

# International VIEWPOINT

Issue 238

November 9, 1992

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## The elections and American society



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Crisis over pit closure plan

#### ITALY

Ten million workers fight government plans

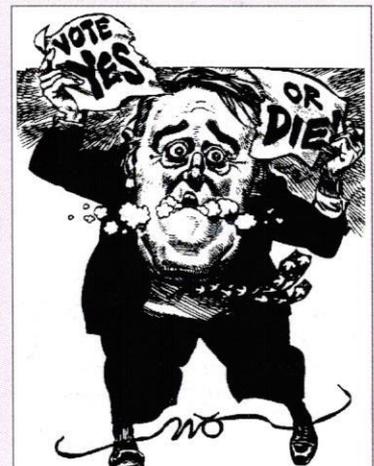
#### PALESTINE

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## International Viewpoint

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# Major government undermined

**BRITAIN'S Conservative administration has been forced to delay plans to shut down two thirds of the coal mining industry, after an upsurge of protest which has pushed the country into its biggest political crisis for many years.**

**DAVE OSLER — October 28, 1992**

**T**HE pit closures programme has become the single symbolic issue focussing the anger felt by many after 13 years of rightwing rule.

Meanwhile the ruling party is deeply split over the Maastricht Treaty on European union; the government cannot count on the support of its own parliamentarians in a crucial vote on Maastricht on November 4.

The mines question dominates everyday conversation in factories and offices. Even the far left has been taken aback by these developments. The British labour movement now has an opportunity to regain much of the ground lost in the Thatcher years.

A demonstration in London on Sunday October 25 sponsored by Britain's single trade union confederation, the TUC, attracted at least 200,000. This was by far the largest march in Britain since the mass mobilizations against nuclear weapons in the early 1980s, bigger even than the anti-poll tax demonstration that ended in a riot in the centre of London in 1990.

Earlier in the week, on Wednesday October 21, 70,000 people — predominantly blue-collar workers had demonstrated on a march called by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) — the largest week-day march for 20 years.

Local government employees and workers at some power stations took solidarity strike action — illegal under Britain's anti-union laws (the toughest in Europe) while many firefighters provided emergency cover only.

If Britain had a real political opposition able to capitalize on these events the fall of the government — by the normal processes of parliamentary democracy such as a vote of confidence — would be guaranteed.

Unfortunately no such opposition exists. The Labour Party now has the most rightwing leadership in its history and has trailed far behind public opinion, sticking to mild condemnations of the closures as a "bad thing".

This is partly due to the considerable rift that has opened up between the Labour leadership and the NUM, historically one of the pillars of the party, largely due to the militancy of the union's president Arthur Scargill. While Scargill's political outlook has been heavily influenced by Stalinism, he is undoubtedly the most leftwing union leader in Britain, as he showed in practice during the year-long miners' strike of 1984-85. The bourgeoisie has demonized him as the very incarnation of working class revolt — what Thatcher openly referred to as "the enemy within".

## Currency crisis

The current crisis started on October 13, when self-important industry minister Michael Heseltine — who has revived the disused title "President of the Board of Trade" to apply to himself — announced plans to close 31 of the country's 50 remaining coal mines by March 1993. The news had been anticipated; liberal newspapers had been leaking government documents well in advance of the announcement.

Some 30,000 jobs in mining were to go, generating over 60,000 more redundancies in related sectors like transport, mining equipment manufacture and shops in mining towns.

Energy experts argue that the closures are madness in anything but the short term.

British Coal made a profit of £170m (\$250m) this year and is by far the most efficient producer of deep-mined coal in Europe. Meanwhile massive subsidies go into nuclear power.

The energy market in Britain has been utterly distorted by privatization. When this took place in 1990, the nationalized electricity monopoly was broken up into 19 ostensibly competing companies, including both generators and suppliers.

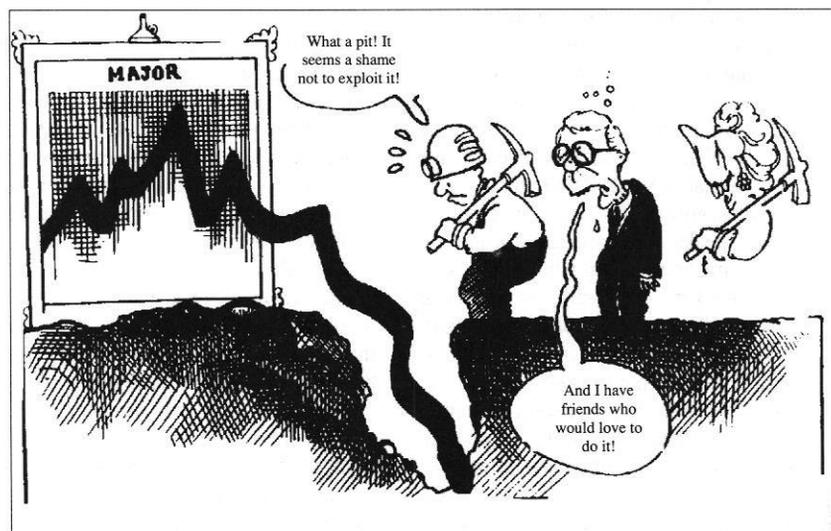
The companies that supply electricity to households and industries are seeking to break their dependence on the generators by building their own gas-fired power stations. No matter that gas is more expensive than coal; the suppliers are regional monopolies and can simply pass on the cost to the consumer.

## Capitalist rationality

If the present round of closures goes ahead, more than £1,000m will have to be spent on redundancy payments; perhaps a further £2,000m will be added to Britain's chronic balance of payments deficit; and 90,000 more unemployment cheques will have to be paid out every week, while direct and indirect taxation revenue will be lost. So much for capitalist rationality.

Coal was the foundation of Britain's industrial revolution. After nationalization in 1947, British Coal owned 1,400 pits. Even before the 1984-85 strike there were still 170, employing 180,000 miners. Now there are just 45,000 miners in 50 mines; many of those who have lost their jobs haven't worked since.

Now the government wants to sell the remnants of the industry back to the private sector. For anyone ready to abolish national wage bargaining, introduce 12 hour shifts and generalize the six-day week, Britain's coal mines could prove gold mines; British Coal has exploitation rights for the 45,000 million tonnes of recoverable reserves.



For the industry's workforce the Tory tomorrow is not so auspicious. As a confidential 1991 report from the government's privatization advisers, merchant bankers N. M. Rothschild put it: "In all market-based scenarios, a substantial further pit closure programme is required". On Rothschild's worst case projection, numbers could down to just 10,000 in 12 pits by 1995.

With unemployment in Britain now at 2.84 million, even according to official statistics which greatly underestimate the true figure, almost every worker lives in fear of being forced into joining the jobless or even the homeless. For many people, including those who voted Conservative in last April's general election, Heseltine's latest move was simply unacceptable.

Opposition from small business owners, many ruined after two years of economic recession, has also been loud. Even hoteliers in the Conservative stronghold of Cheltenham, miles from any coalfield, have organized protests.

### Partial retreat

The sheer scale of the reaction forced the government to undertake a partial retreat within days of maintaining that the case for closing the pits was "unanswerable".

