lost! In this, he was echoed recently by the Israeli minister of defence, Yitzhak Rabin, who said, "Israel hopes that there will be no victor in this war."²²

When you realize Iran's strategic importance in US imperialism's anti-Soviet line-up and remember that the Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, on two occasions in November 1980 declared himself in favor of a

breakup of Iran and self-government for its various minorities, the conclusion from the US point of view follows quite logically.²³ "The United States never wanted a decisive victory by Iraq. The disappearance of the Islamic regime would not necessarily create a favorable situation for it.²⁴ Defeat for Iran would threaten to fan rebellions by the minorities, to provoke a civil war, and — worse still — lead to the dismemberment of Iran."²⁵

However, the United States had other reasons besides the underlying difference between US and Iraqi interests for wanting the war to drag on and to see Iraq get bogged down in it. (In fact, it is an elementary error of logic to deduce an identity of interests between the two countries from the fact that Iraq's unleashing of the war in September 1980 was opportune for US interests.) They had to do with the situation in Iraq itself.

From 1971 to 1975, the Ba'athist faction in power in Bagdad had tried frantically to outbid its Syrian rivals in opposition to imperialism, Zionism and Arab reaction.²⁶ In 1972, Iraq signed a "treaty of friendship and cooperation" with the USSR. At the same time, it made a pact and subsequently a front with the Iraqi Communist Party, two of whose leaders were included in the government until 1979. Moreover, Iraq sponsored the "Rejection Front," which was formed to oppose the schemes for an Israeli-Arab negotiated settlement.

In 1975, under military pressure from the Kurds — who were backed by the Shah, Israel and the United States — the Bagdad regime went down on one knee and moderated its Arab policy. But this did not mean that it was lining up behind Washington's allies in the region. Saddam needed a breathing space in order to consolidate his personal dictatorship and to eliminate all his rivals and enemies — Kurds, communists, Shi'ite fundamentalists and even Ba'athists.²⁷

Iraq plays regional power game

The continuing ambition of the bourgeois nationalist bureaucracy in power in Bagdad, magnified by the tyrant Saddam's personal megalomania, was to impose itself as the dominant force in the region by taking advantage of the sharp rise in its oil incomes after 1974. It got its opportunity when Egyptian president Sadat visited Israel in 1977 and the process was set in motion that would lead to the signing of the Camp David accords in September 1978 by Israel, the United States and Egypt. In this way, the country that had long been leader in the region chose to isolate itself from the community of Arab countries.

During this period, Iraq bought several thousands of millions of dollars worth of arms from the USSR and, to a lesser extent, from France. In November 1978, it called a summit of Arab heads of state in Bagdad,

which denounced the notorious accords and excluded Egypt from the fold. At the same time, Iraq concluded an accord with Syria providing for a fusion of the two countries. The agreement was broken in July 1979, after having thrown a scare into the United States and its allies in the region.

The faltering and then the fall of the Shah removed a major hindrance for the Bagdad regime, enabling it to resume its anti-American and anti-Zionist bluffing. But after February 1979, it found itself confronted with the installation in Tehran of a government violently hostile to it because of its ferocious repression of the Iraqi Shi'ite fundamentalist movement.²⁸ Then, the combination of a whole series of developments led Saddam to decide to send his army against Iran: the revolt of the Kurdish, Arab, and Azerbaijani national minorities starting in the spring of 1979; the sharpening of political conflicts in Tehran; and, especially, the deterioration of the Iranian army and the cutting off of its major source of supply, the United States, as a result of the embassy affair.

Saddam sought to kill three birds with one stone — to wipe out the affront dealt him by the Shah in 1975²⁹; to get rid of Khomeini and Iran as a regional power by giving impetus to the breakup of the regime and the country³⁰; and in that way considerably to strengthen his claims to regional dominance. Not one of these objectives, not one, could be shared by Washington. They were all contrary to its strategic interests. While the US government welcomed the Iraqi military initiative, this was, as indicated, because it improved the perspectives for its protégé, the Iranian army, gaining a greater role, if not taking power.

Overall, what Washington hoped to get from the war between Iran and Iraq was the opposite of Bagdad's objectives — a strong government in Tehran better able to repel the Iraqi invasion.³¹ This why Washington wanted the war to last! The bogging down of the Iraqi army and its subsequent setbacks, moreover, pushed Bagdad into the arms of the Arab monarchies of the Gulf, which it had earlier sought to dominate. By the same token, Iraq was inevitably led to court Washington, the mentor of these regimes, who held the keys to the Iranian war.

In 1984, at the height of the phase of friction between Iran and the United States, Iraq re-established its diplomatic relations with Washington, which had been broken



since June 1967³² Relations between the two countries, nonetheless, continued to be marked with mutual distrust. In fact, in 1985-86, in the context of wheeling and dealing between Washington and the dominant faction in Tehran, and with the complicity of the Saudis³³, alternatives to Saddam satisfactory to all three of these parties had been envisaged as part of a settlement of the conflict.³⁴ This confirms the concern of the Saudis and the Americans, shared and voiced openly by the Israelis, about the role Iraq might play, if its army is not dismantled at the outcome of the conflict.

Why then suddenly, in 1987, did a consensus seem to develop among the great powers for putting an end to the Gulf war? Why, in particular, was American imperi-

ny think that the war should not be stopped before.

First of all there is the economic situation. In the Middle East, in the beginning there was oil. The year 1986 was marked by a price war, conducted with great fanfare by the Saudi oil minister, Ahmed Zaki Yamani. It cost him his job. Against the background of a continual worsening of the structural imbalance between the supply and demand of oil to the detriment of the exporters — a trend that can only continue in the recession that is looming after the stock market crash — the Saudi minister wanted to knock the bottom out from under prices by flooding the market. The objective of this was to win back a large part of the market and to force Saudi Arabia's competitors in OPEC to accept greater discipline.

Oil market anarchy receded since 1986

As far as discipline is concerned, at least, it seems that the lesson has been learned, and the anarchy on the oil market has receded a bit since the price stabilization agreement in OPEC in December 1986. In other words, even if there were no longer any material hindrance to its oil exports, Iran could not afford to exceed by too much the oil production quota allotted to it. If it did that, it would risk losing whatever gains it made through a drop in the price. That is because Saudi Arabia now refuses to try keep the prices stable by cutting back its own production and thereby absorbing the over-pumping of others. As for Iraq, it is already producing at maximum possible capacity.

In all, the ending of the Gulf conflict today would not have the dramatic impact on

the oil market that it might have had in 1981-85. This threat is still less because both belligerents have been acquiring means for exporting that are secure from military actions. Via pipelines linking its wells to the Mediterranean through Turkey and to the Red Sea through Saudi Arabia, Iraq now has an export capacity of about 2.5 million barrels a day, which equals its pre-war level.

Iran oil pipeline to USSR

As for Iran, it is building a pipeline linking its oil fields to the Gulf of Oman, beyond the Straits of Hormoz. Moreover, it is projecting a conversion of its natural gas pipeline to Baku in the USSR to transport oil, which would make it possible to export its entire quota safe from attacks by Iraqi planes. In addition, since it has a wider margin for increasing its production (which today is only 40 per cent of what it was under the Shah), Iran can always boost its income by exporting more oil at cut-rate prices, which is what it has been doing. It can always find buyers, since this a profitable business for all concerned (see footnote 4).

For all these reasons, the operators on the world oil market have no reason to hope that the war will last in 1987. Along with this, interest is fading on the part of the arms merchants formerly involved in selling arms to the two belligerents. Since Iran-gate, the imperialist arms exporters can no longer count on their governments hypocritically looking the other way, at least as regards shipments to Iran. These traffickers have profited from the attitude of the imperialist states, but they do not decide their policies.

22. Speech to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy on July 12, 1987, quoted by A. Kapeliuk in *Le Monde diplomatique*, *ibid.*

23. Press conferences on November 12 and 27.

24. In the initial months of the war, when Iraq had the upperhand and the Iranian left seemed to be the main candidate for taking power in Tehran.

25. Chapour Haghghat, *op. cit.*, p.190.

26. Of the Ba'ath party, "Party of the Arab Socialist Rebirth," of populist-nationalist origins. Opposing factions govern in Iraq and Syria.

27. The break with the Iraqi CP and the latter's liquidation in the country in 1978-79 did not mean that Bagdad went over to the American side, any more than the liquidation of the Tudeh party in 1983 meant that Tehran lined up with Washington. What is more, Iraq has maintained its close relations with the USSR, despite some frictions.

28. The main part of this movement, notably the Al-Dawa party, has fought the "Communist and atheist" Ba'ath regime since its establishment in 1968, and in fact began its reactionary fight after the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958. Before getting Khomeini's sponsorship, this movement had been supported by the Shah himself, also a Shi'ite, although not a fundamentalist — unlike the majority of Iraqi leaders who are Sunni.

29. Besides making political concessions in the Algiers accords of March 1975, Saddam Hussein, with a knife to his throat, also made a major concession to the Shah on drawing the boundary line between the two countries. In exchange, the Shah abandoned the Kurds, who suffered a severe defeat as a result.

30. In this framework, Saddam even cherished the

hope of grabbing Iran's Arab province, Khuzistan (Arabistan), the main oil-producing region of the former empire.

31. This was the perspective adopted by the deceased Shah's son, Reza Pahlavi, who sent a telegram on September 25, 1980, of which the following is a sample: "The independence and territorial integrity of Iran take precedence over any dogmatic or political consideration. In this crucial moment for the life of our country, I would like to give my blood to safeguard the inviolability of our dear fatherland."

32. It might be added, as an additional touch to the image of Saddam Hussein as an American agent as propagated by the Khomeinists, that in 1978 he was decorated in Havana by Fidel Castro with the Order of Jose Marti!

33. In May 1985, Prince Saud El Faysal, the Saudi minister of foreign affairs, paid a visit to Tehran, the first official visit by a Saudi representative since 1979. In December, his Iranian counterpart, Velayati, in turn visited Riyadh.

34. An Iraqi Communist opposition magazine published in London has printed edifying information on this subject. (*Al-Ghad*, No. 20, March 1987). This is an opportunity for a reminder that on the socio-economic level — the extent of the nationalizations (including of commerce, whose freedom is sacrosanct in Tehran), agrarian reform, the status of women and so on — the Iraqi regime is clearly in advance of that of the mul-lahs. With regard to repression, neither one has any reason to envy the other. But the Ba'ath dictatorship is monolithic, unlike the Islamic dictatorship, which is further distinguished by its capacity to whip up fanaticism that the Ba'athists have never had.



alism suddenly in such a hurry to end the conflict? Why did they wait until seven years had passed, a million people had lost their lives, millions had been wounded, handicapped, orphaned and made homeless (to say nothing of the material damage that has been mentioned). Why did the great powers wait until July 20, 1987, to get a unanimous resolution from the UN Security Council that "demands, as an initial measure towards a negotiated settlement, that Iran and Iraq immediately observe a cease-fire...and without delay withdraw all their forces to the internationally recognized borders"?

