

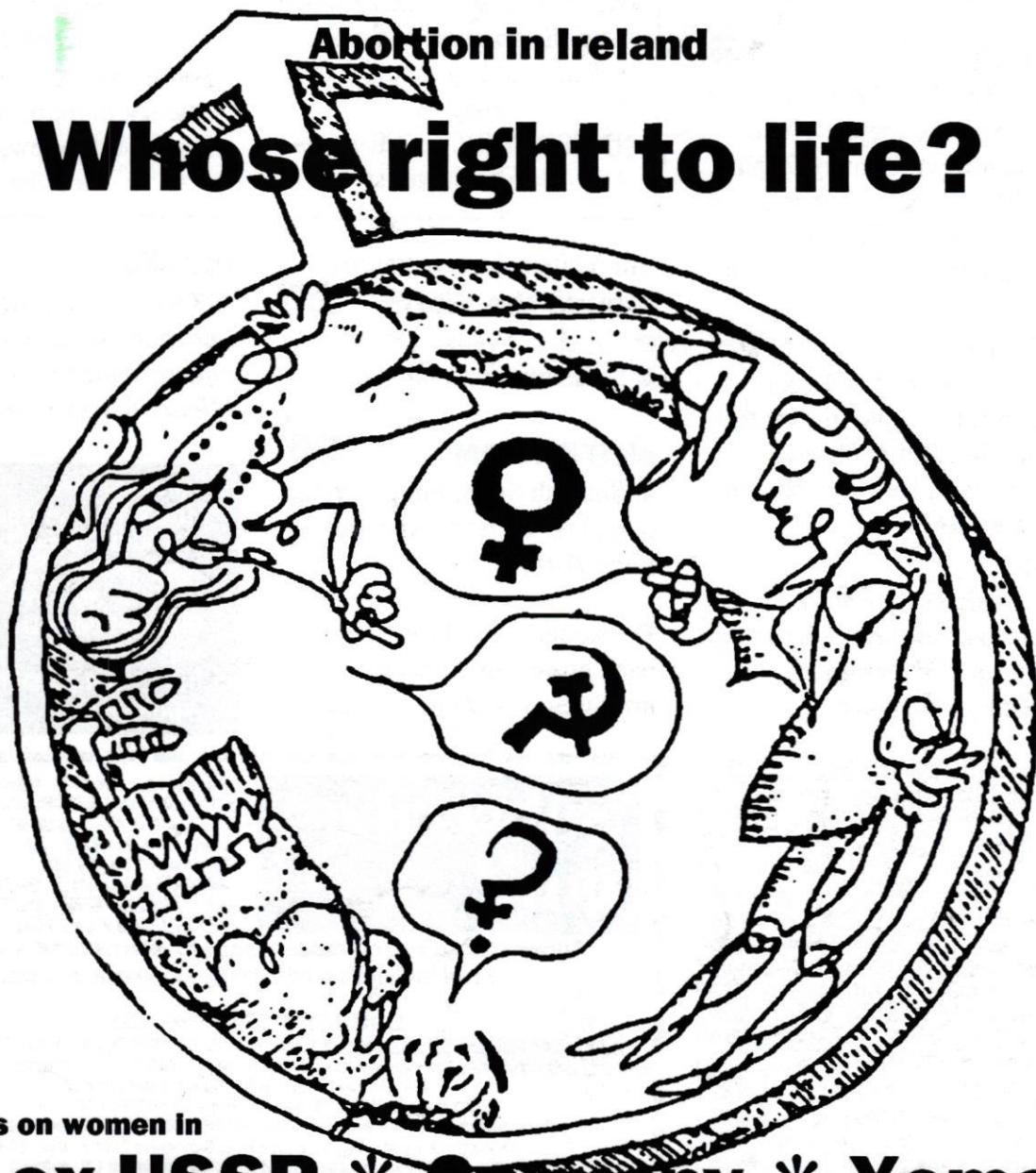
International VIEWPOINT

Issue 224

March 16, 1992

£1.50; \$2.75; C\$3; 16FF

Abortion in Ireland Whose right to life?



Also:
articles on women in

* **ex-USSR** * **Germany** * **Yemen**

Contents also include:

David Mandel on Yeltsin's economic programme

Sergio Rodriguez on Mexico's agrarian counter-reform

And much more

Contents:

URUGUAY 13

PREPARING the country for integration into the "Mercosur" free trade zone — Interview with Uruguayan Trotskyist

MEXICO 15

GOVERNMENT seeks to undermine the legacy of the Mexican Revolution of Zapata and Villa. *Sergio Rodriguez* throws historical light on Salinas' "land counter-reform"

RUSSIA 19

THE government of Boris Yeltsin can use the market to destroy but *David Mandel* doubts that it has any coherent creative project

Plus

TWO articles by *Renfrey Clarke* on the current economic disaster and government provocations against

International Women's Day dossier

IRELAND 3

CASE of rape victim challenges Irish constitution — and perhaps even the Maastricht Treaty — *Anne Conway*

ex-USSR 5

BARBARA SCHULTZ sums up the position of Soviet women as they face the free market
INTERVIEW with Russian woman activist

GERMANY 10

AN ESSENTIAL part of unification on a capitalist basis; making women bear the brunt of unemployment — *Barbara Schultz*

YEMEN 11

CAN women preserve the gains of the South Yemen revolution, as the south merges with the north? Interviews with two activists

anti-Yeltsin demonstrators Around the World 25

- Czechoslovakia
- Sri Lanka ● Catalonia

ANTI-RACISM 26

● Spanish State: First stirrings of an anti-racist movement — *Paco Torres*

● Sweden: A million people back protest in defence of immigrants — *Dick Forslund*

ISRAEL 28

ISRAEL government attacks on Lebanon are aimed at undermining negotiations — *Michel Warshawsky*

Erratum:

IN the article on the eviction of Indian tribal peoples on page 8 of IV 222, we stated that the number of those threatened with eviction was 1,500,000; this should have been 150,000. Apologies!

International VIEWPOINT

A fortnightly review of news and analysis published under the auspices of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, in conjunction with the French language *Inprecor*, which appears on alternate fortnights.

All editorial and subscription correspondence should be mailed to: International Viewpoint, 2 rue Richard Lenoir, 93108 Montreuil, France. Fax: 43 79 21 06.

Published by Presse-Edition-Communication (PEC). Directeur de publication: Christian Lamotte. Commission paritaire: 84324. ISSN: 0294-2925. Imprimé par Photographie.

International Viewpoint is catalogued by the LPS Alternative Press Index.

● News closing date:
March 6, 1992

Subscribe now!

Subscriptions and correspondence to International Viewpoint,
2 rue Richard Lenoir, 93108 Montreuil, France.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

All Surface Mail and EEC airmail: □ 1 year 280FF; £28; \$48 □ 6 months 150FF; £15; \$28
Airmail (non-EEC): Europe outside EEC □ 1 year 300FF; £30; \$51 □ 6 months 160FF; £16; \$29
Middle East, North Africa, North America
□ 1 year 340FF; £34; \$57 □ 6 months 180FF; £18; \$32
Asia, Africa, Latin America □ 1 year 380FF; £38; \$64 □ 6 months 200FF; £20; \$35
Oceania □ 1 year 420FF; £42; \$70 □ 6 months 220FF; £22; \$38
(Please tick where appropriate; Dollar prices all US dollars)

(BLOCK LETTERS PLEASE)

Last name First name

Address

City Country Code

Renewal of existing subscription/ New subscription (please tick)

Abortion debate rocks Ireland

THE DUBLIN Supreme Court has decided that the risk to the life of the mother must be taken into account as well as the constitutional commitment to "defend the life of the unborn". This is the reason for its decision to overturn the High Court injunction preventing a 14 year old pregnant rape victim from travelling to Britain. It represents a first limited victory in Irish women's struggle for the right to abortion. But the political furore caused by this case — which has dominated the news headlines since it first came to public attention on February 13 — will not die down. How will this judgement be interpreted? The anti-abortionists show every sign of continuing their campaign to criminalize any support for the right to abortion, however limited. We explain what lies behind the latest developments. ★

ANNE CONWAY — DUBLIN , March 4, 1992.

"PRO-LIFE" BARBARISM

THE recent threat to legally prevent a fourteen-year old rape victim leaving Ireland to have an abortion in Britain is a horrifying illustration of the barbaric consequences of a so-called "pro-life" position.

The amendment introduced into the Irish constitution in 1983 committed the state to protect "as far as practicable" the right to life of the unborn. From the outset, there were widespread fears of how this would be used. The pro-amendment campaigners denied that it would ever be used to attack individual women. Just as they denied that it would be used to ban information on abortion.

Already, the weight of traditional Catholic opinion weighs heavily on Irishwomen who find themselves forced to seek abortions — in a country where all forms of contraception are available only on medical prescription. The officially recognized figure of 4,000 women who go to Britain each year is undoubtedly an underestimate, based only on those who give an Irish address. Many more give the addresses of friends and relations in Britain for fear that they will be "found out", for fear of the opinions of their families, their communities and the Church.

Now, the fear has become real that they could also be subject to legal proceedings. While this amendment remains in force, the burden of fear will lie still more heavily on women who have so little choice.

The right to choose how to express their sexuality, to decide when and whether they want to be mothers, is a basic democratic right for women, because it is fundamental to their control over their own lives and bodies. Denial of this elementary right, as is so graphically illustrated in this case, leads inevitably to the denial of other basic rights.

Since 1983, the amendment has already given rise to a series of attacks on women's simple right to information on what possibilities exist in the case of an unwanted pregnancy (see accompanying article). The thousands of people on the streets of Dublin who chanted the telephone number of a pregnancy advisory service during the recent demonstrations were committing an illegal act!

The recent injunction was a denial of another basic human right — the right to travel. The young woman had committed no crime against Irish law. She was the victim of the crimes of sexual abuse and rape. She would commit no crime in Britain where abortion is legal. The only reason for preventing her — or any other woman wanting to terminate an unwanted pregnancy — from travelling to a place where it could be performed in safe and legal conditions, is to impose a view that takes no account of the individual woman's circumstances — a view that says that the potential life of a foetus is always an absolute priority over the life and well-being of a woman. The High Court judge summed it up when he said that the risk of this young woman committing suicide was "much less and of a different order of magnitude than the certainty that the life of the unborn will be terminated".

But no legal or constitutional bans will offer any other certainty. Because bans only ensure that abortions are not legal — they still occur, in the worst and most dangerous conditions. Or women give birth, frightened and in hiding, like the fifteen-year old girl who died after giving birth alone in an Irish churchyard five years ago, too frightened to tell her family.

The Supreme Court ruling that the risk to the life — *not* the health or well-being — of women should be taken into account is progress — but limited. Women will have to threaten that they would commit suicide if not allowed an abortion.

Only women's possibility to decide for themselves on when and whether to have a child can ensure that such barbarities do not recur. That possibility necessitates information, education, and social and economic independence. Any attempt to impose that choice — whether it be by a so-called "Communist" state as in Ceausescu's Romania, an Islamic fundamentalist movement, or the combined weight of the Catholic church and state as in Ireland — has consequences that are disastrous for individuals and restrict the rights of society as a whole. — Penny Duggan. ★

THE 14-year old school girl at the centre of the case had been the victim of sexual abuse since the age of 12 by the father of a school friend.

The girl and her parents went to England to obtain an abortion; prior to travelling they had asked the gardai (Irish police) whether foetal tissue could be used in the Irish courts as legal evidence to identify and convict the rapist. The gardai subsequently approached the Director of Public Prosecutions about this.

The DPP's office then contacted the Attorney General who immediately issued an interim injunction against the girl and her family to prevent them from obtaining an abortion.

The family and the girl, who were at that time in England, returned without an abortion having taken place. They were distraught and shattered and, according to professional opinion, the girl was suicidal.

On Monday 17, the High Court upheld the injunction preventing the girl, her parents or agents from leaving the country for the next nine months. This ruling was struck down on Wednesday 26 February by the Supreme Court, which however

reserved the explanation for its decision to a future date.

The injunction was described as barbaric and medieval. The main bourgeois newspaper, the *Irish Times*, considered that it put the position of women in Ireland on a similar footing as in Khomeini's Iran and Ceausescu's Romania.

The original injunction confirmed many of the worst fears of those who had campaigned against the 1983 amendment to the constitution. The possible implications of such a clause are obvious. It strikes fear into all women and makes those contemplating an abortion open to injunction if their intentions become known to the authorities.

Women who have been raped will not report the assaults for fear of interrogation and criminalization by the courts and the state.

Increased threat to women

It also enhances the threat for women that the life of the foetus will be given precedence over that of the mother in a complicated birth or emergency. This High Court judgement gave no weight to the mental or psychological health of the suicidal girl; the court ruled that she must continue with the pregnancy.

In the eight years since the anti-abortion constitutional amendment was passed Irish women have in fact witnessed a continuous and escalating series of attacks on women's reproductive rights through SPUC's (Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child — an anti-abortion pressure group) determination to push the constitutional position. First of all, the pregnancy counselling and abortion referral service of two Dublin women's clinics were closed down through rulings which found in favour of SPUC, who claimed that these activities were contravening the constitution.

Secondly, British magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* have been censored for carrying adverts for British abortion clinics in their Irish editions. The national students union was hauled through the courts for disseminating and publishing abortion information — a judgement against them was upheld by the EC Court of Justice. In the last few months books such as *Everywoman* and *Our Bodies Ourselves* have been removed from the city council central library as they contain information on abortion.

In 1983, over two-thirds of the electorate voted in favour of the amendment. Now, confronted with the human implications of that position as applied to one young rape victim, there is a turnaround in public opinion. The latest opinion poll, published on March 2, shows that only 30% want to keep the amendment, 48% want to amend it and 18% want to get rid of it altogether (*Financial Times*, March 3, 1992).

4

This follows a significant mobilization

of public opinion and protest leading up to the Supreme Court ruling — including a demonstration of some 10,000 people in Dublin the previous Saturday. The singer Sinead O'Connor participated in the protests, stating publicly that she had had two abortions.

The cynicism and disregard shown for the girl and her family in the offer by LIFE (an offshoot of SPUC) to care for her until she bore the child have also alienated people. They are now being seen more clearly as reactionary bigots.

Dilemma for government

The case has presented the Fianna Fail government with a major political problem. They are aware of the depth of public feeling on the issue and the new Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Albert Reynolds has been forced to try and resolve the matter. The girl and her family were urged by the party leaders to appeal against the judgement to the Supreme Court — and the government took responsibility for the family's legal costs.

Clearly, it pushed for the Supreme Court to lift the injunction as they are anxious to avoid another referendum on the abortion issue. While in 1983 the constitutional amendment was used by Fianna Fail to gain votes on a Catholic nationalist conservative ticket in a situation of political instability, today popular Catholic nationalism has run its course.

Since 1983, women, young people, the rural poor and the working class have experienced mass unemployment, forced emigration and diminishing civil rights. These have led to unprecedented political instability and alienation from the main political parties, shown by the election of the socially liberal Mary Robinson as president and the sizeable votes for left wing parties.

SPUC, LIFE and other virulent anti-abortion groups are contributing to this political instability and politicians who once courted them now want to take their distance, as does the Catholic Church.

This case also presents the Irish government with a major problem with regard to the referendum on the ratifica-

tion of the Maastricht Treaty (see box).

There is now a real fear among the ruling class that the backlash caused by the present case could prevent the ratification of the treaty. This would result in the treaty not being implemented in Europe — so this puts real pressure on the Irish government to amend or repeal its anti-abortion amendment.

However, despite the change in public opinion, another abortion referendum would still be very divisive from the government's point of view. While some elements of the Catholic hierarchy indicated that the High Court's interpretation of the constitutional clause was too strict, the Archbishop of Dublin has compared "permissive legislation on abortion" with Nazi policy.

Another bishop interviewed on Irish radio said that he thought that men should have the right to take out an injunction to prevent their wives leaving the country to have an abortion. Anti-abortion forces have suggested that the recent case was a "put-up job" or that the girl seduced her rapist. The only party in the Dail (parliament) that is calling for the amendment to be repealed is the small Workers Party, which has also called for the resignation of the Attorney General.