Now ten mines are to be closed after 90 days of "consultation" with the workforce — a legal obligation that had previously simply been ignored. Even Britain's reactionary High Court was likely to uphold union claims on this score. The remaining 21 pits are to be reconsidered by a parliamentary committee.

The political damage to prime minister John Major is immense. Newspapers that are normally little more than Conservative propaganda organs are speculating on whether his government can survive.

That government is already in deep trouble. Former prime minister Margaret Thatcher is taking every opportunity to undermine her successor over Maastricht, which Major negotiated and which she opposes. The recent Conservative conference, normally an orderly affair, degenerated into open warfare on this issue.

The dramatic collapse of the British pound last month, forcing a humiliating withdrawal from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) has totally destroyed the government's economic policy. It now speaks simultaneously of cutting back on public spending while stimulating the economy by encouraging private sector investment. Not even the employers' association, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) take such claims seriously.

Nevertheless, the pits backdown represents a clever tactic from the Conservatives. A delay is not, of course, a reprieve. But by appearing to give ground — while

will be saved — it hopes to diffuse the public outcry.

More immediately it successfully fended off a revolt by Thatcherite members of parliament, who had threatened to vote against the party line on the issue even if it brought down the government.

Despite posing for the occasion as "friends of labour" these politicians are actually motivated by factional grievances against Heseltine, who was instrumental in the ouster of Thatcher, and above all a readiness to scupper Maastricht at all costs. In the event, only six had the courage to see their rebellion through and vote against the government on the pits issue.

### Regaining confidence

The real gain for the working class is the return of confidence. Until recent weeks, the British labour movement was still living with the consequences of the bitter defeat of the 1984-85 strike which saw a split in the miners' forces with the formation of a rightwing breakaway, the so-called Union of Democratic Miners (UDM). The successive rounds of anti-union laws immensely strengthened the so-called "new realists" in the labour movement who argued that militancy was now not only undesirable but illegal too. By the early months of 1992, the level of industrial action in Britain had hit the lowest level since records began a hundred years ago.

Now the mood is slowly starting to change. With a pay freeze likely in the public sector thanks to the government's deep financial difficulties, widespread hostility to the planned privatization of the rail network and parts of the post office, major cutbacks in London's hospitals (which could cost another 20,000 jobs) and public transport (another 5,000 jobs gone) and widespread layoffs in local government, there is a real possibility of widespread resistance.

The main obstacle to this will be the trade union bureaucracy. Sunday's march technically marked the public launch of a TUC initiative under the title "Campaign for Jobs and Recovery".

With the demonstration safely behind them, this "campaign" consists of little more than lobbying and petitioning. Requests for a meeting with Major have been turned down flat. Typically, the TUC politely wrote back to ask him again.

A number of regional rallies based around dominant local industries are currently under consideration — something that would have happened anyway under the auspices of local activists.

Grassroots initiatives are springing up everywhere. Meetings called at short notice in towns and cities throughout Britain are attracting sizeable working class audiences; 250 in Liverpool and 500 in

Manchester.

### Support network formed

In an effort to provide some form of coordination, a National Miners' Support Network has been initiated by the Socialist Campaign Group of left wing Labour MPs, with official approval from the NUM and the Women Against Pit Closures movement which grew to prominence in the 1984-85 strike.

The network hopes to act as a resource centre for a delegate-based labour movement organization able to attract mainstream support. A national conference is to be arranged shortly. Radical journalists are planning a regular mass circulation bulletin in the network's name. Sympathizers in the music business are examining the possibilities for a major fundraising concert featuring top rock groups.

None of this in itself will be enough. Ultimately the labour movement will have to ready itself for major class battles. Within days of the initial announcement, a special NUM conference had authorized the leadership to hold a ballot on industrial action.

If Scargill had gone straight ahead, the result would have been a "no" vote, as even revolutionary militants in the NUM admitted at the time. Rank-and-file miners were utterly demoralized and the government had organized sufficient coal stocks to last for 12 months.

Even people who had played a leading role in the 1984-85 strike were ready to take redundancy pay-offs worth a year of two's wages at most.

Sensing the popular mood, Scargill took the correct tactical decision to hold back until the outcome of the political pressure was apparent. Events of the last few days have transformed the picture.

Miners now realize that other groups of workers would probably act on their own grievances if one section took the lead. Even UDM members may be about to ditch their moderation.

The crucial question is: What next? The far left's demand for a one-day general strike is gaining ground. But if the NUM decides to await the outcome of the review, which is unlikely to make any real concessions, there is a danger that momentum will be lost.

Meanwhile, the Maastricht vote is set for next week (November 4). Labour has suddenly reversed its previous position and is ready to vote against the government. Major has reportedly threatened to call a general election in a bid to bring rebel parliamentarians with slim majorities back into line.

Britain is suddenly a politically exciting place to be. ★

## "Let the workers speak"

**OVER** the past few weeks more than ten million Italian workers have been involved in nationwide actions. More than a million have taken part in anti-government demonstrations, aimed at the same time against trade union leaderships. The central slogan has been "let the workers be heard".

The unions found themselves forced to call a four-hour general strike on October 13.

**SERGIO D'AMIA — October 18, 1992**



ger have negotiating rights — these having been transferred to the confederations, the General Confederation of Labour (CGIL), the Confederation of Free Unions (CISL) and the Italian Labour Union (UIL). The latter can thus manage the national contracts in a way that is "compatible with the needs of the national economy" whatever the rank-and-file may think.

The factory councils have also lost their negotiating rights and a new system of election has been installed that undermines their initial characteristic as direct representatives of the workers on the principle that anyone can stand. This principle has been replaced by an electoral mechanism that ensures a majority for representatives of the union bureaucracy. Thus in the Alfa-Lancia plant at Arese, a factory of 12,000 workers near Milan, the UIL representative has been elected by a single vote — his own.

In many other cases, the council has not been re-elected for years or exists only on paper, its role taken by an executive made up of former workers who have not worked on the shop floor for a long time.

### Demand for elections

Demands have been raised calling for the election of enterprise committees (Commissioni interne) [the system of union delegates that existed before the creation of the factory councils in autumn 1969]. Despite sabotage by the union leadership, such an election has taken place at Alfa: more than 2,000 workers have taken part in electing representatives in the framework of a factory rank-and-file committee (Cobas Alfa).

In recent times, the suspicion of the unions has deepened even further, with the formation of independent branch

unions; the creation by militant groups within the confederations of rank-and-file committees following the example of the COBAS in teaching and railways; the breakaway by a section of the CISL to found a new engineering union (the United Federation of Engineering Workers — FLMU); and the appearance of parallel structures in the public sector.

In the CGIL more than 200,000 workers have supported the left opposition formation *Essere Sindacato* ["Being a Unionist"] led by Fausto Bertinotti. These workers see this opposition as the only way to give meaning to their continued membership of the CGIL.

While union membership in Italy is high, this is solely due to the automatic renewal of membership, the social functions undertaken by the unions and the "privileges" that derive from belonging to what are more and more evidently tools for class collaboration. The exposure of the reality of corruption made by Bertinotti made the bureaucrats indignant but was no surprise to workers.

