

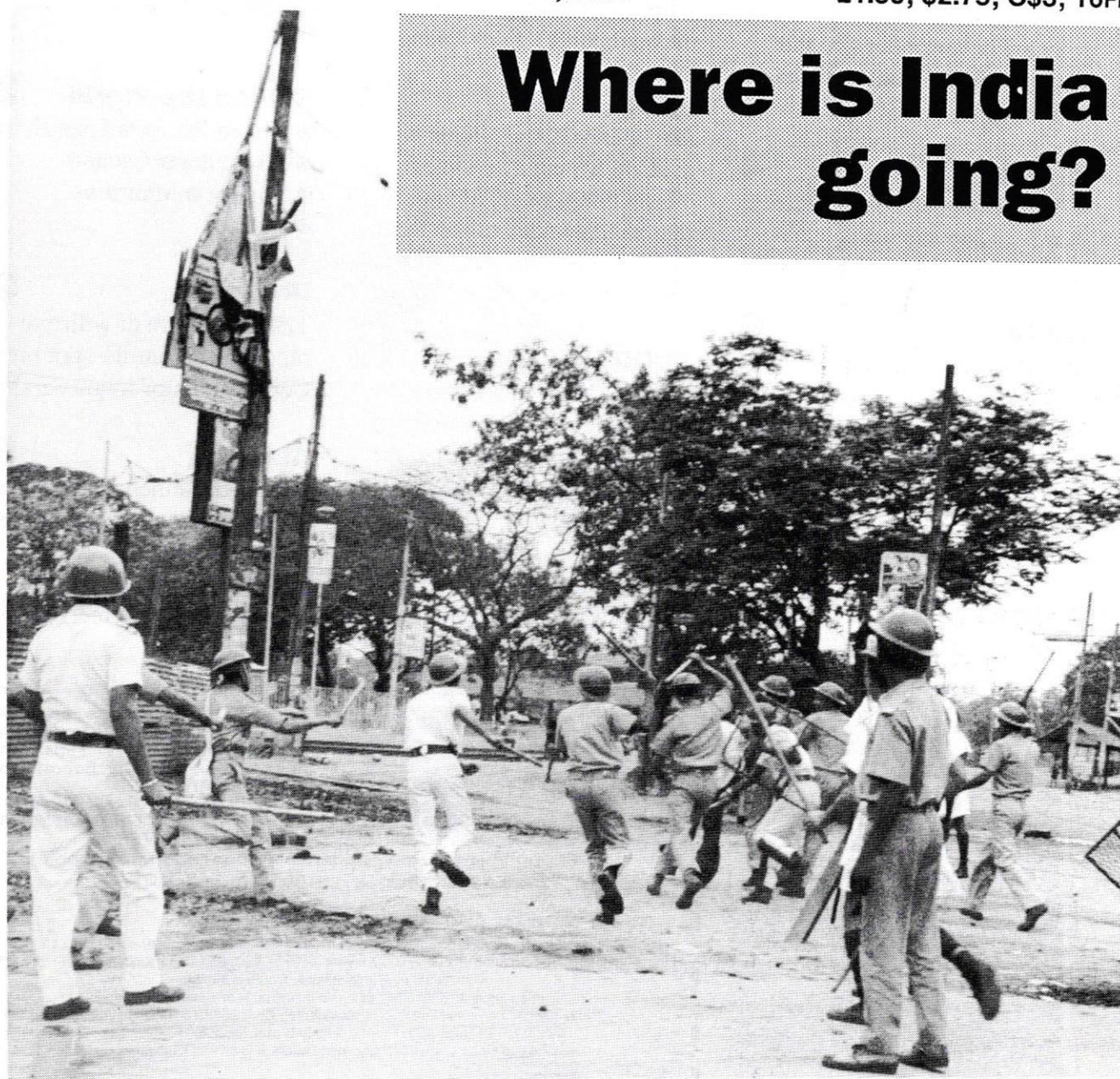
International VIEWPOINT

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Where is India going?



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International VIEWPOINT

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Mengistu's evil empire falls

THE collapse of General Mengistu's military regime in Ethiopia has led to a flurry of diplomatic activity on the part of the United States.¹

FRANCIS CAZALS

AT THE end of April, the Shengo [Ethiopian parliament] adopted two resolutions in an attempt to save the regime from impending disaster. One proposed the legalization of the opposition and the other the call-up of 18 year olds.

The armed opposition fronts treated the first resolution with contempt, while the second never came to life since the army collapsed a few weeks later. The final episode, involving the flight of president Mengistu to Zimbabwe and his replacement by the head of the Ethiopian army, General Tesfaye Gebre Kidan, was unable to halt the political and military collapse of the dictatorship.

At the end of May the general, who had taken refuge in the Italian embassy, was abandoned by the elite presidential guard, who were busy looting the presidential palace. He appealed to the United States to restore order in the capital.

With the rebels of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) already at the gates of the capital, the US' Mr. Africa, Herman Cohen, who had mediated at the London peace negotiations, felt the time had come to "recommend" that the EPRDF enter Addis Ababa.

Eritrean fighters capture key cities

At the same time, the fighters of the Eritrean Popular Liberation Front (EPLF), who have been fighting for independence for two decades, captured Asmara, the Eritrean capital, and Assab, a Red Sea port, cities that had previously been outside their grasp, meeting little resistance.

The London agreement between the American mediator, the EPRDF, the EPLF and the Omoro Liberation Front (OLF) merely set down in writing the relationship of forces on the ground.

The agreement calls for the convocation of a conference on July 1, 1991 to set up a transitional administration. In the meantime the administration of Ethiopia has been entrusted to the EPRDF.

In Eritrea, the EPLF has already announced the establishment of a separate transitional government to oversee the holding of a referendum on independence under international supervision.

The double rebel victory is the result both of their own military advances and the disintegration of the regime and its army, whose fighting spirit has faded away.

Over the years the Mengistu regime had become almost totally discredited. It persisted by appealing to the strong feeling in favour of maintaining the unity of the Ethiopian empire which exists among the Amhara population, from whose elite the Addis Ababa regime was drawn. The secessionist danger in Eritrea and Tigre was constantly emphasized.

Military clique replaces emperor

Otherwise, after coming to power in the aftermath of the 1974 revolution, the ruling military clique had totally exhausted all the hopes aroused by the overthrow of the imperial regime. A military and bureaucratic tyranny replaced that of the Emperor Haile Selassie.

In order to better prosecute the war against the Eritreans, oppress the peasantry (with hundreds of thousands of deaths in the 1984-85 famine) and crush all civilian opposition (as well as executing generals who had expressed interest in a peaceful resolution of the Eritrean conflict), the regime hid behind a pseudo-Marxist ideology, given credence by their cooperation with the Soviet Union and Cuba.

It may well be that the social situation in 1974 did not offer the possibility of passing over from anti-feudal revolt to socialist revolution, but that cannot exonerate the many who have spent the past years trying to pass the Mengistu regime off as an example of some kind of "non-capitalist road of development."

In the course of the years, the regime lost all social support outside of the bureaucracies, and definitively failed to

crush the Eritrean and Tigrean guerillas. In the dying hours, even erstwhile friends had begun to take their distance, in the first place the Cubans, who refused to go along with the whole military plan for Eritrea. The Soviets, to whom the Ethiopian government was heavily indebted, also reconsidered their military aid.

The events in eastern Europe finally showed Mengistu which way the wind was blowing and he made an attempt to link up with Israel, starting with the restoration of diplomatic relations. For a time Israeli military advisers replaced the Soviets.

Using the Falashas (Ethiopian Jews) as a bargaining counter, Addis Ababa was able to get several consignments of arms from Israel. However in the end these new protectors had to drop Mengistu under US pressure, despite the Ethiopian regime's support for the US in the Gulf.

American praise for Marxists

"The Marxists have done good work." These recent remarks by Herman Cohen indicate American strategy, which is especially worried by the prospect of a development similar to what has happened in Somalia (see *International Viewpoint*, no. 207, May 31, 1991). The US had watched Mengistu eliminate one by one all possible rivals in ruling circles. Last year 18 generals were executed, accused of plotting against him.

By thus turning sectors of the military against him, Mengistu handed Washington a team ready to replace him and at the same time guarantee the continued existence and unity of the Ethiopian state.

At the same time the evolution of the international situation made Washington



1. This article first appeared in the June 6, 1991 issue of the French revolutionary Marxist weekly, *Rouge*.

Some organizations

- **The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF):** originated among young "Marxist-Leninist" influenced cadres of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). A few years ago, the Marxist references were downplayed. It is the most powerful guerilla force and has been behind the emergence of most of the other guerilla currents in Ethiopia.
- **Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF):** was set up in 1975 with the help of the Eritreans. Since 1983 it has been led by a small pro-Albanian group, including Meles Zenawi, now head of the interim administration in Ethiopia and at the same time leader of the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigre, which works inside the TPLF.
- **Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF):** was formed around the TPLF in 1989 by the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement, the Oromo People's Organization and the Ethiopian Democratic Movement of Revolutionary Officers.
- **Oromo Liberation Front:** denounces the colonial domination of the Amharas over the Oromo population (40% of the population of Ethiopia) and demands the right to self-determination. Has received support from the EPLF but has come into conflict with the EPRDF. It does not enjoy big military and political influence among the Oromos. ★

feel more relaxed about the rebels' "Marxist-Leninist" political references. A few months ago there was a change of US policy towards trying to compel the Ethiopian government to negotiate a settlement of the civil war including federalization of the Ethiopian state. The hope was that this would forestall the eruption of rebellion in the capital or the development of mass national movements in those areas of the country, notably in the south, that still remained relatively quiet.

US tries to ride rebel victory

The US strategists have thus tried to ride the inevitable rebel victory in the hope of preventing the explosion of the Ethiopian state. It is this that explains American support for the entry of the EPRDF forces into Addis Ababa and the tacit recognition of the right to self-determination of Eritrea. The US administration will maintain the pressure to limit the developments within a definite framework, making its international cooperation dependent on a satisfactory evolution of the new regime.

The EPRDF was not carried into Addis Ababa on the crest of a national popular insurrection. Built around the Tigrean Popular Liberation Front (TPLF), the EPRDF's main base is in Tigre province. The EPRDF is the TPLF supplemented by satellite organizations — one for Ethiopian oppositionists, one for the Oromo people and another for revolutionary army officers — and it is unclear how representative these latter are. The TPLF started out as a revolutionary nationalist organization based on anti-government and pro-autonomy sentiment in Tigre.

It seems that the extension of its influence to other areas of the country has met with resistance from some sections of the peasant population, and they have only very recently had a presence in the Shoa region and in the capital, which is predominantly Amhara. Thus the EPRDF does not in itself amount to a national

political alternative; it will have to reach agreements with other currents that are presently opposed to it. Any refusal to make such agreements will soon bog the new regime down in a cycle of repression and authoritarianism.

Furthermore, the pro-Albanian past of its core leadership may well leave an inheritance of monolithic political conceptions, while the "liberal" turn seen at its last congress in January 1991 seems to indicate that it will not make drastic changes in the existing state structures. Such a policy is made more likely by the fact that there has been no independent mobilization of the population of the capital.

The real nature of the new regime's political project will become clearer in the light of how it deals in the coming months with demands for regional autonomy² and how it relates to the urban and rural labouring populations. Meanwhile, in Eritrea, the EPLF leaders will have to cope with all kinds of manoeuvres aimed at holding back or removing any real substance from the demand for a referendum on self-determination.

Apart from the problems of reconstruction in a war torn country, the EPLF also has other delicate problems to confront, such as that of the right of expression for all Eritrean political currents or the need to negotiate with the Afar community which is demanding a part of the region around Assab. ★

2. At a press conference on June 10, after this article was written, EPRDF leader and acting Ethiopian president Meles Zenawi said that he believed that the secession of Eritrea was irreversible and that attempting to prevent it by force was an option "too ghastly to contemplate".

Zenawi also denounced the deal between Mengistu and the Israelis, which led to the deportation to Israel of the Falashas, as a "shameful act". While pledging that an all party conference will be held within three weeks to form a transitional government, he spoke of the necessity of restricting the democratic rights of "dependent capitalists" (*Financial Times*, 11.6.1990).

Two years after the massacre

ON the eve of the 15th anniversary of the April Fifth Tiananmen Uprising and the second anniversary of Democracy Movement '89, at a time when the Chinese rulers have been celebrating the "correctness" of their repression, the overseas edition of *People's Daily* failed to censor a poem with the embedded phrase "Li Peng, step down to placate the people's anger."

ZHANG KAI

THEN, on April 1, there was a wall poster in a street near Tiananmen Square calling for Li Peng's resignation.

Later, according to a UPI dispatch from Beijing on April 22, a statement signed by students from at least four Beijing colleges pointed out that those who participated actively in Democracy Movement '89 are quietly continuing their resistance against the repression by the government using many methods and are persisting inside the campus with clever forms of resistance.

"The shedding of blood has moved us from fanaticism to soberness and awakening." This sentence expressed the general feeling of a wide section of the people.

According to an intellectual, public security personnel have spoken of many anti-government leaflets and posters appearing in Beijing in April, and the authorities believe that underground organizations have been set up inside the campus.

Liu Yanbin, a student at the People's University, was recently arrested for publishing an underground journal, *Dem-*

1. The following article first appeared in the Hong Kong revolutionary Marxist journal *October Review*.

cratic Discussions, which called for reform of the Communist system (Reuters, Beijing May 5).

In Shanghai, Gu Bin, Yang Zhou and others have reportedly set up the first human rights organization and organized "underground journals".

These sketchy pieces of news may reflect only the tip of the iceberg of the Chinese people's resistance to totalitarian rule, despite the fact that under the constant surveillance and repression from the authorities, democracy movement activists generally do not want to act recklessly so as to preserve strength for future struggles.

The anti-Li Peng poem and its message became widely known inside China because of the response of the government and the *People's Daily* and TV and radio reporting.

When answering questions from foreign reporters, Li Peng tried to play down the incident as a "small matter not worth mentioning", thus contradicting the open accusation by the public security minister that the poem's publication was "a grave matter" that would be investigated.

Leniency towards newspaper staff

Interestingly, it was revealed by the chief of the *People's Daily* that, of the 32% of his staff who have taken part in Democracy Movement '89, only 1% have so far been punished due to "a lenient policy adopted because too many people had taken part." The poem incident may cause many staff members to be persecuted for their activities in 1989.

In his report to the National People's Congress, the head of the Supreme Court said that 490 cases relating to Democracy Movement '89 had been heard in Beijing, involving 750 persons. In addition, 72 persons were tried in 62 cases on more serious charges of incitement, and plotting to destabilize the government. He also claimed that trials of Democracy Movement '89 activists "have basically finished".

But in fact, new arrests have been taking place. Liu Yanbin, Gu Bin and Yang Zhou have been detained. Others have been summoned for questioning, for example the recently released writer, Wang Ruowang, and his wife have again been questioned for 36 hours.

In April, four university graduates in the city of Wuhan were sentenced to death on charges of forming a "secret society" in June 1990 and killing a taxi driver in November 1990. As usual, no details were reported in the newspaper.

Li Peng has tried to justify the June 4, 1989 massacre by saying that, without such repressive measures, there would not have been stability and economic prosperity in China today.

However, the reality is quite different. The June 4 massacre was followed by a

year described as "the most difficult period" for the economy, due not only to the regime's rectification and adjustment policy, but also partly to the passive resistance and negative attitudes to work of workers and foreign sanctions on loans and investment.

Since then, although production has increased again, this is only because the state has pumped in large loans to jack up production and create demand, while the market has remained sluggish, stocks have continued to build up, economic efficiency to fall, the proportion of enterprises suffering losses has increased to two thirds and their indebtedness has increased by 120% over the previous year.

This is partly reflected in the worsening of the government's financial situation. Taking into account the income from internal and foreign loans, the state budget deficit for 1990 was to be 42.3bn yuan (about \$8bn at \$1=5.3 yuan) while the actual deficit was 50.9bn yuan; the predicted budget deficit for 1991 is 47.6bn yuan.

The finance minister reported that the state's financial difficulties had increased in 1990 to a "state not known for many years" and "the 1991 situation is very grave". Because of the worsening financial difficulties, the government has decided to issue 10 bn yuan of state bonds "to be subscribed in fixed proportions by citizens and individual businesses", along with other special bonds to be subscribed by various enterprises and institutions.

In the area of public order, crimes have increased significantly over the last two years. Official figures showed an increase of over 10% in 1990, with over 605,000 persons arrested nationally for criminal offenses, where "gang crimes were more rampant and most of the offenders were youths."

Working class struggles important factor

The resistance and struggles by the working class are important factors in the political unrest today in China. Since the June 4 massacre, working class discontent has been on the rise. An immediate cause is the austerity policy of the government, which has led to a large increase in the number of unemployed and underemployed. This has resulted in urgent appeals for concern from the official All China Federation of Trade Unions and in the *Workers' Daily*.

According to an article entitled "Workers are not weak" in the April issue of *Zheng Ming*, a Hong Kong journal which claims to have insider news from China, the state security ministry reported to the Chinese Communist Party central committee that, in the first eight months of 1990, there were over 42,000 cases of "reactionary slogans", explosions, sabotage, assassinations and other acts of

resistance in industrial and mining enterprises throughout the country, and that workers' secret organizations were discovered in Hunan, Liaoning, Sichuan, Shanxi, Hebei and other provinces.