Solidarity vital

It is vital therefore for feminists and activists throughout Europe and internationally to organize protests in support of their Irish sisters and for the repeal of the anti-abortion amendment. Pressure should be put on parliamentary representatives to make official complaints to the Irish government on its antiquated anti-women laws. Dutch parliamentary representatives made an official complaint to the Irish government that received widespread coverage in the Irish media.

The widest possible protest from abroad is needed. While the strategy of the government and the opposition parties seems to be to sugarcoat the amendment enough to take the heat out of the situation without offending the Church, the forces of the right can be expected to continue to broaden their assault on women's rights as soon as the present crisis blows over. ★

THE government does not want another amendment, but its cowardice has limited the options. A special protocol was inserted into the Maastricht Treaty preventing any challenge to the anti-abortion clause from European law. Apparently, this was drafted by a senator of the ruling Fianna Fail party. This fact alone is likely to cause a lot of embarrassment as it is clear evidence of direct interference by extreme religious bigots at the highest levels of government. The intention was to stop the anti-abortion lobby from opposing Maastricht — but now this protocol is having exactly the opposite effect to what was intended. If the politicians refuse to hold a referendum to scrap Article 40.3.3 they face their own deserved "nightmare scenario" — a campaign against the June referendum on the Maastricht Treaty — because it underwrites the ban on abortion. If the Maastricht treaty continues with the Irish anti-abortion protocol it will be doubly difficult to get rid of it — it will be necessary to hold a referendum to amend the 26 county constitution and to re-negotiate the Maastricht Treaty. ★

A poisoned legacy

The following article, written in November 1991, examines some of the consequences for women of 70 years of Stalinist rule in what was the Soviet Union.

BARBARA SCHULTZ

E DUCATION and training of women has been comprehensively guaranteed in the Soviet Union. In 1984-85, 54% of high school students were women, and 58% of technical college students. For medical and teacher training institutions the proportion of women rose to 69 and 73% respectively.

Meanwhile, 37% of magistrates, 40% of academics but only 14% of higher grade academics were women. However, the profession of doctor is not highly respected and that of teacher is actually looked down on as a miserably paid women's job. Women made up 80% of primary school heads and 37% of heads of secondary schools.

Women comprised 53% of the population and 51% of the workforce of the Soviet Union. However, as in the USA and Western Europe, on average women earned only about 60-65% of what men earned. Thus the formal equality of education should be approached with caution. In the Soviet Union too women have been concentrated in certain industries; 85% of textile workers, 91% in commerce and food services but only 16% in engineering.

In 1988 — and nothing has decisively changed since then — Soja Puchova pointed out the difficult situation faced by women, 3.5 million of whom worked in unhealthy conditions and four million of whom did night work (more than the total for men), despite the fact that legally women can only be required to do night-work in special cases.

Women lose jobs first

Since 1988 it has become clear that when an enterprise adopts the profit principle it is women who lose their jobs first, women with children are not taken on and the enterprise's social amenities are cut back, hitting women hardest.

Job cutbacks in administration are 80% borne by women. Today (in November 1991) 77% of the unemployed in Moscow are women. It is being considered whether dismissals of women who are the "sole provider" should not be forbidden.

The fact that the Soviet leadership was aware that they had to draw women behind *perestroika* was shown by the set-

ting up of women's councils in the factories. Their tasks were included in the law on the enterprises but defined in a very general way: "To concern themselves with matters which affect women at work and in everyday life."

Without clearly defined powers, however, these councils cannot do anything. "One acts according to the motto: beat your wings, as long as you have the strength, but do not dare to step over the boundaries which nature has supposedly set (*Sowjetunion Heute*, no. 3, 1990)."

A particular problem, which is now at least being brought to public attention through readers' letters, is that of the most important method of birth control — abortion. Abortion was legalized immediately after the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks on economic grounds stemming from "state interests".

At this time it was not demanded that women bear children whose upbringing no one could take charge of. Already, by 1923, this freedom was limited; an abortion troika consisting of a doctor, a representative of the health commissariat and a representative of the local soviet now had the final say on whether there were social or medical grounds for the abortion.

Abortion again criminalized

The Stalin era marked a big step backwards, abortion being once again made a criminal offence. From 1936 onwards abortion was completely forbidden. In 1955 it was once again officially permitted on medical grounds and since 1968 has been completely free. At present it is the method of birth control.

This development of the abortion question shows clearly that what has been at stake is neither morality nor the welfare of woman and child, but power over women to put them at the disposal of supposed economic imperatives and deprive them of control over their own bodies.

Contraceptive means are not available even in the big cities. The quality of condoms — the production of which has been stepped up in connection with the coming of AIDS — are inadequate (leaky or too solid) and the pill is considered by many women to be so doubtful from a health point of view that they refuse to use it. "The pill is a hormone preparation,

and I believe it to be harmful" is a typical statement (Thalidomide is confused with drugs preventing ovulation and the consequences of taking thalidomide presented as the results of the contraceptive pill). Women use the coil as a method of prevention.

Almost every woman in the ex-Soviet Union has had an abortion, as a rule from one to five times, in some cases as many as 15 times. Obtained without private expenditure it is a bloody and barbaric operation. A quote from a reader's letter is characteristic: "woman is patient by nature, and can bear any pain, but it would be better if she did not have to suffer."

It is now being stressed that every woman has the right to anaesthetic, as is also true for births. These take place exclusively in clinics and whether or not painkillers are available is (or was) in most cases related to readiness to pay. From many interviews and descriptions it can be concluded that medical care and drugs can be had for the right price. Women are, naturally, especially bitter about this kind of corruption.

Marriage remains norm

Although in much of the ex-Soviet Union living together without marriage is accepted, marriage remains the acceptable norm, one reason often being that it is the only way to attain independence and also the only possibility of having a sex life. Marriage, which is formally only a type of registration, has a romantic component expressed in a ceremony resembling a church ceremony, with white dress, dark suit, bouquets, music and speeches.

The bridal pair can obtain a "marriage book" when they set the date for the marriage — this entitles them to make purchases in special stores, where they can buy a kind of dowry and also marriage garb.

Many marriages do not last long. The divorce rate in the ex-USSR stood at 3.4 per thousand inhabitants compared to a marriage rate of 9.3 per thousand. Requests for dissolution mostly come from women, often owing to the man's alcoholism. Often a "destroyed sex life" is also cited as a reason.

There is virtually no sex education provided in the public education system. At present, however, everything is up for discussion and the need for such education openly stated. The problem of AIDS, which is now recognized in the USSR, speaks in favour of sex education. At the same time pornography and prostitution are also surfacing.

The material consequences of divorce for women are not serious, although the situation of single women with two or more children is regarded as a social problem. Women have a job and their own income. Maintenance payments are not assured for more than a year, in extreme cases for five years. Child care is an



exceptionally difficult problem, as also is general family support.

In families that stay together, it is the women who assume the overwhelming share of housework. Women perform 70% of the shopping, 80% of the cooking, 64% of the washing up, 90% of the washing and 87% of the ironing (the precise figures are from the 1960s, since when the situation has perhaps improved slightly).

Lack of space

Especially in the big cities, above all in Moscow, some 20 to 25% of families are forced to share accommodation where they lack space. At present each person has some 15.2 square metres of living space (in the USA it is 40 sq. m.).

Big dwellings may accommodate two, three or often more families. Young couples often live with their parents (in-law) so that five or six people are sharing two rooms and cooking and washing facilities have to be shared with even more people. In these circumstances even the installation of a washing machine can lead to major conflicts since this will be an individual and not a collective acquisition. The journal *Sowjetunion heute* ("Soviet Union Today") calls this "a pre-divorce situation".

6 The 27th congress of the CPSU in 1986 decided that by the year 2000 every fami-

ly would have a self-contained dwelling or their own home. Home building was to be officially pushed along, since unexploited capital could be used and one's own home "makes for a strong and big family." The tendency to put the emphasis on the family is here apparent.

While in the countryside the grandmother still often assumes a part of the burden of child-rearing, families in the cities depend on public institutions.

The motherhood laws in the ex-USSR facilitated care by the mother for the first phase of the child's life (the father does not appear in these laws). For the raising of babies, the mother can have a year's part paid leave, which can be extended to one and a half years with a guarantee of a job to return to. In 1990 *unpaid* maternity leave was extended to three years.

Distance of crèches resented

However, in Moscow, for example, it is particularly resented by women that crèches are usually neither near to their homes nor their workplaces. Women, and sometimes men, must make hour-long journeys twice a day on overcrowded public transport to and from the crèches. As a result, many, especially single women, make use of children's homes which turn the children into weekend visitors.

Many women have a low opinion of kindergartens. Mothers complain that the

children are always ill and especially suffer from colds. The groups of children are large — 25 or more.

New pre-school institutions with three million places were envisaged for the 12th Five-Year Plan (1986-1990). In 1983 14.4 million children had places in such institutions, when in 1960 there were only 4.4 million — a rise of four times in 20 years. With a population increase of some 5.6 million, we can estimate that there are some 33 million children of pre-school age, of which some 4.5 million were being looked after at home.

That is, only about half of children find a place in a public institution. The situation in the towns in this respect is better than in the countryside.

In general shopping is women's business. Often groups are formed in the enterprises who send a woman during working time to shop on a shift basis.

Queuing tripled

Queuing in the shops can be tripled as one 1. chooses the product; 2. pays; and 3. takes the product, sometimes in a different place. Shopping for a family of three demands an hour and a half. It is easy to understand how necessary a reliably secure supply of the needed goods is.

The number of labour saving household appliances seems considerable. According to statistics from 1983, out of 100 households, 90 had a fridge, 70 a washing machine, 36 a vacuum cleaner, 95 a television and 93 a radio). These appliances often need repairs and the service sector is very inadequate.

In order to offset the privatization of reproductive labour (and housework), the provision of more attractive, cheaper and efficient servicing centres would be needed. However, all public statements and interviews make it plain that the tendency is strongly towards the nuclear family. The re-discovery of the family has gone so far that it is believed that the problem of the dismissal of workers can be solved like this.

Tatyana Zaslavskaya, a member of the Academy of Sciences, has said "in my view a part of the employed women should renounce their jobs and give priority to house work, if the incomes of their husbands rise as planned.

"This leaves open the question of whether women who have qualifications will so simply be ready to leave work. It is hard to believe that women take remarks such as this from a woman professor of medicine seriously: "In the end there is a genetic difference between men and women. If men have to spend too much time in the kitchen they will lose their masculinity."

The small difference, and its big consequences, works out thus for the woman: eight and a half hours work (with a break); one or two hours of travelling to and from work; an hour and a half shopping (this

closely together with gay men and are more concerned with the problem of their sexuality than specifically women's questions.

Propaganda against lesbians

This is based on the fact that the gay and lesbian movements have their origins in the Gulag and have continued to be isolated. The fact that lesbians took part in this congress almost had the result that it did not take place at all, since it meant a barrage of propaganda against these "sick and anti-social subjects."

The congress took up such themes as "Women and the Market", "Women as Subject and Object of Politics", and "Patriarchy and Violence against Women". The greatest interest was in economic questions.

There is also a women's party, whose conference was attended by 40 women and which claims 2 to 3,000 members. An interview with a spokeswoman in a woman's paper, brought forth a hail of correspondence. This party however does not have an official programme. The essence of their programme is "women are better than men" and "should follow their intuition".

Most of the new democratic or less democratic parties show no awareness of the need to address women's issues. Only in Ukraine has a feminist from Kiev written for a democratic party.

Feminist periodicals, which have a certain audience, are not well known, apart from *Eva* which appears in Lithuania and which presents itself as Christian feminist — this takes up such questions as abortion, the position of unmarried women or violence against women. It is interesting that this periodical appears in both Lithuanian and Russian.

At present the developing nationalism is worrying. Nationalism undeniably strengthens patriarchy. Women will be urged to bear more children in the interests of the nation. Old, patriarchal traditions will be unearthed. This can have an economic aspect; in Uzbekistan a factory for the production of veils may be set up.

As in most of the countries of former "really existing socialism" there has been no critical reappraisal of feminist literature and discussions.

The beginnings of the women's movement were dried out by the state ordered women's policy, so that it is now very hard to promote the women's movement as an autonomous movement.

This makes it all the more important to defend existing rights and not to cede a single inch of ground; only on this basis is the defence and extension of rights possible. Economic misery will furthermore be "coped with" at the expense of women.

8 This is a worldwide problem which confronts us. ★

The women's movement in Kaluga

THE following interview with Tatiana Markova, a member of the Social-Democratic Party (SDP) in the Russian town of Kaluga and a feminist activist, was conducted by David Mandel towards the end of 1991. A longer version of the interview will appear in a forthcoming issue of *International Marxist Review*.

YOU obviously believe that it is necessary to act on the political level. What is your attitude to the present Russian government?

In my opinion, Yeltsin's speech yesterday at the Russian Supreme Soviet showed that after the putsch (the failed conservative coup in August 1991) he has simply betrayed the people. Of course, I am not surprised, since I have been critical of him for a long time.

My analysis is more on the psychological than political level. Who is Yeltsin? A former Communist, a man with totalitarian inclinations. I don't want to criticize the entire Communist movement. I am told that in the West there are good people in it, that the movement there is what it should be.

But here it is linked to totalitarianism. Yeltsin spent his whole life in it, was a leader there. He is now close to 60, and one can't expect him to change completely.

Second, he suffered from that regime. He is a decent person, with a conscience and other good human qualities. Since he suffered, something shifted in his head and he realized that it was all wrong.

But the habit remains. As a clever and wily politician — you have to give him his due — he is capable of hypocrisy and betrayal, and he made use of these traits when he tried to make himself into a hero on the crest of the popular upsurge following the putsch.

Frankly, I don't believe in his sincerity. Sure, it hurt him to be attacked by his own party comrades. But history shows that such individuals very quickly forget about the people on whose shoulders they came to power.

He worried me right from the start of his activity in the Supreme Soviet of RSFSR. If he were a politician who cared about his people, he would have first of all done everything possible to defend the sovereignty of Russia, to defend his people from the Centre.

But look how he wavered. He constantly tried to find a common language with Gorbachev and to impose this position on the popular movement, not considering that a putsch could occur any day and the people would be completely defenceless

against it.

This was clear from the logic of events, but he is obviously playing some unclean game.

And so I stopped trusting him as a politician. And after that came other mistakes. I learnt of these things from information I received in Moscow — in the provinces we had less information about his activity in the Supreme Soviet and about the Supreme Soviet itself — and I could draw conclusions and make a prognosis.

My prognosis was that since some 50% of the Supreme Soviet of Russia is made up nomenklatura people, we could not expect reforms that would improve the lot of the people. And, of course, they made sure they passed laws that served only their own interests, not those of the people.

We can now see all this in practice. They passed a law on privatization that suits the nomenklatura strata very well. And those so-called "democrats", people whom until recently we called democrats, who passed this law, are basically individuals who sought to make a political career for their own private benefit on the wave of *perestroika*.

Real democrats, genuinely honest and principled people, are very, very rare in our political life. Indeed, it would be surprising if this were not so. After all, for 70 years public life has been conducted without any reference to principle or morality.

This is probably the natural evolution of politics in our country, and my task and that of other political activists who seek truth and justice is to try to influence the course of political life as best we can by whatever means available, adhering to a principled orientation, so lacking among our politicians. But compared to them, we are very few.

■ You are also active in the women's movement.

Yes, we have a group in Kaluga², and I am a member of the women's commission of the Social-Democratic Party.

■ As a woman, what sort of social policy would you like to see? What are the most urgent state measures needed by women?

The most urgent measures must be

directed to protecting women's living standards.

The first and main blow of the market reform will be directed against women. They will be fired first.

Services are already being cut and becoming more expensive, undermining our ability to raise our children decently. Look at our young girls and boys. They are growing up like little animals who will later rip us to pieces.

The law on privatization also hurts women, because there are very few women economists, people who can orient themselves well in these questions.