Such a demand could have been made unanimously by the great powers at any time after September 1980. Why did the US secretary of state, George Shultz, suddenly say, also on July 20 to the UN: "The world has had enough, the war has to stop now"? The answer is to be found in the same factors that made Shultz and compa-

As for Iraq, its prime suppliers — the USSR and France — are worried about the big debt that it has accumulated to them, and they know that its arms import capacities are being exhausted by a saturation of heavy equipment on the one hand and a reduction of its available finance on the other.

This latter consideration is fundamental. The Arab oil monarchies that have carried Iraq financially over recent years cannot keep this up. The situation of the oil market (quotas and falling prices) has brought a decline of their oil revenues in monetary terms and still more in buying power, owing to the continuing fall of the dollar, in which oil transactions are carried out. This reality is beginning to weigh heavily, even on the promises of post-war deals that have so whetted the appetites of the industrial powers. This is why, from the standpoint of imperialist economic interests, it is high time to halt the mutual destruction of Iran and Iraq.

Escalation of threats against the USA

On the level of strategic and political considerations, from Washington's standpoint, Shultz's statement that "the war must end now" is equally justified. Let us start with Iran. The main fiasco of Irangate was not the scandal that besmirched the White House but the erosion of the relations secretly built up between the Reagan administration and the very influential president of the Iranian parliament, Hojatollah Rafsanjani. The way in which the latter pulled back once the dirty business was discovered and started escalating threats against the American Great Satan has badly scalded the Devil's imps in Washington, even though they were well used to infernal cookery.

This misadventure showed the US leaders that the relationship of forces in Tehran was more delicate than they thought. In fact, over and above the various and often contradictory interpretations of the factional struggle in the Iranian regime that can be found in the world press, it is possible to identify roughly two blocs in the conglomerate of socio-political cliques that today make up the "Islamic Republic" — blocs that are also very heterogeneous.

On the one side, there is the bloc whose leading figure is Rafsanjani. It includes the military, technocrats and other partisans of a "normal" bureaucratic capitalist state. On the other, there is the configuration of hardened fundamentalists. It embraces a gamut from the reactionary far right of the regime grouped around the journal *Ressalat* — which responds with cries of outrage in the name of Islam against any limitation of the freedom of commerce and is linked to the Central Council of Tehran Traders — to the regime's populist far left, the radical fundamentalists, "supporters of the Imam's line", who plead the cause of the *mostaza-*



feen (the disinherited), but whose radicalism is expressed mainly at the level of exporting the Islamic revolution.³⁵ The latter currents have a major base within the clergy and in the Pasdaran, the Revolutionary Guards.

The fundamentalist configuration defends the specificity and continuity of the "revolutionary" institutions, including strict adherence to Islamic law and clerical power, in which pre-eminence is accorded to the *faghih*, (religious expert) and the *maktabi* (pious). In this regard, this configuration of currents supports the principle of *velayat-e-faghih*, the tutelage of the *faghih*, and therefore Ayatollah Khomeini's successor chosen according to this rule, Ayatollah Montazeri. On the other hand, this principle leaves no chance for Rafsanjani, who is not even an ayatollah, to assume legitimate supreme authority after Khomeini's death.³⁶

Need to free the Iranian army from the front

Because of its extreme heterogeneity, the fundamentalist configuration has no serious governmental perspective, other than to increase the present chaos. As a bloc opposed to Rafsanjani, however, it can cause him considerable trouble, as it has amply demonstrated. The *Ressalat* group and the "Imam's line" group have unanimously denounced the parliamentary president's dealings with Washington. For an outcome favorable to the US to emerge from the Iranian cauldron — whether represented by Rafsanjani or by a military coup — the relationship of forces in Tehran has to be modified. The indispensable condition for this is for the Iranian army came back from the front.

Before Rafsanjani, for similar reasons Bani Sadr counted on such an eventuality. Early in 1981, he confides, "negotiation [with Iraq] was on the point of succeeding on honorable terms. However, fearing a return of an army once again ready and the

reinforcement of the prestige of the head of state [Bani Sadr], the clerics in the Islamic Revolutionary Party hostile to him torpedoed this possibility for peace."³⁷ This same scenario seems to be repeating itself in the context of a different relationship of forces for Rafsanjani, who with the US administration explored the conditions referred to before for settling the conflict.³⁸ In any case, Washington is now convinced of the need to end the war in order to enable its protégé, the former army of the Shah, to bring its weight to bear in Iranian politics.

These considerations are compounded by a crucial factor that loomed up at the end of 1986 and the beginning of 1987. Under the joint pressure of Saudi Arabia and the United States, the Bagdad regime had agreed to reduce tension in the waters of the Arab-Persian Gulf after the flare-up in 1984. It rightly felt that it had been the dupe of the US machinations revealed by Irangate, and decided that it was not going to be fooled again. In autumn 1986, its airforce resumed intensive attacks against all the Iranian terminals, including those in the southern part of the Gulf.³⁹ This inevitably (as was in fact intended) provoked Iran to carry out its threats of reprisals, in the event against Kuwait.

In the absence of any maritime traffic

35. The latter current recently suffered a major setback with the execution of the chief of the "Bureau for Aiding Islamic Liberation Movements," Mehdi Hashemi, who, by the way, was responsible for spilling the beans about the wheeling and dealing between the Americans and Rafsanjani.

36. Hojatollah is a rank below that of ayatollah in the hierarchy of Shi'ite divines.

37. Paul Balta in *Maghreb-Mashrek*, No. 113, July-September 1986.

38. The following is an excerpt from an interview given by Rafsanjani to Iranian TV in early September 1986: "Q. If Iraq were governed by a non-Ba'athist but American government, what would be Iran's position? A. We are fighting the Iraqi Ba'ath party and are not responsible for who governs Iraq...If the role of the Ba'ath party is ended, many problems would be solved."

39. Of course, the general aim of the Iraqi attacks is to obstruct its enemy's oil exports in order to cut this economic nerve of the Iranian war effort. On this subject, see my article in *IV* 125, September 14, 1987.

protection of Saudi Arabia, Tehran turned its fury against the small emirate, thereby overstepping the two limits set by the imperialist powers for the Gulf war. "Freedom of navigation" in the Gulf for non-belligerents was attacked, as well as the security of a protégé of imperialism, one moreover that had a great economic importance.

Nonetheless, at first Washington did not respond favorably to Kuwait's request to the great powers for protection. To general surprise, it was the USSR that took the initiative of complying with it, placing three tankers flying the Soviet flag at the disposal of the emirate. In so doing, Moscow intended to show the Arab states, in the midst of the Irangate scandal, that the USSR was a more reliable ally than the Americans.

Thus, with very little enthusiasm, the United States was obliged to meet the challenge and agree to extend American registration to 11 Kuwaiti tankers. Paradoxically, it did not go into action and send an imposing military fleet to protect the American-flagged ships until after its frigate, the *Stark*, was attacked by the Iraqi airforce, an assault that does not seem to have been fortuitous. Involving itself hesitantly, the Reagan administration tried to get its European allies, who in turn dragged their feet, to participate in the operation. However, Iran's reaction in late July and early August greatly exceeded the two limits by laying mines in the international waters of the Gulf and organizing demonstrations of pilgrims in Mecca (Saudi Arabia), which were bloodily repressed. This finally convinced all the imperialist military powers to send battle-ships to escort merchant vessels.

On the basis of a wrong understanding of the Iran-Iraq conflict, some people have interpreted the deployment of the imperialist armada as representing an intention to intervene in the conflict in favor of Baghdad. In the present circumstances, there is no reason to expect such a step, or to think that the reasons the Western governments have cited for sending their fleets are only "pretexts." These reasons are quite sufficient from the imperialist point of view to justify forming the multinational naval force. In fact, what Washington and its allies want to do is force respect for "freedom of navigation" in the Gulf and to be ready to intervene in defence of the oil monarchies, if Iran were to attack their territories.⁴⁰

Even if Iraq were to falter militarily, and there was a real threat of the decisive Iranian military victory that the imperialists have every reason to fear, if only because it would destabilize the neighboring oil monarchies, it is highly unlikely that the imperialist forces would intervene within the territorial limits of the two belligerents. That would involve many dangers, both because of the reaction that it might arouse from the populations of the region and from the USSR. For the eventuality of an Iraqi defeat, a much more realistic scenario is already being prepared — intervention in Iraq by the Egyptian army. This was, more-

over, discussed at the recent Arab summit in Amman (Jordan).

In fact, Washington is now making considerable exertions to force Iran, through a unanimous threat of sanctions by the great powers, to accept the UN Security Council resolution. But the American effort for the moment is running up against the shilly-shallying of Moscow. On the one hand, the Kremlin is demanding the withdrawal of the imperialist fleets from the Gulf and adjacent waters. On the other, it is trying to score points with Iran, a state that Washington and Moscow in turn have not stopped courting since 1979.

Any internationalist attitude toward the

Tasks for internationalists

Gulf war today has to combine a response to its fundamental character with a reaction to conjunctural developments. The fundamental stance, of course, is to denounce the senseless butchery inflicted on the peoples of Iran and Iraq, to call for an uprising of the working people of both countries against their respective regimes, to call for the fraternization of the soldiers of both armies against their rulers.

It is necessary to call for an immediate and unconditional cease-fire between the two warring states, and for the right of self-determination of the national minorities within each. That is the only proletarian attitude toward a war in which working people have nothing to gain, and have their lives to lose!

It is also necessary, of course, to denounce the role of the imperialist states that have cynically fostered this long carnage, as well as that of the bureaucratic "socialist" states that have made no small contri-

bution to the same end. It is necessary to denounce the arms sales to both belligerents, which will only increase the already staggering number of victims of the murderous folly of Saddam Hussein and Khomeini.

In view of the intervention of the imperialist fleets, it is of course also necessary to demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of foreign fleets from the Gulf and adjacent waters. This must, in particular, be the main axis of any campaign on the Gulf war in the imperialist countries.

The governments of these countries have to be energetically denied the right to pose as "protectors of international navigation". The hypocrisy of those who wax indignant about Iranian mining of the Gulf waters, but have never protested about American mining of Nicaraguan ports has to be denounced.