When, on December 10, 1991, the leaderships of the CGIL-CISL-UIL signed with the employers' association, the Confindustria and the government an ambiguous agreement on the ending of the "existing" mechanism for wage indexation, rank-and-file opposition took several forms — there were assemblies and strikes supporting non-ratification of the agreement and appeals to the courts.

### Two years of social peace?

Then, when, on July 31, just before the factories closed for the annual holidays, CGIL leader Trentin and other union leaders signed a further agreement to end wage indexation altogether and end branch negotiations, as well as promising a two-year period of "social peace", discontent exploded. When the holidays were over, protests resumed.

The first demonstration, organized in Rome by the PRC on September 12, showed the willingness to struggle, bringing out 100,000. This demonstration acted as a detonator. At Alfa the Cobas and other delegates launched a strike that brought out half the workforce.

On September 17 the government, under pressure from the currency crisis and the enormous accumulated debt (about \$750bn) launched a plan to cut the deficit by about \$70m. In a series of decrees this plan attacked the main planks of the welfare state, proposing an end to wage and pension indexation; a rise in the retirement age to 65 for men and 60 for women; a cut in pensions via a new form of calculation; an end to free health care, except for hospital care; the abolition of tax rebates for wage earners;

**M**ANY have been surprised by the scope of the mobilizations; they have come after a period of defeats in which the working class seemed deeply weakened by unemployment and the closure of a number of factories. It seemed as if the working class would be unable to react to the even graver dangers that threatened it this autumn, involving hundreds of thousands of sackings in all sectors including in the working class strongholds of the north.

At a political and electoral level the malaise and loss of confidence showed up in the poor results for the Democratic Left Party (PDS — the majority of the former Communist Party) on April 5 and 6, 1992. The PDS's losses were not compensated for by the successes of the Communist Refoundation Party (PRC). On the other hand, we saw a breakthrough by supposedly "non-political" (but actually far right) lists such as the North League.

This paralysis has been deliberately sharpened by the unions themselves who, in order to regain control of the working class, have increasingly emptied the unitary branch federations and factory councils, used by the class in its quest for organizational independence and effective means of struggle, of all content. The branch federations no lon-

a new tax on housing and the abolition of rent controls; and the start of privatization of a series of essential services. Next year all these measures taken together will cost a working class family with two incomes at least four million lire (about \$3000).

This plan provoked a massive response. Even factories that had seen big defeats went on strike. Many students and sometimes even unorganized workers also joined the demonstrations. The confederations tried to halt the trend towards a general strike and, when that proved impossible, to cut it down to four hours and exclude the public sector. Attempts at provocation by the unions and police who deployed militarized stewards and sent disguised provocateurs into the crowds did not check the movement.

The government's manoeuvre has been increasingly exposed for what it is: a huge attack on the working class that does not tackle the root causes of the deficit. Top of the list here is tax avoidance (worth about \$180bn a year, with an annual rise of \$30bn), then there is the transfer of around 10% of the nation's wealth each year into the pockets of investors through high interest rates, and, finally, waste and corruption.

### Waste and corruption

In the waste and corruption category we can mention the ceremonies for the 500th Anniversary of the "Discovery" of the Americas which cost 7,000bn lire (\$5bn), the organization of the football World Cup (\$7.5bn), and a large proportion of the relief after the Irpinia earthquake (\$37bn). Furthermore, at the same time as the cuts package was announced a decree was adopted repaying enterprises for their payments into pension and social security funds (\$5bn).

The government's plan offers new profit making opportunities. The various reforms mean a transfer to the private sector of a potentially enormous amount of business (more than \$300bn for private health care and insurance alone).

The government is also aiming to cripple the workers' ability to resist and strengthen its own uncontrolled authority through the adoption of new electoral laws.

However, the ruling class that is asking for such sacrifices (from others) is without any credibility. It has been shaken by an unprecedented series of scandals, especially in the north. A hundred-odd figures from the government coalition parties, including colleagues of ministers, mayors of big cities and bosses of big enterprises, are in jail. **6** Eight deputies have been charged.

The union leaders have been trying to play down what is at stake. Forced by popular pressures to show some signs of life, they clearly want to restrict the scope of the movement to the most immediate questions, such as indexation and social security cuts. The CGIL's platform goes to great lengths to spell out means of controlling small scale tax evasion by shopkeepers and professionals, but the big culprits are left in peace. The unions — following the line of the government and press — are doing their utmost to break the link of solidarity between public and private sector workers, excluding the former from the general strike and accusing them of responsibility for inefficient services and exaggerating their privileges in such matters as pensions and retirement age.

Most workers now understand that the sabotage of demonstrations by the union leaderships is preventing them from building a movement that can defeat the government's plans. The impressive worker demonstrations of recent weeks and the clear willingness to act beyond the limits imposed by the union leaderships show the need for a new leadership.

That sector of the unions that aspires to play this role must break with the union bureaucracies. In order to be in a position to take initiatives and establish a good relationship with the rank-and-file, it must find ways of rebuilding union strength based on direct and democratic representation of the workers. For this to take place article 19 of the labour law which gives a monopoly on worker representation to the CGIL, CSIL and UIL, must be scrapped.

### Gulf between leaders and workers

Some parts of the left in the CGIL and *Essere Sindacato* have grasped the depth of the gulf between the union leaderships and the rank-and-file and the urgent need to break with the conservative union apparatchiks.

Many in *Essere Sindacato* and beyond have begun to raise the question of a new democratic unionism. The debate on this is underway in *Essere Sindacato* and the PRC. Many leaders are also aware of what is at stake.

The resistance comes from middle-ranking union officials (including some members of *Essere Sindacato*) who are accustomed to a routine of organizing rank-and-file mobilizations to put pressure on the leaderships but who have never considered proposing an alternative strategy and leadership. ★

## When "no" means "yes"

**AFTER the June 2, 1992, Danish referendum which rejected the Maastricht Treaty on European union the initiative passed into the hands of the political parties and the government. The grassroots campaigns came together for the "no" vote but were not united on an overall alternative or even on a political response to the situation created by the "no" victory.**

**ÅGE SKOVRIND — October 9, 1992**

**A**LTHOUGH the referendum result also to a certain extent reflected a rejection of the government as such, the position of the latter was never challenged. The Social Democracy called for new elections but did not make this a central issue.

In parliament, the "no" majority among the population was represented only by the Socialist People's Party (Socialistisk Folkeparti — SF) with 15 seats and the far right Progress Party (Fremkridtspartiet) with 12 seats. The government called for collaboration and unity of all political parties to reach a solution to the "extremely difficult situation Denmark is facing in the forthcoming negotiations with the EC", as the government put it.

The Progress Party responded by sticking quite firmly to its "no" position arguing, along narrowly nationalist lines, that there is nothing to negotiate, while the SF favoured a "positive" interpretation of the reasons for a "no" majority — an interpretation that should legitimize a new agreement between Denmark and the EC.

Outside parliament, the People's Movement Against EC split at its national conference in September. Three of the Movement's four members of the European Parliament, together with its best known spokespersons have gone over to

the newly created June Movement. Remaining in the People's Movement — a majority of the delegates — are many of the grassroots activists, several far left groups (mainly Stalinist) and hardcore nationalists.