■ **Do you see any concern for women's interests in the government?**

None whatsoever.

■ **What is it like for a woman to be active in politics?**

First of all, I am not a true political person, since, in my view, such a person has to be well-grounded in theory. At first, I had a very difficult time understanding things and only gradually did I begin to feel more comfortable.

I recently read a book by Ivan Efremov, *Thais of Athens*, about ancient Greece. Thais said that where women are in the position of slaves, they grow up with the mentality of slaves, and the generation they raise will never be bold and courageous.

In other words, a society that does not understand that woman, that is the free woman, is the basis of everything, of the cultural and spiritual development of the nation, will never be able to rise above the materialism of this world, above purely selfish goals, animal instincts.

As a woman, it is hard for me in the political movement, and not only because men are for the most part merciless toward us and don't understand woman's psychology, that women tire more quickly, they are more emotional.

But it is hard also because, if I have succeeded in raising myself to a higher level of spiritual life and have a deeper grasp of things, I can find no understanding. People are so mired in the worries and pettiness of everyday life that they simply lack the strength to rise above it.

■ **Is this only in relation to women's issues or more generally?**

More generally, I think.

■ **Tell me now about the women's movement in Kaluga.**

Its history began with a woman's conference in the town of Dubno last March. I was supposed to go from the party, but I couldn't make it.

We sent someone else, a very intelligent woman, who brought back documents and told us what happened.

Even this little bit of information made me realize that we needed a women's movement, that we have very many prob-

lems that are specific to women who are about to enter a market.

So our social-democratic organization in Kaluga decided to raise these problems at the third congress of the SPD.

The SPD's programme had no section on women, and we offered to help write one. This was accepted, and now the women's commission, which I helped initiate, is in the process of writing it.

There are seven of us and today we are meeting for the second time. The next time we meet I will definitely invite you.

In Kaluga itself, I became acquainted with another woman who had also been at Dubno and had begun on her own to organize a women's movement in our town. She was working in the regional soviet social welfare department.

She is from Yakutiya, and had been put forward there as a candidate to the Russian Supreme Soviet. She did not make it solely because she was a woman.

Even at that time they were saying that a woman has no place in government.

After that, she came under strong pressure at work and had to leave the soviet. She now works as a lawyer in a commercial bank.

She returned from Dubno and began to organize the women's movement on her own. It is extremely difficult to be a leader when the movement is only beginning to blossom. She was looking for people, and we found each other.

The organization's acronym is rather original: NOZhi (knives), which stands for Independent Organization of Women's Initiative.

For some reason, she dislikes men very strongly, though the situation in her own family is quite good. She is a very decisive person. It helps that she is a lawyer. She has already helped many women with legal advice.

Initially, her idea was to create a purely legal defense movement. But when I told here about the women's commission in our party and after we had discussed the problem of privatization, we concluded that it was necessary to develop a movement with a broader profile that could deal with the various dimensions of our life.

It was only necessary to find women who could take charge of the different aspects. And we agreed that I would head the trade-union section.

■ **What are the other directions of NOZhi's activity?**

Besides the purely legal defense functions, many questions are arising in relation to the market — dismissals, people being cheated, thrown out of privatized enterprises that are then taken over by cooperatives.

I know of one shop whose employees had worked there for 25 years. They were fired, and the shop was given to the cooperative that paid the highest bribe.

The city government's concept of pri-



vatization of the commercial network is not to lease it to the collectives or to transfer it to them completely, but to give it to those who offer the largest sum.

Unfortunately, this is at present the most urgent problem.

Another problem is the material situation of single mothers. These people are now totally unprotected. There are no state allocations, nothing.

Another area of our activity is the cultural development of women, basically educational functions.

■ **How many people are there in your organization?**

It already has about 40 or 50 women, and that is quite good. So far, these are people who come because they need some particular kind of aid.

But we need people who can help the organization to function. There are only about ten of these. However, we understand each other well, and I feel our work will take off.

These are very determined people. I have to say that women are more organized than men. Their thought is more organized and so is their practice.

Life dictates this because you cannot maintain a family unless your feet are planted firmly on the ground.

And the methods that we intend to use in our work, including strikes, picketing, demonstrations and even hunger strikes, I can assure you that when women take to these methods, it will be a very serious affair.

Remember when the soldiers' mothers stood in front of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR and how they conducted their struggle?

True, I was somewhat amused when they said they would lay down on the railroad tracks. But they would have. This is pure desperation.

Our problems are extremely complex. And even though the situation is psychologically very depressing, I do not get discouraged because I am together with women who share my views. ★

1. The SDP, like all other parties in the ex-Soviet Union, is a relatively small organization with at most a few thousand members.

2. A city about five hours south of Moscow by train.

Pushed aside

THE following article, which first appeared in *Avanti*, the journal of the Gruppe Revolutionäre Sozialistinnen (supporters of the Fourth International in the former East Germany), details the attacks being made against women's employment rights in the ex-German Democratic Republic.

BARBARA SCHULTZ

“WE did not earn much under Erich [Honecker]. Thus 2.95 marks an hour.” This was how a 55 year old woman from Thüringen demanded a rise in her retirement benefit from 500 marks.

This is the result of 40 years of working life during which she had also raised two children. The level of female employment in the former German Democratic Republic was around 92%, but, as in the rest of industrialized Europe, women earned on average only two thirds as much as men.

This means that unemployment benefit and pensions are correspondingly lower. In East as in West Germany, poverty is female.

Women solve unemployment problem

Moreover, it is quite clear that the aim of allowing women's level of participation in the labour market to fall to around 45% is to provide a solution to the unemployment problem.

This in any case is what the employers are openly saying. Since women, if they are without a job, are not for the most part unemployed, since they can always have the housework to get on with, at least until they have got over the strain of previous years, they will remain calm.

And then the mechanism already well-known in the West goes into action: no paid employment when childcare cannot be provided but no childcare for those who are not in paid employment.

This of course only applies for women's work. Thus the proportion of unemployed women is much higher than that of men; at the end of August 61% of the unemployed in East Germany were women, 48% in West Germany.

There are, however, far fewer opportunities for women provided on the retraining schemes. The collapse of the textile industry in East Germany has mainly hit women, but there is no re-training project to deal with this.

Since women, owing to the obvious obstacles, are less mobile than men, they cannot commute so far.

For the same reasons, as well as owing to the nature of the job market there, women are also less likely to try to move to the West.

The stories of East German women show that in the time of the GDR it was possible for women to have children without fully falling out of the labour process.

Threats against abortion rights

The right to abortion meant that women could largely determine the number of children they would have and when. The present attempts to make abortion a criminal offence and remove the right to abortion from the basic constitutional rights of women is also naturally part of the attempt to trim women for the market.

When they are needed by the labour market, provision for child care will be made, when they are to be thrown out of the labour market, then it is cut back; all this is justified by the corresponding ideology which explains to women that it is good or bad for them to look after the children.

Anyone who has followed West German policies long enough knows how this works.

That women in East Germany are aware of the situation they are in is shown by the fact that when IG Metall (the engineering trade union) held its women's conference they could reach no agreement on the banning of night work. Women from East Germany vehemently defended their right to do shift and night work, since otherwise they would be made even less competitive on the labour market.

The fact that the West

German trade, banking and insurance (HBV) union is thankful that jobs are falling outside the pay agreement, either from above, in the sense that they are too well paid to fall within the agreement, or, as in the majority of cases, from below, in unprotected jobs, which in the West in 1991 brought in 480 marks a month and in the East 221, and which do not imply any social security benefits, is a sign of the danger.

Such jobs are above all the preserve of women. An estimated 4 to 5 million jobs are unprotected in this way.

It is urgently necessary to support the demand of Heide Pfarr (Hesse's minister for women and social affairs) for a compulsory insurance scheme for these workers.

Federal court finds discrimination

This is underlined by the federal labour court's judgement of October 1991 that found discrimination against women and awarded to a cleaning woman continued payment of 20% of wages in the case of illness for six weeks.

The low proportion of women in the federal parliament means that there is likely to be little pressure from this quarter. Finance minister Waigel has been able to postpone the undertaking that nursery places will be provided for all three to six year olds from 1993 to 1997.

Women in East Germany have already reacted with greater reluctance to have children; demands for sterilization are on the rise. At the same time women's groups are on the retreat.

When will women finally come together to defend themselves? ★



Unification and women's rights

INTRODUCTION

THE unification, ratified on May 22, 1990, of the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY—South Yemen), removing a frontier created by colonialism, has come as part of the new world context marked by the Imperialist victory in the Gulf and the fall of the dictatorships in eastern Europe (including, in the USSR and East Germany, the principal supporters of the PDRY), and in a region dominated by a profoundly reactionary Saudi Arabia.

While this unification meets the wishes of the Saudi monarchy, concerned for many years by the prospect of an extension of the revolution in the south of the peninsula, it is nonetheless the case that up until now the process has not involved the straightforward absorption of one state by the other, on the lines of the annexation of East Germany by the Federal Republic, but rather a fusion of two states, equal in poverty, but of differing social natures.

Moreover, unification is far from being concluded and takes place against a background of tribal and/or fundamentalist agitation orchestrated by Saudi Arabia and of Imperialist pressures designed to make the new state pay for its neutrality during the Gulf War.

Nothing has yet been settled so far as women are concerned: how to "fuse" the status of women in the north, inspired by the Islamic Sharia, improved thanks to a relative opening in the 1980s, and again degraded at the end of the decade under Saudi pressure, with that existing in the south, where the constitution guarantees the legal equality of the two sexes, where divorce was authorized, polygamy forbidden, and so on.

In the south this series of legal measures, accompanied by a social policy in matters of health, education, and employment, created an unprecedented situation in the Arabian peninsula and constituted a revolutionary advance for women in a context of tribalism, illiteracy, and economic backwardness.

Today only the Yemen Socialist Party, formerly in power in the south, continues to defend these gains, but it is making compromises in the framework of the new state and its policy towards defending or abandoning the gains of the Yemeni revolution rests more on partisan interests than on an appeal to a mobilization of interests (women, peasants, and so on), even if it uses the islands of resistance as a significant means of pressure. It is in this context of an as yet undecided relationship of forces that *International Viewpoint* interviewed two women who occupy key posts inside the apparatus of the new state. The interviews were conducted by Michèle Pisigo.

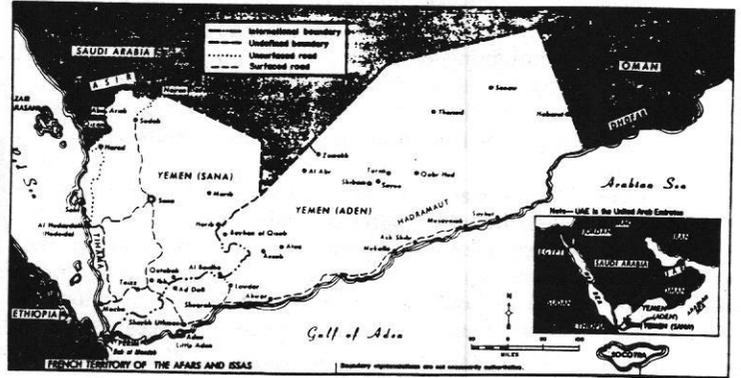
AMAT AL-ALEEM SOUSUWAH is an active member of the Union of Yemeni Women (UYW). She works as an assistant at the Ministry of Information, the highest professional rank held by a woman inside the administration.

WHAT is the history of the Union of Yemeni Women?

The Union of Yemeni Women was created in South Yemen, in

Aden in 1967, after the withdrawal of the British. Parallel to this, the Association of Yemeni Women (AYW) was created in North Yemen in 1963. This association, under the guidance of the Ministry of Social Affairs, offered women courses in literacy and vocational training in several towns in Yemen¹. Today, the UYW is the only organization recognized in the unified Yemen.

The political situation immediately after unification did not favour the holding of elections inside the organization.



That is why the government nominated Aida Saied² president until the next scheduled election. The functioning of the UYW depends essentially on the dues paid by its members and it is composed, in its great majority, of illiterate women from the popular class. Thanks to this affiliation, they have the possibility of improving their situation, particularly through acquiring training.

The number one objective is fighting illiteracy, which affects 91% of women and 50% of men³. That is why some intellectuals have begun a campaign to put an end to this social plague. They write in the press, and propose literacy courses and action plans while maintaining a dialogue with the government. What will be the results of this activity? It is going to be necessary to proceed by stages and take account of the different points of view inside the UYW. Unity is necessary to effectively defend the rights of women as much on the economic as on the social or cultural plane.

■ What were the laws in force before reunification, and what are they today?

Before unification the women's associations of the north remained subject to the Muslim tradition in a country where the family code dating from 1978 has been ignored. Some positive results have been obtained in South Yemen where the government issued a family code in 1974 that profoundly changed the condition of women. This was a very much more egalitarian law, drawing heavily on the example of the Tunisian code.

After unification, fairly recently, a committee was founded in Yemen whose objective is to elaborate a general project dealing with all questions to do with the life of women. This committee has begun to draw up a new family law. In my opin-

1. Nearly 200,000 women participated in these courses in 1984/85.

2. Aida Saied is also a member of the Yemeni parliament.

3. Census of 1986/87/88.

ion, it should not limit itself to Islamic texts alone. This law should be constructed in a very much more jurisprudential fashion, conforming to our times.

This project, which was set up with the help of the Minister of Justice and of Legal Affairs, will soon be presented to parliament. We wish to make some changes in the status of Yemeni women in the areas of divorce, polygamy, age of marriage, and care of children (see following interview). But our problems are not limited to laws alone. They reside also in social reality with all its socio-cultural differences. Beyond the impact of the *sharia* (Islamic law) it is necessary to take account of a social history dominated by a tribal structure.

There is an obvious gap between laws and social reality experienced everyday. The constitution⁴ envisages the principle of equality in law of all Yemeni citizens, without discrimination on grounds of sex⁵ — but it is much more difficult to reconcile the texts with reality. We are then confronted with problems of a historical and psycho-sociological kind. Yemeni society is undeniably a society of customs.

■ What is the status of divorce in Yemen?

To my knowledge, there is no in depth study on this question. There are few divorces in our country. We demand that it be decided by a tribunal after an examination of the family situation. We wish to forbid unilateral divorce where the man alone decides.

■ Have initiatives been taken to popularize contraception and what do men think about this?

There are some family planning centres. They exist in the principal towns but access to them is difficult for the women of the countryside. Many men stop their wives from going to the centres. The reasons are many: firstly, social, because a woman who has many children enjoys a respected status, economic because children often help their father with work and, obviously, religious. That said, women can obtain the pill in the centres or at the pharmacies, but with no social security cover.

■ What is your personal opinion on abortion?

Religion forbids women to have abortions, but it can be allowed in cases of necessity and with the agreement of the husband. As Yemenis and Muslims we have a different reasoning from yours. Abortion is an almost non-existent right in Yemen. What counts in the popular mentality is the medical protection given to the women and to the child.

polygamy. Can you tell us about it?

No normal woman can accept polygamy. In the law which is soon to be discussed, some measures are going to regulate it. Polygamy is not advised by the Koran except in cases of sterility of the first wife. It is necessary to be aware all the same that polygamy is less and less common in Yemen.

■ What is the place accorded to young women in the schools and universities?

Secular schools have now replaced the religious schools. At the time of the British colonization in Aden there were already some faculties in the south of Yemen. Today, there is a growing interest in the education of girls, particularly in the urban areas. Many among them finish their studies before university and very few follow higher studies in San'a (15% of women). We also do not know the rate of participation of girls in the schools: what is certain is that it is lower than that of boys. This is also explained by the fact that 50% of girls are married at the age of 13 years.

■ Is there equality of rights between men and women at the professional level? Is it easy for a Yemeni woman to combine a professional life with a family life?

Men and women receive an equal salary for an equivalent qualification. However, few women work (6%), which makes all demands in this field difficult. It is not easy to combine a professional life with a family life. The principal difficulty resides in the absence of public crèches.

The private crèches are expensive. That is why women have recourse to maternity leave. But this unpaid leave should in no case suppress the rights acquired beforehand. This problem of preservation of rights must be shortly examined by the Ministry of Labour.