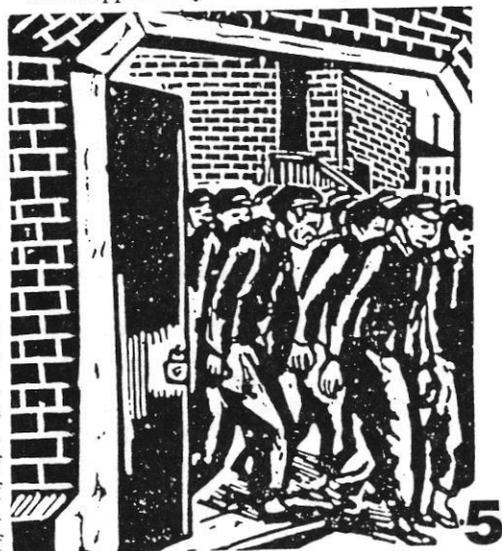
The article also described several concrete cases of workers' strikes and other struggles. If such reports are true, the actual situation in China is much more serious and the threat to the regime much greater than people have thought. The reaction of the official trade union federation and newspapers could further confirm the grave situation.

Li Peng's brave face

Therefore, claims of stability and prosperity by Li Peng are only an attempt to put a brave face on the real situation, as was his unprovoked statement that "the political stability of China also includes the stability of the Chinese government. Therefore, for the term of this government, I see that my position as prime minister will not be changed." The recent appointment of Zhou Jiahua and Zhu Rongji as deputy prime ministers may reflect a factional power struggle and reorganization in face of sharpening social and economic difficulties.

What is worth noting is the "important explanation" Li Peng gave for their appointment: they were "firm and unequivocal in their position during the struggle to quell the counter-revolutionary riot in 1989, keeping in line with the party centre and supporting all measures taken by it". The emphasis on their attitude two years ago could reflect the continued existence of strong dissent and opposition to the party, such that Li wants more people to share the blame and responsibility.

In summary, although at the time of the second anniversary of Democracy Movement '89, the democracy movement in China has not returned to the surface, there are many signs that the social and economic crises are deepening, and the masses are accumulating their strength and waiting for an opportunity to mobilize again. ★



Indian politics after Gandhi

THE assassination of Rajiv Gandhi focussed world attention on the growing crisis of India's largest party, the Congress Party. Oliver New interviewed Achin Vanalk, author of *The Painful Transition* (Verso, London), a Marxist analysis of India's post independence development, and a leading member of the Inquilabi Communist Sanghatan (ICS — Indian section of the Fourth International), about the contemporary Indian political scene.

WHEN Rajiv Gandhi was murdered, the media coverage suggested that democracy in India might be in danger. Why is personal-ity so important in Indian politics?

Bourgeois democracy in India has a plebiscitary character. This applies particularly to the centre parties. Unlike the parties to their right or left, such as the Hindu fundamentalist BJP or the two mass Communist Parties, these are not cadre-based parties.

The Congress Party had a firm structure from 1947 — by which time it was already a sort of government-in-waiting — to the mid 1960s, when the rural bourgeoisie began shifting its allegiance and looking for alternatives, such as regional parties, to defend its class interests.

Other factors have played a role in Congress' decline: the death of the old Congress leadership, the waning credibility of the "Congress socialist" ideology; the rise of the middle castes (who make up the bulk of the Hindu population) and the rise of the upper echelons of these castes.

Congress remains the only truly national party, but its unifying appeal has increasingly come to rely on the charismatic leader, who symbolizes the nation. It is the weakness of the Congress Party rather than mere dynastic ambition that led Indira Gandhi to groom her sons Sanjay and Rajiv for power. The party relies on a leader of national stature, but after Rajiv's death it has none, even compared to the other parties.

■ What are the major ideological differences between the parties?

One crucial issue is secularism, and there are also important differences in terms of economic policy. There are Socialist forces in Janata Dal and in the Congress Party, which, along with the Communist Parties (CPI and CPM), are clearly to the left of European social democracy. They still believe in public ownership of the means of production as a means of managing capitalism.

The other parties are clearly shifting to the right, away from the old statist consensus of Nehru's time. Thus the difference on economic policy between the left and the centre is more pronounced than that between the centre and the right.

Secularism is a very important dividing line in Indian politics today. Congress and Janata Dal are basically secularist, although they opportunistically play communal politics from time to time. They are not so committed to Hindu nationalism as the BJP, however.

■ Is international non-alignment out of the window now?

There are two aspects to Indian non-alignment: firstly, it was a response to bloc politics and an attempt to gain greater room for manoeuvre on the world stage by the Indian bourgeoisie and state than would have been the case with a straightforward pro-Western stance.

Secondly, it involved an emphasis on the greatest possible national independence. This second element retains force today. Nonetheless, since the collapse of bloc politics, non-alignment is now being questioned and there are voices calling for closer links with the US.

An example of imperialist pressure was seen during the Gulf war. The US did not need bases in India — it had them in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. However the US insisted on its planes being allowed to refuel at Bombay airport. Clearly the US were trying to make a political point — "this is the new world order, and you have to be in it." When this became known there was a big furore. The left, the Congress Party and others opposed Chandra Sekhur's acceptance of this dictate and mobilized against it, and indeed the government was forced to back down.

The US is not, in fact, sure what relationship it wants with India. South Asia is not the priority for US policy, which is much more concerned with West Asia [the Middle East] and Europe.

If they really want to improve relations

with India, then they have to adjust their relations with Pakistan. There are some signs of this; the US was more or less neutral in the dispute between Pakistan and India over Kashmir — calls for a UN plebiscite in the region have been dropped. Indeed, on some issues the US behaves as if it wants India to be the regional cop — giving the green light to the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka for example.

At the same time, even after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the US has maintained its strategic relationship with Pakistan, which is important in relation to West Asia, and there are indirect links between the US and secessionist forces in Punjab and Kashmir, which are also supported by Pakistan. In this situation Indian non-alignment still has some life in it, and, in any case, it is not clear what would replace it.

The foreign policy doubts to some extent go hand in hand with the shift towards economic liberalization. The private sector is becoming the leading edge of Indian industrial development — which does not mean that it is the dominant sector.

The current Sekhur Plan is the first economic plan in which the public sector has not been expanded. It is the first plan in which the private sector has been allowed to encroach on areas previously a public sector monopoly, such as power supply and roads.

■ India has finally had to borrow from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). What is the difference between the Indian ruling class and most other Third World ruling classes?

The Indian ruling class is exceptionally autonomous and powerful in Third World terms. Even now, there is no place for the representatives of foreign capital in the ruling coalitions. It would be misleading — as it would be for some other countries such as Brazil and Argentina — to characterize India as "semi-colonial". India has the most autonomous economy of any Third World country, built in spite of imperialism.

A good way of grasping this historically is to see how India got out of the debt trap. Before the 1980s there were only two (or maybe three) Third World countries that had escaped from the debt trap — India, South Korea and perhaps Indonesia. India was in the debt trap in the 1960s, and was very dependent on US support. However the South Korean and Indian roads have been very different.

South Korea got out by orienting itself towards the world market, with a massive export drive. India, on the other hand, shut itself off from the world market — its share of world exports actually declined as it got out of the debt trap, which gives an indication of the scale of India's resources.

In the late 1970s and early 80s, the Indian bourgeoisie took a decision to reintegrate themselves into the world market, hoping that liberalization of imports, particularly as far as capital and electrical goods were concerned, would strengthen the Indian economy's capacity to compete on the world market. However, this gamble has not paid off.

For the second time now, India is on the verge of falling into the debt trap, and this time it will be extremely difficult to get out.

A review of the past seven years shows the seriousness of the situation. Since 1983 the foreign debt has risen five or six times and is now \$60-\$65bn. In seven years some \$50bn have been spent. To this should be added the billions in remittances from Indians working abroad, income from which peaked in 1985/86. The biggest item on the imports bill has been capital goods. This has mainly taken the form of components which are assembled into consumer durables for the domestic market, creating debt dependency.

Now the IMF will tell the Indian government to carry out a deflationary policy. At the moment there is no danger of a massive inflow of foreign capital taking over Indian industry, not because the Indian state would not welcome it, since in the short term it would help the debt situation, but because the foreign capital does not want to come in. It has other priorities, such as east and south-east Asia and, of course, eastern Europe. Even today India is the destination of only a seventh as much foreign capital as China.

■ Can India get out of the debt trap?

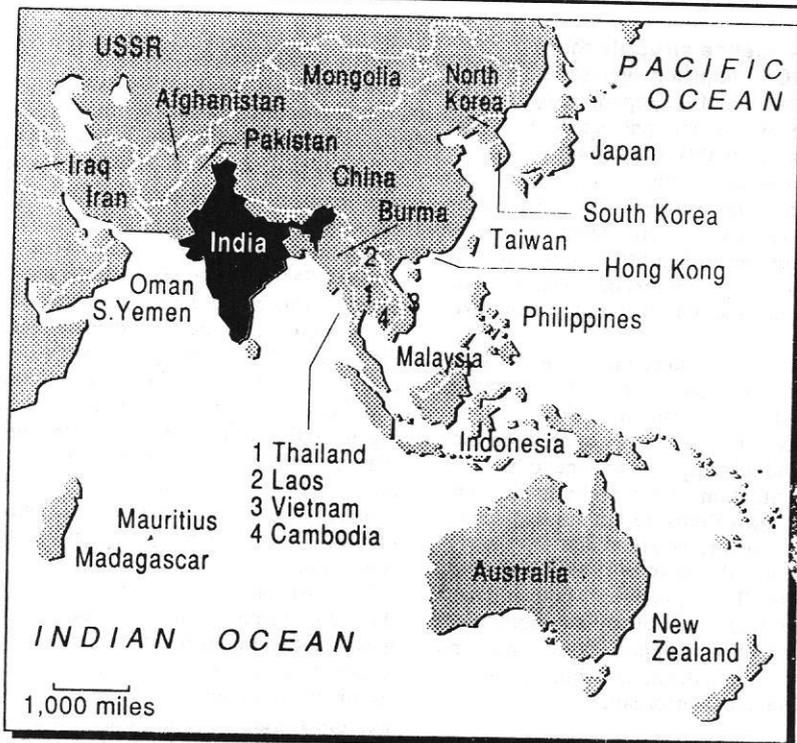
It's possible. It all depends on how far the Indian state can act against the immediate interests of the ruling class coalition and its middle class social base.

Subsidies for fertilizer imports are essential for the agrarian bourgeoisie, and the imports of capital goods are the lifeblood of substantial sections of the industrial bourgeoisie, while the middle class wants to be able to buy imported consumer goods. To get out of the debt trap it is necessary to attack these social groups. The state might be able to do this but it is highly unlikely.

The element of luck should also not be overlooked. If a significant amount of oil can be found then India can buy itself another ten or 15 years. But, although it seems the oil should be there, nobody has yet been able to find it. This issue shouldn't be overlooked — crude oil is India's single bulk import, the second being fertilizers.

■ Why then, given the scale of the economic crisis, is the political focus on the question of communalism rather than on the economy?

No matter which party comes to power



— the left being only a pressure group — there would be no big change in economic policy. All the contenders, V. P. Singh, Chandra Sekhur or even the BJP have more or less the same economic programme. All will pursue liberalization, and make some attempt to tackle unemployment and inflation. The key difference is on secularism.

■ For a long time there have been tensions between the central Indian state and the regions. This has been tied in with the national question, involving demands for regional autonomy and cultural autonomy. At the same time there has been a big rise in communal tensions and Hindu nationalism.

There are a number of separate questions here. Is India a multi-national state? Certainly it is multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural. Is it perhaps a multinational nation state? Clearly an adequate answer requires much theoretical work on what constitutes nations, nationalities and nationalism.

In my view — which is expounded in more detail in my book — India is a nation state with different nationalities. But it would be more accurate to see India as potentially rather than actually multinational.

A comparison in this respect can be made with the Soviet Union, which is today a multinational state that is, at least, in part, breaking up. Russia/the Soviet Union was a multinational empire. India, under Britain, was not a multinational empire, and is not a multinational state.

■ In the Soviet Union you have an economic crisis and at the same

time some democratic openings (*glasnost*) — and an explosion.

In India you have an economic crisis; there have been poverty stricken millions since 1947 and you also have had institutionally-guaranteed democratic rights to a far greater extent than in the USSR.

The national movements in India are largely confined to the periphery, in the north and north-east. The national movements in Kashmir and Punjab are focussed more on religious than linguistic identity.

As for communalism, once you recognize that in India religious groups have been the strongest candidates for nationhood, it becomes clear that there is a strong link between nationalism and communalism.

The social forces behind the rise in communalism in India both before and after independence are the role of the state and the competition between rising Hindu and Muslim middle classes. The rising rural Hindu middle castes — rich farmers or aspiring capitalist farmers — have played a crucial role. Other factors have been at work, among them reactions against the alienating effects of capitalist modernization. The problem is to explain how these factors have led to an expansive Hindu identity.

Hinduism is not like the semitic/prophetic religions; there are no fixed texts, founders or sites, and thus no doctrinal foundation for an exclusive common identity of the kind provided for in the semitic religions. Thus creating a Hindu fundamentalism is not straightforward, although the process, and its partial victories, is itself dangerous.

■ What about the specific situations in the Punjab? What is your attitude and that of the ICS to the

Independence struggle there?

The ICS completely opposes the Khalistani movement for a separate Sikh state in Punjab. We do not consider the Khalistanis as a nationality and certainly not as an oppressed one. This is not to say that Sikhs have not suffered severe repression and state terrorism. But when you talk of an oppressed nationality you have to look at the historical context based on economic, social and political oppression over time.

This is subject to change: thus the Tamils may not have been an oppressed nationality in British times. Subsequently, as a result of cumulative oppression they have undoubtedly become one today.

The situation of the Sikhs is different. As yet most Sikhs do not support Khalistan. However, we argue that state terrorism is not the answer to pro-Khalistani terrorism. The ICS opposes both and calls for the formation of an anti-communal front which will oppose both Hindu and Sikh communalism, and both state and pro-Khalistani terrorism.

■ The Khalistanis seem to have had some success in driving Hindus out of part of Punjab, and this is likely to be reflected in the voting.

No, in fact, the predicted cross-migration of Sikhs and Hindus to and from the Punjab did not take happen. What has happened is a migration of Sikhs and Hindus from the (predominantly Sikh) rural villages in the Punjab to the urban areas, the population of which has been predominantly Hindu.

The Sikh political party, the Akali Dal, is a significant force but there are many factions and it is under pressure from militants on its margins. Punjabi Hindus mainly support Congress — the BJP is not yet important there.

Unless there is a significant sympathy vote for Congress, the vote is likely to swing in favour of Akali Dal. The assumption behind Rajiv Gandhi's Punjab Accord was the idea of a move away from the Khalistani perspective; in return the Akali Dal would be the dominant party in the Punjab government. The militant pro-Khalistan groups outside Akali Dal are themselves divided and lack a centralized authority.

There is also a problem of class; the dominant social class in the Punjab are the rich farmers, who would not benefit from a separate state. Thus it is not clear that there is some inevitable roller-coaster towards secession there. There is a different sort of national question in Kashmir, where the repression is very severe.

■ What has happened to the Indian left over the past few years?

The most important question is how the crisis in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has affected the Stalinist and Maoist left. The Communist Party of India (CPI) has gone along with Gorbachevism, and should not perhaps be called a Stalinist party.

There are five stable or growing mass Communist parties in the world — the Portuguese CP, the South African CP, the Nepali CP and the two Indian CPs. Everybody expects the two latter to hold their electoral support, although they may lose out a bit because of the sympathy vote.

The CPM is more deeply affected by the events in the Soviet bloc than the CPI, being more dogmatic. The main effect is ideological. The Soviet government is far more concerned about the Indian government's foreign policy than about intervening in Indian affairs via the Communist Parties. In such a situation, where the Soviet Union's main interlocutor is the Congress Party, there can be no question of the CPs simply being the tail on the Soviet dog.

The crisis of Stalinism has not modified the CPs' foreign policy outlook. They have seen and continue to see American imperialism as the crucial destabilizing factor in South Asia. While the CPI has welcomed *glasnost* and *perestroika*, the CPM, on the other hand, has rejected them. At the same time the CPI finds some of the concessions made by Moscow to the US difficult to swallow, and has not accepted them.

In fact, the differences between the two parties are not so big, and there is nothing that fundamentally stands in the way of them merging — which would constitute a step forward for the working class, particularly from the point of view of building a secular left front.

The left in general has failed to take the initiative on the issue of anti-communalism and secularism, leaving the issue in the hands of bourgeois figures such as V. P. Singh.

■ The CPs are in power in West Bengal, and Kerala in the south. What has happened there?

The situations in West Bengal and Kerala are different. The Muslims in West Bengal do not vote for the Muslim League, but for the CPM. In Kerala the CPM has played communal politics. It opposed an alliance of the Muslim League and the Kerala Congress, a communal organization representing Christians and others, but this was in fact an attempt to appeal to the majority Hindu vote.

The Maoist groups in India organize about 35,000 cadres, split between seven or eight parties. The best of them represent the militant cutting edge of the struggles of the most oppressed people in India. They face a number of difficulties now. The Tiananmen massacre was a big shock, leading to a reassessment of the whole question of the nature of the Chinese army. Some groups have begun to reassess the question of Stalinism, but this strikes at their roots.

They also have problems now with

defending the notion of socialism in one country, although of course their belief that the Soviet Union and other such countries have been state capitalist provides some protection against reality. The most important question is that of socialist democracy and pluralism.

Here there has been an impact from the autonomous movements, especially the women's movement; some of the Maoist groups want to gain credibility here and involve themselves, though without truly respecting the principle of autonomy.

In fact the current which was committed both to the autonomy of the women's movement and socialism is now rather subdued, with the socialists and the autonomists pulling in different directions. There is a need for a socialist feminist perspective both against the Maoist "party/women's organization" approach and the view that the women's movement consists only of a series of single issue campaigns.