However, neither the People's Movement nor any other of the "no" campaigns are really mass campaigns and relatively few activists are involved. This is very different to the situation in 1972 (and to that now emerging in Sweden and Norway).

There are several issues involved in the split, including personal disagreements and the movement's finances, but basically the division goes back some years and was evident up until the referendum. Top leaders of the People's Movement initiated "Denmark '92" which was renamed the "June Movement" after the referendum. Unlike the People's Movement, "Denmark '92" was not against the EC as

such. It only opposed the Maastricht union and was consciously formed as a broader movement. There is also a real change in orientation towards accepting the EC institutions and pursuing a "realistic" policy there.

Over the summer, everyone was awaiting the result of the French referendum. However, the general situation did not become clearer after that, with big problems for Maastricht appearing in Britain and the crisis of the European Monetary System.

The June Movement demanded to be included in the discussions with the political parties, but the government refused.

This Movement insisted that the Maastricht Treaty is dead and if there are any new agreements between the EC and Denmark, they must be open to countries now applying for EC membership. ★

## UPDATE

### Danish parties agree compromise on Maastricht

ON October 27, seven of the eight political parties represented in the Danish Parliament agreed on a national compromise about Denmark's future role in the European Community (EC). The agreement is now the mandate for the government in forthcoming negotiations with the other EC countries.

According to the agreement, Denmark will not participate in the parts of the Maastricht accords concerning 1) common defence policy 2) the third phase of the economic union, i.e. common currency and a European central bank, 3) European citizenship and 4) common police and asylum policy.

Now the two big questions are: can the agreement be turned into a concrete proposal by negotiations with the other EC countries? and, would such a proposal be accepted in the next referendum set for 1993?

Both are quite possible. The compromise may look like a rejection of the main ideas behind the Maastricht accords, but it should be remembered that Denmark had, even before the June 2 referendum, expressed reservations about participation in the (military) West European Union and about the third phase of the economic union.

In short, the compromise can be characterized as a formula which can avoid a break with the EC as such but leave Denmark back in the last wagon — at least for the time being. European integration will continue in other areas, such as economic policy (second phase of economic union); indeed, the Danish compromise underlines the single market.

In parliament only the rightwing Progress Party is against the compromise, standing firmly on the "no", but so far the party has not criticized the details.

Of particular importance is the position of the left social democratic Socialist Peoples Party (SF) which recommended a "no" on June 2. Now it is behind the national compromise, which, indeed, was drawn up by SF, the Social Democracy and the Liberals and then accepted by the government.

Among other things this is a sign of new parliamentary alliances in Danish politics and probably of the coming of a new Social Democrat-led government quite soon. SF's position in negotiations over the compromise was determined by its hopes for influence on, or even participation in, such a government. *Åge Skovrind — October 29, 1992* ★

# Rail privatization or a rational transport policy?

**PRIVATIZATION of the railways — planned in many European countries — will bring profits for some but losses for many more. German Marxist economist Winfried Wolf who has written many books on transport questions looks at the reality behind the claims made by those promoting the privatization of rail in his country.**

**WINFRIED WOLF\***

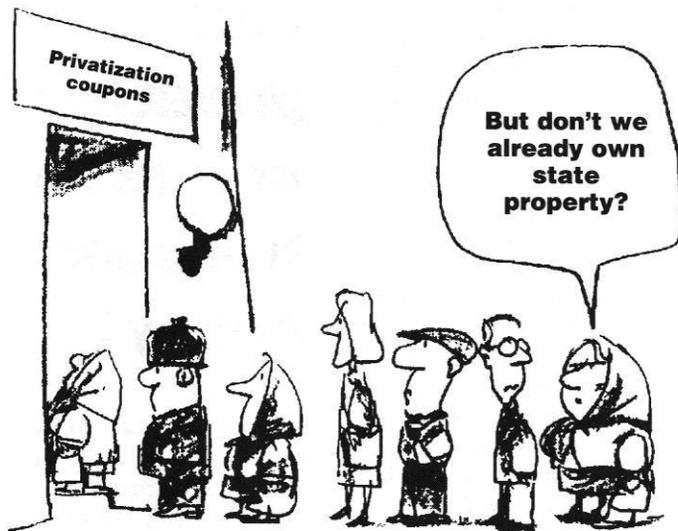
IN JULY 1992, the German government took a crucial decision for the future of German railways. On January 1, 1994, the two railway companies — the Deutsche Reisenbahn (DR) from the former German Democratic Republic (GDR — East Germany) and the Deutsche Bundesbahn (DB) from the former West Germany will be transferred to a newly created limited company, the Deutsche Eisenbahn Aktiengesellschaft (DEAG).

For an initial period all shares in DEAG will be state-owned but the government is intending to sell off the profitable parts to the private sector. Precedents both from Germany and elsewhere such as the two-step privatization of the Japanese railways in 1987 and 1991, the proposed privatization of British Rail or the dismemberment of the German postal service, show where things are heading.

For the moment, however, the details have not been spelt out. There are two reasons for this:

● Firstly, it is extremely difficult to organize the privatization of railways for simple material reasons — for example the difficulty of separating the

\* This article is translated from the French version which appeared in the Swiss revolutionary Marxist journal *La Brèche* in its October 2, 1992 issue.



tracks from the rolling stock. The privatization of Japan National Railways was relatively simply because at the time car ownership was quite low in Japan, making rail a more profitable industry than in Europe or North America. Even so, the privatization cost the Japanese taxpayer some tens of billions in US dollar terms.

● Secondly, public opinion, railworkers and clients have to be kept in the dark as to the catastrophic consequences of rail privatization. The formation of DEAG is presented as a move in the interests of rail, favouring a more efficient and ecologically acceptable rail system.

**Sympathy for the taxpayer**

However, it is money that is the key. German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, the transport minister Günther Krause and the head of DR and DB, Heinz Dürr repeatedly insist that this reform will be to the taxpayers' benefit. This is, nonetheless, the opposite of the truth. The reform will mean:

- The creation of a railway for the privileged.
- The loss of between 150,000 and 200,000 jobs.
- A massive rise in costs for taxpayers and clients.

As usual the plan is to "privatize the profits and socialize the losses" as Gerfried Scholtz, a leader of the Herman GDBA railway unions has put it. This union has always been thought of as inclined to cooperation with management.

Another rail union, the GdED, which has always been opposed to privatization at the level of its paper resolutions, seems to have done an about turn over the past year at least as far as its leaders are concerned, restricting itself to picking at the details of the privatization

plan.

The same variants are found amongst the Greens and associations concerned with transport issues. There has thus far been little fundamental criticism of privatization as such. However a serious defence of the environment and human values requires a rejection of the logic of the market and its destructive tendencies as is perfectly illustrated by the rail privatization project.

"State economics in general and in the railways in particular are inefficient and costly" claim Kohl, Krause and Dürr. They call for the most thorough and rapid "orientation according to enterprise economics".

In fact, when social activities are entrusted to the private sector there are always serious disadvantages for the community. For example, in olden days taxes and tolls were collected by private entrepreneurs; in the Middle Ages private armies carried on private wars on the current Yugoslav model, private schools catered only for the privileged few and water privatization in Britain has led to further deterioration of the quality of water.