■ Do women play a significant political role?

Political experience has been different in the North and the South. Women won the right to vote in 1982 in North Yemen and in 1969 in the south. They can now be candidates in national elections, whether this is in the political parties, the trade unions or in parliament where they have 9 seats against 124 men.

RAUFA HASSAN (Dr Amatalrauf Al-Sharki) is a woman activist, director of an artistic centre and meeting place for women, and President of the Committee for the Revision of Laws, newly set up in San'a. She has been active inside the Association of Yemeni Women (North Yemen) and is a journalist with the

daily newspaper Al Thawra (Revolution).

■ You are the president of the Committee of Revision. Can you tell us what are the objectives of such a committee?

This committee has been recently set up on the initiative of men and women with a post of president, four representatives of the UYW and six members of the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs. It meets each week to elaborate a new law on the family following unification.

To meet such an objective, we must find a just compromise between the family code in the south (1974) and that in the north (1978). These two laws, the one religious, the other secular, will be still applied in Yemen during a two year transitional period. What will be the results of such a compromise?

The Committee is trying to follow with great prudence certain rules of the *sharia*. What is certain is that the south could lose certain gains, whereas the north has the chance to make some progress. In Yemen, one does not speak of the rights of women but rather of the rights of the family. Our deliberations centre around 4 points:

● **Polygamy:** henceforth, a man, to remarry, must obtain the agreement of a judge, demand the authorization of his first then his second wife, and materially provide for each of his wives. The first wife, for her part, can claim a divorce.

● **The age of marriage:** in conformance with the *sharia*, the minimum age for marriage is 9 years for girls and 12 years for boys (a practice widely applied in the north and east of the country). The committee demands a minimum age of 18 for the two sexes.

● **Divorce:** it should be officially pronounced by a judge at the demand of the man or the woman.

● **Childcare:** according to the 1978 family code, the woman has the right to keep her children seven years after the divorce and five years if she remarries. The man can then get the children back. According to the 1974 law, the child is entrusted to its mother until the age of 10 years if it is a boy and 15 if it is a girl. For the committee, the judge will decide after analysis of the material and moral situations of the father and mother.

All these propositions will then be submitted to Parliament. ★

4. In the 1963 and 1970 constitutions "women are sisters of men and have rights and duties prescribed in the Sharia and formulated in the law". In 1991, a referendum was organized on the new constitution (95% for, 5% against). It is currently half-secular, half-religious and has 131 articles of a socio-political, economic and cultural character.

5. According to the results of a study carried out by the Yemeni Centre of Study and Research at San'a, there are some discriminatory clauses which prevent women occupying high level political and judicial functions.

The spiral of decline

THE Uruguayan National Party government, elected in 1990, is planning a wave of privatizations in the framework of the country's integration into the unified market of the Southern Cone (Mercosur), which has already been voted for by parliament. The left, grouped in the Broad Front (FA, Frente Amplio), and supported by the opposition Colorado party¹, has launched a signature campaign to demand the holding of a referendum on the privatization plans. This requires gaining the signatures of a quarter of the electorate (630,000 people) by mid-February 1992.

After a month of campaigning, 12,000 signatures had been collected². *International Viewpoint* spoke to Ernesto Herrera, a member of the Socialist Workers Party (PST, Uruguayan section of the Fourth International) about the current situation in Uruguay.

URUGUAY, like Argentina, has experienced an unprecedented economic crisis since the end of the 1980s. What is the current situation?

The social and economic project of the bourgeoisie is currently entirely determined by the integration into Mercosur, which will come into force in 1995, gradually suppressing all the customs barriers between Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. Industry, but also agriculture and cattle farming — Uruguay is a big meat exporter, with 14 million cattle — are going to undergo a process of reconversion.

The Uruguayan debt has risen to \$6 billion; with Chile and Colombia, it is the most punctual country when it comes to interest payments — 27% of annual exports. Currently, the government is selling off our gold reserves to pay the debt.

The bourgeoisie also wants to implement its project of "state reform" concretely manifested by the privatizations in the public sector. Unlike in Argentina or Brazil, in Uruguay the project of privatization has had to be approved by parliament, which explains the limited extent of the changes up until now — but the plan was finally voted through some months ago.

For the moment, the bourgeoisie does not enjoy a sufficiently favourable relationship of forces to apply its neo-liberal project in a drastic manner, as Menem has done in Argentina. Unlike in the latter country, where 500,000 gov-

ernment employees have been dismissed, the public sector remains stable in Uruguay — again, such dismissals have to be approved by Parliament. Meanwhile, the government has offered incentives equivalent to one year's salary to those who agree to leave, but only 6% of government workers, most of them near to retirement age, have accepted. The majority of people prefer to have a stable situation, even if it involves working in bad conditions for low pay.

Moreover, a sector of the bourgeoisie is

opposed to radical measures and wants gradual reforms, for fear of social agitation.

■ This policy, even in moderate form, could still have significant economic and social consequences.

In fact, unemployment has grown over the past six months and affects 120,000 people — which might seem derisory, but the Uruguayan labour force is 1.3 million people (out of a total population of 3 million inhabitants). We are witnessing a marked social deterioration, despite the relatively "low" inflation rate (80% a year). We do not have poverty comparable to that of the other countries of Latin America, but Uruguay is one of the places where the situation has comparatively deteriorated the most over the past 15 years.

Twenty years ago, Uruguay allocated 25% of its budget to education — illiteracy had totally disappeared — against 6% today. The system of public health, on which 2 million people depended, has been completely destroyed; all the doctors and nurses are trying to emigrate to the United States or to Europe because of low pay. In Montevideo, 70-80,000 people live in shanty towns.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL) has recently published a report which has had a considerable impact in the country;

1. In Uruguay, since independence, power has traditionally been disputed between two bourgeois formations: the Colorado ("red") Party and the nationalist Blanco ("white" party), currently in power.

2. In 1989, a similar campaign collected enough signatures to demand a referendum against the amnesty granted by the government to military figures guilty of the violation of human rights under the dictatorship, but the vote proved negative.

The street traders controversy

THE social crisis and the growth of unemployment have led an increasing number of Uruguayans to live from informal trade in the streets of the capital (see *IV* 220, January 20, 1992). They sell primarily contraband goods originating from Brazil (food, clothes, cigarettes and so on). The itinerant traders have become concentrated in the three commercial zones at the centre of Montevideo.

The FA municipality announced that it would leave nobody without work, but that it would regulate the informal sector. It has drawn up a project which reduces the number of itinerant traders to six per housing block in the centre (against 60 to 80 beforehand) and it has organized permanent commercial centres outside the city centre for the others, investing around \$600,000 in this.

The municipality has been under great pressure from the settled traders who are opposed to what they see as unfair competition.

But the itinerant traders want to work in the centre, to gain more clients and so that people can compare their prices with those of the settled traders. This has led a significant proportion of them to resist the pressures of the municipality and return to the city centre.

They are organized by three trade unions — one controlled by the Communist Party, the other by the traditional parties and the third by the MPP (Movement of Popular Participation). The latter has put forward an alternative project for self-regulation of numbers and for the siting of traders, and has issued a demand for amnesty for those traders convicted of breaking the new regulations — the mayor has rejected these two proposals.

To enforce its regulations, the municipality has appealed to the police, who arrive in lorries, overturn or steal goods, and arrest the traders. Since the installation of the civilian government in 1985, this has been the social conflict which has led to the greatest number of arrests.

This recourse to repression has led to a big debate inside the FA; the MPP is violently opposed and defends the right of all to earn a living.★

because of poor nourishment, 50% of children of school age are undersized and will have diminished learning abilities. In our country, we thought these phenomena were reserved for Central America, Bolivia or Ecuador.

■ Is there opposition to the government's privatization measures?

The FA, the alliance of all the forces of the left, voted against the "reform of the state" in parliament. On the other hand, all the parliamentary groups voted for the Mercosur integration, except for two deputies from the Movement of Popular Participation (MPP), one of the components of the FA.

The FA is divided into 3 blocs: one is led by the Communist Party; another by the Uruguayan Socialist Party — which is not affiliated to the Second International; the third, the MPP, groups the radical and revolutionary left — the Tupamaros National Liberation Movement (MLN), the Party of the Victory of the People (PVP), the Socialist Workers Party (PST), the Eastern Revolutionary Movement (MRO) and some independents.

The FA gained 400,000 votes in the last elections in 1990, or 22% of the total vote, and won the municipality of Montevideo. The MPP had 50,000 votes. The FA put forward single candidates for the presidency, vice-presidency and municipalities, but each bloc had its own lists for the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies.

■ How does the FA administer the Montevideo municipality?

The FA won the municipality of the capital with 35% of the votes³. The mayor, Tabaré Vasquez, is on the central committee of the Socialist Party. The people had many hopes in this new administration and expected serious social measures — above all in the areas of transport, health and housing — and a development of popular participation.

Today, after two years in power, the administration remains popular, although it has not achieved very much in the social field. The most popular measure has been the subsidizing of private transport enterprises to keep the price of tickets down. Practically nothing has been done so far as housing is concerned. Popular participation and the development of self-organization have absolutely not been encouraged.

This "prudent" municipal administration on the part of the reformist sectors of the FA (no confrontation with private enterprise or the central government, "politics for all the citizens") is meant to show that this political formation is capable of governing in a healthy manner and of preserving order: the town hall of Montevideo is a shop window for the 1994 elections.

The FA administration has deliberately chosen not to use its control of the municipality as a centre for resistance to the neo-

liberal project of the central government. It wishes to approach 1994 with a stable social climate.

The FA has led a big campaign against corruption. The favourite slogan of the Montevideo municipality is that politics and ethics must go hand in hand. It has succeeded in leading an open "administration", something which is recognized by the people. From an economic point of view, the FA proposes an alternative project. But if it comes into government in 1994, it is going to have to run the country in the framework of the Mercosur economic union and with a well-advanced project of privatization and state reform, which it will be very difficult to reverse.

■ Does the Communist Party, the biggest party in the FA (it won 50% of the votes of this coalition by itself) still represent an important force?

It is almost certainly on the point of breaking up. The Uruguayan CP was one of the biggest in Latin America, but the crisis in Eastern Europe and the fall of the Berlin Wall have profoundly shaken it. Today, it is divided between an orthodox sector, which is in the minority, and a "renewer" sector, which proposes to create a "democratic socialist party" with the Socialist Party.

Its crisis is very sharp in terms of militants, finances and apparatus. The relations between the different components of the FA are very tense because the dominant reformist sector (PC and PS) wants to come to power in 1994 under the theme of "government for all". Its members hope to develop a policy of broad alliances, which requires a watering down of political programme.

The revolutionary pole, centred in the MPP, is not in agreement with the management of the Montevideo municipality.

The confrontations with regard to the regulation of the itinerant traders (see box) and the divergences on the Mercosur have allowed certain sectors of the FA to present the MPP as an obstacle to their electoralist, reformist and gradual strategy. Some even want the FA to get rid of the radical groups.

■ Is a split of this type likely in the FA before the 1994 elections?

No, because there is not a sufficient relation of forces inside the FA. During the last congress of the FA, in August 1991, the MPP obtained nearly 30% of the delegates, arguing that the accumulation of forces would be achieved through a confrontation with the neo-liberal project of the government.

■ What about the trade union movement?

It is going through a very deep crisis, a fall in membership, and is experiencing numerous organizational problems. I believe however that this is still one of the

rare countries in Latin America where the single trade union federation, the National Confederation of Labour (CNT, controlled by the "renewer" sector of the CP and the Socialist Party) retains a big capacity for mobilization. Thus, in December 1991, a general strike of 36 hours — the fifth organized against this government — paralyzed practically all the sectors. This was in solidarity with the dockers strike against the privatization of the port of Montevideo, which lasted 20 days.

Recently, the biggest tyre factory in the country, which employs around 2,000 workers, wanted to close down and dismiss all its workers; following a strike, it reopened under workers control.

The deepening of the economic crisis has led to the development of popular urban movements; parallel with the conflict over itinerant traders in Montevideo, there were occupations of municipal land and of empty houses belonging to the big landowners. Traditionally in Uruguay social movements were closely tied to political organizations, but today this mould is beginning to be broken.

Movements for housing, water, electricity, against the high cost of living and mobilizations of women in the popular neighbourhoods are mushrooming, unlike the preceding period where the backbone of the popular movement was formed by the trade unions. The new sectors which are beginning to organize themselves (itinerant traders, youth, women) are not controlled by the bureaucratic apparatuses of the CP and the SP; they form, rather, the social base of the MPP.

■ In this context, what is the strategy of the MPP?

The MPP bases itself on the 1971 programme of the FA, which affirmed its democratic, popular and anti-imperialist nature and defended a policy of a break with the state and the dominant class. It follows a policy of fighting to win the leadership inside the FA. The MPP recognizes that the workers movement is on the defensive faced with the ideological offensive of the bourgeoisie, but it thinks that it is necessary to continue to take initiatives of confrontation with the latter. The debates revolve primarily around the best manner of accumulating forces, and on what policy to adopt in relation to the municipality.

The last plenum of the FA decided that the next national central campaign, starting from March 1992, will be the collection of signatures to launch a referendum of popular initiative against the privatization plans adopted by parliament. ★

3. Uruguay is a country which is 80% urban — half of its population lives in Montevideo. Outside of the plains devoted to cattle ranching, there are few peasants. There are small agricultural producers in the belt around Montevideo and in the north-east of the country, at the frontier with Brazil, where sugar cane and rice are grown.

Free trade and the land



THE government of Salinas de Gortari has recently undertaken one of its most spectacular measures: the reform of article 27 of the Mexican constitution.

These measures will certainly lead to a radical restructuring of Mexican agriculture and will have a dramatic impact on property relations in the countryside, particularly the *ejidos*.¹ This takes place in the framework of a larger reform of the state which involves widespread privatizations as well as the free-trade act with the United States.

SERGIO RODRIGUEZ*

ARTICLE 27 of the Mexican constitution synthesized the nature of the Mexican Revolution and the regime that issued from it. On one hand it reflected the destruction of the state apparatus of the former dictator Porfirio Diaz and the depth of the peasant struggle for the land, while on the other hand it reflected the debate that took place after the military and political defeat of the peasant armies of Zapata and Villa.

The victorious generals understood that it was necessary to establish a social pact in order to seal and bring to a close the revolution. This pact was codified in article 27 of the constituent congress. The article instituted an agrarian reform based on the idea that all the soil and subsoil of the country is the property of the nation put at the disposal of the peasants.

The article summed up the contradictory character of the Mexican revolution: though the peasant armies had destroyed the bourgeois state of Porfirio Diaz, they were not capable of erecting a new state on its ruins. This is why it was possible for a group of petty-bourgeois military figures to rebuild the bourgeois state. However, they were forced to recognize certain demands of the peasantry and to enter into a social pact that recognized a series of these peasant demands. Thus article 27 and, to a lesser extent, constitutional articles 3 and 124, reflect the uninterrupted character of the revolution of 1910-1917.²

Salinas de Gortari's proposed reforms attempt to end this social pact. They amount to a settling of accounts with the Mexican revolution, its ideology and its popular aspects as well as its aspects of false consciousness. By questioning *ejidal* property and promoting the reconcentra-

tion of landed property the government seeks to advance its programme of capitalist reconstruction in the countryside. These reforms are a necessity from the point of view of the interests of capital and the economic projects underway in Mexico today, and especially for the free trade agreement.

The most significant elements of Salinas' reforms can be rapidly summarized here. On one hand the *ejidal* property becomes constitutional. On the other hand, the stipulation preventing the *ejidos* from being expropriated, rented or sold is now threatened. The government has also announced the revision and the resolution of agrarian conflicts (under the presidency of de la Madrid the large landed owners had been favored over the peasants through the law of agrarian protection) concerning an estimated 42,000 requests for land.

The government claims that there is no more land to be distributed. Consequently, the misnamed small holdings (small holdings can be as much as 100 hectares, though for decades peasants demanded that it be limited to 30 hectares) as well as the latifundia system will not be touched.