The women's movement has had an impact on the far left, and on the CPs where the question of internal regime and of taking up women's issues is now being raised. The social base of the Naxalite [Maoist] groups is the tribal societies, where there are far more egalitarian relations between women and men than in non-tribal Indian society. Thus there is already a strong involvement of women in these areas.

■ What do you expect to happen in the elections?

The big question is how well the Hindu fundamentalist BJP do. The better it does, the more it appears as the wave of the future, and the more the centrist organizations waver on the question of secularism. This will remain true whatever the realignments in the centre.

The Congress' electoral plank of stability is now obviously a much more powerful attraction than before. The BJP has shifted its line, putting itself forward as a disciplined party of stability, rather than simply being anti-minority. They say that, since Congress cannot stabilize itself, how can it be expected to stabilize the whole country, a slogan that does not lack appeal.

The fiasco over Rajiv's wife Sonia, who was pressured, but refused, to take over the leadership of Congress, has lost the party time, and only now are they getting their act together. The Congress Party, with no obvious leader, has to close ranks and establish a collegiate leadership — which is what they are doing now. They have a caretaker leader without a strong regional base, who will not necessarily be the prime ministerial candidate if Congress are the largest party.

The big question in these elections is whether, given the economic crisis, the Indian centre parties can resist the pull away from independence on the world scene and the challenge to secularism domestically. ★

Disaster and underdevelopment

THIS cyclone is only the most recent of a series of natural disasters that have struck the country over the past 20 years. In September 1988, overflowing rivers flooded two thirds of the country and killed more than 1,500 people. In May 1985, a cyclone submerged several islands in the Ganges delta, leading to between 20 to 50,000 deaths. In 1970, another cyclone left an indelible mark on the country, killing 500,000; this disaster exposed the inability of the Pakistan government to organize a rescue operation and gave added impetus to the struggle for independence which led, the following year, to the creation of Bangladesh.

Between 1960 and 1981, Bangladesh thus suffered 17 major floods and 37 significant cyclones.² It is this history that led the special correspondent of the French daily, *Le Monde*, to ask: "Between cyclones and floods, does Bangladesh really have a chance?"³

Dangers of geography

There is no denying the fact that Bangladesh's geographical position exposes it to exceptional dangers. The country lies at the mouths of three rivers which form the second most extensive delta in the world, after that of the Amazon. The Ganges collects the waters of the Himalayas on the Nepal and Indian slopes; the Brahmaputra (called the Jamuna in Bangladesh) brings down the waters from the Tibetan and Chinese slopes, while the Meghna draws in the waters of the Himalayan foothills of Assam. Together their basins cover a surface area of 1.5m square kms inhabited by more than 500 million people.⁴

The monsoons of June to September bring down on this region some of the heaviest rainfall in the world. During the September 1988 spate, the outflow of the Ganges reached 72,300 cubic metres a second, that of the Brahmaputra 98,600 and the Meghna, 13,000. By way of comparison, the outflow of the Seine in spate reaches 2,500 cubic metres a second.

These three mighty rivers and the 250-odd others that water Bangladesh carry some 1-2 billion tonnes of silt every year.⁵ When they arrive at the Indo-Bengali frontier at a mere 22.5 metres above sea level, they have a further 400 to 500 kilometers to go across land mainly composed of the same sediment, and which is almost without rocks. The result is rivers that divide up into hundreds of branches whose main stream can be several kilometers across, which frequently change their bed and which overflow every year.

ON APRIL 28 this year a cyclone of unprecedented violence devastated the eastern seaboard of Bangladesh. The official death toll was 125,000 and some 10 million people were made homeless .

J-F MARQUIS*

Meanwhile, the warm waters of the Gulf of Bengal favour the formation of cyclones, in the same way as the Caribbean. The number of major cyclones to strike Bangladesh each year averages out at 1.5.⁶ Winds of between 150 and 200 kms an hour whip up waves three to six metres high. A tenth of Bangladesh lies below sea level and one third is only two to four metres above it.⁷ Only on the western part of the coast is the effect of the cyclones softened somewhat by mangrove forests.⁸

High population growth

It is currently fashionable to add population growth — 2.4% a year — to these natural dangers. "In Bangladesh it is simple enough; the population grows faster than food production."⁹ Some 115 million people inhabit this land of 144,000 square kms and the average population density is 900 people to every square km.

It is to these causes that the poverty of this country, numbered by the World Bank among the ten poorest on the planet, is often attributed. This is a country where, each year, a million children of less than five years die of malnutrition and disease¹⁰, and where, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), two thirds of the population lives beneath the basic minimum; half of the rural population is underfed.¹¹

In fact, the poverty of rural Bangladesh is explained in the first place by a social rather than a natural condition.

Some 60% are landless or almost landless (that is, have less than 20 ares — 1 are = 100 square metres). Furthermore this proportion continues to grow. In 1947 10% were landless or almost landless, in 1961 the figure had risen to 13-17%. By 1984, however, 60% of the rural population had fallen into these categories.¹²

Furthermore, peasants who have less than 100 ares of poor land or less than 50 ares of irrigated land fall into the same insecure category. According to circumstances they are in a position to provide for their families for between three and nine months of the year. For the rest they have to find work as agricultural labourers or sharecroppers. In the latter case they abandon half of the crop to the owner, although they assume the entire cost of the farming. Often they cannot get through the year without borrowing from a village notable: 10-15% interest per month is the going rate, with the land serving as collateral. Thus more often than not they end up losing their land.

The other end of the scale

At the other end of the social scale are found the *jotdars*. Making up 7% of families, they own 50% of the land. More often than not they also exercise political authority as well as control over irrigation canals, which offers many opportunities for corruption.¹³

The process of dispossession affects fishing — which provides 80% of protein — as well as agricultural land. Each year the state auctions fishing rights; very often it is the rich owners who get them, after bribing the relevant officials.¹⁴

A good example is the farming of shrimps. Shellfish exports have risen from 1,000 tonnes in 1980/81 to 23,000 tonnes in 1989/90, making up some 12% of Bangladesh exports, supported by the World Bank.¹⁵ Shrimp farming can have disastrous consequences. Thus 100,000 Namasudra, Hindus living in south-western Bangladesh, are today facing the threat of losing their livelihood, since the marshes they live in, which provide them with crops during the dry season, are no longer drying out due to the construction of dykes thirty years ago. The only hope is to

* This article first appeared in the May 31 edition of the Swiss revolutionary Marxist newspaper *La Brèche*.
1. *Le Monde*, 8.5.1991.
2. *Overseas Development Institute*, Briefing paper, London, November 1990.
3. *Le Monde*, 22.5.1991.
4. *New Scientist*, 13.4.1991, and *Ambio*, June 1989.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ambio*, June 1989.
7. *Die Zeit*, 10.5.1989.

8. *Tages Anzeiger*, 31.5.1991.

9. *Le Monde*, 22.5.1991.

10. *International Herald Tribune*, 16.5.1991.

11. *Guardian Weekly*, 12.5.1991.

12. René Dumont, *Finis les lendemains qui chantent, Bangladesh, Nepal, "l'aide" contre le développement*, Paris, 1985, p. 50.

13. *Libération*, 18.6.1985.

14. René Dumont, op. cit., p. 90.

15. *Panoscope*, January 1991.

break down the dykes, but this would threaten the shrimp farming which has since been started up on the other side of the dykes. For the time being the rich landowners who own the shrimp farms have been able to get their way.

On the other hand, at Khulna, it is the shrimp farmers themselves who have broken down the dykes with the aim of allowing in the seawater, drowning rice-fields.¹⁶ Shrimp farming, furthermore, requires consolidation of land holdings and thus is inherently favourable to the big owners.¹⁷

This is the social background that has led hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis to set up on extremely dangerous land. The silt brought down by the rivers endlessly gives rise to the formation of new islands, both in the rivers themselves and in the estuaries. As soon as these new islands appear, they are settled by poor Bangladeshis. However a spate or a cyclone can sweep them away, in the literal sense of the terms; in 1985 this happened to the island of Urirchar and its 10,000 inhabitants.¹⁸ As Allister MacGregor, professor at Bath University explains: "these are the poorest people and they take the biggest risks. They live on the edge of a precipice. One flood is enough to make them pay the supreme price. They are forced into this situation by their poverty."¹⁹

Dyking of rivers proposed

These facts need to be borne in mind when considering the remedies proposed to defeat the periodic flooding of Bangladesh. Following the spate of 1988, on September 29 of that year French president François Mitterrand proposed to the UN General Assembly nothing less than the dyking up of the three rivers.²⁰ That December, his special adviser, Jacques Attali, visited Bangladesh to advance a cause which, as the French daily, *Libération*, explained, was not wholly motivated by goodwill: "the humanitarian issue is at once political and commercial. We have to get France into position for what could be the big construction project of the century."²¹

What enticed the French entrepreneurs was the vision of 4,000 kms of dykes of between 4.5 and 7.4 metres in height, necessitating 20 years of work and costing \$5 to \$10bn. Such an undertaking implies some 4280 to \$10m per year for construction and the same ever after for maintenance.²²

Despite some highly critical studies, notably from American sources, this project was put before the summit of the Big Seven in July 1989 and accepted by the World Bank that December as a basis for research. An initial credit of \$146.3m has been granted for preliminary studies to be conducted over five years. Salim Rashid, a professor at Illinois University has remarked: "it is enough to make you

despair when you find out the low importance granted to agriculture, the socio-economic impact, fishing and the environment, since of these \$146m only \$2m are designated for such matters."²³

The commercial interest of such a pharaonic project is obvious enough, but its positive impact on the Bangladeshi people is not so obvious.²⁴

Carrying out the plan would mean the displacement of between 2 and 5 million people; 180,000 people would have to be removed from 20,000 hectares of land in a country where there is already an intense land hunger.

The confinement of the rushing waters in the canals would raise the level of the high waters without anyone knowing how the existing hydraulic system would react. It would also increase the level of the water downstream, creating in the monsoon season an abnormal sea-level and floodings upstream.

A big challenge

Such a construction would have to be perfectly carried out and excellently maintained. In case of a burst dyke the resulting disaster would be worse than the floods now. This is a big challenge for a very poor country. Indeed, many scientists doubt the very possibility of blocking the flow of such powerful rivers which cross a rockless delta.

The subsidence of the delta would no longer be compensated by silt from the rivers. On the other hand, as has been shown by experience in China, the dyking would lead to a rise in the level of the riverbeds.

Furthermore, by ending the nutrient supply provided by the river-borne silt, the dyking would imply a radical change in agricultural methods. The loss could perhaps be met by using more intensive farming methods, whether by combining fertilizers and artificial irrigation, or by installing sluices in the dykes, allowing a controlled flooding of the fields. In either case the power of the rich peasants would be further strengthened. Experience shows that it is they alone who have profited from the "green revolution" and it is they who have taken control of the sluices in the 225 kms of dykes already built along the Brahmaputra. James K. Boyce, professor at the University of Massachusetts, remarks that: "the replacement of closed water cultivation for open water cultivation is also a substitution of private for collective property. In a socio-economic context marked by extreme differences of wealth and poverty, this

can result for the poor in a dramatic closing off of their access to aquatic resources."²⁵

Twenty percent of Bangladesh is flooded during a normal monsoon, and this plays a vital role in agriculture and fishing. It is thus not surprising that the first of the World Bank studies of the dyke project have revealed that "the floods are not the main preoccupation of the Bangladeshi peasants. The scourge of the moneylenders, land distribution and the ravages of disease are much more basic questions for the rural population."²⁶

The objective of blocking the rivers is highly questionable, both from an ecological and social point of view. The beneficiaries will be, apart from the multinationals, the ruling layers in Bangladesh, through corruption or the strengthening of their control over agricultural resources. In fact, "gentle" means exist for dealing with the most severe floods: the improvement of the early warning system coordinated with India and Nepal, which can give a week's warning; the construction of raised shelters; the building of special dykes to protect essential installations. The maintenance of existing dykes (those of the capital Dacca are currently used for house-building), to facilitate the canals and basins and improve the circulation of the water, would furthermore provide work and thus make a further contribution to the struggle against desperate poverty.²⁷

The struggle against cyclones

The struggle against the effects of the cyclones, which are far more destructive than the floods, presents the same kind of problems. After the 1970 cyclone, a mound ("killa") and shelter building programme was agreed on and won support from the World Bank. By this April only some 300 of the 2,500 planned shelters had been built. They were effective and saved thousands of lives. However, some 5,000 are needed to cover need on the coast.²⁸ At the same time, while the alarm system permitted the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of people, the fact that many are too poor to own a radio was not in fact adequately compensated for by the system of volunteers charged with spreading the news to their neighbours. Quite simple projects would thus immediately reduce the impact of these natural disasters. In the longer term, land reform is indispensable in order both to increase production and lessen the pressure on the land, which forces ever more Bangladeshis to settle on the edge of the sea. ★

16. Ibid.
17. *Le Monde*, 22.5.1991.
18. *Libération*, 28.5.1991.
19. *Guardian Weekly*, 12.5.1991.
20. *Libération*, 31.10.1991.
21. Ibid., 3.12.1988
22. *Croissance*, May 1990.
23. *Bangladesh environmental letter*, October-December, 1990.

24. On these problems, see *Croissance*, May 1990; *Libération*, 31.10.1990, *New Scientist*, 13.4.1991 and 2.12.1989; *Panorama*, March 1991.
25. *Bangladesh environmental letter*, October-December 1990.
26. *Le Monde*, 4.5.1991.
27. René Dumont, op. cit.
28. *Die Zeit*, 10.5.1991 and *Guardian Weekly*, 12.5.1991.

A new era of world peace?

PREPARATIONS for the 7th Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) are nearing their end. The burning question of pluralism has been

ruled out of order in the official debates in an authoritarian manner. This question is nonetheless at the heart of the crisis which is undermining the party¹. The "contribution" of Hoàng Minh Chính, contained in this issue of *IV*, bears witness to this, as do the interview with Bùi Tín and the "Letter" of Nguyễn Khắc Viện which we have previously published². Hoàng Minh Chính is a cadre who was decorated for valour during the resistance to the French occupation in 1954. This former rector of the Institute of Philosophy fell into disgrace in 1963 for denouncing the influence of Stalinism and Maoism on Vietnamese Communism. He paid for his obstinate defence of his ideas with 15 years of detention or house arrest, and expulsion from the ranks of the party.

In his "contribution", Chính attacks the single party system, noting correctly that it necessarily smothers any real democracy. But he seems also to have many illusions on the role of the market in the development of the capitalist Third World, on the United Nations and the "presidential parliamentary" regime of bourgeois democracy.

PIERRE ROUSSET

Nations, against a dictator, its real objective was the preservation of "international law" (whose meaning is revealed by the counter-examples of Palestine, occupied by Israel, and East Timor, occupied by Indonesia). The official line from Washington, London and Paris has scarcely concealed the traditional pursuit of imperialist objectives, such as the desire for politico-military hegemony over the Third World, the struggle for direct or indirect control of resources and the recycling of oil revenues. The UN — representing states and governments, not peoples or nations — appears more than ever dependent on the five permanent members of the Security Council, an un-democratic nuclear club.⁴

We are, unhappily, not out of the imperialist era. Chính notes with wry humour that it is a little absurd to demand that the developed capitalist countries finance socialism. But it is no less absurd to hope that they are going to aid the constitution of new independent bourgeois economic powers.

Debt and domination

Witness the use that they make of the Third World debt to consolidate their domination over the debtor countries. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) arrogates to itself a veto over governmental policies, while the dictatorship of the market continues to condemn to poverty entire sectors of the population⁵.

Free trade zones only serve the multinationals and some national bourgeois concerns. Industrialization in a south east Asian country like Thailand, which claims the status of a new "dragon", is taking place under Japanese hegemony. The Philippines have always discreetly followed the precepts of the IMF and the World Bank. They are now the prisoners of a dramatic crisis. The "Third World" — defined as the ensemble of the dominated countries — is not in the process of disappearing from the map of the world.

Hoàng Minh Chính demands, rightly, that Vietnam respect fundamental liberties, liberties which can in no way be char-

1. *International Viewpoint* no. 201, March 4, 1991.

2. *IV* 204, April 15, 1991.

3. He refers here to Hồ Chí Minh's programme of national democratic revolution in the period 1945-55. But this national democratic revolution would precisely open up a transition to socialism.

4. It is also true in relation to the role of the UN in the determination of a Cambodian peace plan. See *IV* 183, April 23, 1990.

5. Chính refers to the Asian "dragons" like South Korea. But their takeoff was favoured by a very particular historic conjuncture marked, amongst other factors, by the defeat of "their" imperialism (in the form of Japan), the US will to isolate the Chinese revolution, and then the availability of "petrodollars". Their "model" of growth, very "statist", is strongly anti-democratic and violently repressive. The socio-political crisis now shaking South Korea shows the sharpness of the contradictions opened up by this model. See in particular Walden Bello, Stephanie Rosenfeld, "Dragons in Distress, Asia's Miracle in Crisis", *IFDP*, San Francisco, 1990.

longer count on the aid of the economically more developed "brother countries" like the USSR, and asks how Vietnam, one of the poorest countries in the world, can hope to "directly construct socialism" by "skipping the capitalist stage of development".

It is a serious question, and one which does not only concern Vietnam, as the example of Nicaragua shows. At stake are the conditions of what we call the process of "permanent revolution" in the dominated countries.

Hoàng Minh Chính draws the conclusion from the crisis of the "socialist camp" that only the "bourgeois democratic revolution" (conceived as a very long process) is on the order of the day in Vietnam³. He does so in the name of realism, but does not for all that avoid illusions. The Gulf war broke out after Hoàng Minh Chính had written his "contribution". It shows that the "new world order" does not open up an "era of peace" and of "dialogue between nations" as Chính had hoped. Waged primarily by the United States, employing unprecedented military means, it could not be described as a "regional conflict".