**General satisfaction**

It became obvious a long time ago that, even from a bourgeois point of view, if certain services were to be run to general satisfaction, they would have to be run according to other criteria than that of short term profit maximization. This is the case for transport in general and railways in particular.

Until the end of the last century most railways were privately owned. They were nationalized throughout the world insofar as it became necessary to maintain comprehensive national networks rather than a few profitable lines.

Where railways remained in private hands, as in the United States, they

have almost disappeared. Where the state has taken a close interest, as in France or Switzerland, they are still in excellent health. Where they have been recently privatized, as in Japan, there has been a massive shutdown of lines and cuts in jobs, a decline in safety and a sharp rise in the price of tickets.

The privatization of bus services in Britain has had the same consequences. In the three years since the sell off there has been no new investment. The average age of the vehicles has risen exactly parallel to the length of time since privatization — to 12 years. Schedules have been cut back and ticket prices raised. Britain's transport planners tremble at the prospect of 1993 when London's still relatively efficient public transport is to be privatized.

"The DR and DB are bottomless pits of subsidies" say Messrs. Kohl, Krause and Dürr. And indeed the official deficit of the two companies for 1992 will be about DM6bn. But an essential aspect of the rail deficit is overlooked. Four fifths of it is interest payments of a DM55bn debt accrued over 45 years. But this debt is the result of a transport policy that has favoured and subsidized road transport for decades. At the same time the railways have had to pay normal interest rates. This is thus not a railway debt but a state debt. If it was considered as such and put to one side, the companies annual deficit, despite policies favouring roads, would be DM1.5bn.

**Ecological content**

A transport policy with the slightest ecological content would approach the deficit differently. For example a rise in petrol tax of a mere DM0.20 would raise an additional DM8bn in income. Such a sum used effectively for public transport and rail would not only wipe out the debt but would permit significant modernization and development.

"The DEAG will be freed of debt and this will open new perspectives for rail in Germany", we are told. Ah hah! Suddenly the debt ceases to be a problem.

Unfortunately there is debt relief and debt relief. Supporters of public rail services have called for debt relief so that the rail companies can get on with fulfilling their task of providing transport and services to the community and so that the share of rail in the total volume of transport can be increased. For Kohl and co. the aim of debt relief is to remove a disincentive to private investors interested in buying into DEAG.

Privatization means concentrating on

## European railworkers take joint action

EUROPE's first ever day of joint union action, called for October 27, 1992, by 26 unions from European Community countries to protest against plans for rail privatization, was widely supported by railworkers.

"Railworkers will stop the trains so that passengers can still catch them in the future" said the appeal for the action. In France, where the movement was supported by all the unions, the railworkers went beyond the one-hour stoppage agreed on, with interruptions of services throughout the day. The one-hour halt was widely observed and there was a big demonstration outside the offices of the French SNCF state rail company. In Belgium and Greece no trains ran between 11am and midday while there were many interruptions of services in Italy and Spain. In Portugal, where only one of the union confederations, the CGTB, supported this initiative, some 20,000 workers stopped work.

In Germany where the right to strike is limited to economic demands, the railworkers distributed leaflets and unfurled banners; the same was true in Britain where solidarity strikes are prohibited.

Throughout Europe the notion of profitability is replacing that of public service, following the European directive of June 20, 1991, which calls for the "purification of the financial structure of rail companies".

In line with this EC policy, British Rail will be split into two companies from 1994 onwards, a public company entrusted with managing the tracks and another dealing with passenger and freight traffic, which is destined for privatization. Germany is not far behind (see surrounding article); here the rail companies will be divided three ways, one for passengers, another for freight and the third for track.

In Italy the Necci plan envisages two companies, one, to go private in 1995, will get the profitable parts of the network and the other, to remain in state hands, will inherit all the debts and difficulties.

In France the SNCF has already got rid of tens of thousands of jobs and imposed a decline in working conditions and safety and there is a plan to split the company up on the same lines and with the same aims as elsewhere.

This is the sort of "convergence" envisaged in the Maastricht Treaty on European union; hopefully the workers' day of action will usher in a process of "counter-convergence" to defend the interests of railworkers and users against the plans embodied in the Treaty. — **Helene Viken** ★

profitable fields and shunning the loss-making. The latter will be shut down or given to regions and municipalities. The result of privatization will be a reduced rail service and an increase in individual transport. The demand for debt relief for rail has been rejected for decades; now, in a perspective of privatization, it has suddenly become acceptable.

"There is no reason to treat railway workers like protected species" exclaim the privatisers. In fact between 1980 and 1991 the DB got rid of 120,000 workers which means that now railworkers work some six million hours of non-paid overtime.

At regional and local level schedules have been repeatedly cut back, safety norms lowered, and services such as baggage handling allowed to deteriorate. However now the time has come for another massive cut in staffing levels. On July 14 the Frankfurter Rundschau announced that "a third of the 426,000 staff are to go in the next eight years".

You often hear people say that things cannot go on as they are on the rail-

ways and for that reason we have to support the reform. But this is not true from a financial point of view. The taxpayer is not going to pay less. Indeed according to some estimates costs may rise sharply between now and the year 2000.

The privatization plans take no account of the costs of sharp cutbacks in personnel. The reform will mean about 150,000 job losses in rail and dependent industries. That is, 150,000 more unemployed people on top of the three million officially recorded in July 1992. This means a further DM4.5bn in unemployment benefit and other forms of welfare. This is getting close to annual deficit of the railways. On top of this are the social costs of a further decline in rail and increases in individual car transport — for example the "costs" that accompany the annual carnage on the roads (with 11,248 dead and 503,636 injured in 1991).

### Carnage on roads

These days it is easier to predict the

figure for road deaths than for the gross national product. In the next ten years around 100,000 people will be killed on German roads and a million seriously wounded. It is telling that these costs, both human and material, which are specific to road transport and are several times higher per kilometre travelled than for other forms of transport, never appear in the calculations of the people brandishing the red pencil over the lack of profitability of the railways.

"The new transport policy gives priority to rail" according to Kohl, Krause and Dürr. The grand German transport plan (GVWP) foresees an overall growth in traffic and in road traffic in particular. The GVWP optimistically predicts by the year 2010:

- A growth in individual car traffic of 30%;

- Road goods transport growth of 95%;

- Internal air traffic growth of 140%.

At best, rail will keep its share of the total, at least for carrying people. Its share of goods transport will certainly fall sharply.

These are official government forecasts, which have always in the past been marked by a rosy view of road transport. A recent forecast from the Shell petrol company has predicted a rise in the number of individual cars of 30% by the year 2000 — half the time predicted by the GVWP. Such predictions do not include the impact of massive road construction.

*Der Spiegel* has written that "transport minister Krause aims to cover the Federal Republic with more than 11,000 kms of road, mostly in the West". But there is a rule that whoever sows the road reaps the traffic. New roads, or indeed new canals such as the new Rhine-Main-Danube canal will take traffic away from rail.

### Emission of pollutants

What is certain is that the emission of pollutants by road traffic will continue to grow. The Federal Environment Office has already noted that even the GVWP figures mean that "the promised reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> transmissions cannot be implemented".