Agrarian commercial firms

On the other hand, there is now a possibility that agrarian commercial firms of up to 2,500 hectares can now be formed. And to top off this "modernizing" project it is proposed that private international capital can participate in mercantile firms. This would in practice mark a break with the principal that "all the soil and subsoil belongs to the nation" and would sooner or later lead to a discussion about denationalizing the oil industry.³

Almost simultaneously with these pro-

posals the government announced ten measures to revitalize the Mexican countryside. These take up some old peasant demands as well as involving huge investments in the countryside. As far as these measures are concerned, the most important concerns the repudiation of the *carteras vencidas* (debt contracted by peasants). This was welcomed with much fanfare by the sectors tied to the state. But in reality these measures are indispensable for the development of capitalism in the countryside because the peasant debt has inhibited increased productivity of agricultural labor.

The government is therefore not engaging in charity. Worse yet, it is taking advantage of the cancelling of the debts in order to reap political dividends. It transferred the peasant debt to an organism called the National Program of Solidarity (PRONASOL) — its key tool for social control over the population and assuring electoral support for the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). In the final analysis only a small part of what the government saved in terms of social spending was transferred to the PRONASAL. This is tantamount to playing with the hunger and misery of the Mexican people. In other words, PRONASAL is a government mechanism that attempts to avoid any true

* Sergio Rodriguez is a leader of the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT — Mexican section of the Fourth International).

1. The *ejidos* are parcels of state land handed over for individual and collective usufruct to the peasants in 1920. The state has done everything to ensure that these latter work the land individually. Almost half of Mexican territory is covered by the *ejidos*.

2. Article 3 of the constitution says that primary education must be non-religious, free and compulsory. Article 123 sets out the basic framework of the country's labour relations.

3. President Lazaro Cardenas nationalized oil in 1940.

social representation and at the same time reinforces the "presidential" and dictatorial character of the regime.

It is interesting to examine the source of the funds to be allocated to rural investments. The renegotiation of the Mexican foreign debt has given the government a respite. Though the government was unable to attain its initial objective of lowering payments on the service of its debt to 2% of its internal GDP — in 1991 it paid 10 billion dollars — Salinas was, however, able to save nearly \$1,600,000 million through negotiations and had reduced the principal debt from 102 to 83 billion dollars.

Moreover the Gulf War increased the price of oil, signifying increased income for Mexico. But it was the sale of nationalized enterprises that resulted in an income of billions and billions of dollars. The process of privatization during Salinas' mandate amounts to a qualitative change.

Selling the family silver

While the preceding government was able to sell off relatively important enterprises, the Salinas regime has sold the most important and profitable ones. Among these have been the selling off of the Mexican telephone company (which brought in \$3,200,000 million), the privatization of the nationalized bank, and the sale of nearly all of the steel mills. All this bolstered the state coffers by almost 20 billion dollars and constitutes a record reserve of 16 billion dollars.

All of this money that has come from privatizations has been earmarked for a "contingency" fund which the government claims will be saved for difficult times in the future. It is out of these funds that PRONASOL is funded and from there that the peasant debt is "paid off". In other words, a small part of the income received from the squandering of the nation's resources was used to "pay off" the peasant debt which was the failed product of an agrarian policy that sunk millions of Mexicans into hunger and misery.

In its presentation of its plan for the reform of the constitution, the government began with a long introduction reinterpreting Mexican history from the period prior to the Spanish invasion through Tenochtitlan to the present. It is an attempt to expropriate the national historical consciousness and to expunge from it all references to social clashes. But the fundamental objective of this ideological reinterpretation is to rewrite the history of the period of the presidency of Lazar Cardenas between 1936 and 1940.

This was the period of the expropriation of the oil industry, the nationalization of the railroads, the support (including the sending of arms) to the Spanish republic and the granting of asylum to Leon Trotsky. It was also under Cardenas that the

The Mexican revolution

THE Mexican revolution broke out on November 20, 1910. Two essential factors lay at the root of the 20th century's first social revolution: the attempts of dictator Porfirio Diaz to prolong his 34 years of rule, in spite of the election victory of Francisco Madero; and the opposition of the peasantry to government measures aimed at "modernizing" the countryside and putting an end to communal land ownership — one of the rare features of Aztec society respected by the Spaniards from the time of the conquest.

Finally Porfirio Diaz was forced into exile and Francisco Madero was elected president in new elections. Contrary to the hopes of the population, Madero continued the "liberal project" in the countryside; and thus began 11 years of peasant struggles for land. Led by Emiliano Zapata and in support of the so-called Ayala Plan, these struggles reached their height in December 1914 when armed peasants following Zapata and Francisco Villa took control of Mexico City.

Lacking an overall social project beyond the demands relating to land, Zapata and Villa were unable of offering a credible and viable project to the different sectors of Mexican society — notably the working class, which was under strong anarchist influence — and they finished by returning to their regions of origin, Morelos and Chihuahua, which permitted the federal army to regroup and later defeat them.

Profiting from this situation, Venustiano Carranza, the new figurehead of the bourgeoisie, convoked a congress at Queretaro which promulgated the 1917 constitution, one of the most progressive of the epoch, which recognized the right of workers to organize, reduced the power of the state and, above all, provided land for the peasants.

After the killing of Zapata and Villa, a long period of internal struggle between different factions of the bourgeoisie began, lasting from 1920 to 1934 (Carranza was defeated by Alvaro Obregon, who was in turn replaced by Plutarco Elias Calles; Obregon won new elections but was assassinated before he could take office)

This period ended with the conclusion of a kind of political pact which put a full stop to the revolution and with the foundation of the National Revolutionary Party (PRN) fore-runner of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The PRN, it could be said, succeeded in "channeling" the various bourgeois policies, while permitting the "peace" and "stability" that have been the main characteristics of more than 60 years of "perfect dictatorship" by the "government born of the Mexican revolution" as the writer Vargas Llosa has put it. — **Agustin De la Peña ★**

semi-corporatist domination over the population was put into place inaugurating the basis of the antidemocratic and dictatorial Mexican system that the Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa has correctly defined as "the perfect dictatorship".

Today, the principal target of the current government team is Cardenism. The reasons are clear. Cardenism represented a means by which a part of the government bureaucracy sought to take advantage of the international situation to build a nation independent of the whims of imperialism.

The Cardenist project was not a socialist one, but rather a project to develop a type of state capitalism that would favor the formation of a strong national bourgeoisie. Cardenism therefore launched the industrialization of the country (through import substitution policies), revitalized the agricultural sector with a large agrarian distribution (with an infusion of state credits and ambitious irrigation projects), and built a nationalized industrial infrastructure to service these

projects.

The current reforms of Salinas are in practice the antithesis of all this. But the reforms of both Cardenas and Salinas were both anchored in the same political structure. Both claimed to be the legitimate heirs of the Mexican revolution. This is why Salinas tries to present his reforms as "anti-Cardenista" but "pro-Zapatista".

Some writers have sought to identify Cardenas' projects with socialism and even socialist policies on agriculture with Stalinist forced collectivization. Trotsky's analysis of the Cardenista agrarian reforms are quite useful in this regard and are worth quoting at length. "This part of the program (Mexico's second six year plan) the most important part for Mexican life (the agrarian reform), is based not on an analysis of the needs of the country, but rather on some general formula borrowed from the vocabulary of the USSR and very badly adapted to national realities. . .

"What is the main question in Mexico today? Agrarian reform, or the *democratic agrarian revolution*; that is, the life of the

peasants is characterized by a massive accumulation of the holdovers of feudal property reforms and the relations and traditions of slavery. It is necessary to courageously and definitively liquidate these holdovers from medieval barbarism with the aid of the peasants themselves. The large parasitic or semi-parasitic landed proprietors, the economic and political domination of the landowners over the peasants, forced agricultural labor, the quasi-patriarchal sharecropping system, which is fundamentally equivalent to slavery — these are the things that must be definitively liquidated in the shortest possible time.

"Now, the program does not even call for the completion of this task, which is essential to the democratic revolution, within the next six years; but at the same time it does call for the complete collectivization of the common lands in the same period of time. This is a complete inconsistency, which can lead to the most dire consequences, economic, social, and political... Collectivizing ignorance and misery by means of state compulsion would not mean advancing agriculture, but rather would inevitably lead to forcing the peasants into the camp of reaction... Imitating these methods (those of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR) would mean heading for disaster. It is necessary to complete the democratic revolution by giving the land, all the land, to the peasants.

"On the basis of this established conquest the peasants must be given an unlimited period to reflect, compare, experiment with different methods of agriculture. They must be aided, technically and financially, but not compelled. In short, it is necessary to finish the work of Emiliano Zapata and not to superimpose on him the methods of Joseph Stalin... If methods of compulsion are used, this will only produce collectives that exist at state expense, while lowering the general level of agriculture and impoverishing the country." (Leon Trotsky, "On Mexico's Second Six Year Plan" in *Writings of Leon Trotsky* pp. 221-228, Pathfinder Press, New York).

In fact, Cardenas' agrarian reform resulted in an enormous corporative bureaucratic web that subjected the peasant organizations to the vagaries of the various governments. In this way a formidable cycle of peasant struggles was ended as the political independence of peasant organizations was subordinated to government forces and a profoundly unproductive agrarian system was put into place. In practice, the Mexican government prioritized control over productivity.

Today, Salinas de Gortari and his acolytes try to lay the blame for all of the problems of the country on the Cardenas regime and by analogy on all those who

defend socialism. At least one pro-Salinas writer has sought to lump the ideas of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and Cardenas together in opposition to those of Bakunin, Kropotkin, Makhno, Zapata and Salinas de Gortari.

Unfortunately, the demagogic discourse of Salinas has begun to register certain results. Salinas de Gortari presents himself as an uncompromising warrior against unproductive populist corporatism, the defender of peasant freedom

without any subsidies whatsoever. This proves that the reforms of article 27 of the constitution were closely tied to the Free Trade Agreement. Salinas needed to have his privatization proposals ratified before his trip to the United States in December 1991.

His modifications sought to capitalize the countryside by transforming the *ejidos*, moving towards privatizations and therefore perfecting the superexploitation of agrarian labor. In 1990 Mexico had to import \$4.7 billion worth of food in spite of a record corn harvest. This reveals a deliberate policy of the government that consists of allowing agricultural production to drop, creating the conditions of poverty that would allow capital to go on the offensive. Some figures are quite revealing. State investments for the development of agriculture fell by 70% between 1981 and 1989. The agricultural credits allotted by the development bank were reduced by 55.3%. Per capita production for the ten principal crops in 1988 were 33.5% lower in 1988 than they were in 1981. Between 1982 and 1988 agricultural prices fell by 34.6% in relation to prices in general. Fertilizer prices fell by 48.7%. All this means that the exchange mechanisms between town and country deteriorated at the expense of the countryside.

But the fundamental aim of the Salinas reforms is to change the forms of property in the countryside. According to the National Institute of Statistics (INEGI) there were 28,058 *ejidos* and communities in 1988 with 3,070,058 peasants on 95,108,066 hectares, making up 48.6% of the national territory. The government cannot permit this to continue and the logic of Salinas' plan is a privatization of this. The key element in the plan concerning this question is to sell or rent the individual plots of *ejido* land. This involves 25,388,413 hectares, or 27% of *ejido* land, which is 13% of the national territory. These figures are even higher if we look at the question from the point of view of production, for in the collective part of the *ejido* there are lands where the institutions of the peasant community are located, such as schools, churches, municipal facilities, clinics, and so on. The collective lands constitute a smaller percentage from the productive point of view and the individual plots are more significant. It is the latter which will be shared out to the commercial firms.

Foreign investors can participate here, as well as the new agricultural capitalists and certain rich peasants who are becoming capitalists. Though it is said that nobody would sell off their patrimony, this is not true given the generalized poverty of these peasants without resources.



against collectivism, proposing to develop peasant individualism, and ending the old corporatist organizations that controlled the peasantry. He claims to favor the emergence of a new layer of peasant leaders that will no longer be characterized by their being members or not of the PRI, but rather their capacity to lead productive organizations.

Liquidation of ejidos

What are the key elements of these reforms? Recently, the ministers of Finance and Agriculture Pedro Haspe and Carlos Hank (one of the largest landowners in the country) sent a letter to the World Bank (WB). They took up the suggestions of the WB and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) made in 1987 concerning the liquidation of the *ejidos* as a condition for the granting of credits for rural development.

In this letter they announced the end of state paternalism, claiming that Mexican agriculture would henceforth function

We are confronted with an ultra reactionary plan to privatize society which at the same time seeks to take advantage of the economic situation to propose "solutions" to old problems (like the peasant debt) in exchange for the acceptance of the privatization of the countryside. Of course at the same time the government reinforces its new corporatist project around PRONASOL.

Landed property is put on the market in an attempt at redistribution that will allow it to be concentrated into large capitalist holdings. This amounts to a new phase in separating producers from the means of production. These developments are always accompanied by violence and bloodshed.

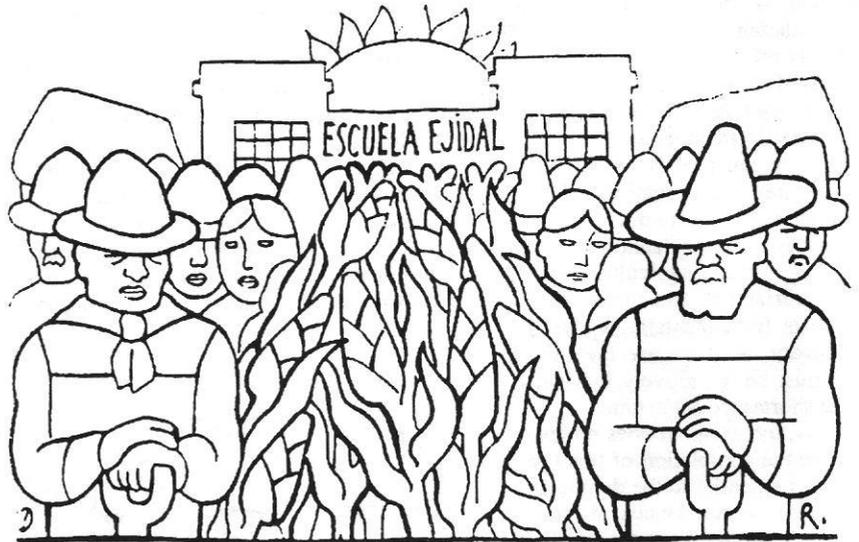
The peasant movement is experiencing a crisis. After several years of radicalization, maturation and accumulated experiences, we are today experiencing the worst offensive of the government against the independent peasant organizations. This is a different and more dangerous offensive than the traditional repressive policies. Not only because repression will be used but but because the policies of cooption are being successful. These cooption tactics serve the goal of agrarian capitalist restructuring. As in all bourgeois plans this one attempts to integrate and reinforce the most productive sectors and allow the rest to wallow in misery.

Divisions in peasant movement

These policies have already succeeded in provoking division in a good part of the peasant movement. The Permanent Agrarian Council (CAP) played a big role in this. The CAP was used by the government for two functions. In the first place the government needed a new organism as the old structures of control of the PRI over the countryside were exhausted. In the second place it needed to put into place an agrarian counter-reform that involved not only peasant organizations tied to the PRI, but those outside of it.

The inclusion of independent forces into the CAP was not a mistake. They were there to the degree that the majority of organized peasants are in the CAP. The problem is that in the context of this plan the independent forces did not represent a radicalization and consciousness within the CAP. In practice these forces play the role of privileged interlocutors of Salinas and have increasingly identified with his plan.

An important organization like the General Popular Peasant and Worker Union (UGOCP), initially set up primarily by the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT — Mexican section of the Fourth International), could have been a basis for the reorganization of the peasant movement in the direction of a majority organization independent not only of the PRI but of Salinas as well. In this sense it missed an historic



opportunity. Its general secretary, Margarito Montes, has not only supported the president's line, but has become one of the leading propagandists for Salinas' policies (as a result of this Montes' resignation was unanimously accepted by the PRT's central committee).