Waged in the name of the United

WE are not in a position to discuss the fundamental conceptions put forward by Hoàng Minh Chính. This text presents only the conclusions of his analysis, in the condensed form of "theses". His writings of the 1960s (in particular a document of 200 pages, drafted in 1967, entitled "On dogmatism in Vietnam") seem to have had only a very limited diffusion and remain unknown to us. It is nonetheless useful to examine the questions raised by Chính here.

They illustrate a danger inherent in the current international situation; that of anti-bureaucratic critics in the transitional societies resigning themselves, for lack of an alternative, to the "laws of the market" and "cooperation through the United Nations" as the way to bring these countries out of crisis.

Hoàng Minh Chính's document identifies some real problems. It attempts to identify the internal factors underlying the bankruptcy of the Stalinist model — foremost among them the anti-democratic dynamic inherent in the single party system. It discusses the situation of Third World countries undertaking socialist revolution, in a situation where they can no

acterized as "bourgeois". They have been conquered by sustained struggle in the West, against the bourgeoisie, as they must be against the bureaucracy⁶. Many of them, like the right to work and health, or trade union rights, are today subject to repeated new attacks in the developed capitalist countries themselves.

Political "openness" and the right to information are freedoms without which there is no true democracy. It is then symptomatic that, at the time of the Gulf War, manipulation of information reached summits rarely scaled before. The Gulf conflict has, in fact, illustrated the extent to which the system of presidential parliamentarism (which is completely bourgeois) in force in the Western countries, stifles direct democracy. A large scale war has been launched in the name of the United States, without the American people ever being allowed to say a word about it. Experience in the capitalist Third World shows that this type of democracy accommodates itself very well to the most corrupt clientelism and patronage.

Hoàng Minh Chính presents a far too optimistic picture of the contemporary world. He also draws an overly unilateral balance sheet of the past, making of "leftism" the sole "generator of all ills". In fact, in the field of international politics, the Stalinist policy has more than once been "rightist".

Stalinism and colonialism

The Vietnamese revolution has also paid a strong price for this "opportunism" as in 1936-39 when, in the name of antifascism, Moscow and the French Communist Party accepted the colonial status of Indo-China; in 1945-46, when they "recognized" Vietnam as belonging to the western "zone of influence"; in 1954 when the Soviet Union and China imposed heavy concessions of great consequence on the Vietnamese fighters during the Geneva negotiations; and at the beginning of the 1960s, when Khrushchev negotiated an agreement of peaceful coexistence with Washington.

This debate is not academic. Reformism — whether social democratic or Stalinist — has opened the road to some of the bloodiest counter-revolutions, like in Indonesia in 1965-66 and Chile in 1973.

The perspective proposed by Hoàng Minh Chính is illusory. But the questions he poses are nonetheless well founded — and not easy to answer. It is necessary to relaunch the revolutionary dynamic, particularly through radical democratic reforms. But it is necessary also to avoid the market and the multinationals imposing their own dictatorship on society, with the transformation of a part of the bureaucratic elite into a new bourgeoisie. To a large extent the concrete forms of a transitional economy and a socialist democracy adapted to national realities remain to be discovered. Finally, and above all, it is

Leftism is the root of all evils

WE reproduce below major parts of the "contribution to the political programme" submitted by the former rector of the Institute of Philosophy at Hanoi, Hoàng Minh Chính, in the context of the debate prior to the 7th Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) (see IV 201 and 204). The document was translated into French by the review *Doàn Kê*, which published it in full in its April 1991 edition.

DOCUMENT

THE [preparation of the 7th Congress of our party] raises burning theoretical and practical problems and invites discussion. I respond in all sincerity, without seeking to spare sensitivities. The constraints imposed by the form of a newspaper article have led me however to sketch my ideas, without elaboration, in the form of theses.

1. One of the great lessons that our party (and many others) must draw from living experience [concerns] infantile ultra-leftism, the generator of all other ills. An example of this is the "Theses" advanced in October 1930 by Trần Phú, the first secretary general of the party. [They] are based on a leftist conception of the class struggle and the dictatorship of the prole-

nariat which has dominated the practice of the party in the course of its history. They were put forward in opposition to the "Political Programme" of February 3, 1930, of Nguyễn Ai Quốc¹, which advocated national unity as a revolutionary strategy. [These] "Theses" have had devastating consequences; [such as] the insurrections precipitated [and the repression of these] which show the errors of Maoist leftist dogmatism. Campaigns bearing the mark of Stalinism and Maoism have caused incalculable waste and losses of human life....

2. Another, no less important lesson, [concerns] the strategy of national unity of classes, of popular layers, of religious believers, of ethnic groups and of differing political opinions. This political line,

necessary to find the means to revive the internationalism of which Third World revolutions have a vital need.

One can agree with Chính that it adds up to a long haul, in which the responsibility of all is engaged.

The debate opened up by Hoàng Minh Chính is thus both inevitable, because of the current international situation, and legitimate and necessary. It cannot be "resolved" by administrative repression. However, the leadership of the Vietnamese Communist Party continues to employ selective repression against the "oppositionist" intellectuals or political cadres.

The writer Duong Thu is still imprisoned, accused of having "had the intention of gathering and sending abroad documents inimical to national security"⁷. Th editor-in-chief of the *Hồ Chí Minh* City review *Tuổi Trẻ* ("Youth") was suspended from her functions on May 28 for having published on its front page an article on the "Letters of Nguyễn Ai Quốc [Hồ Chí Minh] to his wife", whereas according to his official biography, he never married.⁸

A French filmmaker of Vietnamese ori-

gin, Gesbert Bernard Romai, was arrested, then expelled, for making a film "falsifying the situation in Vietnam and encouraging opposition" and bringing "reactionary" documents into the country⁹. Bui Duy Tam, an American of Vietnamese origin, has also been expelled for receiving such documents. These amount to measures of intimidation aimed at cutting the "dissidents" off from all contacts with the outside world.

The preparatory debates for the 7th congress of the VCP have been entirely "sewn up" by the leadership. That means that the congress itself will resolve none of the problems posed by the very difficult situation the Vietnamese revolution is going through. ★

6. It is perhaps in this sense (that of liberties) that *Việt* notes that it is necessary to speak of "popular democracy" and not "bourgeois democracy" (see his "Letter", IV 204). It is noteworthy that while critics like Bui Tin, Nguyễn Khắc Văn and Hoàng Minh Chính agree on, for example, the democratic demands, their respective analyses also differ profoundly, notably in their appreciation of the social dynamic of capitalism.

7. *Le Monde*, May 15, 1991.

8. *Hồ Chí Minh* seems to have had at least a companion in France, in the 1920s, and another, later, in China.

9. *Le Monde*, May 15, 1991.

put forward by Nguyễn Ai Quốc [in 1930] was qualified by Trần Phú, and the central committee of the time — indeed the International, completely dominated by Stalin — as rightist, reformist, nationalist and devoid of class position. They forced Nguyễn Ai Quốc to make a self-criticism. But the history of the Vietnamese revolution has shown in a striking manner that each time this great policy of national unity has been implemented, it has met with success [and that it] is not only indispensable in the national democratic revolution, but also throughout the stages of the socialist revolution².

3. [The current] draft programme proposes an analysis of the world situation [conforming to] the dogmatic vision of 30 or 40 years ago [which] can only lead to strategic orientations which do not correspond to, indeed which are contrary to, the

general tendency of the world today.

Since the end of the Second World War, the capitalist countries (including the vanquished) have put to profit the scientific and technical revolutions (in the field of biology, and above all in that of information), regulating themselves, adapting themselves to the rapid pace of change in the world, and thereby overcoming numerous grave periodic crises. If they have not completely escaped from general crisis, they have nonetheless made prodigious process, passing to a post-industrial civilization and an information civilization. This is true even for the newly industrialized countries of the Third World, like the "dragons" of the Far East.³ At the same time, the socialist world (in Europe, Asia, Latin America, as in Africa) has indulged itself in an abstract ideology of dogmatic leftism....

Here resides the cause of the latent economic, political, social and moral crises which socialism has experienced for 45 years, crises which have finally broken out [into broad daylight]. The model of socialism has been shattered [in 1989] by the very will of the people concerned.

One cannot decree arbitrarily that this collapse is the result of some imperialist plot seeking to "peacefully transform" the socialist camp. Let us have the courage to recognize the cause, in all lucidity, whatever it costs us; an inherent cancer which has gnawed the body of actually existing socialism and which has reached its ultimate stage...

Fundamental and marvellous phenomenon

Humanity is now witnessing a phenomenon, fundamental and marvellous... which dogmatic souls cannot see. It is, with the end of the Cold War, the disappearance of the spectre of world war, of nuclear conflagration (which does not exclude regional armed conflicts). Confrontation gives way to the dialogue of nations, of member states of the United Nations, which could cooperate to find a solution to the burning problems which menace the survival of the human race... Certainly, we are only at the beginning of a long road sown with snares, but the road is opened. The information civilization forces states, nations and peoples to evolve rapidly, to revise radically their conceptions of the world, the epoch, the social system, [of] all the essential questions....

To accede to the information era, each people must ... give first place to intellectual work — to the scientists, the intellectuals, the creators, to promote a modern national education, to engage itself resolutely in the course of scientific progress and the new technologies...

4.After having remarked with justice that "Vietnam starts from the posi-

Release political prisoners!

THE following appeal was issued in France on April 25, 1991, signed by over 370 people, including many leading French and Vietnamese intellectuals:

"Mme. Duong Thu Huong, writer, scriptwriter and poet, after two years of threats, has been arrested in Hanoi because of her political views. The undersigned, active for many years in solidarity with the Vietnamese people, protest against this arbitrary act of repression against an intellectual who has brought honour to women and to Vietnamese literature, and whose courageous voice expresses the aspirations of an entire people to democratic change. They demand the immediate liberation of Duong Thu Huong and all the detainees held because of their political views. They demand an urgent international mobilization in their defence".

Further information from: Đoàn Kê, 193 Rue de Bercy, 75582-Paris, Cedex 12, France. ★

tion of a colonial, semi-feudal society, its economy dominated by small production" — classed by the United Nations among the ten poorest countries of its 160 member states — [the draft programme] affirms that "our country passes to socialism by skipping the stage of capitalist development" (draft programme, chapter 11, point 2). ...How can Vietnam [do this]? The path indicated by Lenin implies "fraternal aid in all areas on the part of the countries which have achieved the construction of developed socialism". At the current time, no socialist "rearguard" country of this kind exists.

In these conditions, for a country like Vietnam, whose rural backward economy is still at the pre-capitalist stage "to pass directly to socialism by relying on its own forces, by skipping the stage of capitalist development" amounts to following a road characterized by Marx, Engels and Lenin as anti-scientific, anti-historic and utopian. At least unless one expects the developed capitalist countries to help us to directly construct socialism! Height of irony, that is precisely what the draft programme proposes to us.

To finish, I want to make five propositions.

1. Nguyễn Ai Quốc was a pseudonym used before the Second World War by Hồ Chí Minh. The "Theses" of Trần Phú remain an official reference document.

2. The stage of the "national democratic revolution" essentially precedes the seizure of power (1954 in the North, 1975 in the South). The socialist revolution succeeds it immediately.

3. South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore.

Hoàng Minh Chính

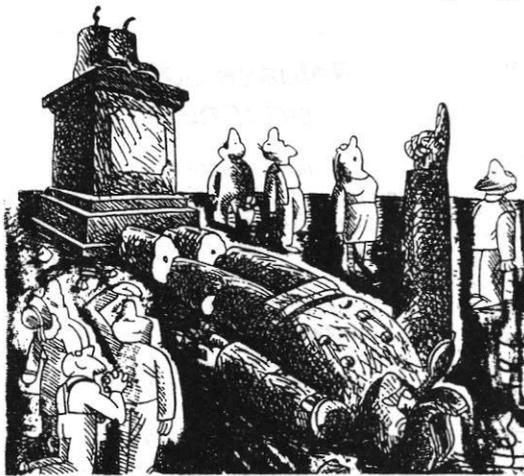
* BORN around 1925. Involved in militant activity from an early age. Imprisoned by the colonial regime. After 1945, a fighter in the People's Liberation Army (decorated for valour in 1954).

* Nominated to the leadership of the Communist Youth after the liberation of North Vietnam (1954). Sent, in 1957, at the head of the first Vietnamese class at the higher cadre school of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

* He was convinced by Khrushchev's secret 1956 speech on the crimes of Stalin of the need to struggle against the Stalinist and Maoist influence inside the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP). Nominated rector of the Institute of Philosophy on his return to Hanoi (1960). He drafted a political platform on the Sino-Soviet conflict, adopted by the political bureau of the VCP.

* Opposed the line of the central committee of November-December 1963, where the VCP sided with the Chinese CP in ideological opposition to Moscow. Wrote several texts defending his positions (1963 and 1967). Characterized as "revisionist", he was condemned without trial, expelled from the VCP, and spent a decade in detention or house arrest.

* In June 1981, sent a petition to the National Assembly. Once more condemned to administrative detention. Freed five years later, after the 6th Congress of the VCP (1986). Wrote, in January 1991, a "contribution" to the preparatory debate of the 7th Congress of the VCP. ★



(i) To renounce definitively Maoist ideology and start genuinely from the concrete conditions of Vietnam. [To elaborate] for some years to come a line, a strategy and an urgent plan of national salvation.

(ii) To value all the human and material potential of all classes and social layers, all ethnic groups, all religions, of the Vietnamese diaspora around the world, in appealing to all the capitalists and the workers, peasants and intellectuals of all regions and countries The market economy must obey the laws of value, of supply and demand. This implies legalized competition, a creative enterprise spirit, the search for profit, privatization and the diversification of property.

(iii) To unblock foreign relations in the new spirit promoted by the United Nations, so as to open Vietnam to foreign investment, new technologies and the efficient methods of management of the advanced capitalist countries, the newly industrialized countries and the countries of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). To open special economic zones along the coast, in the manner of the Chinese Shenzhen zone. To have the ambition of becoming the fifth or sixth "economic dragon" in one or two decades.

(iv) To dare to suspend the so-called objective of "immediate and long term construction of socialism". It is a matter of more haste, less speed, for socialism as conceived by Marx, Engels, and Lenin exists only in the form of abstract thought, a working hypothesis.... Even the academic experts in Marxism-Leninism and in models of actually existing socialism no longer dare to claim to have a response to the question: "what is socialism?"....

Heritage of Vietnamese nation

Let us return resolutely to the "political programme of Nguyễn Ai Quốc" [of the 1945-55 period], the platform of "the bourgeois-democratic revolution" which was able to channel the cultural heritage of the Vietnamese nation, to respond to

the aspirations of the people in all its components... It goes without saying that the bourgeois-democratic revolution is a long haul.... Historic precedent teaches us that it has taken a hundred to two hundred years to carry out this great revolution, whether it be the French revolution of 1789 (200 years), the Meiji era reforms in Japan (120 years, starting from the Iwakura mission of 1871) or the American revolution (200 years).

(v) The whole world knows the famous slogan of president Hồ Chí Minh: "Nothing is more precious than independence and liberty".

The president said also that independence without democratic liberties is only a formal independence... What are the profound causes of [the absence, in Vietnam, of real democracy]? The first cause resides in article 4 of the 1980 constitution which institutionalized the powers of the party: "the Vietnamese Communist Party is the sole leading force of the state and the society". This absolute power became, in the hands of cadres at all levels of the hierarchy, in particular the degenerate cadres, an absolute weapon authorizing all abuses, privileges and prerogatives, corruption, repression, lies and hypocrisy.

The absolute power of the party transformed itself into the absolute personal power of each of its representatives... The history of the years 1950-70 shows that all the socialist states have established this implacable relation of cause and effect; the economic, political, ideological monopoly, the monopoly of information and the truth leading inexorably to totalitarianism and dictatorship... To become a true democracy, there is no other road than that indicated by Lenin: "We do not reject absolutely the slogans of bourgeois democracy, we put into practice that which is most democratic in these slogans, and in a manner more radical, more complete and more resolute"⁴.

Humanity has until now found only one type of democracy (which is still perhaps not the best) — the regime based on the separation of the three powers, the state of laws, presidential parliamentarism, pluralism, freedom of the press....

Let us hope that in the future, thanks to the development of the democratic institutions of the existing capitalist regimes (capitalism is far from being an ideal model, exempt from all defects) and to advances in the sense of the humanist ideals of socialism, humanity will be able in the course of the first decades of the third millennium to create a fully free and democratic regime in the service of all.



4. The author cites as a reference for this quotation the French language edition of Lenin's "Complete Works", Editions du Progrès, Moscow, 1980, volume 27, page 558.

Power struggle amongst the Mullahs

SINCE the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran's clerical bourgeois regime has witnessed a continuing struggle between forces wishing to "normalize" the country's position on the international stage and stabilize regular state institutions, and others who base their power on the informal institutions of the Islamic revolution.

In the interview published below, Iranian revolutionary Marxist, Mahmood Kafaie, who has spent several years in the jails of Iran's Islamic Republic for his political activities, spoke to *IV* about the present state of play in the struggle between Iran's "moderates" and "radicals".

WE read a lot in the Western press about a power struggle in the Iranian regime between the so-called radicals and the pragmatists, associated with President Rafsanjani, who wish to make an opening to the West. What is the reality behind this picture?

The basic cause of the division is the consolidation of bourgeois institutions, although many questions of religious and ideological principle have become involved.