"The GVWP offers the new [East German] regions a modern transport policy". In fact it will be the citizens of the ex-GDR who will bear the heaviest cost for these mistaken policies. Currently an orgy of road and concrete construction is underway in the east, facilitated by laws favouring investment and undermining the modest efforts in defence of the environment. Furthermore, the biggest job losses will be in

the former East German rail company and dependent industries, while line closures will have their biggest effects there.

"We are finally doing something for the railways". In fact, the application of an exclusively profit-based policy must lead to massive cutbacks. These cutbacks will hit those already disadvantaged who do not have a car, but who similarly cannot pay for the privilege of travelling on a profitable luxury rail service aimed at the elite to which the likes of Kohl, Krause and Dürr belong.

Of course it would be foolish to deny that the existing service is ideal. But privatization is not a solution to the real problems; these will be compounded and new ones added.

### **A sane transport policy**

A sane transport policy would involve:

- A policy of the "shortest route"; the distance between housing, workplaces, and shopping and leisure centres should be drastically reduced;

- A big campaign to promote walking and cycling;

- Firm priority for public transport;

- Modernization and development of the European rail network instead of giving priority to a few high speed lines at the expense of the rest;

- No privatization;

- Debt relief for the railways;

- Abandonment of megalomaniac projects such as the Hamburg-Berlin magnetic high speed train and a shift of the money saved toward the broader objectives mentioned above;

- A rise in petrol prices through a tax increase to provide finance for (1) the modernization of the railways and public transport in general and (2) the acceleration of rail traffic throughout the network through interlocking of schedules;

- Restrictions on truck traffic; a ban on night driving; development of road-rail combinations so that long distance goods traffic goes by rail with only the final distribution by road; generalization of road-rail containers.

Such a policy would require new democratic structures. Transport policy should be the object of a wide public debate in which an ecological and democratic point of view could be put forward.

Rail should be effectively under the control of its users. Switzerland's railway network has largely survived owing to the influence of the country's cantons and communities. ★

## **European health and safety campaign**

**EACH year, 8,000 workers in the European Community (EC) countries die because of work-related injuries. Around 10 million suffer from work-related illnesses. This is according to official statistics — experience indicates the real figure is much higher and no country reports all cases.**

**ANNE RICHTER**

**I**N this situation the launching of a European network for improved working conditions, supported by worker activists, unions and professionals, is to be welcomed. The network was initiated by 250 European work environment activists in Copenhagen in 1990. In September 1992 the Network organized a conference in Sheffield, Britain in which 400 safety representatives, union activists and environmental advisers took part from 11 EC and non-EC countries, plus a few representatives from the USA, Japan and India.

The conference focussed on the extremely bad working conditions facing immigrant and ethnic minorities. Besides the fact that this is the group that has been hit hardest by unemployment, they also have the hardest and most dangerous jobs.

Surveys in a number of European countries show that bad health related to work is more than ten times as common among immigrant and ethnic minorities. The same is true of the USA and Japan.

Speakers at the conference also documented how, for the instance, the British government is avoiding and postponing the implementation of EC directives. The Danes informed their colleagues that gains in that country concerning organic solvents are under attack from the EC. Experiences were shared about how the introduction of new technology, increasing shiftwork, flexible worktime, seven-day shifts and increased contracting out are making union activity more difficult.

The conference supported a Danish initiative for an all-European campaign to substitute organic solvents. It is recognized that these substances are harmful to the brain, but this danger is not recognized either by the EC or the national governments.

Several sub-networks were set up, for instance on organic solvents and on work with computer screens. The next conference on the working environment is set for 1994, to take place either in the Netherlands or Italy.

At the previous conference in Copenhagen, a draft Charter on Health and Safety was submitted for discussion. The Sheffield conference adopted a detailed charter.

### **Challenging the transnationals**

The preamble to the charter explains that:

"Transnational and national companies have achieved their aim for a borderless Europe for the movement of capital. We believe that employers and their organizations will campaign for increased productivity, unrestricted access to contract labour and will marginalize the impact of safety and health legislation to improve competitiveness in the market places of Europe".

The charter put forward a series of demands aimed at strengthening the ability of workers to challenge this trend through legislation placing responsibility for all aspects of health and safety on employers, and the right of workers to organize and obtain adequate information.

Point 18 of the charter underlines "the recognition that black, ethnic minority and migrant workers are frequently exposed to a greater extent than indigenous white workers, and that consequently, trade unions, government agencies, employers and other official bodies take whatever remedial action is necessary, including the translation of information into the appropriate languages".

Point 19, meanwhile, demands that "homeworkers in Europe have specific legal protection from hazards at work, that employers and suppliers of work be responsible for equipment and materials and any activities using substances harmful to the health of such workers and their families are banned".

For more information on the European Network for a Better Work Environment, or to make contact with participants in a specific country, write to:

**Aktionsgruppen Arbejdere Akademikere, International Gruppe, Valby Laggade 55, Denmark. ★**

Presidential elections:

# The economy sets the agenda



**THIS year's presidential campaign has been a typical exercise in US-style bourgeois politics. The parameters of the public debate were set as usual by the needs of the bourgeoisie and consequently, the interests of the working class and its allies were not directly part of the public debate in a country where no mass party based on the labor movement yet exists. Nevertheless, many of the growing contradictions of US society as well as changes in the political landscape did find a distorted reflection in the campaign.**

**KEITH MANN — October 28, 1992**

**T**HE first of these has been an unmistakable rejection by broad layers of the US population of politics as usual. This sentiment expressed itself in at least two ways. The first was the broad appeal of candidates who presented themselves as political outsiders. Several candidates struck a responsive chord with the US electorate on this theme. The best known was Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot, although rightwing newspaper columnist Pat Buchanan caused considerable anxiety in the Bush camp when he challenged Bush for the Republican nomination last winter and spring.

Though Perot's level of support after he re-joined the race in September has been significantly lower than that which he enjoyed shortly before withdrawing from the race last summer, the volatility of the US electorate — a function of the lack of real enthusiasm for either Bush or his Democratic challenger Bill Clinton and a disgust with an unresponsive political system — cast a measure of uncertainty over the actual outcome of the election for much of the latter stages of the campaign. In fact, in the last week of the campaign, Perot's standing in the polls jumped from 11 to 19%. Voter dissatisfaction is also expressed by the likelihood of the largest turnover since World War II in the congress-

sional elections which take place at the same time.

The Perot campaign, like the more ephemeral effort of Buchanan before him, benefitted from the failure of the Democrats and Republicans to offer solutions to a deep economic crisis and the glaring social inequalities that were highlighted by the recent events in Los Angeles. They also reflected, in a distorted way, the lack of an independent political voice for US workers and the oppressed. Buchanan advanced the type of reactionary and openly racist propositions that mainstream capitalist politicians have so far not considered necessary or possible. But even though rightwing conservative political commentators felt obliged to take their distance from Buchanan, his campaign filled a political space to the right of the Republican party that was created by the rightward movement of both the Democrats and Republicans.