There is much division in the peasant ranks as a result of which the president's hand has been greatly strengthened. There have been however, some reactions, such as a march on Mexico city of some 8,000 peasants organized by the National Peasant Resistance Movement (MOMARCA), which was established by rank and file members opposed to the support given to Salinas by some of their leaders. But these are minor developments compared with the constitutional changes concerning agriculture and its effects on the peasantry.

These changes amount to a substantial altering of the balance of forces between the masses and the state. It must be remembered that the balance of forces that existed before was established under the Cardenas regime and had been quite effective in forging a social pact that lasted for decades. Thanks to this pact the state was able to enjoy social peace and order for an extended period. These policies and the way they evolved sacrificed productivity for stability. It was precisely this stability that guaranteed growing GDP rates in spite of the low productivity of labor, which was a function of the low wages and super-exploitation of the peasantry who became, de facto, state employees.

This all came to an end when the state no longer had the resources to subsidize the low productivity of labor. A system like that of Mexico could not solve its problems by expanding democratic space in order to increase productivity. Rather, it chose to allow the full brunt of the crisis to fall on the workers in order to later restructure production and raise productivity with compulsory methods. But the old structures were an obstacle to this.

The state therefore tried to dismantle the old organizations from above, using a "democratic" discourse that misled those who, desperate to destroy the old corporatism, found Salinas' measures positive.

The government seeks to establish a new long term social consensus. But this time it will not be between the social organizations and the state but rather through the weakening and crushing of the social organizations. There will be attacks against any organization that is even remotely collective. This amounts to a historical turning point: the government is trying to end the Mexican revolution in the interests of capital. It is not trying, as some have held, to finish the work of Zapata (which, according to this logic, had been "distorted" by Cardenas), but rather, to put an end to the vestiges of Zapatismo and promote the interests of agro-business by selling off the land that the 1910-1917 revolution considered as the property of the nation.

As always the modernizers think that all is settled and under control. But they fail to take into account the consciousness of the Mexican people. This reform will not only not result in the desired stability, but will, on the contrary, lead to new peasant struggles. The dictator Porfirio Diaz used to say that it was necessary to avoid upsetting the tiger that is the Mexican peasantry. Salinas has done just that, with the help of a series of ex-militants of the left who have passed over to the camp of the state.

But the gains of the state will appear much weaker as the process of reconcentrating the land deepens, when a good part of the Mexican peasantry are transformed into day laborers at hunger wages, and when the latifundia system is revived. Then it will be clear that Salinas should have followed the advice of his "illustrious" predecessor and not disturbed the tiger. When that happens the validity of Trotsky's opinion that "the next Mexican revolution must continue where Zapata left off" will be clearer than ever. ★

"Shock therapy" comes to Russia

WHILE the Polish "shock therapists", faced with an increasingly cranky patient who threatens to rebel against the continued, and apparently futile, infliction of pain, have decided to moderate their treatment¹, their Russian colleagues, seemingly oblivious to the depressing experience of their Slavic brothers to the west, began on January 2 to subject their own population to the same cruel course of treatment. Left with little option, the other republics of the former Union followed suit.

DAVID MANDEL

THE Russian reform adheres closely to the now familiar neo-liberal formula promoted by the IMF and posed as a condition for its aid. Its guiding logic is to allow the market full sway in determining the allocation of resources and goods in the economy.

This requires the restoration of a free, capitalist market, including a currency that can play an active role in the economy and that is convertible. Accordingly, prices are freed and allowed to rise until a market equilibrium is reached. This occurs at a level that reduces the mass of population to poverty, making all but the most basic goods inaccessible. On the other hand, the expectation is that shortages and lines will disappear.

At the same time, subsidies to enterprises are cut and credit tightened, forcing inefficient producers to reduce costs, including labour costs, and, hopefully, to restructure, or else face bankruptcy and closure. To further balance the state budget, a central part of the programme, and fight inflation, government spending on social programmes is reduced, taxes increased, and wage rises to employees on the state payroll restrained.

In the former Soviet Union, military procurement, hitherto a massive part of production, is also to be drastically reduced. All this, of course, means massive unemployment, but this is viewed as inevitable if labour resources are to be freed to find their most rational application — as determined by the market. Besides it makes people work better when they do have a job.

Property relations are transformed through rapid privatization of the state sector. Private ownership is considered the only basis for an efficient incentive system. Privatization is also seen as a

means to de-monopolize the economy and help fill the state coffers. Finally, the economy is opened rapidly to the world market, which will subject it to market prices and incentive structures. The hope is to rapidly expand exports in order to earn badly needed foreign exchange and bolster the ruble.

First round of price rises

These are the basic elements of the Russian government's reform that began on January 2 with the partial freeing of prices — limits were retained on metals, energy and other resources as well as some services, while retail prices on a series of basic consumer goods (including vodka) were limited to a 25% markup over wholesale prices charged by the producers. However, the government has announced that most of the remaining controlled prices will be freed by the end of April with the exceptions of medicine, baby food, communal services and mass transport.

Privatization is to begin on a large scale very soon and is expected to earn the state treasury 92 billion rubles in 1992, putting 20-25% of the state's property in private hands.

In the first year, it will predominantly affect the service sector (60 to 70% will be privatized in 1992) and small enterprises.

But the chairman of the State Committee on Property has said: "We will privatize everything that can be privatized" excluding only "underground resources, nature reserves and military property."² Collective ownership, favoured by the movement of work collective councils, has been rejected.

But to mute worker resistance, the government is offering work collectives

25% of the shares in their enterprises free of charge and another optional 10% at a discount. However, these are to be held individually, not collectively. The workers will also receive 10% of the wholesale price. Under this scheme — and this is the major consideration — the work collectives will not be able to exert real power in the privatized enterprises.

In the next few months, the government plans to launch a major agrarian reform, forcing the dissolution of thousands of collective farms that are in debt and cannot show a profit. These will be re-organized as joint-stock companies, cooperatives or private farms. It is not clear how much say in this the farm employees will have. In any case, the plan is to eliminate all of the 25,000 state and collective farms in Russia by the beginning of 1993.

Besides the expected income from privatization, the state budget is to be bolstered by increasing tax revenues, which fell drastically in 1991. These include an income tax with a minimum 60% rate, a 28% VAT (later reduced to 18% for catering establishments), 32% profit tax, a 45% tax on profits for mediatory services (the ubiquitous and sundry exchanges). Taxes are to absorb 40% of the GNP (as compared to 20 to 22% in 1991 and 50% in 1990 in the former Soviet Union).³

Massive unemployment approaching

It is not clear to what extent the subsidies to enterprises have already been eliminated but the process is underway, and massive unemployment, which has so far hit mainly people with higher education, and women above all, is not far off. According to the Ministry of Labour, unemployment could rise from seven or eight million (10 to 12% with 70% of these women) by the fall from its current level on one and a half million. Cuts in military procurement, up to 85% this year according to one announcement, have already brought some shops in military factories to a standstill. In some areas, like the Moscow region and the Urals, military enterprises account for nearly 60% of employment.⁴

The government's social policy is to support the "neediest and least protected" elements in society, but otherwise to keep wage rises down to avoid hyperinflation. Pensions, stipends, and other allocations, as well as the minimum wage, were raised on the eve of the reform (remaining well below the poverty, or even subsistence, levels, one third of the minimum

1. See for example, D. Warszawski; "La Pologne veut changer de cap", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, February 1992, p. 3.

2. Interfax, February 7, 1992, in *Daily Report on Central Eurasia (DROE)*, February 11, 1992, p. 49.

3. V. Capelik, "Yeltsin's economic reform", *Radio Free Europe Research Report*, January 21, 1992, p. 30.

4. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta (NG)*, January 25, 1992; *Financial Times (FT)*, January 30 and February 4, 1992; *Trud*, February 18, 1992.

organized of the six [governments of the USSR and Russia that I have advised]. They don't answer letters, don't reply to phone calls on the special line; they don't carry out their commitments; it is impossible to know who exactly authored Yeltsin's disarmament initiative, or where and when Gaidar's economic reform was discussed... [Besides that], in the new structures of power, corruption is practically legalized and without limit.¹³

Indeed, although privatization is now officially getting underway, vast amounts of real estate and other state property has already been appropriated privately by officials of the "democratic" state administration.¹⁴ The liberals themselves have had to admit that corruption in government is unprecedented, no small admission when one recalls the freebooting Brezhnev era.¹⁵

Blatant corruption among politicians

A major split in Democratic Russia, the most important liberal movement, occurred in January in part over the widespread practice of combining public office with private business activity and the blatant conflict of interest and opportunity for corruption this creates. The debate at the movement's Council of Representatives over a draft resolution "On Urgent Measures against Corruption in the Government Apparatus" was extremely violent and bitter.

But the majority, backing the "Moscow-Popov lobby", voted to omit from the resolution a phrase declaring inadmissible the practice of government officials engaging in entrepreneurial activity at the expense of the tax payer. Gavriil Popov, mayor of Moscow and a close ally of Yeltsin, has himself declared that he has no intention of abandoning his business activities. Ken Livingstone, former leader

of the now defunct Greater London Council, recently remarked while on a visit to Moscow that if Popov were mayor of a British town he would long since have been put behind bars and his declaration would be taken as an admission of guilt.¹⁶

This is the other, more real, side of the market reform. It would be naive to think that Yeltsin and his economic advisors lack accurate information on the results to date of the Polish "shock therapy", or for that matter on the real state of the economy of the United Kingdom, Chile and elsewhere.

But what might appear as a failure to the average citizen of these countries, is viewed as a success by the minority striving to acquire and consolidate power and privilege. And the neo-liberal experiments have known a considerable amount of success (even if it is open to question whether it will be lasting) at this task, which is a political, rather than an economic, one.

The declared goal of the market reform — a flourishing economy and general prosperity — is at best a secondary goal, and, more immediately, it is a demagogic cover for the primary aim; the carrying through of a "revolution from above", whose task is to consolidate the economic and political situation of a new property owning class drawn from the old "communist" bureaucracy, the former underground businessmen and mafia and well-connected (to the state) enterprising intellectuals and youth. In this sense, it is a transformation similar to other "revolutions from above" in Russian history — Stalin's in 1929 and Alexander II's in 1861 (the emancipation of the serfs) — in which the political goals of the elite were paramount over — and to a large extent in conflict with — considerations of economic development and popular welfare.

Yeltsin and his colleagues often talk of the need to quickly "make the reform irreversible". This concern might strike the casual observer as strange coming from professed democrats when the reform has yet to prove itself. Surely, they would want to leave open the option of trying a different strategy if the present one does not produce the expected results.

But this concern becomes clearer if one understands that the primary goal of the reform is to allow rapid "primitive accumulation" that is, the private appropriation of the nation's property by the new/old elite, and, even more important, its legitimation through the market.

The key role of the market is not so much to encourage economic efficiency as to hide the true nature of social relations behind the seemingly objective, neutral workings of a "natural" economic mechanism. If the operation succeeds, the economy is effectively removed from the sphere of democratic control.

This, then, is the gamble of the Russian reformers. Their success or failure will depend on the reactions of the population to the reform, a topic for a following article. But a few things are immediately clear. This reform has no chance of producing even minimal prosperity for the mass of the population within any politically acceptable time. If the reform continues it will be years before pre-reform levels of production are attained again.

Dwindling reservoir of trust in Yeltsin

Despite a certain reservoir of trust, which is quickly dwindling, enjoyed by the Yeltsin regime as a democratically elected government, he has no mandate for the reform he is carrying out (during the election campaign, he promised that no one would suffer). The reform was never subject to open, democratic debate, and certainly not to democratic decision. Indeed, most of the reform measures are introduced by presidential decree "to save time and avoid parliamentary debate".¹⁷

Numerous polls (whose liberal bias is notorious) show that the majority of the people, who are still very far from internalizing market fetishism, do not agree with the reform. And the proportion that opposes the reform will surely grow as the pain intensifies.

Thus 45% of Russians surveyed at the end of January believed that only the state control of prices and distribution of goods and resources can save the economy, while 36% still put their faith in free entrepreneurship and 20% were not sure

Second issue of Russian Inprecor

THE second issue of *Inter-Vzglyad*, the Russian-language sister publication of *IV*, was published in Moscow in mid-February. Its contents include an article on Poland by Cyril Smuga, articles on the immigration policies of the EEC and the crisis of the Western Communist parties by Claude Gabriel and an article on the future of socialism by Michael Löwy.

There are also articles on the Third World debt, the North American Free Trade Zone, social democracy in Western Europe as well as comments on the self-management movement in the ex-USSR and Yeltsin's economic reforms. *Inter-Vzglyad* is also publishing the appeal for solidarity with Cuba which appeared in *IV* no. 215, October 28, 1991.

The magazine is being distributed to a broad range of left wing groups and individuals, and has been sold at various left wing gatherings and demonstrations against Yeltsin.

The third issue of *Inter-Vzglyad* is due to appear by late spring/early summer, hopefully to coincide with a speaking tour organized by the magazine.

Write to us for further information. ★

15. *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, December 26, 1991, NG, January 21, 1992.

16. NG, January 21, 1992.

17. Capelik, p. 30.

18. Interfax, January 29, 1992; DROE, January 29, 1992, p. 35; *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, January 31, 1992.

what would help. 43% of Muscovites doubted that the Russian government could extricate the republic from its crisis, as opposed to 31% who had faith in it. (Moscow, with its concentration of intellectuals, is more liberally-minded than the provinces.)¹⁸

Not surprisingly, predictions of, and calls for, an authoritarian regime, a long favoured theme of liberal commentators and ideologues, who curse politicians worried about popularity, are increasingly frequent in the press. Of course, an authoritarian regime already exists for all practical purposes, as far as the promulgation of the reform goes. However personal freedom still remains more or less intact.

Moves to strengthen repressive forces

But there are some ominous signs. The unprecedented violence used by the Moscow government's forces of repression against the mainly conservative demonstrators on February 23 (many were beaten and a retired Lieutenant-General died of a heart attack after a verbal scuffle with the police) is being widely seen, in left and liberal circles, as part of a plan aimed eventually at dissolving the soviets and sharply reinforcing executive power.¹⁹

On February 12, the usually well-informed *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* reported that a decree on the introduction of martial law for eight months had already been drafted.

According to the Russian Minister of Security, Viktor Barannikov: "The only real force that can defend the reform in Russia is the armed forces and our apparatus... The people are sick of *perestroika*. Only armed detachments can guarantee the success of the reform". As for the Russian parliament: "These are good-for-nothings. They should be dispersed."²⁰

Barannikov has certainly grasped the logic of the situation. But it is far from certain that he will get his way soon. The main reason for this is not any lingering attachment on the part of the liberal reformers to democratic values or concern with world opinion. The only world opinion that counts is that of world capital and the IMF is not overly obsessed with democracy and human rights.

The problem is that, whatever Barannikov might claim, there is no confidence in ruling circles that the forces of repression presently at the disposal of the Russian government are indeed capable of maintaining order in the face of active popular opposition to the reform. This does not augur well for the "revolution from above". ★

19. *NG*, February 27, 1992.

20. *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, January 22, 1992; *NG*, January 10, 1992.

A situation of chaos

EVERYBODY knows January in Russia was a bad month. But just how bad? The figures are now coming in.

According to the Russian State Committee on Statistics, retail trade turnover during January, measured in physical terms, fell by a staggering 63%. In a survey conducted in St. Petersburg, only 15% of respondents reported that they were eating as well as last year. Fifty-nine percent said that their diet had deteriorated markedly.

RENFREY CLARKE*

OFFICIAL calculations put the rise in average retail prices during January at 350%. However, this figure includes the farmers' markets and private "cooperative" stores, where prices were already astronomical and where few Russians could afford to shop. According to a widely quoted estimate, the rise during January of a typical "market basket" was 500%.

Even on official figures, wholesale prices quintupled on average during January. In specific cases, the rises were much greater; the wholesale price of tyres for example, rose 23 times.

The overall volume of industrial output fell during the month by 15%. This decline seems certain to accelerate, since the government's "shock therapy" is expected to have its main impact on factories during February and March.