Any economic sanctions directed against the peoples of the region must be opposed. It is also necessary to oppose any embargo on arms shipments to Iran alone, and to demand a similar embargo on arms shipments to Iraq.⁴¹ These must be the major themes in the response of internationalists to the situation in the Gulf. ★

40. "The determination with which the Western powers are striving to protect these strategic waterways and keep the Gulf open may have less to do with their fear of an oil shortage than with their desire to keep the access routes open to a thriving export market, the only one in the third world today able to absorb \$60,000 million worth of goods a year, of which half comes from the EEC and a third from the United States." (Chapour Haghghat, *op. cit.*, p.189.)

41. It is necessary to denounce the hypocrisy prevailing in a country such as France, where supplying shells to Iran was the object of a "scandal," while the enormous shipments of arms of all types to Iraq are considered entirely "normal."

INTERNATIONAL MARXIST REVIEW



The significance of Gorbachev
Ernest Mandel

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New challenges for Kanak independence fighters

SINCE ITS BOYCOTT of the November 1984 local elections, the Kanak independence movement has faced many tests. The final adoption of pro-independence positions by all components of the nationalist movement and the formation of the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) projected the struggle to the front of the political stage. At first caught by surprise by this radicalization, the French state subsequently had the time to gauge what was at stake and to adjust its policy accordingly.

From the springboard of the 1984-85 mobilizations, the FLNKS tried to stabilize the new relationship of forces by accepting the constitutional game and involving itself in the running of the "regions." Unfortunately, this tactic proved very dangerous. Today, the FLNKS leaders recognize that they are in a certain political and strategic impasse. French imperialism is now in a position to launch a counter-offensive. There is now a real danger that the Kanak national movement will find itself isolated, as in the past.

Nothing has changed in New Caledonia. The numerous constitutional reforms over the last few years have not even scratched the surface of the French-style apartheid system on the islands. Quite the contrary! The recent acquittal of "loyalists" who cold-bloodedly murdered a whole group of Kanak activists at Yenghène is a reminder of this disagreeable reality [see box].

Likewise, the holding of the Pacific Games in New Caledonia today — despite the FLNKS' call for a boycott — shows that while some of the small states in the region may be ready to vote for motions in the UN, they are certainly not going to alienate Paris. The coming congress of the FLNKS should, in normal course, review all the tactics of the movement. Owing to confusion about the FLNKS' strategy, the solidarity movement in France has tended to ebb a bit in recent months

TODAY, three years after the Kanak uprising of November 1984, the referendum in September and the new status worked out by the

Chirac government mark a turn in the situation in the islands. The decentralization proposed by Bernard Pons [present minister for overseas territories] is a subtle combination. It takes the regionalization in the Fabius plan [of the Socialist Party government ousted in the April 1986 elections] as its springboard. But the regional carve-up it calls for reflects other motives, and aims at putting Kanak elected officials in even more of a minority in the institutions.

The four new regions proposed correspond to the traditional patterns of uneven economic development on the islands. The essential power will remain in the hands of the settler right. Of the three regions that the pro-independence forces currently administer, they will at best retain two (the Iles Loyauté and the eastern coast). And even in these areas, their room for maneuver will be further restricted. The Local Executive Council will assure the predominance of the RPCR [Rally for Caledonia in the Republic, the settler party linked to Chirac's RPR in France] and the omnipotence of the French high commissioner. The territorial congress will also remain largely under the jurisdiction of the settler right.

A policy aimed at bolstering the most traditional forms of colonialism is being established. It includes relaunching European land acquisitions in the bush, military surveillance of the Kanak tribes and injections of public money to support the local market artificially, with the more or less avowed aim of eventually reviving European immigration.

Seeking to divert the independence struggle

Unlike Fabius's regionalization proposals, the present government in Paris no longer seeks to divert the independence struggle by co-opting nationalist elected officials and a fringe of its activists into the administration of regional mini-governments and economic management. Now, the aim is to use decentralized institutions to open up more and more of the bush to the local capitalist lobbies, while further marginalizing the Kanak masses economically and politically.

Fabius addressed himself to the leadership of the FLNKS [Kanak Socialist Nationalist Liberation Front], intending to use the hearing that he got to bring the Kanaks back into the institutions. Pons, taking account of new relationship of forces, is no longer interested in the corrupted clan chiefs and Melanesians who, like the Libération Kanake Socialiste (LKS) mayor of Poindimie, are ready to collaborate openly with the right in return for investment in their districts. [The LKS is a group outside the FLNKS distinguished by its reformist

and sometimes collaborationist positions.] The return to a policy of excluding the Kanak people is the basis for the government's unyielding attitude toward the FLNKS.

Paris and the local right differ, however, over the extent and speed of marginalizing the Kanak population. The RPCR, goaded by the far right, is demanding that the state break more sharply with the Fabius regionalization policy and carry out a more open repression of the Kanaks and the FLNKS. Pons himself wants to take advantage of the foundation laid down by the Fabius plan, and the absence of a radical alternative on the part of the SP and the president, to build a consensus of silence around his orientation. To this end, he is pretending to leave the door open for negotiations with the FLNKS in order to salve President Mitterrand's conscience.

Divide and rule via regionalization policy

In early 1985, repression and Pisani's promises of independence-association managed to halt the surge of the pro-independence mobilizations. [Pisani was the French high commissioner under the Socialist government.] After breaking the momentum of the Kanak revolt, the Fabius government pushed through in the summer of 1985 a new statute based on a regionalization of the institutions. This orientation no longer set as a solution the perspective of an automatic drift toward independence-association. It envisaged only holding a self-determination referendum in unspecified conditions. Paris was then seeking, above all, to gain time.

Fabius-style regionalization had a specific objective — to reintegrate Kanak leaders into institutions readjusted to accommodate them and to try, through state-financed economic projects in the bush, to increase the involvement of Melanesians in the financial economy as well. In the long run, the idea was to effect a new social division of the Kanak people that would make it possible to envisage a peaceful reform of the institutions. There was no longer any question of moving toward independence in any form whatsoever.

The Fabius plan's economic side was extremely insidious because it held up the possibility for a painless readjustment of social inequalities in the territory. However, without control of the state power and without a radical agrarian reform, it is hard to see how the perennially oppressed could turn the tide of social and national inequality.

The FLNKS leadership was led to accept the Fabius plan all the more easily because it suffered from a clear lack of strategic perspectives. It has to be recognized that the independence forces did not fully comprehend its dangers. So, the change in the attitude of Paris toward them after the victory of the right in the imperialist homeland was to put the FLNKS in a difficult situation.

LCR condemns Yenghène massacre verdict

IN RESPONSE to the acquittal of the settlers involved in the massacre of Kanaks at Yenghène, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, French section of the Fourth International, issued the following statement on October 30. It was reported in *Le Monde* as follows:

"In the view of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, 'Chirac's justice resembles that of the banana republics,' and the Nouméa verdict 'legitimizes the institution of the death penalty against Kanak independence fighters.' The LCR adds: 'Thus, in a New Caledonia occupied by French military forces, any settler has the right of life and death over Kanaks (considered to be subhuman) who run up against the speedy justice of the French occupiers...Le Pen [leader of the neo-fascist Front National in France] gets encouragement for his persecution of immigrants when [President Jacques] Chirac's France practices the same thing actively in its colonies.' Alain Krivine's organization ended by stating that it would 'help the FLNKS get justice.'"

Le Monde also noted that only Le Pen's National Front and the Association for Legitimate Defence expressed "gratification" at the verdict. ★

On top of the reactionary offensive from Paris, recent diplomatic setbacks (many countries drawing back from supporting the FLNKS in the UN, the limited capacity of the Pacific Forum countries for applying pressure) have pushed it into an even tighter corner. Consequently, belief in the impact that the diplomatic front could have and the illusions in a Pacific Forum made up of two imperialist countries and tiny states — all dependent on one way or another on the EEC or the United States — has been put in question.

The difficulties the independence forces are facing do not date just from the recent referendum. In fact, the balance sheet of that operation is rather paradoxical. The election results only confirmed what everyone knew beforehand. But the staging of the vote was part of a French diplomatic counter-offensive that has scored some points. Today, when the diplomatic ground is slipping a bit from under the feet of the Kanaks, the FLNKS has to confront some organizational and political weaknesses that reduce its capacity for bringing pressure to bear.

Nationalist strategy important to assess

The nationalist strategy followed since the September 1985 regional elections is not irrelevant to this balance sheet. Of course, the problem then was not simply participating in the elections. The criterion for this could only be what would best advance the independence struggle. The FLNKS' victory undoubtedly had a positive effect in that regard. But the way in which it subsequently worked actively in the institutions and all the gradualist illusions that this reflected (shown by the abandoning of other areas of activity) proved to be a very dangerous tactic.

The FLNKS stressed the economic work of its members in order to show the compe-

tence of Kanaks to manage, to "build Kanak" by developing the rural areas. Many actions involving a break with colonialism (land occupations, EPK [Kanak People's Schools]) were discouraged or even sharply criticized by the most prominent Kanak leaders in the name of this absolute priority of "demonstrating competence." The FLNKS' strategic framework of reference remained that of "the bush encircling and strangling Nouméa." But while this approach scored some successes in November 1984 when it involved active mobilizations, it could not be expected to achieve equivalent results in the economic realm.

Diplomatic gains fragile

The only area of activity accepted for continuing to change the relationship of forces was that of international diplomacy. Without underestimating the successes achieved in this field, it has to be said that diplomatic gains in general are fragile. This period did not see a significant advance in solving the difficult problems of the struggle in the islands. But, what is more, the possibilities for improving the organizational and political capacities of the FLNKS, for reinforcing its unity in action, were not grasped.

The present situation, therefore, includes certain aspects of an ebb in the mobilization of pro-independence forces. There is a general weakening of the FLNKS at the rank-and-file level (expressed in a withering away of some local committees following the turn toward economic activity). The most radical experiences were shunted to the sidelines (the EPK were isolated, becoming the object of sharp debates or even boycotts by some elements). Also marginalized were all those who can in general only express themselves fully at times of struggle and intense collective organization (youth and women). Organizational capaci-

ties declined in the southern region, Nouméa and Mont d'Or. There was a growth of parallel activities by the various groups making up the FLNKS.

A debate is now going on in the FLNKS over a new strategy for the coming months. Such a discussion, however, carries the danger of leaving its participants stuck on the horns of a dilemma, ignoring the possibility and the means for modifying the present relationship of forces. In fact, the negative balance sheet of the recent experiences of economic management and the present difficulties of mobilizing people can lead the independence movement to vacillate between two attitudes — pursuit of the crumbs of regional autonomy in the Pons plan as a final attempt to exercise institutional pressure (even if this means fostering pernicious illusions about the role of a future left president of France); or systematic pursuit of confrontation (at scattered points) with the repressive forces and rejection of any constitutional tactics.