From the beginning the Islamic regime was based on committees, the Pasdaran [Islamic militia] and the clerical hierar-

chy, as opposed to the regular police, army and state bureaucracy. Now, to consolidate bourgeois institutions a big purge of the leaders of the regime has to be carried through, affecting even the top levels of the clergy. A move is afoot to push them out of positions of power.

Failing to carry out such reforms, which would guarantee bourgeois law and order and the security of property — not against state expropriation but against vandalism — would mean that most of the Iranian capitalists, who are currently living in the West, would not have the confidence to return to Iran.

■ **Could you give some details on the progress of the "normalization"?**

Not long ago, Mr. Nourbaksh, the head of the Iranian central bank, was in the United States trying to contact Iranian capitalists there and persuade them to go back to Iran. But he is unlikely to have much success if things in Iran stay as they are. In fact the current trend is the reverse; the capitalist economy is not really functioning in Iran.

This reform, however, is a far more difficult business than defeating the bourgeois liberals, such as Bani Sadr and Bazargan. But following the death of Khomeini, the consolidation is really being pushed through; the "pragmatists" have gained the upper hand.

Six months ago there was an election for the Supreme Council of Islamic Experts (Khobregan), which is ultimately chosen by the Guardian Council. This body was selected by Khomeini and then by his successor, Khamenei, and is the real power centre in the country.

It is the Khobregan council that chooses the religious leaders such as Khomeini or, at present, Khamenei. The elections to this body were due six months ago. However, the law for the elections was changed in order to favour Rafsanjani's supporters. Previously any Ayatollah could stand for this council but on this occasion all the Ayatollahs were required to do a written test in order to be a candidate for this body. The leader of the radical faction, Kerubi, was thus excluded from the council.

There were different lines during the Gulf war. One was that taken by Rafsanjani and the National Security Council, the other by Kerubi (who is speaker of the parliament). Both talked about peace, but posed it in a dif-

ferent way. Kerubi travelled through the Muslim countries looking for support for a peace resolution but he did not succeed. Then he took the position that Iran should take Iraq's side against America, and this was used later as a reason for pushing his supporters out of the institutions. Rafsanjani came out of the war strengthened.

In the parliament deputies such as Montashemi or Khalkhali were saying that Iran should join the war on the side of Saddam. This meant both political and military support. When the war finished they were in a weak position. They came back to the parliament and said that they hadn't really meant it.

The radical faction have a magazine called *Bayan*. The first issue of this magazine was banned by the regime, but after a few months it was permitted. At first it was very popular, it was hard to get hold of copies. People could read different political opinions in it. For example, there was a letter from Kerubi to Ayatollah Sanai calling on the latter to intervene in the matter of the elections to the Khobregan. Sanai did not take a strong position against the radical line. But after the war the magazine has lost its appeal.

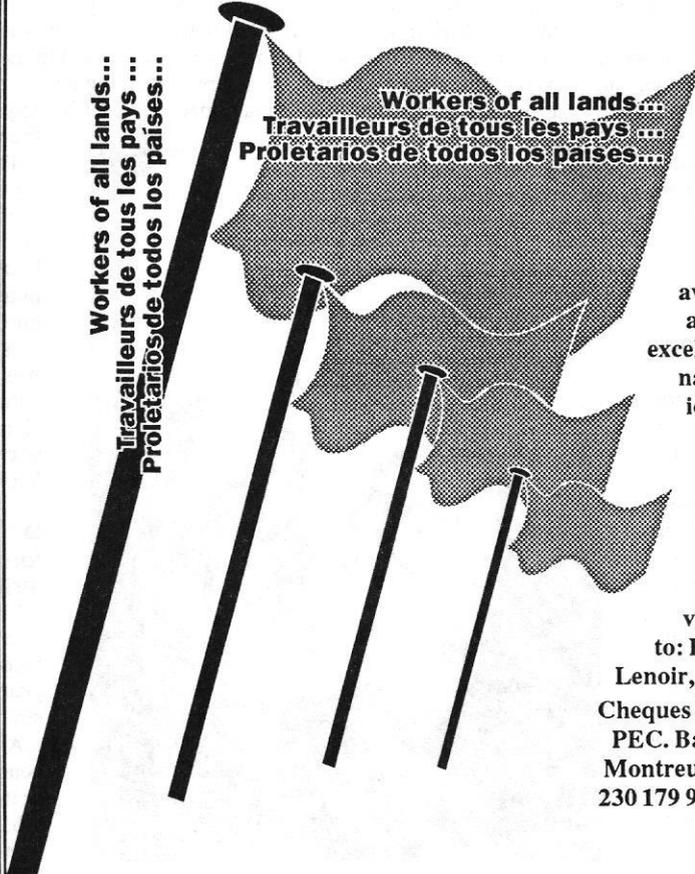
The radical faction tried to impeach the (relatively competent) health minister, who was a weak link in the government. They won in the parliament, which they dominate. Whatever the government does the parliament opposes. Two days before

the Khobregan election, the radical faction wanted to pass a resolution on the conditions for election to the Khobregan, saying that everyone can be a candidate. The supporters of Rafsanjani won in the parliament; the first victory for the pragmatist line there since the revolution.

Then there was the impeachment of the minister of education. The discussion on this question became very violent. Rafsanjani's supporters openly confessed that the country is ruled by a bunch of hooligans. Finally Kerubi, the leader of the radical faction, proposed that the members of parliament give a vote of confidence to the the minister, which he got.

A month ago an ayatollah stated openly that there are two organs in the country, the government and the parliament, and that they cannot work together. Therefore, he said, we must dissolve the parliament. This is now one of the main issues. The problem is that Rafsanjani has no base among the activists comparable to that of the radicals.

Recently there have been rumours about putting a prominent member of the radical faction, Ayatollah Khalkhali, on trial for indiscriminate killing, and in particular for the execution without trial of Homaïda, a prime minister under the Shah. Such a trial would of course be a big blow to the radicals, but not a decisive one — Khalkhali is a much discredited and deeply hated figure.



Workers of all lands...
Travaillleurs de tous les pays ...
Proletarios de todos los paises...

Workers of all lands...
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The government is trying to integrate the so-called revolutionary institutions — the pasdarans and committees — into the regular state institutions, the army and the police. However the army has not found the pasdars acceptable. There is too much bitterness. Furthermore, the regime does not yet feel confident that it can totally detach itself from its base in the Islamic committees, pasdars and so on.

There is a custom that notables from around the country go to see the religious leader. In the past two weeks, all these highly publicized meetings have been with army personnel. This means something. It is a part of the process of centralization.

Furthermore, recently Khomeini's son, a hardliner, withdrew as leader of the annual Haj (pilgrimage to Mecca). He said that his mother was sick. This was a concession to the Saudis but also to the western powers, who are in Saudi Arabia. They don't want someone in Mecca who is going to start demonstrations against the Western presence, as Khomeini had promised.

■ How does the general population feel about all this?

They are fed up with the whole regime. Compared to income, prices are astronomical. There is galloping inflation, mounting unemployment and the education system is in a shambles — the majority of schools work on a two or three shift a day basis. Intellectual and artistic activity has been totally suffocated, to say nothing of political repression and women's rights.

Many thought that the consolidation of Rafsanjani's position would mean an improvement. Such people have been deeply disappointed. If there has been any change, it has been for the worse. For example, during Mous-sani's premiership, the price of a Peykan (an Iranian-manufactured car) was 450,000 Tumans on the black market (the official price being 120,000 Tumans). Now the black market price is 2,200,000 Tumans (official price 500,000).¹

More than 90% of the people are against the government and the regime as a whole. It is very difficult to find anyone who supports the regime, and even those who do are ashamed to say so in front of others. This is true even of committee members or pasdars. People do it to get money to live. Even four or five years ago people were ready to give their lives for this government and would strongly defend their decision. It is no longer like that. Then people would volunteer. There is no more ideological mobilization.

At the age of 18 boys have to join the army. At the start of the revolution everybody was a candidate for

the committee. Five or six years ago the army could recruit from volunteers. Now they conscript draftees from the army into the committees. This worries the government.

Some of the committees support Rafsanjani, others Kerubi or other leaders. They fight each other. In Tehran there have been inter-committee battles over the *Hejab* (the veil). In the east of Tehran I know of a case where a committee was attacked by the pasdaran.

Rafsanjani and the government do not control the committees, but he does have control via a special ministry over the pasdaran, and this is one of the main reasons why Rafsanjani wants to smash the committees and integrate them with the regular police.

All these factional battles take place on the pretext of the Islamic *hejab*. This was also true during the struggle against the left. The question of women, especially of *Hejab*, was one of the central themes of counter-revolutionary mobilization. The fact that the left did not recognize the importance of consistently defending women's rights, facilitated this.

Shi'ite ideology is extremely reactionary on the question of women. Hatred of women is deeply rooted amongst the fanatics who make up the base of the regime, and it is thus no wonder that the radicals have kept resorting to anti-women themes.

Six months ago, Rafsanjani raised the issue of "temporary marriage", in reality religious permission for prostitution. His critics raised a great hue and cry about this, but Rafsanjani demonstrated that his critics had no grounds in Islamic law. He raised the issue because of the reality. Prostitution is very widespread, people

cannot marry because it is too expensive. Rafsanjani also referred to fact that there were a large number of widows of men killed in the war.

There is a place in the east of Tehran where such widows live; it is visited by Mullahs.

There is a discussion about legalizing brothels going on in the Minister of the Interior. The only problem is that you can allow a Muslim man to go with a non-Muslim woman, but obviously a Muslim prostitute cannot be with a non-Muslim man. The man marries the woman for five minutes and then it is "legal" from the religious point of view. You have to go the notary office for the marriage, but there are not enough notaries. This is what it's like.

The papers were full of the opinions of Ayatollahs on the issue.

■ What was the popular feeling about the war in Iraq?

Maybe fifty percent of the population supported Iraq against America. People could see the way that the US army was bombing Iraq. It was the brutality of the attack that aroused sympathy. There were only a few people who directly backed the Americans. Fifty percent supported the Iraqis and most of the others were saying: why did Saddam do such a stupid thing as invading Kuwait? Thus basic anti-imperialist feeling remains stronger than anti-Arab or anti-Iraqi feeling, despite the Iran-Iraq war.

There was a demonstration organized by the "radicals" in support of Iraq, which was quite small, about 5,000 people. On the other hand there was a spontaneous demonstration at Tehran University with about 2,000 people when the war broke out.

There were also demonstrations by the radicals outside the British Embassy over the trial of an Iranian accused of setting fire to a bookshop in London. There was a hunger strike by the man's family, but Khomeini came and told them to stop it and go home. Thus he was supporting Rafsanjani, although he had been the head of Kerubi's faction. Nor did he object over the exclusions from the Khobregan.

■ Are there any concrete forms of resistance such as strikes or national struggles?

I have not seen evidence of this. The Kurds continued some resistance until 1982. About five or six years ago there was a car demonstration by supporters of Bakhtiar.

An important thing that has happened recently is a move by some writers. A well-known poet, Shamloo, who had opposed the Shah was giving interviews last year in Germany and America, saying that



there is repression in Iran and writers cannot publish their books.

After his interview other writers also began to talk in the press about their rights. Three months ago, five famous writers in Iran signed a petition saying that they want to rebuild a writers' association. Other writers expressed their support. Shamloo is presently in America — he is unwell. But he has expressed his support for such an organization. He says he is going to go back and join it. This could be a very important step in the intellectual circles at least in Tehran. This is reminiscent of Iran in 1979. In another interview he said that a poet must be able to read his work in front of people.

Perhaps this kind of thing is getting into the papers as part of the government's efforts to improve its image in the West.

■ What has become of the Iranian left?

Inside the country it has disintegrated and people are demoralized. The Iranian Revolution was a very complex event. Most of the schemas of the left organizations, with extremely few exceptions, turned out to be in glaring contradiction with the real course of development and the outcome.

The worst of all was the Stalinist schema which praised the Mullarchy as national-revolutionary and anti-imperialist and supported it all along the line. The events in the Eastern bloc have definitely not helped.

People came out of jail and found that the organizations had gone and many had left the country. Given the crisis in Iran there is big pressure to find a job. It is not only a matter of a lack of activity, but of people renouncing their ideas.

But in fact a solid organization could do a lot now. The government is divided and in crisis. The old organizations of the left have disappeared. When we were active as Trotskyists we were under pressure from both sides, and both sources of pressure are now weak.

About two months ago there was a meeting of about a hundred in Khuzestan where I could read my poems. All my poems are against the government and people wanted to discuss. In queues everybody talks against the government. It is not just people from organizations.

Nor does it seem obvious that the government, even if it can carry through centralization, can resolve the economic crisis, which weighs on people more and more with ever higher taxes, soaring rents and so on. If there was a genuine election they would all be thrown out. Their base is in the military organs, regular or irregular.

At the moment there is no sign of a popular explosion, although in the future anything can happen. ★

1. Under the Shah the price of a paykan was, at its height, 40 to 50,000 tumans.

The death of the Yugoslav federation

YUGOSLAVIA's latest crisis erupted on May 15, when Serbia and its satellites flouted the Yugoslav constitution by blocking Stipe Mesic (Croatia's representative on the Federal Presidency, Yugoslavia's collective head of state) from taking his turn as president for the coming year.

The voting confirmed the basic division within Yugoslavia: the representatives of Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia and Croatia voted for Mesic; Serbia, Vojvodina, Kosovo and Montenegro voted against. But the men who cast the votes for Vojvodina and Kosovo had no legal and political right to be there in the first place.

MICHELE LEE

ACCORDING to the Yugoslav constitution, the eight-man presidency is made up of representatives from each of the six republics and two provinces. Each of these representatives is elected by secret vote in the appropriate republican or provincial assembly and remains responsible to that assembly. On May 15 each year, the presidency elects a new president in accordance with a strict rota. Thus on May 15, 1989, the post went to Slovenia (Janez Drvnosek), on May 15, 1990 to Serbia (Borislav Jovic) and on May 15, 1991 it was due to go to Croatia (Stipe Mesic).

The system of rotation was established in the early 1970s to express the equal status of members of the Yugoslav Federation.

This constitution was drawn up when Yugoslavia was still a federation of equal nations. But only a year after his rise to power in Serbia, Milosevic began to dismantle it. In 1988, the Serbian assembly adopted an amendment to the republican constitution cancelling Vojvodina's and Kosovo's political autonomy. Nationalist mobilizations were also organized to bring down the governments in Vojvodi-

na and Montenegro and replace them with Serbian stooges.

Kosovo, though abandoned by the rest of Yugoslavia, resisted. There were mass demonstrations of Albanian citizens there, and, in February 1989, a general strike led by Kosovo miners. The province was then placed under military occupation. The following month, with tanks ringing the assembly building and military jets flying overhead, Kosovo deputies voted in the required constitutional amendment.

In July 1990, however, following the break-up of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, multiparty elections in Slovenia and Croatia and (most important) the establishment of a state of terror in Kosovo, the provincial assembly declared Kosovo's independence from Serbia. Serbia responded by dissolving the provincial assembly and government, and its own assembly voted in a new republican constitution which reduced the provinces to a status lower than that of a municipality.

With the adoption of the new Serbian constitution, the federation as defined by the Yugoslav constitution ceased to exist. Without a functioning assembly, Kosovo representatives in the Federal Assembly and on the Federal Presidency became illegitimate, and with them also the work of these bodies. The other republics, pursuing their own selfish interests, connived at this illegal state of affairs until May 15, 1991, when it was no longer possible to avoid the issue. For if Serbia could get away with vetoing Croatia's representative, then it, rather than Yugoslavia, would decide the country's future.

The Kosovo boomerang

The Federal Presidency consequently fell apart. As this author predicted at the time, the boomerang released in Kosovo in 1988 returned three years later to deliver a mortal blow to Yugoslavia. The decision by the Serbian regime to bring down the Yugoslav presidency proves conclusively that it sees federal organs outside its control as an impediment to its own survival.

At the beginning of 1991, Milosevic appeared at the height of his powers. Although the dissolution of the Yugoslav Communist party had scuppered his earlier plan to use the party machine to win

for Serbia the hegemony it had enjoyed in pre-war Yugoslavia, the illusion that this could be achieved persisted because of the army's evident hostility to the new regimes in Slovenia and Croatia. With control over four federal units, Serbia now enjoyed disproportionate influence within the federal institutions.

On the presidency, which is also commander-in-chief of the army, Milosevic now wielded four of the eight votes. Furthermore, egged on by renegades such as Mihailo Markovic of *Praxis* [a prestigious Marxist journal of the 1960s and 70s] fame, he encouraged armed rebellion among Serbs in parts of Croatia (the so-called Krajina) and Bosnia-Herzegovina, in order to undermine these republics' ability to resist. Last, but not least, by winning a huge majority in the 1990 Serbian elections, he marginalized the domestic opposition.

Moment of truth for Milosevic

The March 1991 demonstrations in Serbia, however, were the moment of truth for Milosevic. He entered history as the first republican head of state to ask the army to intervene in a domestic dispute. Indeed, Milosevic pressed the army to introduce a state of emergency throughout Yugoslavia. But the Army — keen in principle, but fearing a possible breakdown of discipline in its own ranks — would not comply without the authority of the presidency. The latter, supported by federal prime minister Markovic, refused the request. Kosovo's representative broke ranks to vote with the independent republics.

The army high command, shaken by the Serbian demonstrations, now rallied

behind Markovic (though not all of them unequivocally).

Milosevic, defeated in the presidency and challenged at home, now opted for a strategy of making the federal institutions unworkable. His immediate response was to denounce the Federal Presidency as an agent of Yugoslavia's destruction, and Markovic as a western stooge. On March 18, the representatives of Serbia, Montenegro and Vojvodina resigned from the presidency.