Production of tractors fell during January by 49%, with alarming implications for agriculture. Oil output declined by 14%. The volume of milk that was processed for sale fell by 46%.

Still, Russians had been warned: shock therapy was a "painful but necessary" corrective. The freeing of prices to find their own levels was supposed to end the shortages and help bring about economic

stabilization — a prerequisite for renewed growth and eventual prosperity.

It is true that since price liberalization, the shelves of Russian shops have gradually become less empty.

If shoppers are patient and resourceful, they can now buy goods such as refrigerators, washing machines and TV sets for 15 to 17 times last year's price. In general, however, the hope that low-priced scarcity would be replaced by high-priced abundance have not been borne out.

Consumer industry fared badly during January with output of various product lines falling by as much as 20%. Countless small, necessary items, from tap washers to lightbulbs, remain impossible to find at any price. Russian president Boris Yeltsin continues to assure the public that an improvement in the economic situation will be evident "before the end of the year".

However, the January figures lend weight to mounting suggestions that the economy will not even "bottom out" during 1992 and that real stabilization will be years off. Price liberalization has set off a powerful inflationary dynamic, which the Russian government shows no sign of being able to rein in by limiting growth in the money supply.

Tax income plummets

The state taxation service reported recently that, in nominal terms, tax revenues in January were up by 4.1 times on the January 1991 figure. However, inflation during the twelve months to the end of January was in the region of 2000%. In real terms, the government's tax income has fallen drastically.

This is confirmed by a report that revenue during January from the new 28% Value Added Tax (VAT), on which the government had pinned most of its hopes of curbing the state deficit, was only 25% of the expected figure.

These facts, which have received little publicity in the liberal-dominated media, point to a situation of chaos in state finances. Self-financing state firms and their privatized counterparts appear to be evading taxes on a gargantuan scale.

While inflation impoverishes the bulk of the population, the state budget deficit remains out of control, pumping fresh purchasing power into the hands of a favoured minority and creating still more inflation.

At a certain point, millions of Russians who have accepted the government's strategies as the price of future prosperity will realize that their sacrifices have been in vain — that in the new capitalist Russia, the impoverishment of the masses is meant to be permanent. When that realization dawns, it will take more than Yeltsin's charisma to save him. ★

* Renfrey Clarke is the Moscow correspondent of the Australian socialist newspaper *Green Left*.

The new enemy within

DEPUTIES to the Moscow Soviet on February 26 were petitioning for an emergency sitting of their assembly to consider a motion condemning the city government for its handling of the February 23 opposition demonstration.

RENFREY CLARKE

THOUGH widely misreported as a provocation by "Communist conservatives", the Army Day march and rally was planned as a peaceful and orderly affair.

Clashes developed only after the "democratic" city administration, in a move which has brought sharp criticism even from within the liberal camp, denied marchers the right to proceed to their announced destination.

The February 23 action was called by the Officers Union and the Trudovaya Rossiya ("Toiling Russia") group around demands for the defence of the Soviet army.

The city soviet deputies passed a motion stating that the demonstration should be allowed to go ahead. However, virtually all of the deputies' powers have now been transferred to the mayoral administration, and resolutions of the soviet are little more than expressions of opinion.

Limited publicity for demonstration

Publicity for the demonstration was limited, and the total attendance was only a few thousand. Many of those present were elderly war veterans.

The demonstrators intended to march from Mayakovsky Square in the northern part of the city centre, down Tverskaya Street to the Manezh Square. After listening to speakers, they were then to lay wreaths on the nearby Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

For years now, the Manezh has been the major rallying point for political demonstrations in Moscow. It is difficult to recall any violent incident at these gatherings. As recently as February 9, a Trudovaya Rossiya demonstration in the square

passed off without trouble.

Nevertheless, by eight o'clock in the morning of February 23 a total of 450 vehicles, mainly buses and heavy trucks, were parked across the entrance to the Manezh.

The closure of some of central Moscow's busiest streets threw traffic into fierce tangles. The exits of 11 metro stations were shut. Long lines of grey-coated police, as many as 10,000 in all, marched into position.

Explaining why the Manezh had been sealed off, the city government claimed that allowing the demonstration to go ahead on the square would have created major problems in keeping public order, and would have impeded the flow of transport and pedestrians.

Why was this decision taken? In deputy Khramov's view, the city government aimed at making a show of strength, and also at avenging the blockade, by the same police, that prevented an anti-Communist demonstration on the Manezh in March last year.

A weak and ineffective dictatorship

Another deputy, Boris Kagarlitsky of the Party of Labour, was more forthright. "What we have in Moscow is a weak and ineffective dictatorship. The city government is constantly looking for extra powers. To try to justify this, it is doing all it can to provoke violence."

Mayor Popov's strategies seem likely to deepen the divisions in the "democrat" camp between real supporters of democratic rights and would-be capitalists for whom "democracy" has never been more than a flag of convenience.

This prospect was lent weight by a report on the demonstration in the February 25 issue of *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* ("Independent Newspaper"), the leading organ of Russia's liberal intelligentsia. Uncharacteristically, the paper's analysis coincided on major points with the views expressed by leftists.

Nezavisimaya Gazeta noted that the organizers of the demonstration were claiming a victory, on the basis that the city government had recognized Trudovaya Rossiya as an important danger.

"However," the paper continued, "it is entirely possible that the authorities laid on the clubs not because they were scared themselves, but in order to convince society that there is a 'red-brown threat'.

"Since the collapse of the Communist Party, the place of the 'enemy within' has been vacant." ★

Tension mounts in Nagorno-Karabakh

THE conflict in the mountainous region of Nagorno-Karabakh has entered a new phase with the break-up of the Soviet Union. The Karabakh issue, which has led to big popular mobilizations in the Caucasian republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan (the region is inhabited by Armenians but has been administered by Azerbaijan since 1923), is now the subject both of attempts at a political solution and of military escalation on the ground.

VICKEN CHETERIAN

ON September 22 last year, after mediation by Russian president Boris Yeltsin and his counterpart from Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev, the republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan reached an agreement to start negotiations for a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Two days after this agreement, serious fighting restarted in the enclave, when for the first time Azeri artillery shelled Stepanakert, the capital of the "autonomous republic", while Armenian forces bombarded the city of Shusha and launched armed attacks on Kokjan, the Azeri suburb of Stepanakert.

Military clashes continue

Military clashes, involving artillery and tank attacks, have continued since; in the single month of October 1991, seven helicopter "accidents" were reported in the region.

The tension reached its height after November 20, 1991, when a helicopter carrying Russian, Kazakh and Azeri mediators and statesman was shot down.

Azerbaijan accused Armenian "terrorists" of responsibility, while the Armenian republic presented its condolences and asked for an investigation to be opened. The immediate reaction of the Azeri parliament was to abolish the status of "autonomous republic" for Nagorno-Karabakh¹ and to step up the blockade of Armenia.

The Karabakh problem has reached a point where Armenia and Azerbaijan are in a state of undeclared war. It is also true that the political rulers in Baku and Yerevan are not in complete control of the situation, although they have an interest in calming the situation down. After each new diplomatic agreement between the two capitals is signed, the situation on the ground gets worse.

Azerbaijan's president Aiaz Mutalibov is seeking investment by Western oil companies like Texaco, BP and Chevron² in the republic's obsolete oil industry. However, such investment is unlikely given the state of war.

On the other hand, the Armenian economy, with the exception of its agriculture, is in a much worse state. The republic has been under a strict blockade imposed by Azerbaijan, from where it used to receive most of its oil and gas. 85% of Armenian industry has ground to a halt as a result of this blockade, while reconstruction of the cities destroyed in the 1988 earthquake has been frozen.

Army withdrawal creates power vacuum

Another reason for the resumption of the fighting is the power vacuum created by the withdrawal of the Soviet army from the region.

A few months before, the Soviet "buffer forces" numbered 11,000; now less than 2,000 remain, awaiting departure. In the Gorbachev era, the Karabakh issue was manipulated to fit the needs of the centre and the preservation of the union.

For example, in spring 1991 Soviet interior ministry troops cooperated with Azeri police units to attack and deport Armenians from Getashen and Martunashem, villages north of the enclave.³

This was after Azeri leaders had expressed their intention of voting for the union treaty prepared by Gorbachev, while it was expected that the referendum planned in Armenia for a few months later would come out against it.

Now the republics that have inherited Soviet troops have no actual ambitions in a conflict that could turn out to be costly. As the troops leave the two sides are trying to take over their positions.

The war on the ground has long since taken on its own dynamic. Although some of the fighters are local villagers who are trying to defend their own territory from the "enemy", most of the fighters are volunteers coming from Yerevan and Baku, as well as, Armenian refugees from Baku



or Azeri refugees originally from villages in the east of Armenia.⁴ There are around 500,000 refugees on both sides as a result of the conflict.

The two countries' devastated economies cannot integrate these refugees, who, in their turn, attribute their tragic fate to the other ethnic group. There are practically no Azeris left in Armenia, while Armenians are still left in enclaves in and around Karabakh.

At the beginning of the century, these countries were not ethnically homogeneous. The Armenian bourgeoisie was based in the Georgian capital Tbilisi and Baku, while Yerevan was nothing more than a small provincial town.

With the Sovietization of the Caucasus, these countries achieved self-government. The bureaucratic system had created local national elites that ruled over the internal affairs of the republic, "planning" the distribution of investments, the location of industrial projects, and also local cultural policy.

Repression causes slow migration

While enjoying significant cultural and political autonomy, the local national elites with their repressive policy towards minorities caused a slow migration that tended to turn each republic into a national state.⁵ This trend seems to be confirmed with the present war.

The opposition in both countries is trying to profit from the situation to attack their respective governments from an ultra-nationalist angle.

The Popular Front of Azerbaijan has on several occasions in the last three months organized mass demonstrations in Baku that brought out around a hundred thousand people to call for the resignation of Mutalibov for being unable to put an end to the "Armenian intervention in the internal affairs of Azerbaijan".

Similarly, on the Armenian side, the nationalist leader Parour Airikiyan, who stood against current president Levon Ter-Petrosian, has called on the latter to stop any negotiations with Azeri officials since "they have violated all previous agreements," as he puts it. His alternative is the maximum "internationalization" of the conflict.

The Armenian republic seems to be ready to compromise by stopping its interference in support of the Armenian population of Karabakh if the Azeri government stops its "genocide" of the Armenians.

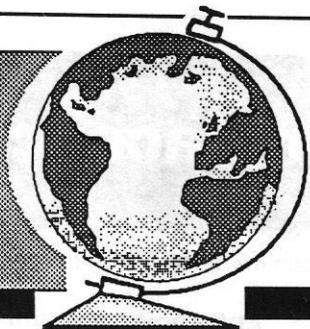
This distancing by the Armenian government was also reflected in the voting that has taken place in Nagorno-Karabakh to decide the enclave's status. The vote was on "Do you agree that the Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous republic should become an independent republic?", not that it should be linked to Armenia.

On the other hand, Mutalibov declared on February 4, 1992 that he will agree to the deployment of UN observers in the region.

It is hard to imagine at the moment that the Armenians of Karabakh will agree to live under rule from Baku.

On the other hand, if the internal pressures in Azerbaijan, with the struggle between the remnants of the still-ruling Communist Party and the Popular Front, were to lead to the mobilization of the country with its seven million people, the fate of the 160,000 Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh could turn out to be tragic indeed. ★

1. *Armenopress*, November 28, 1991.
 2. *Les Nouvelles du Moscou*, December 3, 1991.
 3. *International Herald Tribune*, May 2, 1991.
 4. Note here the role played by refugees in other wars, like in Lebanon and more recently in Yugoslavia. While local fighters are more moderate towards their neighbours, refugees involved in fighting are characterized by their extremism.
 5. See the article by R. Suny in *New Left Review* (London), no. 184.

AROUND
THE
WORLD

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Witch-hunt

THE Federal Assembly of Czechoslovakia, under pressure from the Finance Minister Vaclav Klaus and the Democratic Civic Party, passed a law on December 20, 1991, which threatens with one to five years in prison "any person supporting or promoting... fascism or communism".

In May 1990 a text decreed the expropriation of the property of the former Communist Party.

The *lustrace* ("exposure") law of October 1991 targeted people who had collaborated with the old regime, members of the former militia and greater or lesser "dignitaries" of the Communist Party who are to be excluded from public employment for five years. A thoroughgoing witch-hunt is underway in Czechoslovakia.

Both inside and outside the country voices have been raised in protest, including the *Open Letter to Vaclav Havel* published below:

"The amendment to the penal code adopted by a majority of the deputies in the Prague parliament criminalizes those who promote "communist ideas" and "class hatred" assimilated to fascism and racial hatred. This denial of democracy could be used to burn *Capital*, and condemn individuals not for their acts but their ideas...

"We, who expressed our solidarity with the victims of Stalinist repression, and who, for that very reason, supported Vaclav Havel's struggle for democracy, think that we have the right to ask the president of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic to use all his authority to achieve the abolition of this anti-freedom amendment."

Initial signatories:

Madeleine Rébérioux, president of the *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme*; Gilles Martinet, French ambassador; Mgr. Jacques Gaillot, Bishop of Evreux, France; Petr Uhl, federal deputy from Prague; Yves Jouffa, honorary president of the *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme*, France; Michel Vovelle, director of the *Institut d'Histoire de la Révolution*, France; Marc Terwagne, coordination of the international relations commission of the *Ecolo Party* in Belgium; Peter Van Oertzen, member

of the leadership of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD); Daniel Bensaïd, university professor, France; Gilles Perault, writer, France; Hugo Van Dienderen, A.G.A.L.E.V. deputy, Belgium; José Luis Lopez Aranguren, writer, Spanish State; Carlos Saura, film-maker, Spanish State; José Antonio Gimbernat, president of the Human Rights Association, Spanish State; Antonia Garcia Santesmases, member of the Federal Committee of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE); Jacques Bourgaux, vice-president of the Belgian Association of Democratic Jurists; Wolfgang Thierse, vice-president of the SPD of Germany. ★

SRI LANKA

Trade union opposes repression

A GENERAL membership meeting of the Ceylon Mercantile, Industrial and General Workers' Union (CMU) was held in Colombo on January 29, 1992. Total attendance was about 5,000, with many having to follow the proceedings by loudspeaker from outside the packed CMU headquarters.

The meeting unanimously endorsed three General Council decisions calling, respectively, for: the withdrawal of the so-called Social Security Benefits Bill and opposition to the replacement of the Employees' Provident Fund with a Pension Scheme; the repeal of the Essential Services Regulations and other Regulations affecting democratic rights, with particular reference to the Simca garments strike, and reinstatement of the workers who participated in the strike; and the abolition of the Executive Presidency and of the power of an Executive President to make Emergency Regulations under Article 155 of the Constitution of Sri Lanka.

A resolution submitted by the General Council, condemning police interference with legitimate trade union activity, was also unanimously approved.

In his address to the meeting, the union's General Secretary, Bala Tampoe, stated that although the Social Security Benefits Bill had reportedly been "shelved" by the government, the union

would have to consider calling a general strike, together with other unions, if there were any plans to reintroduce it.

He said that the Essential Services Regulations, supposedly introduced to combat terrorism, were in fact employed to attack trade union and democratic rights. Tampoe told the meeting that no politician should be invested with the powers currently enjoyed by the Executive President of Sri Lanka, as provided for under the present Constitution, and that it was for the people to demand the abolition by parliament of these powers.

With regard to police harassment against legitimate trade union activity and strikes, Tampoe cited several specific examples of such action in the recent past, especially in relation to strikes now taking place in the Ja-Ela area.

Before the meeting began, it was announced that the CMU bulletin in Sinhala had been printed under a new name, *Kamkaru Balaya* ("Workers' Power"). A large number of copies were sold at the meeting.