The Perot campaign on the other hand, reflects the crisis of the political system itself. Perot's carefully cultivated image as an "outsider" struck a responsive chord in a year where dissatisfaction with the two parties and their candidates is greater than usual. He appeals to the disgust that wide layers of the US population feel towards corruption and politics as usual.

## Appeal of "outsiders"

This appeal to voters' distrust of professional politicians by candidates posing as "Washington outsiders" has been a theme of several recent successful presidential campaigns such as that of Jimmy Carter in 1976 and Ronald Reagan in 1980. That disgust is apparently even sharper this year, especially among young people of whom only one in five bothered to vote in local elections in 1990. A recent poll conducted by the Washington Post/ABC news revealed that 70% of young people in the U.S. between the ages of 18-24 had contempt for politics and politicians, and felt that the best years of their country were behind them.

Perot is, in fact, really not that much of a stranger to the halls of power. Much of his vast wealth was obtained through government contracts and he had privileged access to most recent Republican presidents and their advisors including Nixon, Reagan and for a time Bush.

One of the more interesting aspects of the Perot campaign before he withdrew last July was its lack of a clear program and set of positions on a number of issues. This was a striking indication that his appeal owed more to a lack of enthusiasm with Clinton and Bush and the lack of a clear alternative that addresses the aspirations of workers, youth and the oppressed, than actual support for Perot or his vague program.

## Decreasing the debt

While his emphasis on his plans to decrease the huge US public debt overshadowed nearly anything else he had to say after he resurrected his candidacy in September, his propositions on a range of questions that he put forward earlier this year revealed much about him as an individual as well as the crisis of bourgeois politics in the US today. Taken together, his vague proposals amount to an assortment of traditional rightwing themes mixed with populist appeals.

Perot earned his rightwing credentials long ago when he took up the cause of missing POWs supposedly still held captive in Vietnam, an issue dear to right wing veterans and anti-communists. His call for increased law and order measures, support for the death penalty, tougher drug laws and anti-gay prejudice places him in the right wing consensus shared by all of the currents in the Republican party as well as by many Democrats. In this sense, Perot catered to the same reactionary white sentiments as Buchanan. In fact, Perot has been particularly popular amongst middle class, white voters.

His penchant for investigating business and political opponents including Bush himself, and even his own children, suggests that a Perot presidency would bolster the already dangerous assault on civil liberties that the courts and the Democrats and Republicans have launched. As a Bush campaign official — not the type of people who have been the greatest defenders of civil liberties — remarked last summer, “what would he do if he had the FBI and the IRS (the Internal Revenue Service) and the CIA? The country does not need big brother as president.” This along with his claim that he can clean up crime and corruption with methods that “won’t be pretty”, conjure up visions of an Orwellian nightmare run by a strongman unconcerned with legal or constitutional niceties. Likewise with his proposals for “electronic town hall meetings” in which voters would be able to vote on various issues by pressing buttons attached to their TV sets. Though his supporters point to this as proof of Perot’s democratic proclivities, they in fact share more in common with the type of plebiscites that rightwing dictators like Hitler and Mussolini as well as “democratic” strong men like De Gaulle were so fond of.

### Perot; the modern rightwinger?

But unlike Buchanan, Perot offered only some of the classic rightwing proposals and racist appeals that Buchanan put forward, nor did he represent the more contemporary version of rightwing politics and economic policy seen in the Reagan-Bush administrations or the Thatcher or Kohl governments. For example, Perot does not champion reduced government intervention in the economy. On the contrary, he favors increased government

participation in managing the economy in general and government involvement in the long-range planning with major corporations in particular. He promises to cut taxes and reduce the mammoth US budget — a goal espoused by Reagan who miserably failed to do either. His populist approach is seen by his proposals for tax breaks and aid to small businessmen and



his call for the rich to forego medicare payments and social security benefits. His support for abortion rights is a reflection of both his populism and maverick individualism.

An important factor in his chances of actually being elected is whether or not influential sectors of the US capitalist class and their political representatives were prepared to support a Perot candidacy. Though there is widespread dissatisfaction in both parties with Clinton and Bush, the crisis of US politics and society is not yet deep enough for the US bourgeoisie to turn to an unknown quantity like Perot especially since he doesn't have a party behind him that would be susceptible to direct pressure from any wing of the bourgeoisie.

### Disgust with politics

The second manifestation of public disgust with politics as usual was the clear rejection of any candidate that did not at least attempt to focus on concrete issues rather than the ridiculous side shows that often dominate US politics. In this sense this year's campaign offers several contrasts with the 1988 campaign. The election that year was even by US standards strikingly devoid of almost any substance that reflected even in a distorted way the country's pressing problems. The Bush campaign successfully made the issue of the “liberal” prison policies of the Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis during his term as Governor of Massachusetts — in reality a thinly disguised appeal

to white racist sentiments — the center of his successful campaign.

In the first elections held in decades where the spectre of a foreign threat could not be used to divert attention from the everyday problems that working people face, it has proved considerably more difficult to campaign on such “non-issues”. George Bush who enjoyed a 91% approval rate in opinion polls following the Gulf War has seen his popularity plummet as neither he nor his party has been able to offer solutions to the country's deep economic crisis. The crisis-ridden US economy has thrust itself to the center of the campaign and Bush's attempt to divert attention to Clinton's draft record and other questions concerning the Democrat's personal integrity has rebounded against him. The reactionary anti-woman, anti-gay campaign around “family values” launched by the Republicans after the Los Angeles uprising was likewise quietly shelved when it failed to strike a responsive chord. As one political scientist put it, it has been difficult “to do pure ideology” this year.

Clearly, many working and middle class Americans were looking for concrete solutions to their pressing material problems. In fact, one of the big contrasts between Perot's campaign after he re-entered the race and his campaign earlier in the year, was that he was forced to offer a much more detailed economic program.

### Hunger for real answers

Even though none of the three candidates offered any economic proposals that corresponded in any way to the interests of the country's wage earning majority, the fact that all three were forced to focus on the economy can be considered as a distorted manifestation of the potential of the US working class and its allies to demand that its interests be addressed in the public arena. The hunger for actual solutions to real problems also explains why the dry policy books issued by Perot and Clinton and Gore were near the top of the best-seller lists.

Another new trend in US politics that has been highlighted by this year's election is the rightward movement of the Democratic Party. For some time the Democrats have sought to rid themselves of the reputation of being beholden to “special interests”, that is, being friendly to the interests of the labor movement and its allies. Clinton and his running mate Al Gore represent a new breed of “moderate Democrats” who are breaking with the party's image as proponents of costly

social programs. Their campaign ads stress that they are a "different" type of Democrat who support welfare reforms and the death penalty.

While appealing to the labor movement with the Democrat's usual vague promises, they have made a concerted appeal to US business. Though most industrial leaders continue to give lukewarm support to Bush as the Republican candidate, one of the more interesting features of this year's campaign is the fairly successful effort of Clinton to court the support of wealthy industrialists. In fact, not since Lyndon Johnson's appeal to the upper reaches of the Texas oil industry and other captains of industry in the 1964 presidential elections has a Democrat so successfully won over traditional Republican industrialists and CEOs (chief executive officers). For example, the 210 member National Coalition for Advanced Manufacturing which includes such huge corporations as Johnson and Johnson and IBM, recently wrote to Clinton to commend him for his pro-business policies.