Relationship between mass struggle and negotiation

Getting caught in such a dilemma would be very dangerous because it would lead above all to regarding the present relationship of forces as immutable and hopeless. Might it not be possible, on the basis of a different relationship of forces, to seek to counter the colonial state and its policy in such a way as to create a situation in which the relationship between mass struggle and negotiation would take a different form, one more favorable to the independence struggle?

Would not creating such a relationship of forces mean, first and foremost, settling down to strengthen the fighting organization of the entire Kanak people; appealing to layers still on the sidelines of this struggle; improving the activity and organization of the movement in the city in particular, in order to get away from the traditional underestimation of the importance of Nouméa; using the Papeete (2) events to shake up the Tahitian community; and strengthening the coordination and centralization of the struggle committees, among other things?

But does not all this require first of all a reevaluation of the assessment that has been made of the imperialist adversary, of its strategy, of the links between colonial domination and the power of money, and of power relations in the modern world?

This question of the link between the relationship of forces created by mobilization and the possibilities for winning new concessions was pointed up clearly in 1985 by Pisani's action against the hardest kernel of the Kanak mobilization. Were not his proposals in part determined by the breadth of the pro-independence mobilization of the time? The independence-association plan was a cover for a neocolonial perspective inspired by the Gaullist policy in Black Af-



rica in the 1960s. But it was also the most "advanced" status proposed.

For the government, Pisani was the man for the given situation. The FLNKS could have gained a more favorable relationship of forces through its November 1984 action. The state apparatus had to respond in the appropriate way, both in the choice of its personnel and in its proposals for negotiation. Pisani managed finally to get the FLNKS to lower its sights. He got it to retreat in Thio (1) by organizing a return to work in the mines, to retreat on the EPK, to relax its vigilance against the state apparatus.

Active and militant solidarity is vital

Illusions about Pisani himself were widespread in the FLNKS leadership, and this made it possible to get the front to drop its guard, and then to pay less attention to action tasks, which were the fundamental thing. This new state of affairs offered a foothold first for the Fabius plan and later for the policy of Bernard Pons. This is the starting point for the internal debate that the FLNKS is now relaunching.

There is a great danger that the coming months will see the development of isolated violent confrontations with the state apparatus, such as the one that involved the Saint Louis tribe (3). Such spontaneous local initiatives reflect the exasperation of a section of the Kanak population (young people in particular) in response to the disillusion of the past period. They involve a threat of a dispersion of the struggle.

This new situation may, moreover, catch off guard all those in France who were happy to see the FLNKS commit itself to constitutional action in 1985 and 1987. The isolation of the Kanak struggle from the democratic and anti-colonial forces in the imperialist heartland that finally flowed from this is a threat that must be firmly combated. This is all the more necessary as Mitterrand's last statement confirmed that there is no clear dichotomy between the right and the Socialist Party on the Caledo-

nian question. It cuts against too many aspects of the chauvinist traditions of state affairs that are shared by a lot of Socialist administrators.

In Kanaky, as well as in the solidarity movement in France, some people may imagine that an impasse in the situation would justify sitting back and waiting to the presidential elections. Nothing could be more illusory. Active and militant solidarity in the imperialist mother country has never been so necessary. Despite its limited forces, the Association for Information on, and Support for, the Rights of the Kanak People (Association information et soutien aux droits du peuple Kanak — AISDPK) plays a vital role. It will continue to do so in the coming period, if all the anti-colonialist forces commit themselves to supporting its initiatives and participating in them.

But it should be understood that anti-colonialism demands far too much clarity on key problems, such as the role of French imperialism and its institutions, for the ranks of its adherents to expand automatically and without difficulties. The tasks of building such a movement certainly cannot be abandoned. But in order to accomplish them, it will be necessary to wage a constant struggle to put pressure on all the democratic forces. While the latter will denounce the most flagrant injustices of colonialism, they often refuse to go further than that. In this area, it is necessary to dare to undertake a determined struggle for the Kanak people's right to independence. Such a fight will be relatively unpopular with public opinion in the beginning, but in time it could lead to a new situation. ★

1. In November 1984, the FLNKS called for an active boycott of the territorial elections. Actions were carried out against the polling stations. Homes of settlers were attacked to get weapons. It was on this occasion that Eloi Machoro distinguished himself, leading the occupation of the mining town of Thio. He was murdered in Thio by French gendarmes in January 1985.

2. The capital of Tahiti, another French colony in the Pacific, where there has just been a violent mobilization of dock workers and a part of the Polynesian population.

3. In the Saint Louis tribe, which inhabits an area not far from Mont d'Or, young people again set up roadblocks and clashed with gendarmes after a young Kanak was killed.

After Levesque: the anglo-bourgeoisie rewrites history

FIFTY THOUSAND people filed past Rene Levesque's coffin in the old Palace of Justice. Ten thousand waited on Notre Dame Street just to watch the departure of the hearse after the funeral. Crying, applauding and singing, the popular response to the death of Rene Levesque has been massive in Quebec.

They saw in him the symbol of a new pride in themselves, pride in being Quebecois. His death, on Sunday, November 1, is felt as a great loss of "un bon gars" (a good man). No other current politician was seen in the same light, as a truly sincere and honest person. The call by the Quebec government for national mourning only reflected this popular response.

SUSAN CALDWELL

AT THE SAME TIME, the media reported the responses of all the parliamentary leaders in Ottawa. Brian Mulroney spoke of a man who "followed a single dream and struggle for the full emancipation of Quebec". John Turner joined the chorus in praising Levesque. Ed Broadbent described him as responsible for "making French the dominant language in the life of Quebec". There seems to be a "rehabilitation" of Rene Levesque as a "good Canadian". The fact that less than ten years ago he was seen by English Canadian politicians as the greatest

danger to the Canadian state seems to have been forgotten. With the Meech Lake Accord [see IV 124], Quebec is now simply a province much like any other in the Canadian federal state, so the attitude is "let bygones be bygones" and bury that whole episode in Canadian history.

This sort of double vision is in part due to the nature of the Parti Quebecois (PQ) itself, which under Levesque was a bourgeois nationalist party with a progressive social democratic view of the state and its relationship to the unions. The PQ was built and based upon a rise in nationalist and working class struggles in the late 1960s and in the 1970s. It was the Sovereignty-Association wing of Rene Levesque and company that had power, as it progressively distanced itself from workers' aspirations, crushing union struggles — including the introduction of Bill 111 in the Common Front of 1983 — and softened and finally jettisoned its position on independence.

Ed Broadbent's more moderate answer is a concrete reflection of the situation of his party provincially, the National Democratic Party-Quebec (NDP-Q), and its relationship to the Parti Quebecois. The "Toupin Affair" has shown most clearly that the NDP-Q is recruiting from the members of the PQ. Toupin essentially wanted to formalize this, to allow for provincial membership in the PQ while having federal membership in the NDP. The PQ under Pierre Marc Johnson has disassociated itself from the independence project, and

therefore is almost indistinguishable from the Quebec Liberal Party (PLQ), as was demonstrated in the last elections with mutual accusations of who stole whose platform from whom. In this context, many militants are looking for an alternative to the PQ and PLQ to express their political aspirations. The NDP-Q presents itself as this alternative and, given the historical similarities on progressive social programs, it has attracted a number of people, some of whom are or were PQ members.

This situation was highlighted by both the "Toupin Affair" in the NDP and the call for a leadership change by Gerald Godin within the PQ on October 29, two days before Rene Levesque's death. Godin, who is one of the former ministers within the PQ cabinet and one of the most popular PQ politicians, sees that the only way to distinguish the PQ from the NDP-Q is on the independence question. He is hoping to transfer the leadership to Jacques Parizeau, who left the PQ when it dropped the independence plank from its platform in 1985.

At the moment, neither the PQ nor the NDP-Q respond to the needs of the working class, feminist and youth organizations. The PQ has a clear history of being anti-labour, which was the basis of its defeat in the last provincial elections. The NDP-Q must face the reality that any progressive movement in Quebec must have a clear position in support of self-determination for Quebec, including political independence. The NDP-Q congress at the end of November will have to take clear positions on both this political question and its organizational consequences for the relationship of the NDP-Q and the federal NDP.

Fight for national aspirations

A related issue is the relationship of the Quebec union centrals to the NDP-Q, which is far from settled, as only the Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ) has any formal position of support for the federal NDP. The same FTQ, however, is the strongest PQ supporter of the three Quebec centrals. There is discussion within the Teachers' Federation about affiliation to the NDP, but this could lead to a split in that central. So while activists are looking for a political organization through which their demands could be made, there is no ready answer.

Rene Levesque's death has focused attention on these problems. The federal politicians' response is to try and integrate him, and what he symbolized, into an "all Canadian" perspective. On the other hand, the massive popular support in Quebec demonstrates that the national aspirations of the Quebecois have not disappeared — nor have they been satisfied. ★

[From the November/December 1987 issue of Socialist Challenge, newspaper of the Fourth Internationalist Alliance for Socialist Action.]



Rene Levesque (DR)

Protests mount over police crackdown

BETWEEN October 26 and November 7, the Special Branch of the Malaysian police arrested 93 people under the Internal Security Act. The sweeping police and political crackdown in Malaysia has attracted growing criticism and protests, both within the country and internationally.

BARBARA WENTWORTH

DATUK SERI Dr Mahathir Mohamad explained the detentions of politicians and leaders of social organizations as necessary to prevent racial riots. However, several weeks after the start of the biggest police crackdown on social and political activists in Malaysian history, that reason has worn thin.

Most political observers, and ordinary Malaysians, now interpret the crackdown as a desperate attempt by the prime minister to save his own political career by silencing all effective critics of his policies, his personality and his position.

By November 7 a total of 93 people had been detained without trial or access to a lawyer. They are being kept in small, dark cells without proper lighting or ventilation, in solitary confinement. Many of them have not been allowed to see their relatives or friends. It is also not known where the majority are being held.

With continuous interrogation by Special Branch police, and being kept in solitary confinement without being able to speak to anyone, the political detainees must be undergoing tremendous physical — and especially psychological — stress.

Politicians and activists detained

On November 24 the petition for writs of habeas corpus filed by seven of the detainees were denied. They, along with the others, are still being held under the same conditions.

A study of the list of detainees reveals that while politicians (including several members of parliament and of the state assembly) are highest in number, a large proportion are leaders or active members of social and voluntary organizations involved in community work, civil rights,

consumer and environmental activities, labour rights and socio-economic research.