Milosevic declared that the presidency no longer existed, and (somewhat inconsistently) that Serbia no longer recognized its authority. At a hastily convened secret meeting, he told local government heads that Serbia was in a de facto state of war. Milosevic's bluff was called, however, and two days later it was back to business as usual on the presidency — but only for the time being.

The Kosovo representative was placed summarily under house arrest and replaced by a man appointed by the Serbian assembly. The new man, Sejdo Bajramovic, is an oddity even for recent Serbian politics: elected by 0.03% of votes in his Kosovo constituency (Albanians had unanimously boycotted the Serbian elections), this retired army sergeant is renowned only for his addiction to tombola. Vojvodina and Montenegro also came up with new presidential representatives.

Between mid-March and mid-May Yugoslavia lived a charmed life as a country tottering on the brink of civil war and/or military coup, while its high politics became more and more of a charade. For several weeks during March and April republican heads met in conference at different luxurious locations, accompa-

nied by a swarm of journalists, in order supposedly to forge a new consensus. These meetings, all of which ended in failure, served only to shore up Milosevic's position in Serbia. His strategy of destabilization, if anything, gained a new lease of life. The following brief survey of some of the key events in the period between the end of March and the middle of May give the reader an idea of how this strategy works.

A strategy of provocation

ON March 31, an armed unit from "Krajina" (a part of Croatia where Serbs form a majority) tried to occupy the Plitvice National Park in Croatia, and were repulsed by the Croatian police. At Jovic's request, but over Slovene and Croatian protests, the Federal Presidency met in emergency session and ordered the army to occupy the park.

- On April 18, some 750,000 Serbian workers declared a general strike and the republican government quickly met their terms for the sake of Serb national unity.

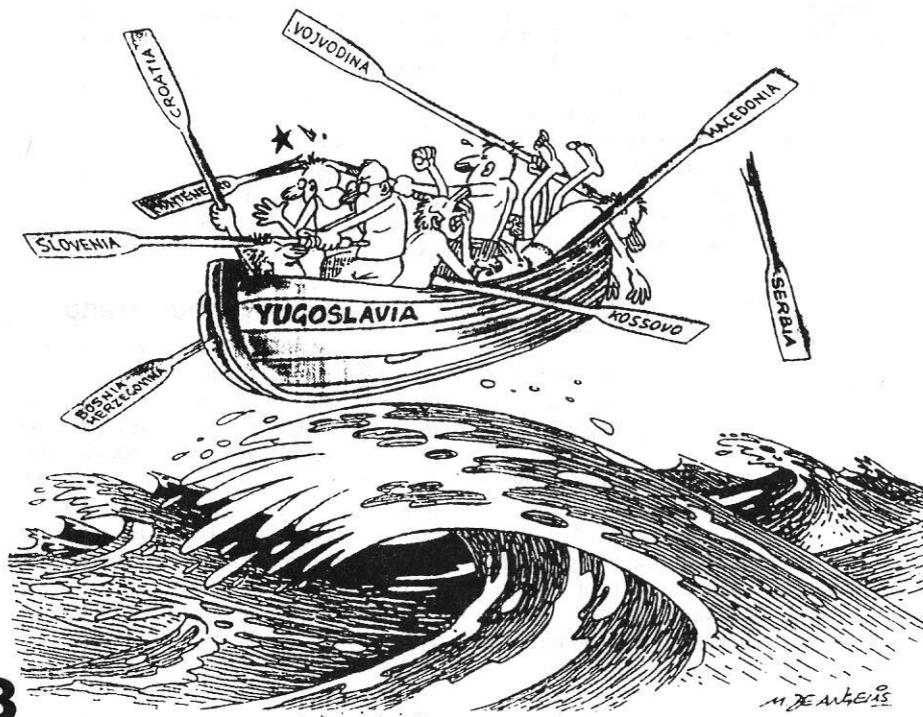
- On May 2, in Borovo Selo in eastern Croatia, Serb militants ambushed a bus carrying Croatian police, killing twelve. Serb Chetniks, a proto-fascist nationalist formation, boasted publicly of having taken part in the massacre. The fact that some of the victims had been severely tortured gave credence to their claim. There followed another emergency session of the Federal Presidency, and another threat of military takeover — and another part of Croatia was occupied by the army.

- In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serb followers of Milosevic set up two new "Krajinas" as a future part of Serbia, and henceforth refused to recognize the authority of the republican government.

- By now, an anti-army mood had become entrenched in Croatia, reaching a high point on May 6 in Split, when 30,000 workers massed outside the navy command centre demanding an end to the blockading of Croatian villages by the "Krajina" militia (with army complicity). A soldier's death led to yet another emergency session of the Federal Presidency, at which the army was given additional policing powers in Croatia.

- Fearing that a military occupation of Croatia was imminent, the population of several Croat villages and towns in Bosnia-Herzegovina took to the streets to block army tanks moving towards Croatia. The army sent in a parachute unit to "liberate" its troops. Thanks to the combined efforts of the Croatian and Bosnian presidents this particular conflict was defused.

- In the Dalmatian ports of Zadar and Sibenik, however, anti-Serb riots and destruction of Serb property erupted, after a local man was killed by a "Krajina" activist. Anti-Croat riots and destruction of Croat property followed in



"Krajina".

● Since the soldier killed in Split was a Macedonian, demonstrations followed in Macedonia, at which Milosevic and Croatian president Tudjman were denounced as warmongers.

● Slovenia's response to this turbulence was to speed up legislative procedures preparing independence.

● In the Serbian assembly, demands were voiced that Serbia should raise an army for war against its enemies. Though this was rejected (albeit only formally, for in reality Serbia already has a well-armed paramilitary force), a Serb National Council, involving the ruling party and the main opposition parties, was established, its chief aim being to create "one state for all Serbs" the slogan of the Serbian extreme right.

● Political ferment has also been evident in Montenegro, where the opposition has left the republican assembly for good.

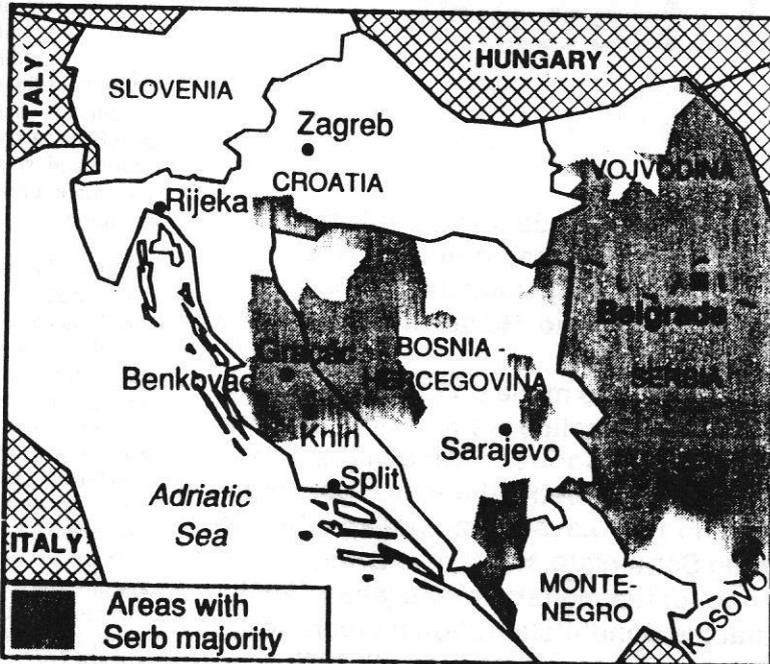
● In the Serbian part of the Sandjak, which is largely Moslem in ethnic terms, a Moslem National Council was set up, aiming at winning local autonomy.

● Also in May, the Serbian authorities distributed firearms to all Serb nationals in Kosovo, who proceeded to practice by shooting unarmed Albanian civilians.

In mid-May, a constitutional crisis was added to this inflammable mixture. On May 10, a federal assembly session broke up in confusion when the delegates from Croatia, Slovenia and Kosovo refused to recognize Bajramovic as Kosovo's representative on the Federal Presidency. Vojvodina and Montenegro then withdrew their own candidates. On May 15 they, together with Serbia and Kosovo (represented temporarily by the vice-president of the Serbian assembly) cast their votes against Mesic.

The country was suddenly left without a head of state. Federal premier Markovic, supported by the army, proposed a compromise: Slovenia and Croatia should accept Bajramovic in return for Serbia voting for Mesic. Slovenia refused this shabby deal, but a desperate Croatia agreed — and was tricked.

In the assembly, Kosovo delegates protested against their rights being traded in such a cynical manner — Serb delegates responded by questioning their very right to sit in the federal assembly. Eventually, although the Slovene and Albanian delegates, accompanied by many Croats and Moslems, voted against Bajramovic, his



confirmation went through.

But the farce reached its apex when, at a renewed meeting of the presidency, Serbia, Montenegro, Vojvodina and Kosovo solemnly proceeded once again to vote against Mesic. The Slovene, Croatian and Macedonian representatives then packed their bags and went home. Milosevic's second attempt to destroy the Federal Presidency has succeeded. His next target will be the federal government.

Seething chaos

The logic behind this combination of crisis at the top and seething chaos below was spelt out by the Serbian branch of the Alliance of Forces of Reform (which supports Ante Markovic): "By obstructing the election to the post of president of the member from Croatia, Milosevic's personal regime has completely revealed its full intentions in regard to the future of Yugoslavia. We are witnessing the final act in the destruction of Yugoslavia, which has been pursued over the last few years in accordance with a clear plan: to force Slovenia to leave the country; to cause chaos within, and the territorial disintegration of, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina; to transform Macedonia into a southern province of Serbia; to provoke a military intervention in the name of protecting Yugoslavia; to stop all economic and political changes that could bring Milosevic's personal regime into question.

"By their refusal to accept the constitutionally prescribed procedure for electing the president, the representatives of so-called "unified" Serbia, acting as Milosevic's personal executives, have shown that they do not recognize the equality and sovereignty of the other republics, or

accept the basic rules of democratic procedures. They have shown, in other words, that they no longer recognize Yugoslavia."

If so, then war remains the only option. Ever since the March demonstrations Milosevic's regime has been sliding fast to the right, embracing cooperation with the Chetniks. His followers outside Serbia — Milan Babic, in the Croatian "Krajina" and Radovan Karadzic, his counterpart in Bosnia-Herzegovina — are openly collaborating with the Chetnik leader Vojislav Seselj.

Judging by the growing occupation of Croatia, by the disintegration of the authority of the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina, by the growing

number of incidents involving armed civilians, and by the rising number of dead it would be fair to say that civil war in Yugoslavia has already begun.

The destruction of the Yugoslav presidency, on the other hand, has left the Yugoslav army without its civilian commander-in-chief, strengthening the hand of putschist currents within it. There is little doubt, however, that a military coup would only hasten the disintegration of the army. This is why the army leaders, working with Markovic, expressed their support for Mesic's election.

But time is running out for Yugoslavia. Only a miracle — in the shape of a democratic alternative emerging in Serbia, strong enough to remove Milosevic — could save it now. Such a miracle almost materialized at the beginning of March, when Serbian democracy suddenly displayed its tremendous potential. Then the youth demanded an end to Milosevic's politics of war. It was cast aside, however, by the main parties of the opposition, eager to join Milosevic in his megalomaniac quest for a Greater Serbia ("one state for all Serbs").

Herein lies Serbia's tragedy. The so-called democratic opposition seems to be unaware that Milosevic is grooming the Chetniks not simply as a striking force against the Croat, Moslem, Albanian, Slovene, Macedonian, Hungarian etc. "national enemy" but also as his personal insurance against any "velvet revolution" happening in Serbia. It was only in the aftermath of the March demonstrations that the regime decided to legalize Seselj's Serb Radical Party.

Serbian democrats would be wise to heed the words of Ibrahim Rugova, leader of the Albanian Democratic Party, addressed to his Slav countrymen: "you are all potential Albanians." ★

"A revolutionary force"

THE "truce" which the Sandinista trade union confederation, the National Front of Workers (FNT), had granted to the Chamorro government so that it could launch its new economic plan is approaching its end. However, strikes have continued in the public sector.

On April 27, 1990, an attempt was made on the life of president Violeta Chamorro; the police are pursuing inquiries in circles linked to the rightwing Contras. Some of the latter, supporters of "commandante" Ruben — himself close to Vice-President Virgilio Godoy — have threatened to return to armed struggle if leading Sandinista, Humberto Ortega, is not dismissed as commander of the military forces (see IV 205).

It is in this context that the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) is preparing its first congress (see IV 203).

During a conference on the revolutionary movements in Latin America held in Belgium on May 9-10, FSLN leader and former president Daniel Ortega made some interesting comments. Speaking of the "new international order" he said that the partisans of this latter disposed of their own internationals (liberal, Christian democrat, and socialist).

It is the first time that an FSLN leader has taken such a position in relation to social democracy — the FSLN had observer status at the Socialist International and the question of formal membership has been raised during its pre-congress debate. Ortega also said that revolutionaries could not identify with the Socialist International and that what was necessary was "a new international of revolutionaries, formed by all those who oppose the new world order".

We publish below substantial extracts from an interview with Daniel Ortega which recently appeared in *Barricada*.

DOCUMENT

YOU recently said that it would be possible, in spite of the current government, to pursue, with the people, the social and economic revolution, on the basis of the political revolution realized by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). What confidence is it possible to have in this government?

It is important to recall that this government has not lost its class character and that it is the fruit of the interventionist policy of the United States. We can have no illusions in it. We can have confidence only in the strength of the workers.

Imperialism has not disappeared. It is seeking, by different means, to dismantle the revolutionary process, to weaken San-

dinism — which it attempts to divide and neutralize — and to reestablish neo-Somozism and neo-capitalism. We are thus obliged to rely on our own popular and patriotic forces to impose a policy which genuinely serves the interests of the country, and not those of the United States.

When we talk about defending the social and economic revolution in our country, starting from the fundamental transformations made in the social, economic and political domain, we are talking about an active struggle of the workers, an expression of the class struggle which has not disappeared and which is not about to disappear. Our objective can only be to pursue this active struggle to oblige the government to respect the

transformations made.

The policy of this government, determined by its class nature, tends to privilege the capitalists to the detriment of the interests of the workers. But governments do not do what they want, but what the people allow them to do. Popular mobilization and struggle can ensure that the government respects the conquests of the revolution.

■ What is the FSLN's role in this struggle?

It is necessary to understand that the FSLN is a revolutionary force. For this reason it cannot be on the centre, but must be resolutely on the left. This left force can work to change the positions of the government, which is of the right and lead it to the centre and even to the left. It is an objective which no revolutionary force can renounce.

There has been no previous revolutionary movement in history which, after having brought down a dictator by force of arms, has taken the head of the struggle against US aggression and laid the bases of a real democracy, with planning, and which, having held the second free elections in the history of Nicaragua, has lost them and passed into opposition.

■ What can be done concretely to bring this government towards correct positions?

It is necessary to act from below. It is necessary to "govern from below" by exercising real power. Any government, as strong as it might appear, holding all the instruments of power, can only hold power, in the last instance, by a consensus which is born at the base. That is to say that power is determined from below. And this power, when it decides to change the government, does it, even if this latter holds all the constitutional and even repressive mechanisms. In Eastern Europe, governments have fallen leaving intact armies, police forces, and security services.

In the bourgeois democracies we meet the same situation, where governments which have been elected with popular support, can lose that support in a short period of time, and thus real power.

■ To be more precise, what is revolutionary about the Chamorro government?

The revolutionary element is not to be found in this government, and is not dependent on it. It resides in national reality, profoundly transformed by the revolutionary process started on July 19, 1979, and which has given place to a government which, paradoxically, is not revolutionary. That which is revolutionary is found in collective consciousness, which has established new values of solidarity and national pride.

■ Does the signature of the dialogue

accords represent a new dimension of the transition agreement [signed during the transfer of power]?

The transition agreements were signed with a great deal of mistrust on both sides.

From April 1990 to March 1991 — the day we met the government to discuss its economic adjustment plan — we held regular meetings with the government, where we always expressed our concern about its unfulfilled promises.

When we met on March 3, 1991, we first explained: "We consider that these measures come at the worst moment, when the essential problems, like, for example, the political stability of the country have not been resolved: the monetary measures hit everyone and above all the workers, they are not just and it is for this reason that they must be modified to the benefit of the workers, the small farmers, the cooperatives, small industry, the artisans and petty commerce. They must also protect the earnings of the police and soldiers".

In this climate of mistrust, we were in favour of giving them a reprieve, but with guarantees for the workers, in favour of the protection of wages and employment. It could not then be said that this was a new dimension of the agreement of transition.

■ In some sectors confidence has never been so weak and Sandinism appears to be becoming the accomplice of a systematic dismantling of the revolutionary conquests. What is your opinion of this?

Reprieves have limits, and the dismantling of the revolutionary conquests is not a problem of confidence, it is determined by the combativity of the workers, the popular sectors and the Sandinista militants. Lack of combativity, accommodation, opportunism, are the accomplices of the dismantling of the consequences of the revolution.

■ Has the Front lost its identity since the electoral defeat?

The Sandinista Front is not a traditional opposition. It has been a revolutionary political force, in the vanguard of the process of struggle in this country. Since April 25, 1990, we are a revolutionary force which exists to defend the conquests of the revolution. We have our own identity which must always be linked to the popular interests and not to the temporary situation. There is no risk, in that case, of a loss of identity.

■ Can we have confidence in a government which, following your own expression, proposes to apply a series of economic measures which hit the workers?

The test will be the forthcoming policy of structural adjustments. The monetary adjustment policy is in a critical phase; inflation reached 285% this month, or a

cumulative rate for February and March 1991 of 800%, which is intolerable for the workers. The government must rapidly decide on a devaluation of the cordoba at around 12 to 1.