The meeting ended with the traditional CMU slogan: "Long Live the CMU" ★

Trotskyists celebrate anniversary

THE Sri Lankan Trotskyist group, the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), celebrated its 14th anniversary on January 25, 1992. Over 3,000 people attended the meeting organized in commemoration of the anniversary, which was covered in all the daily newspapers, as was the decision of the Fourth International to accept the NSSP as its Sri Lankan section. ★

CATALONIA

Report on abortion

ABORTION is forbidden in Catalonia, as in the rest of the Spanish State, except in cases of rape, deformation of the foetus or a threat to the life of the mother. A recent official report by the Catalonian government throws some light on the extent of the problems faced by women in this situation. In 1991, 200 young women had abortions each quarter – around 13 per thousand, according to the official figures which understate the real figure.

Nine out of ten young people from 18-19 used no means of contraception and 88% had never been to a family planning centre (54% of women who had abortions had also never been to a family planning centre). Almost all abortions take place in private clinics because doctors refuse to perform them in public hospitals, citing "conscientious objections". The situation is especially acute for women in the small towns or villages outside of Barcelona, and it is likely to get even worse in the light of the plans of the Spanish Socialist government to privatize the family planning centres or transform them into mere centres of gynaecological education). ★

The end of complacency

UNTIL a few years ago the assertion that "there is no racism in Spain" was a view shared by the immense majority of the population, including on the left.

PACO TORRES

This was to forget the 500 years of marginalization, exclusion and racism that afflicted and continues to afflict the Gypsies — the first anti-Gypsy legislation dates from the time of the Catholic Kings.

This false and complacent common belief has changed in recent years, because of a number of phenomena:

- The growth of xenophobic and racist attacks on Gypsies. Since 1990 attacks on members of this ethnic group (proposals that they be expelled from towns, refusal to teach Gypsy children in school, various types of harassment and physical assaults) have been on the increase. To the age-old rejection of the gypsies (of whom there are some 500,000) has been added the accusation that they are involved in heroin trafficking.¹

- The increasingly evident presence of foreign immigrants. The largest groups of Third World immigrants are from North Africa, South America and Central Africa. They are "accused" of all the normal things: "taking our jobs", "being dirty" and the rest. They are also held responsible for crime (blacks in particular are accused of being involved in the heroin traffic).

- Other factors are: the growth of conservatism and reactionary ideas; all the different problems which beset ethnic minorities, including poverty, marginalization and crime which the society in which we live reproduces in a vicious circle that feeds on itself; the growth of racism and xenophobia throughout Europe.

The growing manifestations of racism and xenophobia have produced a mood or preoccupation and sensitivity among progressive people. Now "we are racist". However for the time being this sensitivity has not been translated into an organized anti-racist movement. There have been, nonetheless, various initiatives and as is true for everything in this state, the

situation is different in each nationality.

Anti-racist activity

One could summarize the situation as regards anti-racist activity thus:

- Organizations that undertake support work for immigrants. These are very diverse: Christian (base organizations such as the Comunidades Cristianas Populares or those more tied to the hierarchy such as Caritas or Justicia y Paz), trade union (in particular the CC.OO — the Workers' Commissions). A wide-ranging campaign has developed around the issue of the regularization of immigrants; various parts of the Left Alternative (IA) have taken part in united platforms, one of whose themes has been anti-racism.

- There has also been anti-racist campaigning by Gypsy organizations, although this is not their main concern.

- Groups called SOS Racism have arisen in a number of places. These exist in Barcelona, Granada and Euskadi (the Basque Country). Despite having the same name they are not linked up. The make up of these groups varies — people from the IU-PCE (United Left-Spanish Communist Party) in Barcelona, and a broader composition elsewhere: Christians, IA and various people interested in work in solidarity with immigrants. They carry out propaganda work, consciousness raising, maintain contacts and help immigrant colonies. They represent the beginning of something.

- The only nationwide platform is the Equal Rights Campaign ("Iguales en derechos") set up two or three months ago with the publication of its founding manifesto. It intends to undertake activity in a number of fields (institutional, public opinion, exposure) which "oppose racism and xenophobia" and uphold "the right to one's own identity". This is an

Immigrants in the Spanish State

THERE are some 800,000 foreigners resident in the Spanish State (2% of the total). They can be divided into two main groups:

a) Half are citizens of European Community countries and to a lesser extent from the USA and Canada. Most are pensioners living on the Mediterranean coast. They have official papers and good living standards...

b) Immigrants from the so-called Third World. There are different estimates of the numbers of those without papers (130,000 according to the government, 294,000 according to Caritas, while the European Commission on Racism and Xenophobia suggests 300,000). On December 10, 1991, a process of regularization of these saw the presentation of 133,000 requests. That would leave some 180,000 undocumented immigrants. This figure is tending to grow. ★

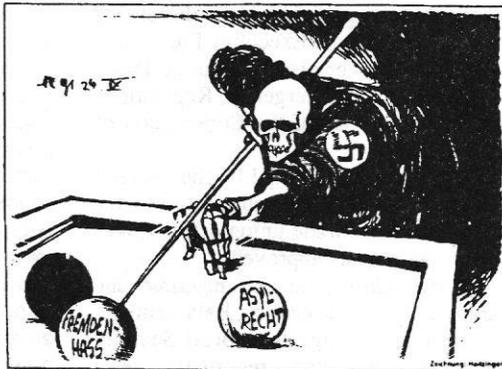
initiative from the Human Rights Association which has brought together Christian, Gypsy and other non-governmental organizations.

Thus, for the moment there does not exist an anti-racist movement, but rather various initiatives, groups and collectives which take up some of the problems connected with racism and xenophobia.

Growing concern about racism

These initiatives have found a considerable response in the press and wide sympathy. While it is still at present the property of a relatively small layer of society, the concern with and rejection of racism is growing.

It is hard to say what will happen in the immediate future. The dispersed anti-racist activity is going to continue. Perhaps there will be moves towards a more coordinated and cohesive movement. Or the present situation will continue with a range of different groups with no coordination between them. It would be unwise to give a categorical answer. ★



1. There is a kind of anti-drug psychosis spread through the media and the administration (and which is very useful, for example, as a justification for anti-democratic and repressive legislation such as the recent Law on Civil Security).

The Gypsies themselves admit that there are some among them who live off selling heroin (as do some "payos", the Romany word for a non-Gypsy). This fact has led to the equation Gypsy=heroin and the criminalization of the whole Gypsy people.

A million join anti-racist action

OVER one million people took part in the demonstration against racist violence in Sweden on February 21. No one in the country between 10 and 11am could fail to notice that something extraordinary was happening.

DICK FORSLUND

THE initial appeal to all Swedish immigrants — “Strike for one hour on the 21st to show our importance for the Swedish economy — was issued by 15 immigrant organizations. The National League to Stop Racism (“Stoppa Rasismen”) was also behind the appeal, although it is not a purely immigrant organization. After two weeks, over 50 other immigrant organizations added their support to the appeal and gathered around the February 21 Committee.

An unprecedented three-month long wave of racist violence — injuring ten and killing one immigrant, accompanied by arson and other attacks against refugee camps and several bomb threats at railway stations and airports — provoked the Kurdish National League in Sweden to take the first initiative for an “immigrant strike” on January 30.

Increased Neo-Nazi activity

Knowing that the increased activity of different neo-Nazi groups was only the tip of a racist iceberg, the thrust of the call was to argue against an opinion that has become more and more widespread in recent years: “Immigrants are lazy people who don’t want to work and who are an economic burden on the state, benefiting from social welfare at a time when hardworking Swedes have to face cuts in living standards and accept one austerity measure after another.”

The idea was that immigrants would show in action that “Sweden would stop” without their work in industry, hospitals, schools, childcare and public transport. It caught on at once. The initiative shook the new bourgeois coalition government, which for more than a month had been the target of criticism over its passivity on the issue of racism and defence of immigrants. Some days before the strike call, the Conservative prime minister, Carl Bildt apparently unaware that he was about to lead his government into its first serious crisis, questioned in a radio interview whether the shots fired at immigrants might be the work of crimi-

nals settling accounts among themselves.

But the Liberal Party felt the pressure from public opinion and the day after the appeal for the immigrants’ strike was issued the Liberal minister for social affairs came out in “support of the idea” thus trying to save the honour of the coalition government and repair the damage done by his Conservative coalition partner.

The next day the LO trade union confederation, which is led by the social democrats, issued a statement in support and appealed to the employers’ federation, the SAF, not to take any workers to the labour court, although the proposed strike was unauthorized.

Employers organization takes cautious line

The following week was one of frenetic activity by different establishments. The SAF responded to the LO’s request, saying that they would not recommend bringing any cases to court if immigrants went on strike, but stressing that it was a bad idea to damage industry by striking and advocating a minute’s silence to protest racist violence from everyone, whether Swede or immigrant.

It was evident that the employers did not want a general strike situation to develop, which would legitimize a new weapon in public consciousness and which could be used again by the working class. But at the same time they felt it impossible to condemn the appeal.

SAF thus decided to play on a weakness in the appeal, one which was also brought up by Carl Bildt when he finally chose to actively intervene. The argument was that it was wrong to divide “us” and “them” in this way. “Only the racists will benefit from the division. Why not do something together instead?”

Carl Bildt developed this into an attack on “collective thinking” when two weeks later he yielded to pressure to appear on the television and “speak to

the nation”. He, an outspoken believer in many types of “collectives” (“family”, “Sweden”, “Europe”) stated that “collectivism was the very root of racism”. For decades his party has been advocating special laws for immigrants and refugees — and at the same time as this debate was taking place, members of his conservative parliamentary group were suggesting that immigrants charged with minor crimes should be expelled from Sweden. But now he was challenging the very notion of “us” and “them” in an effort to support the SAF’s “silent minute”.

At the same time a real debate started in the different workplaces. It was evident that if it were to be effective the strike had to be organized and that the local unions were crucial for this. It was also clear that it was impossible to leave “the Swedes” out, both for organizational reasons and in order to build links of solidarity between all union members regardless of nationality.

Intertwined with this there was also a sort of healthy confusion arising out of the preparations for the strike. What were the hundreds of thousands who are both “immigrants” and “Swedes” to do on February 21?

Pressure mounted on the February 21 Committee to respond to these debates. By now the large Finnish immigrant organization had joined the movement, although its members — many of them having stayed a long time in Sweden — did not feel an immediate target of racist violence.

A stab in the back from the bureaucrats

The pressure became acute after the LO issued a circular to its local unions, after secret negotiations with the less radical immigrants’ organizations, saying that the “strike is cancelled and has been replaced by a silent minute for all”, thus bowing down to the SAF. Despite subsequent apologies to the February 21 Committee this circular was never publicly withdrawn, continuing to be a source of confusion up until the very day of the strike.

Finally the February 21 Committee resolved its dilemma one week before the crucial day by stating that “immigrants can strike for up to one hour and all others can solidarize with this in the manner they found most suitable. We welcome all support. Everybody who wants to take part in the demonstration for the full hour must be supported and respected by all the others”.

Better late than never. And, although late, this appeal finally made February 21 a day to remember.

It is estimated that over one million workers and youth took part in the demonstration. The churches rang in the hour all over Sweden. Thousands of schools from all over Sweden stopped their usual

activities for one hour starting at ten, and students from 7 to 18 years old gathered in demonstrations or discussions on the issue of racism. In big plants such as Volvo in Göteborg, Saab Scania in Södertälje or Trelleborg stopped work for five, ten or fifteen minutes with the support of the trade unions...and often with the permission of the local bosses, although they recommended the SAF "minute".

Immigrant groups more clearly identified with the call often continued for the full hour, both at Volvo and Scania, without being stopped and thus bringing production to a halt. In some factories the local bosses even hesitated to deduct the strike hour from wages. In any case there has been no official statement from the bosses saying that this "wildcat strike" will be taken to the labour court, although such statements were issued, for example at Volvo, before the strike. However there were cases, above all in towns with few immigrants and far from Stockholm, where threats from local employers stopped any action.

Public transport halted

Public transport in the main cities and many other towns stopped for five, ten or fifteen minutes with the participation of the entire workforce. The reason for the stoppage was proclaimed by loudspeakers and placards. In the big hospitals in Stockholm and other cities, the personnel gathered in meetings with hundreds of participants which heard speakers and passed resolutions...and delaying lunch since the majority of hospital kitchen staff are immigrants. The Arlanda airport outside Stockholm was blocked for forty minutes by immigrant taxi drivers causing chaos.

And in the evening there were demonstrations and meetings — the biggest of 8,000 people in Göteborg, in dozens of towns and cities.

Despite confusion, various weaknesses and the efforts made by the government and established forces to divert or diminish the "Display of Grief" it ended up a success. The original call was strong enough to survive three stormy weeks. For one day the air was clear again and the basis for a deep discussion now exists in thousands of workplaces and schools about the origin of racism and how to fight it.

Although the February 21 Committee never officially used the work "strike" the demonstration has brought a useful new notion into the workers' movement in Sweden, one badly needed at a moment when the rightwing government is continuing its work of taking from the poor to give to the rich: The Political General Strike. "Positive" comments from bourgeois forces showed that they were aware of this dangerous aroma: "...but do not let this become a habit!" ★

Attacks on Lebanon: More than an electoral ploy

NO Israeli government could, in normal times, accept without reaction the insult represented by the successful attack on an Israeli army camp mounted by a Palestinian commando unit on February 14, 1992, especially in the run up to an election.

MICHEL WARSHAWSKY
February 28

BEHIND the blusterings about the "unjustifiable murder of three soldiers" the spokespersons for the Israeli ruling class had been hard put to hide their humiliation: three or four Palestinians succeeded in entering an army camp where, using knives, they killed three and injured several more soldiers, some of them armed. They then withdrew without losses, taking their victims' arms with them. This operation has once again highlighted the operational and psychological problems besetting the Israeli army today, but also the progress made by the Palestinian commandos both from a professional point of view and in terms of fighting spirit.

The immediate reaction — the assassination of the Lebanese Hezbollah leader Sheikh Mussawi and his family in an Israeli air attack — surprised nobody, even if it is not certain that the Israeli government had weighed up beforehand all its consequences. History will remember that in February 1992 a group of courageous, poorly armed civilians attacked an army camp, and one of the world's best equipped air forces took revenge by killing a political leader, his wife and five year old child.

Mussawi's murder was inevitably followed by a response from Hezbollah supporters. For four days they bombarded Galilee, claiming one victim, causing considerable destruction and paralyzing the north of Israel. Once again the Israeli army invaded Lebanon, sowing death and destruction... to protect Galilee of course.

As usual it has been the civilian population and not

the Hezbollah commandos who have been the victims of the Israeli army attacks. From the military point of view, furthermore, the value of the invasion is unclear. Thus one must ask whether it was not simply an electoral operation, to save face and show that Tsahal (the Israeli army) is still able to hit back. However, such an interpretation fails to take into account the current Israeli-Arab negotiations and the objectives of the Israeli government under Yitzhak Shamir in these negotiations.

As we have explained several times, Shamir has found himself trapped by his own plan, and has found himself at the negotiating table despite himself. For more than six months he has been trying to find pretexts for sabotaging the negotiating process, hoping to do so in a way that will make it look as if the Arabs are to blame.

One of the objectives of the renewed invasion of Lebanon was — as with the decision to deport 12 Palestinian activists or to colonize the Silwan quarter in the middle of Arab Jerusalem — to try and provoke the Syrians (two months ago it was the Palestinians) to slam the door and refuse to continue negotiating with a government which is making a mockery out of both them and international legality.

The Israeli extreme right had left the government in order to try and outbid Shamir in the intransigence stakes. This means that Shamir has to try and prove that, far from being trapped, his plan has allowed him to throw the blame for the failure of the negotiations onto the Arabs while making no concessions himself.

Shamir's problem is that he is faced with Arab regimes — and under their influence a Palestinian leadership — who have decided to overlook his provocations and close their eyes to the constant attacks by the Israeli authorities on the rights of the Palestinians and the other peoples of the region.

From this point of view also, last week's invasion of Lebanon was a failure for Shamir. The Syrian delegation came to Washington along with the rest of the Arab delegations. However it is doubtful that this decision will be much consolation to the families of the victims of Israeli aggression, whether in Lebanon or the occupied territories. ★