Among the people arrested and detained are well-known figures from the major political parties, including a few members of the ruling coalition of the Barisan Nasional (National Front). Three key leaders of the youth wing of the dominant component of the National Front, the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), eight important leaders of the Malaysian Chinese Association and five members of the Chinese-based Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia — all components of the National Front — are among those detained.

The opposition, however, is the worst hit by these arrests. Twenty-six leaders and members of opposition parties, including the general secretary of the (mainly Chinese) Democratic Action Party, Lim Kit Siang, together with 15 of his party colleagues and nine members of the Islamic Party of Malaysia were among the early victims of the crackdown.

In addition, the cream of the nation's non-governmental organizations appear to have been taken into prison. Most of these are small groups that carry out research or hold seminars and provide community services for poor communities or workers.

Among the groups the political detainees are associated with are Aliran, a social reform movement involved in civil and human rights issues; Sahabat Alam Malaysia (Friends of the Earth), a leading third world environment group that helps communities affected by ecological problems; the Institute for Social Analysis (Insan), a group of university academics that publishes books on social and economic themes; the Consumers' Association of Penang, widely acknowledged as the third world's most active and important consumer organization; the Malaysian Trade Union Congress, the main umbrella body of the country's labour unions; the Transport Equipment Union; the Environmental Protection Society; and several groups associated with the Catholic and Christian churches, such as the Office for Human Development.

"Racial tensions" used as a pretext

These groups find it incredible that their leading members are being detained in a swoop supposedly caused by heightened racial tensions. Those detained are advocates of multi-racial harmony, which they feel can be attained only through helping communities solve their basic problems, irrespective of the ethnic origin of the communities.

Also detained are leaders of grassroots people's organizations or movements, including the Perak Anti-Radioactive Committee (which is protesting against the operations of a Japanese company produc-



Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (DR)

ing radioactive substances), Felda (government-owned) land scheme settlers and workers in a Sarawak government land scheme who had gone on strike over wages and working conditions.

In order to clamp down further on dissent, the country's most lively newspapers, *The Star* (English) and *Watan* (Malaysian), have been banned. The other leading papers are mainly owned by UMNO and they have been warned not to carry news or analysis critical of the police crackdown. Indeed, the papers now carry very little news of the security developments or the fate of the political prisoners. Freedom of assembly has been suspended with the banning of all public meetings and rallies. Parliamentary proceedings with critical speeches made by both opposition party MPs and those in the prime minister's party, are being blacked out. The MPs have to resort to making photo-copies of parliamentary proceedings for private circulation.

Independent observers increasingly see the police crackdown on opposition politicians and leaders of social organizations, and the banning of critical papers and public meetings, as Mahathir's way of silencing criticisms against him and his political colleagues.

Accusations of corruption in government

In recent months the prime minister's credibility and authority have been shaken by revelations and accusations of corruption and abuse of power for financial gain by his party, UMNO, and by politicians such as finance minister Daim Zainuddin, and businessmen close to him.

The crackdown is also seen as a way to silence and cripple the prime minister's critics within his own party, who had almost succeeded in voting him out of office in the last party elections in April 1987.

To justify such widespread repression, Mahathir has painted a picture of extreme racial tension among the people, the Malays and the non-Malays in particular. The prime minister also raised the spectre of the violent and bloody racial conflict of May 1969 to justify the arrests and detention of his political opponents and dissidents, saying that they are "absolutely necessary" to prevent the escalation of the tension from breaking out into riots.

While there has been underlying tension among people of different ethnic groups, especially in recent weeks, much of it has been generated by government policies and by the squabbling among the racially organized political parties of the National Front coalition.

In recent months Mahathir has been deliberately allowing, indeed nurturing, racial tensions to draw attention away from other pressing economic and social problems like unemployment and economic stagnation.

The prime minister has promised to maintain the system of parliamentary de-

International protests

INTERNATIONAL protests are increasing over the detentions. On October 30, Amnesty International issued an urgent action notice requesting its members to send letters to the Malaysian prime minister to express concern at the detentions and asking for the detainees to be freed. In a press release, Amnesty said most of those arrested were prisoners of conscience detained for the non-violent expression of their opinions.

The International Commission of Jurists urged the Malaysian government to bring to trial or release the detainees.

The Regional Commission on Human Rights in Asia said the detentions should be viewed with grave concern and were an attempt "to stifle the activities of those concerned with environmental problems facing society. The use of the security act to intimidate such activists must be strongly condemned. Those detained should be released immediately or charged in an open court."

Eight members of the European Parliament (representing the Netherlands, UK, Greece, West Germany and Belgium) have also sent telegrams to the Malaysian prime minister and to the Inspector general of police expressing alarm over the arrests, especially of members of social groups.

Other international human rights organizations, including SOS Torture and the European Committee on Human Rights in Malaysia and Singapore, plus several worldwide environmental groups, have strongly condemned the arrests.

Readers of *IV* are urged to send messages of protest, requesting the immediate release of all the detainees, to: Dr Mahathir Mohamad, The Minister of Home Affairs, Jalan Dato Onn, Kuala Lumpur 50480, Malaysia. Telex: MA33099 PERMA. ★

mocracy, even while saying that the period of liberalism is over. In fact the recent police crackdown and associated government moves have substantially wiped out most of the vital institutions of democracy.

Resemblance to a police state

Malaysia today already resembles a police state. The 93 detainees were arrested under Section 73(1) of the Internal Security Act, which enables the police to detain anyone for a period of up to 60 days. Detainees are put in solitary confinement in harsh prison conditions and interrogated for several hours at a time.

After the 60-day period, the home minister can decide whether to sign an order detaining the person for an initial two-year period, or to release them. The two-year period can be renewed — some individuals have been detained without trial for up to 15 years.

In this all-enveloping atmosphere of extreme tension and fear, it is very difficult for those remaining out of prison to protest against the detentions. There is the fear that anyone voicing criticism of the arrests will themselves be arrested. Indeed, several people who were in the process of defending some of those detained were them-

selves arrested a few hours later.

But, despite such difficulties, several individuals and groups have publicly protested against the detentions. The most influential criticism has come from Malaysia's first prime minister and "father of independence", Tunku Abdul Rahman, who stated: "This is undemocratic and I deplore the attitude of the prime minister... It portends ill for the future of the country. What the future will be is difficult to answer. I cannot see how parliamentary democracy can be maintained."

The Bar Council, to which all the country's lawyers belong, also issued a statement describing the arrests as an "extremely serious matter."

A grouping of 14 social organizations in Kuala Lumpur — including the Social Science Society, the Association of Women Lawyers, Insan, Aliran and Young Christian Workers — was formed to provide assistance to the detainees and their families. It initiated a petition campaign calling on the government to either charge those detained or release them immediately. It disputed the government's reasoning that the arrests were needed to prevent racial riots. A similar support group has been formed from eight organizations in Penang. ★

[This article was compiled from reports issued by *Werkgroep Maleisië/Singapore, Utrecht, Netherlands.*]

**AROUND
THE
WORLD**



INTERNATIONAL

Moscow Trials Campaign

THE CAMPAIGN to clear the names of the accused in the Moscow Trials has been collecting signatories from all over the world (see *IV* 129 for full appeal and list of signatories). In each issue we are publishing the names of new supporters. You can contact the campaign c/o Michael Löwy, 34 rue des Lyonnais, 75005, Paris, France.

Latest signatories:

Greece: Editorial Board of the review *Skholiastis*.

Poland: Josef Piniór, ex-president Solidarnosc in Lower Silesia, and ex-member of Solidarnosc' clandestine National Coordinating Csn.

Switzerland: Andreas Gross, local councillor and vice-pres. Zurich Socialist Party; François Masnata, Lausanne Univ.; Georges Petersen, Vaud Council deputy, Lausanne Univ.

Turkey: Yildiz Sertel, Paris Univ. ★

IRELAND

A massive exercise in intimidation

RAIDS carried out by Irish police in November allegedly looking for IRA arms caches hit a very wide spectrum of political and social activists, *An Phoblacht*, the Irish Republican paper reported in its December 3 issue.

"Its real purpose as a massive exercise in political information-gathering, surveillance and intimidation of people for their political views was clear to the vast majority of those raided. Personal letters and files, newspapers, posters and other literature were all scrutinized by Garda [police] raiders who spread their net widely, taking in many members of the public with no political involvement and many prominent individuals unconnected with the republican movement."

Among those whose homes were raided were Matt Larkin, general secretary of the National Association of Tenants Organizations; the president of the Dublin Council of Trade Unions, Gerry Shanahan; broadcaster Donncha O Dulaing; Joe Costello of the Prisoner' Rights Organization; Ite Ní Chionnaith, president of the Gaelic League; Ann Conway of People's Democ-

racy, Irish section of the Fourth International; Labhras O Murchu, president of the traditional music association, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann; Daithí O hÓgain of the University College Dublin folklore department, a prominent writer in the Irish language; film-maker Bob Quinn; and Jack Bennet, assistant editor of the Dublin *Evening Press*. Members of the Communist Party and the Labour Party were also reportedly harassed.

Republican representatives said that the raids were so extensive that they suggested that the hidden agenda of the British and Irish governments might include the introduction of massive internment of political suspects. Internment was introduced in Northern Ireland in August 1971 and maintained until May 1972. It was preceded by what appeared to be joint preparations by the British and Irish governments, but the explosion it touched off in the North threw a scare into the Dublin government.

In any case, it seems clear that one of the objectives of the recent raids was to try to isolate the revolutionary anti-imperialists by intimidating anyone who might sympathize to some extent with any of their ideals or goals. ★

UNITED STATES

Book on "covert operations"

GROWING SCANDALS about covert US operations against governments unloved by Washington led in October 1986 to the start of a suit for \$20 million against persons — such as General Secord, well known for his testimony in the Contragate affair — who were alleged to have played leading roles in such activities.

The plaintiff was the Christic Institute, an American liberal foundation. It charged that a sort of parallel politico-military command, which it called "the Second Team," had been set up to conduct a clandestine aggressive international policy. A book containing the charges of this suit about US covert operations against the Sandinista government, entitled *Assault on Nicaragua* has now been published, edited and with an introduction by Rod Holt. (114 pp, paperback, no price listed).

It contains speeches by Daniel Sheehan, general counsel for the Christic Institute; an address to the United Nations by Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega; and an article by Jeff Mackler and Nat Weinstein,

leaders of the US Fourth Internationalist group Socialist Action on the meaning of the revelations for the American anti-intervention movement. The book can be ordered from The Walnut Publishing Company, 3435 Army Street, Suite 308, San Francisco, California, 94110, USA. ★

SWEDEN

Fourth Internationalists meet

THE NATIONAL CONGRESS of the Socialist Party, Swedish section of the Fourth International, was held November 21-22 in the city of Köping. About 40 delegates attended, representing 13 regions, along with the members of the outgoing Central Committee, members of the organization, sympathizers and guests.