The policy of structural adjustments will determine the future of the country; either it is the well known model of the capitalist oligarchy which is chosen, and thus neo-Somozism, neo-capitalism; or Nicaragua will go towards new forms of economic and social development, respecting the conquests of the revolution.

■ What is the reaction of the workers to the government, when it betrays its promises?

The peasants who want the land to work it, faced with a government which favours the big proprietors and the Somozists, must unite to defend their rights instead of fighting each other for a scrap of land. This combat is the sole guarantee of the agreements signed with the government.

■ How far are the trade unions and the popular movement able to influence the measures of structural adjustment?

They are in the process of launching discussions and mobilizations; they must strengthen this role starting from now. It is inadmissible that a Sandinista militant should remain outside a struggle which is going on in their workplace.

■ Is there a risk of a recomposition of social and economic groups and of a weakening of the working class?

When Sandino said that only the workers and the peasants would go all the way, he defined correctly the fundamental forces of the revolutionary struggle, and this remains true. But, as much at the time of Sandino as today, the working class is not as developed in Nicaragua as in an industrialized society. The weight of the peasants, traders and artisans is significant. Yet, our working class is well organized: if, quantitatively, it represents only one force in the social reality, from the qualitative point of view, the workers of the town and the country are at the head of the struggles; it is necessary to recognize the maturity and combativity which the FNT has shown.

■ What is the position of the FSLN on the property question?

We have put the accent on the democratization of property. Today, we demand the privatization of state enterprises in favour of the workers, and that the property distributed by the agrarian reform be respected. This question will be decisive for the FSLN, for the future of the revolution and for the stability of the country. The FSLN is not an electoralist party, but a political force whose task is to defend

the gains of the revolution.

■ Why did you insist on the fact that the FSLN is not an electoralist party?

It would mean nothing to the FSLN to win the 1996 elections in a neo-capitalist, neo-Somozist country where all the conquests of the revolution have been dismantled. It is preferable that the Front succeed in maintaining and developing the gains of the revolution, and thus reinforce the consciousness of Nicaraguan society, so that the truly democratic model consolidates itself. That is why the Front cannot be electoralist.

■ The current government symbolizes the interventionist policy of the United States. How is that reflected in its behaviour?

The government is under the influence of the policy of the US, which believes it has a right to govern Nicaragua. The forces of the far right sense also that it is their government, and that it is necessary to go forward to the extermination of Sandinism, without respecting the democratic game.

Meanwhile, the Somozist forces, the big landowners and the capitalists are returning to the country to strip Nicaraguan society of the essential elements of the democratic process. They wish to take the land from the peasants, deprive thousands of families of their means of subsistence and take back what the revolution has given them, to take the industries and the factories from the workers.

It is the counter-revolution which is seeking to gain space. It is no longer the armed counter-revolution, but a force which wishes to force the government to dismantle the revolution.

■ What is the role of the Sandinista People's Army (EPS) and the police? What side will they be on if the conflict deepens?

They must be on the side of the constitution which states clearly that the army should defend national sovereignty and should never be an instrument of repression against the workers and the people. The role of the police is also defined in the constitution as the guardian of interior order and the guarantor of laws; it is in no case the protector of the capitalists and the big landowners.

The government has already tried to turn the army and the police against the workers, exerting pressure on them to act in a repressive way. These institutions did not allow it and they acted in accord with the constitution.

■ Many think that the FSLN has not been combative enough in recent conflicts; some say that its role is reduced to that of social mediator.

It is necessary first to understand the role of the national leadership of the

FSLN, that of the trade unions and that of Sandinista militants. The FSLN is not a social mediator, it plays a role of political leadership. The national leadership defends the gains of the revolution; that is clear from the agreement of transition. We have devoted all our forces to the disarming of the Contras; we supported the workers in the course of the May, June

and July strikes of 1990; we have clearly stated our position with regard to the monetary measures of March 1991.

The Sandinistas are at the head of the trade union movement. But not all the militants have taken their place in the struggles. A Sandinista militant in a factory or a hospital should obviously be in the first rank of the struggles. ★

“Communist refounders” meet

THE MOVEMENT for Communist Refoundation (MCR) — created in February 1991 after the split which took place at the Rimini Congress of the Italian Communist Party (PCI)¹ — held its first national conference in Rome from May 3-5, 1991. The conference had two parts; an internal meeting with 400 delegates during the first two days, then a public meeting.

LIVIO MAITAN

THE refounders prepared for this event in a climate of euphoria. Since mid-February they have distributed around 150,000 cards, and it would seem that between 400 and 500,000 former members of the PCI have not yet joined the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS — the renamed Communist Party).

PDS leader Achille Occhetto certainly had not foreseen this situation when he launched his initiative in November 1989 — the refounders themselves could barely have hoped for it at that time.

Given the number of votes that the unitary motion of the opposition had obtained during the election of delegates to the Rimini congress (around 120,000), and given that the Ingrao current stayed with Occhetto, it appears clear that a good number of the people who have joined the MCR had already left the PCI before the split, individually, during the last decade if not before. They believe today that there is a new chance to build an opposition inspired by an anticapitalist spirit.

The same goes for the militants of the far left, who had withdrawn from politics after the disappointments of the second

half of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. It is difficult to evaluate the weight of the one or the other current, but overall this phenomenon is undeniable.

The debate which has marked this new formation since its beginning — whether to immediately launch a new party or maintain a movement until a later time — was settled at the Rome conference, with everybody agreeing around the second choice.

Thus, the refounders will continue their activity as a movement until the congress of foundation of the new party², which will not take place until November 1991.

A coordination committee of 49 members has been established; this body will take any necessary decisions prior to November.

A commission of 98 members, charged with preparing the texts for the congress, has also been set up; Sergio Garavini³ will take charge of the political questions in particular, and Armando Cossutta⁴ the organizational problems.

It has also been decided to produce a weekly newspaper, *Liberazione*.

Public meeting an undoubted success

The public meeting on May 5 was an undoubted success, with 15,000 people attending — on March 16, 1991, Occhetto had attracted a visibly smaller audience in the same place. The MCR has 12 representatives in the Senate (including the daughter of Aldo Moro, the Christian Democratic leader killed by the Red Brigades, who has left the Christian Democrats) and eight deputies.

These latter have formed a common group with the four deputies of Democrazia Proletaria (DP) and with Lucio Magri, former leader of the Manifesto group, who has left the PDS without joining the MCR; he will chair the unified

group.

On May 12, 1991, the MCR faced its first electoral test in partial local elections involving around a million voters.

The movement's low overall share of the vote — 2.6% — is hardly significant, for it was contesting only nine districts. In the latter, its score was relatively satisfactory, at between 4-5% and 16%. As might have been expected, these results were basically obtained at the expense of the PDS, which saw a general fallback in its share of the vote.

On May 3 and 4, the debates at the MCR conference only very partially started to deal with the important political questions.

The appeal which was adopted is very general and implies no precise orientation. On the other hand, some conflicts flared up around organizational questions, notably on the composition of the provisional leadership and on the responsibilities of those elected to it.

Important decisions already taken elsewhere

The fact that the daily *Il Manifesto* had published, before the opening of the conference, a diagram of the new leadership structure — which turned out to be that finally approved — made the pressure mount.

Numerous delegates felt that decisions already taken elsewhere were being imposed on them; in particular, the partisans of Cossutta judged insufficient the place reserved for their current and their spokesperson.

After several meetings of its national leadership, Democrazia Proletaria has finally decided to link itself with the MCR. After its national congress of June 1991, DP will no longer exist and its members will join the MCR.

This decision was taken virtually unanimously, although differences appeared on the form of this fusion and on certain parts of the text which will be submitted to the June congress⁵. ★

1. See *International Viewpoint* no. 203, April 1, 1991.
2. The refounders wanted to adopt the name and symbol of the former PCI, against the wishes of the PDS. After many judicial wranglings, a tribunal decided in favour of the PDS; the MCR then announced that the new organization would be called the Communist Party and would have its own symbol.
3. Sergio Garavani was for a long time the leader of the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL).
4. Armando Cossutta headed a battle for the “destalinization” of the PCI in Milan in the 1960s. Later on, on the other hand, he was opposed to the PCI’s “break” with the Soviet leadership after Jaruzelski’s coup d’etat in Poland.
5. During a meeting of the DP leadership at the end of April 1991, a draft for the congress was adopted with 20 for and 13 abstentions. Different amendments were presented; the two most important — one an analysis of Gorbachevism, the other on the significance of the agreements and political and theoretical divergences with the MCR — were rejected. They will, however, be discussed in the provincial congresses and, eventually, at the national congress itself.

The strength to change

WE publish below a speech made by MCR leader Sergio Garavini at the movement's meeting in Rome on May 5, 1991, together with an extract from an article by another leading MCR spokesperson, Armando Cossutta, published in *Il Manifesto* on May 3.

DOCUMENT

Sergio Garavini: To have the strength to change, it is necessary not to destroy, but to cherish and recuperate the values originating from the tradition of the PCI, which are the constitutive elements of our experience. This involves a project of change within the framework of democracy, founded on the historic process opened by the wartime Resistance and whose premisses are found in the constitution; on the mass character of the party and on the class and popular nature which has always been the hallmark of the movements where the Communists have engaged themselves; on the need to translate a great ideal of social and cultural transformation into a concrete political arrangement within society and the institutions; on the refusal of any ultraleftism in action, which must always have a democratic and mass character; on the choice of non-violence which becomes relevant once more today, in the face of new elements which provoke violence.

It is with these references that, as Communists, we can attempt to answer the big questions of today. In the first place, of course, those which are posed by the crisis of actually existing socialism. We have no intention of extricating ourselves from the affair by simply proclaiming that it is nothing to do with us and putting the accent on the critical distance that the PCI had correctly taken towards those regimes, albeit belatedly and in a conceptually limited way.

We must approach this crisis through an optic which includes our own problems, and by a critique which we address to others but which also concerns our own experiences.

We criticize the statist character of these regimes, the fact that private property was

abolished only to become state property with which the party in its turn became identified, through the imposition of a bureaucratic and authoritarian hegemony which has led to tragedy. Moreover, the equality of conditions imposed from above has created in fact a new inequality between those who command and the majority which is commanded.

But it is necessary to ask if a form of statism has not also marked our political and social attempts and those of the western left in general. Rather than being concerned with a dialectic between society and institutions and stimulating within society autonomous forms of direct democracy and social management, we have demanded from the state the solution of the social problems and the fulfillment of cultural orientations. Going beyond a statist approach, the need to return to society and, starting from that, to relaunch an intervention in the institutions, demands a profound revision on our part; a revision which is not just conceptual, but also political.

Let us consider an aspect which is amongst the most worrying. We find ourselves confronted with a trade union which suppresses forms of direct democracy in its relations with the workers, which operates as a very bureaucratically structured semi-institutional body outside of the workplaces, and is permitted to exercise tutelage over the workers due to the recognition it enjoys from the government and the employers' organizations. There are the signs of a corporatist regression, which can lead to the installation of an authoritarian domination of the state over the decisive social relations and the absence of a real dialectic between society and institutions.

On the other hand, in the countries of "actually existing socialism" we see both statism and economic crisis. The model of production and exchange stemming from capitalism have proved impossible to manage in the context of state property and planification, because this model is based on a logic of profit, not a bureaucratic logic. One can either accept this or contest the model in question.

But if actually existing socialism has proved bankrupt, the Western left has renounced any challenge to the model of production and exchange of the capitalist system. In practice, and, moreover, in theory also, respect of the logic of the system and the primacy of the enterprise has determined the orientations of the left and, at least in the course of the last few years, of the PCI itself. And if one accepts

this model, one cannot hope to adapt to its different demands simply through softening its forms.

The dissolution of the alliances in the East should also have led to the bypassing of the political-military alliances of the West. This has not happened. These latter have been renewed and reinforced by a new orientation, above all directed towards the South of the world. Italy is increasingly implicated in this. Its role is that of a forward post of this coalition and it is redirecting its own military orientation with plans for a professional army and giving itself the means to launch an offensive beyond its frontiers. Counterposed to pacifism is a militarist culture, which is at the same time a culture of order, with a president who plays the patriot in the name of Gladio (see *IV* 199). ★

Armando Cossutta, another leading figure in the MCR commented in the left daily *Il Manifesto* (May 3, 1991):

OUR movement must deal with the problem of the East, immediately and in depth. On this question there are no disagreements or divergences amongst us. So far as I am concerned, I consider some of my positions outmoded, conceptually even more than sentimentally.

The polemic on the "break" had a sense, perhaps, only as a denunciation of the abandonment of a class identity, of an anti-imperialist tradition, of an important part of our historic patrimony.

Today, I am amongst the most critical militants. In Berlin and Prague, the regimes fell without a single stone being thrown or a window being broken, meaning that these regimes had no foundation in the consciousness of the workers, the people, the youth. A crisis so profound is not produced by a single blow, it has causes and roots in the past.

A very critical and very free discussion helps also to underline what was positive in the great turn of Gorbachev and to explain what is unconvincing. The German events remain amongst the most worrying for Europe and the world. The Soviet Union did not exist during the Gulf war, despite its diplomatic efforts. In short, 1989 has not "freed" the world as Occhetto and his PDS comrades said; today there exist an obvious unipolar domination, a strong capitalist domination. ★

AROUND
THE
WORLD

UNITED STATES

Abortion rights threatened

A UNITED STATES Supreme Court verdict of May 23, 1991, upheld the ban on clinics that receives federal government funds from "promoting" abortion. They are already forbidden to use public funds to carry out abortions, but this new ruling makes it illegal for staff to give a pregnant woman any information on termination of pregnancy or on any abortion clinic.

It is clinics in the most deprived parts of the country that get federal funds. Most of them have decided to do without the money in order to be able to continue to help women seeking advice. In some states, such as California, the state government may provide the money, but it is nonetheless clear that this federal decision represents a clear restriction on women's right to choose.

This ruling, which was first adopted in 1988, had been challenged by the state and city of New York, as well as by the Planned Parenthood Federation. The Supreme Court decision will give heart to the anti-abortionists who see it as a step to the total criminalization of abortion. ★

SPAIN

Right gains in local elections

AGAINST a background of austerity and little social mobilization (despite a public sector day of action on the eve of the vote) the May 26 local elections saw a high abstention rate (37.8% overall), especially in the big cities.

The ruling Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), with 38.4% of the votes, improved its 1987 score and remains the country's strongest party. However, it lost control of major cities, such as Madrid, Seville and Valencia, to the benefit of the rightwing People's Party (PP). To maintain control of other important cities like Barcelona, the Socialists had to make alliances, notably with the Communist Party.

While the PP remains a long way behind the PSOE, it picked up over 600,000 votes and saw off its rightwing rival, the Democratic and Social Centre (CDS) of former prime minister Adolfo Suarez.

But both the PSOE and the PP will have

to follow a policy of pacts and alliances (with bourgeois nationalist forces in Catalonia, Andalucia, and elsewhere, in both cases, and with the CP for the PSOE) whether to keep control of municipalities or prepare for the legislative elections in 1993.

The United Left (as the Communist Party presents itself) improved its vote, with 8.4%, and strengthened its representation. The Greens did not make the expected breakthrough with less than 5% of the vote.

In Euskadi, the revolutionary nationalist organization Herri Batasuna lost some ground, but remains the main force in some places, such as San Sebastian. ★

News from the left

CANADA

Canadian Trotskyists meet

THE second convention of Socialist Challenge/Gauche Socialiste, recognized earlier this year as the official section of the Fourth International in the Canadian state, was held in Montreal on May 19-21, 1991. The convention brought together rank and file leaders from the labour, feminist, lesbian and gay liberation, anti-war and student movements across English Canada and Quebec.

Two themes dominated the convention: the deepening crisis of the Canadian federal state, in the face of the struggles for national liberation of the Quebecois and aboriginal peoples; and the growing resistance to the ruling class "free trade" offensive against workers' rights, job security and wages, which threatens all public services and enterprises.

SRI LANKA

Fear is declining

THE leadership of the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), which won over 20 seats in the recent local government elections in Sri Lanka (see IV 208) issued the following comment on the elections on May 12, 1991:

THE local government election results show clearly that the masses are coming out of fear and feel less intimidated in expressing their opposition to the government. However the low poll indicates that in many areas effected by state terror during the recent period, people are still scared to openly express such opposition. We are happy that even under adverse conditions large numbers dared to vote against the government. The ruling UNP has been defeated in several places where they dominated since 1977 and in many places overall. Their so-called landslide victories are due to the bonus seats allocated to them as the single largest party. If not, the opposition would be in the majority in many of these councils as well.

Even though technically speaking the election was relatively free and fair there was indirect pressure on the people as the UNP entered the contest with the powers of president, cabinet and provincial councils in their hands. In particular the media was misused and abused. On the other hand the war in the north against the Tamil people remains a serious blow against democracy and the fundamental rights of the people.

The election results show the validity of a realistic agreement among the opposition parties. Our proposal for a no contest pact was rejected by the main bourgeois opposition party, the SFLP. If that had existed the UNP would have been defeated in many other places.

We are very pleased with the election of 22 NSSP council members, which will strengthen our campaign for a mass struggle to oust this reactionary UNP regime.

The general shift to the left adds to our strength. It is clear that the hope for revolution is alive and revolutionary Marxist ideas are accepted by a significant number. The efforts of our MP and other elected representatives to arouse the masses against the system will be enhanced by the activities of these newly elected members of the people.