The reports and contributions reflected the working-class and trade-union roots of the organization, whose members have a growing influence in particular in the Volvo plants in Göteborg. They also reflected an important involvement in various mass movements, such as the one against racism.

Most of the debates were over the orientation for the election campaign that will take place next September. There were two counterposed draft resolutions. One, submitted by the outgoing leadership, stressed the basic axes for an election campaign in the present socio-economic context. A second draft proposed a more broadly programmatic approach. Many amendments were also proposed on specific themes. Finally, with amendments, the resolution submitted by the outgoing leadership was adopted by a large majority.

By secret ballot, the congress elected a Central Committee of 25 members, 12 of whom had not been on the previous CC. Eight members were women. The CC subsequently elected a Political Bureau of five members, including two women. In the following issue of *International Viewpoint*, we will publish excerpts from the political resolution adopted at this congress. ★



1987 INDEX

(Issues 112-132)

T HIS INDEX of articles published in *International Viewpoint* for 1987 is ordered alphabetically by country or region. There are also categories for articles on the peace movement, women, youth, Communist Parties, the economy, nuclear power, ecology and book reviews. These articles also appear in country categories where appropriate.

Statements, events and news of the Fourth International and its sections are also classified separately. The symbol (NS) indicates that an article appeared as a short news report.

AFGHANISTAN

- Eight years on from the Soviet intervention 117 6 Apr 87
Salah Jaber
Who are the Mujahideen? 117 6 Apr 87
The Fourth International and Afghanistan 117 6 Apr 87

AUSTRALIA

- Anti-intervention march in Sydney (NS) 122 15 Jun 87
Red hopes and election blues 126 28 Sep 87
From *FI News*

AUSTRIA

- Homelessness on the increase (NS) 123 29 Jun 87

BASQUE COUNTRY

- Discussion on the national question (NS) 113 9 Feb 87
Bourgeois nationalists sink deeper into the mire — *Gerry Foley* 117 6 Apr 87
Commemoration of Guernica (NS) 118 20 Apr 87
Attacks on Basque refugees (NS) 120 18 May 87
GAL attack (NS) 123 29 Jun 87
Bayonne demo against raids (NS) 128 26 Oct 87
Chirac's pogrom against Basque refugees 129 9 Nov 87
From *Zutik*

BELGIUM

- JGS congress (NS) 113 9 Feb 87
Marxism vs liberalism (NS) 116 23 Mar 87
Strikewave in Flanders (NS) 118 20 Apr 87
Abortion trial (NS) 119 4 May 87

BOOKS

- From Militancy to Marxism* by Alan Thornett 130 23 Nov 87
Reviewed by *Livio Maitan*

BRAZIL

- Austerity follows November elections 112 26 Jan 87
Joao Machado
Stabilization plan fails — *Pierre Salama* 118 20 Apr 87
General strike challenges Bresser plan 127 12 Oct 87
Documents from *Em Tempo*:
Building the PT; The PT in the union movement; The test of the general strike; PT runs candidate for president

BRITAIN

- Viraj Mendis must stay! (NS) 112 26 Jan 87

- Alliance for socialism (NS) 112 26 Jan 87
One year of the print strike — *Hilary Eleanor* 113 9 Feb 87
Teachers' action provokes suspensions 113 9 Feb 87

Theresa York

- Fight racism rally (NS) 116 23 Mar 87
After eight years of the "Thatcher revolution" 121 1 Jun 87

Hilary Eleanor

- New revolutionary marxist journal launched (NS) 121 1 Jun 87
Teachers face an uphill struggle 122 15 Jun 87

Ray Sirotkin

- Tory "landslide" with only 42 per cent of the vote — *Hilary Eleanor* 124 13 Jul 87

- Stop the deportations! (NS) 125 14 Sep 87

- "The only alternative to mass action is abject surrender" — *Theresa York* 126 28 Sep 87

- TUC waves the white flag (NS) 126 28 Sep 87

- A breath of fresh air for the left 131 7 Dec 87

Mary Read

- A Tory curriculum for education 131 7 Dec 87

Patrick Field

- Renewed attack on right to choose (NS) 131 7 Dec 87

BURKINA FASO

- Thomas Sankara killed in coup d'etat 129 9 Nov 87
Claude Gabriel

CANADA

- Anti-intervention conference (NS) 112 26 Jan 87
Counter-summit (NS) 115 9 Mar 87
Summit protests — *Barry Weisleder* 120 18 May 87
The drowning at Meech Lake 124 13 Jul 87
Barry Weisleder
Thousands demonstrate for abortion rights (NS) 131 7 Dec 87
After Levesque: the anglo-bourgeoisie rewrites history — *Susan Caldwell* 132 21 Dec 87

CENTRAL AMERICA

- Solidarity with the peoples of Central America 124 13 Jul 87
Statement of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International

CHILE

- Pinochet's bitter pill — *Orlando Serra* 120 18 May 87
"We are ready to come to an agreement" Interview with *Gabriel Valdés* 120 18 May 87
The Communist Party's twists and turns 120 18 May 87
Dominique Legrand

CHINA

- Chinese students lead fight for democracy 112 26 Jan 87
Statement by October Review and the RML
The upsurge of the democratic struggle and the CCP — *Zhang Kai* 113 9 Feb 87
Students in the frontline of the struggle 113 9 Feb 87
Wei Wen
Peking's New Economic Policy 113 9 Feb 87
Ernest Mandel
A critique of the seventh five-year plan 113 9 Feb 87
Zhang Kai
"Brutal repression against Tibetan people" (NS) — From *La Guache* 129 9 Nov 87

COLOMBIA

- Journalism — the fatal profession 116 23 Mar 87
From *Murmure*
Mass protests follow left leader's murder 128 26 Oct 87
Rodrigo O'Farrell

COMMUNIST PARTIES

- Vietnam: A watershed party congress 112 26 Jan 87
Pierre Rousset

INDEX FOR 1987

<i>Cahiers du féminisme</i> celebration (NS)	128	26 Oct 87	Repression unleashes wave of protest	117	6 Apr 87
Pierre Juquin to stand for president	128	26 Oct 87	Interview with <i>Michel Warschawsky</i>		
<i>Christian Picquet</i>			Fight for press freedom continues	118	20 Apr 87
LCR special congress (NS)	131	7 Dec 87	From <i>News from Within</i>		
GREECE			Palestinian land — <i>Kjell Ostberg</i>	119	4 May 87
A massive "no" to Papandreou's policies	113	9 Feb 87	Hunger strike by Palestinian prisoners	119	4 May 87
<i>Jean-Jaques Laredo</i>			From <i>News from Within</i>		
Explosion in the highschools	113	9 Feb 87	Fight for academic freedom (NS)	120	18 May 87
From <i>Ergatike Pale/Spartakos</i>			Arab war losses (NS)	120	18 May 87
New initiatives needed in fight against austerity	117	6 Apr 87	Special appeal (NS)	120	18 May 87
From <i>Spartakos</i>			Arms industry (NS)	123	29 Jun 87
PASOK's right turn creates crisis on the left	123	29 Jun 87	Information Center reopens (NS)	127	12 Oct 87
<i>Dimitri Ionos</i>			ITALY		
<i>Spartakos</i> republished (NS)	130	23 Nov 87	LCR meets DP (NS)	115	9 Mar 87
GRENADA			Gramsci's political legacy fifty years on	118	20 Apr 87
What went wrong in the New Jewel Movement	114	23 Feb 87	Interview with <i>Livio Maitan</i>		
Interview with <i>Don Rojas</i>			Election accord (NS)	120	18 May 87
HAITI			A common electoral campaign	121	1 Jun 87
Mass upsurge arouses fears in Washington	125	14 Sep 87	Elections bring new setback for Italian CP	124	13 Jul 87
<i>Andy Brock</i>			<i>Livio Maitan</i>		
The Jean-Rabel massacre: a "mountain of corpses" for Duvalier — <i>Filip Martens</i>	125	14 Sep 87	Communist Party youth Socialist International — <i>Livio Maitan</i>	129	9 Nov 87
Crisis cannot fail to ignite new explosions	127	12 Oct 87	Rank and file organize against austerity	131	7 Dec 87
<i>Filip Martens</i>			<i>Alexandre Lys</i>		
Religious and political imperialism	127	12 Oct 87	Defending the right to strike — Interview with <i>Elettra Deiana</i>	131	7 Dec 87
Interview with <i>Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide</i>			After the general strike: union bureaucrats running scared — <i>Livio Maitan</i>	131	7 Dec 87
The army and Duvalier's thugs massacre election — <i>Arthur Mahon</i>	132	21 Dec 87	IV		
HONG KONG			Autumn sales campaign	127	12 Oct 87
Democratic self-rule for the people of Hong Kong — Statement of RML and <i>October Review</i>	126	28 Sep 87	Before the crash comes, invest in IV!	129	9 Nov 87
INDIA			Editorial on sales campaign	131	7 Dec 87
Rajiv's fading star — <i>M Navid</i>	121	1 Jun 87	JAPAN		
Anti-communal front needed in Punjab	123	29 Jun 87	Hard times for women workers — <i>Kaji Etsuko</i>	115	9 Mar 87
<i>M Navid</i>			Rail union attacked (NS)	120	18 May 87
Third term for the Left Front in West Bengal	124	13 Jul 87	KURDISTAN		
<i>Kunal Chattopadhyay</i>			Protest at Turkish bombings (NS)	117	6 Apr 87
Left victory in Kerala — <i>Venugopal</i>	124	13 Jul 87	LATIN AMERICA		
IRELAND			Christianity and liberation in Latin America	130	23 Nov 87
Dublin government collapse forces general election — <i>John Meehan</i> and <i>Anne Conway</i>	114	23 Feb 87	<i>Michael Löwy</i>		
A holy war against women's rights	115	9 Mar 87	LEBANON		
<i>J Morrissey</i>			Economic ruin sparks mass revolts	132	21 Dec 87
A warning for the anti-imperialist movement	116	23 Mar 87	Interview with <i>Zafer</i>		
<i>John Meehan</i>			LESBIAN & GAY LIBERATION		
Stop strip-searching (NS)	117	6 Apr 87	Lesbians and gays mobilize for second march on Washington — <i>Peter Drucker</i> and <i>Anne Menasche</i>	125	14 Sep 87
"Why don't they let them bury this poor guy?"	119	4 May 87	<i>Redmond O Neill</i>		
<i>Redmond O Neill</i>			"For love, for life and for liberation" (NS)	128	26 Oct 87
Britain's political murder — <i>Gerry Foley</i>	122	15 Jun 87	LIBERATION THEOLOGY		
Sinn Fein weathers bourgeois offensive	124	13 Jul 87	<i>Haiti</i> : Religious and political imperialism	127	12 Oct 87
<i>Gerry Foley</i>			Interview with <i>Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide</i>		
"Lively debate" in Irish (NS)	127	12 Oct 87	Christianity and liberation in Latin America	130	23 Nov 87
Stop the use of plastic bullets (NS)	128	26 Oct 87	<i>Michael Löwy</i>		
Anti-Extradition Campaign (NS)	129	9 Nov 87	<i>Philippines</i> : Revolutionary Christians in people's war — <i>Sonia Rupon</i>	130	23 Nov 87
Irish feminism: a third-world model?	129	9 Nov 87	The church and the Sandinista revolution	130	23 Nov 87
<i>Sue Pentel</i>			From <i>Encuentro</i>		
The anti-imperialist movement after Enniskillen — <i>John McAnulty</i>	131	7 Dec 87	<i>Mexico</i> : "Christian women have to organize politically" — From <i>Internationales</i>	130	23 Nov 87
The terrible price of British rule — editorial from <i>An Phoblacht</i>	131	7 Dec 87	MALAYSIA		
A massive exercise in intimidation (NS)	132	21 Dec 87	Protests mount over police crackdown	132	21 Dec 87
ISRAELI STATE			<i>Barbara Wentworth</i>		
Zionist police raid human rights bulletin	115	9 Mar 87			
Frameup continues against Warschawsky	116	23 Mar 87			

INDEX FOR 1987

MEXICO		Sun Liangsi (1912-1987) — <i>Wang Fanxi</i>	126	28 Sep 87	
Victory for the student movement	117	6 Apr 87	Christos Anastasiadis (1910-1987)	127	12 Oct 87
<i>Edgardo Sanchez</i>			Chen Bilan (1902-1987) — <i>October Review</i>	128	26 Oct 87
"Left unity must be forged in the class struggle"	119	4 May 87	Icelandic communist dies	131	7 Dec 87
<i>PRT Political Committee</i> statement			PARAGUAY		
Marxist Workers' League join PRT	123	29 Jun 87	Two new unions founded (NS)	117	6 Apr 87
"I believe in the next generation"	125	14 Sep 87	PEACE MOVEMENT		
interview with <i>Don Felipe Ramos</i>			END convention (NS)	123	29 Jun 87
A key political test — <i>Gerry Foley</i>	128	26 Oct 87	PERU		
An important congress for the PRT	129	9 Nov 87	Major advance for peasant organization	126	28 Sep 87
"Christian women have to organize politically" — From <i>Internationales</i>	130	23 Nov 87	<i>Hugo Blanco</i>		
MIDDLE EAST		<i>Document: For land and power</i>	126	28 Sep 87	
Defeats and fiascos: the last five years of	121	1 Jun 87	PHILIPPINES		
Arafat's leadership — <i>Salah Jaber</i>	122	15 Jun 87	Landmarks of a new situation — <i>Paul Petitjean</i>	112	26 Jan 87
Twenty years after the Six-Day War	122	15 Jun 87	Letter from the PnB (NS)	113	9 Feb 87
PLO at a crossroads — <i>Salah Jaber</i>	125	14 Sep 87	A temporary and fragile success for Cory	114	23 Feb 87
Gulf war: End the slaughter — <i>Salah Jaber</i>	132	21 Dec 87	<i>Paul Petitjean</i>		
Imperialism and the Gulf war — <i>Salah Jaber</i>			"Women have to unite and struggle for liberation" — <i>Sonia Rupon</i>	115	9 Mar 87
MOSCOW TRIALS			New women's party launched	115	9 Mar 87
Moscow Trials Campaign (NS)	121	1 Jun 87	Interview with <i>Maita Gomez</i>	115	9 Mar 87
Trotsky rehabilitated? — <i>Catherine Verla</i>	126	28 Sep 87	The history of women's organizations		
Moves to rehabilitate Moscow trials	128	26 Oct 87	Speech by <i>Maita Gomez</i>	122	15 Jun 87
defendants — <i>Ernest Mandel</i>			USec greetings to Bisig congress (NS)	123	29 Jun 87
Clear the names of the accused in the Moscow	129	9 Nov 87	Aquino scores another personal triumph		
Show Trials!	130	23 Nov 87	<i>Paul Petitjean</i>	123	29 Jun 87
Mikhail Gorbachev's speech: a new			A year of debate in the Communist Party	126	28 Sep 87
mystification of history — <i>Statement by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International</i>	130	23 Nov 87	<i>Paul Petitjean</i>		
Moscow Trials Campaign update (NS)	131	7 Dec 87	Aquino under the shadow of the gun	126	28 Sep 87
Moscow Trials Campaign update (NS)	132	21 Dec 87	<i>Paul Petitjean</i>		
Moscow Trials Campaign update (NS)			"We need real land reform"	126	28 Sep 87
NAMIBIA			Interview with <i>Serge Cherniguin</i>	127	12 Oct 87
Miner's strike (NS)	129	9 Nov 87	Assassination of a militant — <i>Paul Petitjean</i>	128	26 Oct 87
NETHERLANDS			<i>Erratum</i>	127	12 Oct 87
Revolutionists campaign (NS)	119	4 May 87	Declarations on the murder of Lean Alejandro: Bayan; USec; <i>Paul Petitjean</i> & <i>Sonia Rupon</i>	130	23 Nov 87
NEW CALEDONIA			Revolutionary Christians in people's war		
Anti-Kanak offensive (NS)	115	9 Mar 87	<i>Sonia Rupon</i>		
New challenges for Kanak independence	132	21 Dec 87	POLAND		
fighters — <i>Claude Gabriel</i> & <i>Vincent Kermel</i>			Women's work is never done	118	20 Apr 87
NICARAGUA			<i>Jacqueline Heinen</i>		
Women and the "apron economy"	116	23 Mar 87	A year of debates in Solidarnosc	125	14 Sep 87
From <i>Pensamiento propio</i>			<i>Cyril Smuga</i>		
Contras in crisis (NS)	118	20 Apr 87	Referendum blows up in generals' faces	132	21 Dec 87
Award for Cardenal (NS)	120	18 May 87	<i>Arthur Wilkins</i>		
"National sovereignty and the revolution are not negotiable"	126	28 Sep 87	PORTUGAL		
Interview with <i>Tomas Borge</i>	126	28 Sep 87	Elections challenge the left (NS)	126	28 Sep 87
The Central America peace accord	130	23 Nov 87	SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY		
<i>Roberto Bardini</i> (From <i>Panorama</i>)			New reproductive technology: a mixed blessing?	121	1 Jun 87
The church and the Sandinista revolution	131	7 Dec 87	<i>Leonora Lloyd</i>		
From <i>Encuentro</i>			SENEGAL		
US oil companies refuse to handle Cuban petrol — From <i>Klassenkampen</i> (NS)	131	7 Dec 87	Electoral code denounced (NS)	130	23 Nov 87
OBITUARIES			SOUTH AFRICA		
Nahuel Moreno:	113	9 Feb 87	Union disputes (NS)	113	9 Feb 87
Veteran Argentine Trotskyist dies			Danish government imposes South African sanctions — <i>Åge Skovrind</i>	114	23 Feb 87
Tom Gustafsson (1947-1987):	114	23 Feb 87	ANC celebrates 75th anniversary		
"A strong link has been broken"			<i>Dominique Legrand</i>		
<i>Göte Kildén</i>	116	23 Mar 87	A triple oppression — <i>Philomena O'Malley</i>	115	9 Mar 87
Juan José Gonzalez	117	6 Apr 87	Political prisoners (NS)	115	9 Mar 87
A Scandinavian contribution to internationalism	117	6 Apr 87	Amon Msane arrested (NS)	116	23 Mar 87
<i>Gerry Foley</i>			Boycott busting (NS)	116	23 Mar 87
Emile Van Ceulen (1916-1987)	125	14 Sep 87	IV joins censored publications (NS)	117	6 Apr 87