Our council members will pursue an independent revolutionary line while fighting together with other oppositional parties both inside and outside the councils. ★

On the first question, the convention reaffirmed SC/GS' traditional position of support for an independent socialist Quebec, and adopted a report calling for aboriginal self-government. On the second point, convention delegates voted to initiate a campaign of solidarity with the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) and the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), unions currently heading for confrontation with the very unpopular federal Conservative government. The convention adopted reports and resolutions counterposing internationalist solidarity to protectionist responses to the imperialist trade blocs. Particular attention will be directed to solidarity with Mexican and US workers' struggles.

The convention adopted a new constitution for SC/GS, which creates the framework for a binational leadership capable of meeting more frequently and more able to direct the work of the organization as a whole. Finally, the convention had the pleasant task of voting to recognize new branches and new members in Ottawa-Hull and Sydney, Nova Scotia. This is the first time in decades that the Trotskyist movement has had an organized presence in Atlantic Canada. ★

TURKEY

The future of socialism

ERNEST Mandel, a leader of the Fourth International, spoke at three meetings during a visit to Turkey from May 23-26. The first, in Istanbul, was on the theme of "the future of socialism" — it was organized by Turkish supporters of the Fourth International, and more than 600 people attended. The two following meetings were organized by *Mülkiyeliler Birliği*, the Association of Alumni of the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Ankara. They dealt with the upheavals in eastern Europe and with neo-liberalism, and attracted 1800 and 1200 people respectively.

Youth were in the majority at all three meetings, and their reaction was very positive. Whilst the process of recomposition of the Turkish far left has seemed bogged down for several years in interminable discussions, there are now grounds for hope for the politicization of a new generation, on a far more healthy basis.

For a year now the Turkish government has combined a relative liberalization of the regime at the juridical level with increasingly violent police repression,

going as far as the summary execution of militants or assumed militants of the far left.

In this context, the fact that such meetings have taken place is not without importance. Several left newspapers underlined the positive contribution that the three meetings have made to the morale and revolutionary optimism of all Turkish socialists. The first meeting in Ankara, for example, was the biggest left political gathering in this town since the coup d'état in 1980. ★

MAURITIUS

New organization formed

THE socialist left in Mauritius has just witnessed an important process of regroupment. At the end of April 1991, the Militant Workers' Organization (OMT) and the Progressive Militant Force (FMP) fused.

These two organizations have already worked together for several years in the social movements and particularly in the trade unions. Recently, they have debated the reasons for the crisis of the regimes in eastern Europe, the question of democracy, and political strategy in the dominated countries like Mauritius.

After reaching a certain level of agreement, they decided to fuse and to form the Militant Workers' Party (Parti militant travayer, PMT).

The task facing the PMT is considerable, given the dizzying socio-economic changes Mauritius is experiencing with the development of the industrial free trade zone (see IV 204).

It will be necessary to build the bases of a new workers' movement independent of

the political establishment, and particularly the Mauritian Militant Movement (MMM) of Paul Béranger, whose populism has become fundamentally conservative, in the service particularly of French interests in the region.

In this context the PMT has the opportunity to build and affirm itself as a current useful to all the forces of popular resistance.

In countries like Mauritius, where there is now only a low rate of residual unemployment, where women have entered the labour market in a massive way, and where professional qualifications and ways of life are changing rapidly, trade union struggles will take on central importance if they can extend themselves to a series of new democratic and social demands — new rights for women, defence of the environment against

frenzied tourist development, and an intransigent struggle against corruption and foreign domination (particularly South African and French). ★

CORSICA

Marxism and nationalism

A FIUMARA is an organization of supporters of the Fourth International in Corsica. This group is linked to the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR — French section of the Fourth International), but enjoys decision-making autonomy so far as its intervention in Corsica is concerned. This special "status" is a consequence of the national liberation struggle which has been going on in this country for 15 years. Members of *A Fiumara* have now decided to join the revolutionary nationalist organization *A Cuncolta*. They will remain collectively members of the Fourth International.

This decision has been taken in the context of the recent split suffered by *A Cuncolta*. Whereas the group which left proclaimed at its founding conference "the bypassing of nationalism and socialism", *A Cuncolta* maintains the perspective of a break with capitalism, together with the rejection of the single party and bureaucratic centralization. Its goal is to build a society capable of responding to the needs of the whole of the population and not of some groups.

Supporters of *A Fiumara*, while building *A Cuncolta*, will seek to participate in this debate in the light of the programmatic gains of the Fourth International, particularly through integrating the struggle for national rights in the perspective of socialist revolution on an international scale. ★

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Twenty years backwards

THE French commission of inquiry "Truth about the Gulf War" (see *International Viewpoint* no. 204, April 15, 1991) spent several days in Iraq, during which time they attempted to get precise facts about the destruction wrought by the coalition forces, and distinguish this from the consequences of the civil war.

The independent commission is sponsored by many well-known figures on the left in France, involved in the Communist Party, the left of the Socialist Party, the Greens, the LCR (French section of the Fourth International, and others.

We publish below the first reactions of the commission of inquiry as they got off the plane in Jordan on May 25. This material first appeared in the French revolutionary Marxist weekly *Rouge* in its May 30 issue.

DOCUMENT

WHAT weapons were used by the coalition forces?

General Gallois: The coalition forces had three categories of aims and methods.

There were what I might call acts of spectacular destruction, to show Baghdad what American high technology was capable of. Thus, buildings of no military interest were destroyed near to a hotel full of journalists, to show the latter that the Americans could destroy buildings without suffering any loss. Thus the Palace of Congresses, the Ministry of Light Industry, the Interior Ministry and a telephone exchange were destroyed. This was not strictly anything to do with the liberation of Kuwait, but these were very selective operations which were highly successful from a technical point of view.

Then there were another series of attacks of strictly military importance away from the capital and journalists — the destruction of bridges, means of communications, relay stations, of under-

ground air force and other bunkers, and roads and railways, to make transport and communication difficult. It seems that there were few mistakes in these operations.

The third and final category were those that took place in the south, around Basra. Here almost everything was destroyed. Military targets were destroyed, largely without error, but at the same time civilian targets were hit unintentionally. For example, in Basra we saw two villa-lined roads that had been totally destroyed, although there was no military installation in the vicinity. These roads are now being cleared by bulldozers. Six hundred civilians died here — thus it is clear that there were sizeable civilian losses in the war.

Some 7 to 8% of the material used was high tech. Such weapons are very expensive and were, in my judgement, used sparingly. Otherwise traditional arms were used, often old weapons coming from Vietnam war stocks. They were efficiently used and caused considerable damage. Thus, again in Basra, we saw the crater made by a 500 kilo bomb, some 15 metres from the front of a big hospital; all the hospital's windows had been smashed and the walls knocked down. In the intensive care unit, there were fragments of shells 30 centimetres in diameter some eight or ten centimetres from the head of the patient. It seems that the target was a bridge some 500 metres away. This is hardly surgical precision, except in an ironic sense.

We also saw destruction that seemed to have been inflicted gratuitously: corn silos, electric pylons, petrol stations, dairies — we verified the destruction of one of the latter. All this can of course be explained as the inevitable accompaniments of war — always a horrible thing — but in that case they should not have announced to the world that this was to be a "clean war". Perhaps they wanted a clean war but it was a dirty one. The disinformation on this point has been striking. The information that was given out was copious but partial. All kinds of military — above all technological — virtues were presented as fact when they had not all been realized.

Antoine Comte: We all agreed that much of the destruction that we saw did not seem to have anything to do with the UN mandate, which insisted that the occupation of Kuwait end. We saw

destroyed factories, hospitals damaged, sometimes indirectly, the whole road system has been destroyed, as have bridges in all directions — temporary bridges have been borrowed. This is the first problem which concerns us and also the French government which took part in this.

The second problem is that we saw things that ran totally contrary to what is called the law of war. We saw ambulances and buses that had been machine-gunned.

Malek Boutih: There seems to have been two wars. There was the war of Baghdad, which was very meticulous, very high tech, and the up country war, which was rather less meticulous, where, when dealing with a bridge, a residential district near by would also be hit; while knocking out a factory, another adjacent district would be hit and so on. It is outside Baghdad that the big losses were suffered, in my view. And it is there that people are facing the biggest economic and food difficulties.

What people there are now expecting from the Western and other coalition countries is not that the whole thing is put behind them, not that everything is regretted, not that all the debates are gone over once more, but that the Iraqi people are not left to die in these conditions, while the coalition washes its hands of all responsibility.

It was not the ordinary people who were responsible for what happened, but it is they who are now paying the price.

■ What about the suction bombs?

General Gallois: We went to the Kuwaiti frontier to find the famous road along which the Iraqi troops retreated. That road is strewn with a huge number of burnt out vehicles. The paint has been burnt away to reveal the scorched steel. This was done after Kuwait had been freed. This was the destruction of a retreating army — not very glorious. These shells, the so-called Fuel air explosives, produce heat comparable to a single kilotonne atomic bomb. While it is not certain, I have the impression that such weapons had been used against these vehicles.

■ What is your estimate of the number of the war's victims?

General Gallois: The Iraqis do not want to give these figures out of pride. They do not want to admit to their misery, which they feel ashamed of. According to current figures, there were perhaps 15,000 military fatalities — this is certainly an under-estimate — and 25,000 civilians killed, which is possible. Then there has been the civil war, that is to say the Kurdish rebellion in the north and the Shi'ite rebellion in the south, and the repression against these. A figure of 30,000 victims of these conflicts has been

given.

To this should be added the 1,800,000 Iraqis who have fled their homes, 1,200,000 in the direction of Iran (Kurds and Shi'ites) and 600,000 Kurds towards Turkey. These latter have been able to return thanks to the efforts of the UN. I have been struck by the role of television in this; the media had access to the north and the international community was moved to action. There was no TV coverage of what was happening in the south, and nobody has taken any interest in the Shi'ites. Thus, law and morality are dictated by the TV.

■ What currently faces the Iraqis?

General Gallois: First of all Iraq, a country that was emerging from underdevelopment, is probably going to lose 15 or 20 years. Then, it is absolutely essential that the present sanctions are lifted. They are illegal; there is no UN resolution stating that the Iraqi government does not have the right to feed its people. Iraq imports 70% of its food, but there have been no imports for eight of nine months owing to the embargo. Thus, this country is being starved by an international community that seems indifferent to suffering.

The first measure is to lift the sanctions to permit the import of food and medicines, both of which are urgently needed. After that there could perhaps be negotiations over some kind of political measures of economic reparation. But for the moment the main thing is that the Iraqi people should not have to pay for the misdeeds of their leaders. When Mr. Bush says that Mr. Saddam Hussein must go at any price, he is claiming a right to interfere which has not before been recognized in international law. It is up to the Iraqi people to decide if they want to keep Saddam Hussein as president or not, and not a choice for the president of the United States.

It seems that the total number of victims of this war will be between 100 and 150,000. However this figure will grow. In 1992, 200,000 children will probably die of the effects of what they have lived through — dehydration, pollution, enterogastritis and all

kinds of disease due to a lack of medicine and care. There is a great urgency from this point of view. There is a fear that the losses of the war will be supplemented by postwar losses. This is why it is urgently necessary to take measures to supply the population with what they need.

Douceline Bonvalet: The primary problem is water. This has been rendered acute by the destruction of the purification plant in Baghdad and the canals in a country where water is hard to find, and people find themselves obliged to drink polluted water, with a risk of catastrophic epidemics. These have not yet occurred, but we read in a Baghdad journal that 30 cases of cholera have shown up in the Baghdad region.

Further problems result from the ten months long embargo, as well as the war itself. Thus far there is undernourishment rather than famine. But such under-nourishment can have very serious consequences for infants. They are not yet dying from hunger, but their resistance to disease has been reduced, and dehydration occurs more easily. On average, families have cut their food consumption by half. This is not yet famine, but such a level of nutrition can have very serious consequences. This is getting worse by the day, and, if the embargo is not lifted, deaths will result.

The embargo is also affecting the supply of medicines which are almost all imported. The Iraqis are using up their

stocks and doctors are reducing their prescriptions. But it hard to tell at what point a reduced prescription loses all value. Vaccinations are also a problem. The lack of milk — which is all imported — is also a serious problem for children. Thus the embargo is an underhand way of condemning people to a slow death.

■ What is the military situation of Iraq?

Iraq's military capacity has been considerably reduced by the war. On a legal point, it should be pointed out that there is no UN resolution stating that Iraq's future military potential should be destroyed. Now, this potential has been destroyed. The considerable sums invested to build up this potential have been lost. More conventional military potential has been considerably damaged, and Iraq is certainly militarily much weaker than it was.

At the same time the country's infrastructure has suffered. Between 150 and 165 bridges have been destroyed. A considerable effort has been made over the past decade to build up the country's transport system. Iraq has excellent three-lane highways, but all the river crossings have been destroyed. Rebuilding the bridges will be expensive and will divert resources away from development.

Iraq will go backwards. This is the result of serious mistakes by the Iraqi leaders, but the human problem remains. This is why we are demanding the ending of sanctions. ★

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State of siege

THREE weeks before the country's first multiparty national elections, Algeria's president Chadli Benjedid announced a state of emergency and changed the head of the government — despite the fact that, a few days before, everything had looked rosy for the regime.

On June 7 the new government promised presidential and legislative elections for this year, and the fundamentalists of the FIS rescinded their unlimited general strike call. However the regime has proceeded with the arrest of a number of fundamentalist militants.

The following article looks at the background to the Algerian regime's manoeuvres.

CHAWKI SALHI — June 6, 1991

THE government has turned the political liberalization conceded after the October 1988 revolt, and helped along by the determination of the popular movement, to its advantage as a way of legitimizing the implementation of the economic changes required to satisfy the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other imperialist creditors. These reforms include: an end to the state monopoly on foreign trade; the acceptance of foreign companies (among them Fiat and Peugeot) setting up in Algeria; changes to the tax system and a massive devaluation of the dinar, leading to a huge drop in living standards; and the progressive closure of loss-making state enterprises.

Imperialist satisfaction has expressed itself in Italian, Japanese and French foreign loans which have driven the Algerian debt up from \$26bn to \$36-\$40bn while giving the regime the room to get through the legislative and presidential elections.

At the political level, the regime was able to recover from the shock of the October 1988 youth uprising. The social and democratic movements have been contained, mobilizations dispersed or prevented, and the building of firm struc-

tures held back by an arsenal of laws and the active intervention of the whole state machine.

The fundamentalists escaped this repression and were able to offer a leadership to the popular movement, from the sanctuary of their sumptuous mosques. The regime's strategy for the June 1990 local elections, where they insisted that only a vote for the ruling FLN could stop the fundamentalist rise, blew up in its face. The fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) benefited from the protest vote and took control of almost all the country's towns.

But this was a Pyrrhic victory for them. Obligated to administer town councils in the grip of a housing crisis, massive unemployment, and the deliberate starvation of state funds, the fundamentalists lost the confidence of the voters. Then the Gulf crisis imposed a spectacular about face on them: after trying to defend the Saudis — from whom they receive funds — they decided to take the leadership of the anti-Bush movement. Their militarist bid lacked credibility and brought their contradictions to the surface.

Their next test was the March 12-13, 1991 general strike called by the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA) in protest against the cost of living. The FIS wanted to ignore or even cripple this strike, but it was 95% followed, signalling the end of the FIS' domination of the popular movement.

The disillusion of the FIS' voters, the shrinking of the influence of Ait Ahmed's Front of Socialist Forces (FFS) in Kabylia, the marginal electoral significance of former president Ahmed Ben Bella, and the absence of any working class or even simply populist alternative meant that Chadli felt confident about fixing June 27 as the date of the legislative elections.

Shameless gerrymandering

The opposition had foolishly agreed to a two-round ballot, which would permit the FLN to once again put itself forward as the "saviour of the nation" in the face of the "fundamentalist menace". Shameless gerrymandering, which gives the 1.8 million inhabitants of Algiers 21 seats as against 84 to the same number of people living in FLN-dominated areas, was to be the finishing touch.

The FIS was slow to grasp that it was

trapped. It threatened a general strike, and the FLN called the fundamentalists' bluff, relying on the prevailing scepticism and lack of interest in the party political game, which has so little to do with the real lives of the population.

The strike, which was to take place on May 25, was a patent failure. Only handfuls went on strike in factories with thousands of workers; there was no massive shutting of business and shops, which perhaps expressed annoyance at competition from the "Islamic markets"; and demonstrations were poorly attended — there were marches a few hundred strong and a few thousand came to the main demonstration to hear the FIS leaders Abassi Madani and Ali Belhadj.

The official television, for its part, irritated everyone by insisting on the derisory nature of the marches. The FIS then organized big evening marches, which non-strikers could attend, and occupied the squares in the cities. Then, suddenly, on the second day, the youth entered the scene, both to show solidarity in the face of the regime's tear gas, but also because there have been no other forums in which to express their rejection of the regime.

It was non-fundamentalist youth who put up barricades in several parts of Algiers. However the movement was not of the dimensions of that of October 5, 1988, and was, indeed, opposed by an important part of public opinion out of fear of the fundamentalists.

Democratic opening to continue

Despite the state of emergency, Chadli has promised that the democratic opening will continue: he has even felt obliged to promise a coalition government — with an eye on the Democratic Cultural Assembly (RCD) and the liberals of the PRA — to hold popular discontent in check and prolong his rule for a few years more.

However, while it seems clear that the country will not return to the pre-1988 situation, the population remains discontented. Thus chronic instability is likely for the future.

While the FIS leadership is the most prominent force in the anti-regime movement — as was not the case before 1988 — a significant part of public opinion has reservations about the fundamentalists owing to their record in local administration.

Thus, Algerians have rejected the state of emergency in a contradictory way: people are opposed to the repression, but some feel relief and think that the situation will be more stable. At the same time the fundamentalist domination of the protest movements and the lack of any alternative to them is the source of profound confusion. ★