INDEX FOR 1987

- | | | | | |
|--|-----|-----------|---|---------------|
| Sanctions loopholes (NS) | 117 | 6 Apr 87 | SWITZERLAND | |
| On the eve of the white elections
<i>Peter Blumer</i> | 119 | 4 May 87 | Funding apartheid | 120 18 May 87 |
| Black strikers need support (NS) | 119 | 4 May 87 | SYRIA | |
| A decisive battle for the rights of labour | 120 | 18 May 87 | Hands off the Communist Action Party!
<i>Salah Jaber</i> | 130 23 Nov 87 |
| Cosatu documents: | 120 | 18 May 87 | Communist Action Party statement | 130 23 Nov 87 |
| "The future is in your hands"; Workers can manage; End the cheap labour system; Open your books; Unite by July | | | | |
| "National and class struggles cannot be counterposed" — <i>Sydney Mufamadi</i> | 120 | 18 May 87 | TIBET | |
| Free Moses Mayekiso and Amon Msane! (NS) | 121 | 1 Jun 87 | "Brutal repression against Tibetan people" (NS) — From <i>La Guache</i> | 129 9 Nov 87 |
| Metal unions win paid maternity leave (NS) | 121 | 1 Jun 87 | TURKEY | |
| Three phases in the history of the Communist Party — <i>Peter Blumer</i> | 122 | 15 Jun 87 | The rise of Islamic fundamentalism
<i>Fuat Orçun</i> | 120 18 May 87 |
| A step forward for the independent unions
<i>Jean Sutherland</i> | 123 | 29 Jun 87 | Women in the land of the generals
<i>Elif Keskin</i> | 120 18 May 87 |
| Railworkers score a major victory
<i>Gerry Foley</i> | 123 | 29 Jun 87 | "Stop wife-battering!" (NS) | 121 1 Jun 87 |
| Railworkers celebrate their victory
<i>Doreen Weppler</i> | 124 | 13 Jul 87 | Reconciliation between the generals and the politicians — <i>Fuat Orçun</i> | 124 13 Jul 87 |
| An eyewitness report — <i>Doreen Weppler and Geoff Revell</i> | 124 | 13 Jul 87 | USA | |
| Solidarity with the anti-apartheid struggle!
<i>Motion adopted by the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International</i> | 124 | 13 Jul 87 | "A union-sponsored lockout"
Interview with <i>Jim Guyette</i> and <i>Ray Rogers</i> | 112 26 Jan 87 |
| The gains of the Black miners' strike
<i>Tony Roux</i> | 125 | 14 Sep 87 | Socialist Action convention (NS) | 112 26 Jan 87 |
| A milestone congress for COSATU
<i>Tony Roux</i> | 127 | 12 Oct 87 | Irangate and Washington's dirty war
<i>Tom Barrett</i> | 114 23 Feb 87 |
| Stop South African coal! — <i>Steve Roberts</i> | 127 | 12 Oct 87 | A racist murder in Howard Beach
<i>Andy Pollock</i> | 117 6 Apr 87 |
| Get the sHell out! (NS) | 128 | 26 Oct 87 | US anti-war actions | 118 20 Apr 87 |
| Defend Moses Mayekiso! — <i>Paul Smith</i> | 128 | 26 Oct 87 | "A new consciousness in this country"
<i>Gerry Foley</i> | 120 18 May 87 |
| Cosatu conference on education (NS) | 131 | 7 Dec 87 | Contragate: the shit hits the fan
<i>John Barzman</i> | 121 1 Jun 87 |
| SOUTH KOREA | | | San Francisco in April (NS) | 121 1 Jun 87 |
| Working class takes over the fight
<i>David Cameron</i> | 125 | 14 Sep 87 | Protest at contra killing (NS) | 121 1 Jun 87 |
| SPANISH STATE | | | A memory of Benjamin Linder — <i>Jack Bresee</i> | 122 15 Jun 87 |
| Growing repression in the Basque country
<i>Jose Bikila</i> | 112 | 26 Jan 87 | The fight is on for a new Equal Rights Amendment — <i>Evelyn Sell</i> | 122 15 Jun 87 |
| Students rock Gonzalez regime
From <i>Combate</i> | 114 | 23 Feb 87 | High court attacks right to bail (NS) | 122 15 Jun 87 |
| End of an era for Felipe Gonzalez
<i>LCR document</i> | 121 | 1 Jun 87 | Court acquites white vigilante (NS) | 124 13 Jul 87 |
| LCR election accord with Herri Batasuna
From <i>Combate</i> | 121 | 1 Jun 87 | Lesbians and gays mobilize for second march on Washington — <i>Peter Drucker</i> and <i>Anne Menasche</i> | 125 14 Sep 87 |
| Revolutionaries campaign in the Spanish elections — interview with <i>Jose Bikila</i> | 124 | 13 Jul 87 | Warschawsky defence meeting (NS) | 125 14 Sep 87 |
| Accords with Uncle Sam (NS) | 129 | 9 Nov 87 | "For love, for life and for liberation" (NS) | 128 26 Oct 87 |
| SRI LANKA | | | Book on "covert operations" (NS) | 132 21 Dec 87 |
| Protest at arrests (NS) | 115 | 9 Mar 87 | USSR | |
| May Day march banned (NS) | 121 | 1 Jun 87 | Gorbachev's dilemmas — <i>Ernest Mandel</i> | 114 23 Feb 87 |
| End anti-Tamil repression
<i>Statement of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International</i> | 124 | 13 Jul 87 | Pravda since the Central Committee plenum
<i>Gerry Foley</i> | 116 23 Mar 87 |
| Accord won't bring peace (NS) | 128 | 26 Oct 87 | Gorbachev's reforms and daily life | 116 23 Mar 87 |
| Rajiv in quicksand? — <i>Gerry Foley</i> | 131 | 7 Dec 87 | "Turn to the people, to the workers"
Interview with <i>Yurii Orlov</i> | 116 23 Mar 87 |
| What was involved in the Indo-Sril Lankan accord — Interview with <i>Bala Tampo</i> | 131 | 7 Dec 87 | Soviet play includes Trotsky (NS) | 118 20 Apr 87 |
| SWEDEN | | | Moscow Trials Campaign (NS) | 121 1 Jun 87 |
| Socialist Party strengthens support in trade unions
Interview with <i>Göte Kilden</i> | 126 | 28 Sep 87 | Interview with <i>Dudintsev</i> (NS) | 122 15 Jun 87 |
| Baltic demonstrations (NS) | 126 | 28 Sep 87 | Trotsky rehabilitated? — <i>Catherine Verla</i> | 126 28 Sep 87 |
| Workers' insurgency revives — <i>Gerry Foley</i> | 128 | 26 Oct 87 | Moves to rehabilitate Moscow trials defendants — <i>Ernest Mandel</i> | 128 26 Oct 87 |
| Garment workers victory (NS) | 129 | 9 Nov 87 | Economic reform and democratization
<i>David Seppo</i> | 128 26 Oct 87 |
| Fourth Internationalists meet (NS) | 132 | 21 Dec 87 | What's in it for the workers? — <i>David Seppo</i> | 128 26 Oct 87 |
| | | | Political crisis at the top — <i>David Seppo</i> | 128 26 Oct 87 |
| | | | <i>Perestroika</i> opens the way for independent social movements — <i>A Severyukhin</i> | 129 9 Nov 87 |
| | | | "Whatever is not forbidden is permitted"
Interview | 129 9 Nov 87 |
| | | | Statement of the Federation of Socialist Social Clubs | 129 9 Nov 87 |
| | | | Clear the names of the accused in the Moscow | 129 9 Nov 87 |

INDEX FOR 1987

Show Trials!			
Mikhail Gorbachev's speech: a new mystification of history — <i>Statement by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International</i>	130	23 Nov 87	
Moscow Trials Campaign update (NS)	130	23 Nov 87	
VIETNAM			
A watershed party congress — <i>Pierre Rousset</i>	112	26 Jan 87	
WESTERN EUROPE			
The European Monetary System <i>Ernest Mandel</i>	113	9 Feb 87	
Unions unite against the multinational Caterpillar — From <i>La Gauche</i>	119	4 May 87	
A new generation of youth is radicalizing <i>Claude Gabriel</i>	119	4 May 87	
International youth camp (NS)	125	14 Sep 87	
WEST GERMANY			
A semi-victory for the Kohl government <i>Winfried Wolf</i>	114	23 Feb 87	
Battle resumes for 35-hour week (NS) From <i>Sozialistische Zeitung</i>	117	6 Apr 87	
Highschool students fight education cuts <i>Bjorn Mertens</i>	118	20 Apr 87	
Unions compromise over shorter workweek <i>Manuel Kellner</i>	122	15 Jun 87	
Solidarity groups meet (NS)	124	13 Jul 87	
WOMEN			
<i>Philippines:</i>			
"Women have to unite and struggle for liberation" — <i>Sonia Rupon</i>	115	9 Mar 87	
New women's party launched Interview with <i>Maita Gomez</i>	115	9 Mar 87	
The history of women's organizations Speech by <i>Maita Gomez</i>	115	9 Mar 87	
<i>South Africa:</i> A triple oppression <i>Philomena O'Malley</i>	115	9 Mar 87	
<i>Denmark:</i> Women's quotas in brewery union <i>Karin Peitersen</i>	115	9 Mar 87	
<i>France:</i> <i>Cahiers du féminisme</i> celebrates tenth anniversary — Interview with <i>Josette Desbois</i> and <i>Anne-Marie Granger</i>	115	9 Mar 87	
<i>Eastern Europe:</i> "Work like a man, and also like a woman" — <i>Jacqueline Heinen</i>	115	9 Mar 87	
<i>Japan:</i> Hard times for women workers <i>Kaji Etsuko</i>	115	9 Mar 87	
<i>Ireland:</i> A holy war against women's rights <i>J Morrissey</i>	115	9 Mar 87	
<i>Nicaragua:</i> Women and the "apron economy" From <i>Pensamiento propio</i>	116	23 Mar 87	
<i>Ireland:</i> Stop strip-searching (NS)	117	6 Apr 87	
<i>Poland:</i> Women's work is never done <i>Jacqueline Heinen</i>	118	20 Apr 87	
<i>Belgium:</i> Abortion trial (NS)	119	4 May 87	
<i>Turkey:</i> Women in the land of the generals <i>Elif Keskin</i>	120	18 May 87	
New reproductive technology: a mixed blessing? <i>Leonora Lloyd</i>	121	1 Jun 87	
<i>Turkey:</i> "Stop wife-battering!" (NS)	121	1 Jun 87	
<i>South Africa:</i> Metal unions win paid maternity leave (NS)	121	1 Jun 87	
<i>USA:</i> The fight is on for a new Equal Rights Amendment — <i>Evelyn Sell</i>	122	15 Jun 87	
<i>France:</i> <i>Cahiers du féminisme</i> celebration (NS)	128	26 Oct 87	
Irish feminism: a third-world model? <i>Sue Pentel</i>	129	9 Nov 87	
<i>Britain:</i> Renewed attack on right to choose	131	7 Dec 87	
<i>Canada:</i> Thousands demonstrate for	131	7 Dec 87	
			abortion rights (NS)
YOUTH			
Chinese students lead fight for democracy Statement by <i>October Review</i> and the <i>RML</i>	112	26 Jan 87	
<i>Greece:</i> Explosion in the highschools From <i>Ergatike Pale/Spartacos</i>	113	9 Feb 87	
<i>China:</i> The upsurge of the democratic struggle and the CCP — <i>Zhang Kai</i>	113	9 Feb 87	
<i>China:</i> Students in the frontline of the struggle — <i>Wei Wen</i>	113	9 Feb 87	
<i>Belgium:</i> JGS congress (NS)	113	9 Feb 87	
<i>Spain:</i> Students rock Gonzalez regime From <i>Combate</i>	114	23 Feb 87	
<i>Mexico:</i> Victory for the student movement <i>Edgardo Sanchez</i>	117	6 Apr 87	
<i>West Germany:</i> Highschool students fight education cuts — <i>Bjorn Mertens</i>	118	20 Apr 87	
A new generation of youth is radicalizing <i>Claude Gabriel</i>	119	4 May 87	
<i>East Germany:</i> Youth unrest (NS)	124	13 Jul 87	
International youth camp (NS)	125	14 Sep 87	
YUGOSLAVIA			
Strikewave fuels discussion on legalizing strike action — <i>Michele Lee</i>	118	20 Apr 87	
"The leadership is incompetent, if not outright corrupt — <i>Mila Stula</i>	123	29 Jun 87	
A new stage in the Yugoslav crisis <i>Michele Lee</i>	131	7 Dec 87	
Documents: Dragisa Pavlovic's address to the editors of the <i>Politika</i> publishing house; <i>Mladina</i> editorial; Letter from 70 Slovene intellectuals published in <i>Mladina</i>	131	7 Dec 87	
Strike movement deepens — <i>Michele Lee</i>	132	21 Dec 87	
ZAMBIA			
Government retreats (NS)	112	26 Jan 87	

International VIEWPOINT

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