In doing so, they ranked him more friendly to their concerns than George Bush. Robert Johnson, the chairman of Western Digital Corporation and a staunch Republican remarked after a discussion with Clinton that "I realized that I wasn't talking with a traditional Democrat." Even some in the defense industry support Clinton in spite of his calls for cuts in military spending. They do so because he has signalled his readiness to have government step in and find new markets for the arms industry.

It also appears that for the first time since 1964, the Democratic candidate will receive more newspaper endorsements than his Republican opponent, including such conservative newspapers as the *Washington Post*.

### The twilight of Reaganomics

It is very possible that this year's presidential election has signalled the end of the hegemony of the Reagan-style free-market, supply-side economics that was the creed of the Republican party and much of the US bourgeoisie throughout the 1980s. The failure of Bush and his advisors to offer an economic program that went beyond tax cuts for the rich and minimum government regulation explains the declining confidence of many capitalists in Bush and the Republicans as much as his bland and undynamic character. Though Clinton has made it clear that he rejects the liberal, mildly

reformist policies that used to define the Democratic party, he remains committed to government intervention into the economy.

The sympathy that many capitalists now appear to have for Clinton and his proposals to spend 200 billion dollars on education, training and infrastructure in the next four years may represent the beginning of what could be a significant shift in the economic philosophy of the US bourgeoisie. In fact, this is how the *Wall Street Journal* explained the relative success of Clinton in garnering support from big capital: in its September 25-26 Europe edition it wrote that "many high-ranking businessmen have decided that the Democrats and their vision of a more activist government aren't necessarily bad for American business."

### Progressive initiatives

Another noteworthy aspect of this year's presidential campaign has been the evolution of the three progressive independent political initiatives that have over the last period been animated by forces that have called on workers and oppressed peoples in the US to break with the two parties of US capital. The three initiatives are the Labor Party Advocates, the 21st Century Party and the Campaign for a New Tomorrow which is presenting veteran Black activist Ron Daniels for president.

The 21st Century Party was formally launched at a convention held in Washington, DC on August 29-30, 1992. This convention was the culmination of an effort begun following the 1989 convention of the National Organization for Women (NOW).

Its program, some of which is called an Expanded Bill of Rights is a program of radical reforms from a primarily, though not exclusively, feminist point of view. The most important aspect of the founding of this party regardless of its weaknesses and shortcomings is that as it is based on a mass progressive social movement — the women's movement — it will have the means to popularize the idea of indepen-

dent political action that has also been advanced by the LPA and the Ron Daniels campaign.

The Daniels campaign organized a National Progressive People's Convention that was held last August. A little over 300 militants from a variety of social movements attended. The goals of the conference were quite modest: establish regular contact between various progressive social movements. Though the convention did not formally endorse Daniels for president, important contacts between social movements and fighters for independent political action were made which will certainly stimulate discussion in these movements.

The Labor Party Advocates initiative launched by Tony Mazzocchi, an official of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union continues to be relatively isolated by the reformist labor bureaucracy which continues to support the Democratic Party and has endorsed Clinton. Nevertheless, Mazzocchi is confident that the goal of winning 100,000 workers to the idea of a labor party can be met by the end of 1993. He points to opinion polls that show that 55% of US trade unionists believe it is time for a labor party. When this is done, the LPA plans on formally launching a Labor Party.

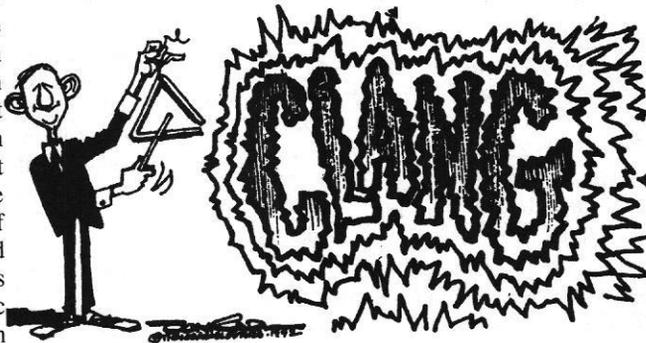
### Contradictory pressures

As election day approaches, some leading members of each of these three formations have offered support to the Democrats — in some cases quite openly. This has been made easier by a certain ambiguity concerning the permissible limits of support to "friendly" capitalist politicians on the part of some of the leaders of these organizations. This is usually referred to as the "in-out" strategy vis-a-vis the Democrats.

While this is certainly a major weakness of these initiatives — one that will undermine their entire projects if not rectified — the fact that none of them have been able to use the arguments of "realism" and "lesser-evilism" in order to officially endorse Clinton on behalf of their organizations, attests to the force that the sentiment in favor of a clear break with the Democrats has gained.

This is particularly significant in the case of the 21st Century Party at a time when abortion rights are under serious attack and Bush calls for outlawing abortion, while Clinton defends this right.

More generally, it can be said that at a time when little has been seen of a generalized working class fight back, the modest support that all three of these initiatives has gained is impressive indeed. ★



# Referendum results prolong instability

**THE victory of the "no" side in the October 26 cross-country referendum on the constitution is a major defeat for the Canadian Establishment.**

**Business leaders, the three main political parties, and a large majority of English-Canadian academic, media and political elites had supported the package of constitutional changes in the hope that its passage would put an end to the political instability that has plagued the country over the past two years.**

RAGHU KRISHNAN — October 29, 1992

**T**HE package of constitutional offers (see box) was rejected by a convincing majority of voters in the western provinces and the majority French-speaking province of Québec. It barely scraped by in the wealthiest and most populous province, Ontario, and was only accepted by a clear majority in three of the four small Atlantic coast provinces and one of the two sparsely populated northern territories.

The Progressive Conservative (Tory) government of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney called the referendum in early September, after it had reached agreement with Canada's ten provincial leaders and one delegate each for Native Indian peoples living on reservations, those living off reservations, Inuit ("Eskimo") peoples and Métis (mixed aboriginal-European) peoples. The final five-day meeting which produced the constitutional offers took place in Charlottetown, capital city of the Atlantic coast province of Prince Edward Island.

The over-riding consideration in Charlottetown for the government and its provincial counterparts was the need to head off the Québec-only referendum on sovereignty that was to have taken place on October 26 according to legislation adopted by Québec's

National Assembly in the fall of 1990 after the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, the previous attempt to bring Québec back into the constitutional fold.

On this matter, at least, federal and provincial leaders speak with one voice — against the right of the Québécois, who make up about 25% of the total population, to freely decide their own political future; and for the preservation of a "united Canada" at all costs.

Indeed, the referendum was meant to be the culminating point of a vast cross-country federalist counter-offensive whose primary target has been "Québec separatists", whom Mulroney dubbed "the enemies of Canada".

This counter-offensive included a blitz of government-financed Canadian unity propaganda in the media and a mix of threats and dire forecasts regarding the economic consequences for both English-Canada and Québec in the event of Québec independence. The United States government even chimed in with its announcement that an independent Québec would not be automatically admitted into the exclusive club of the recently concluded North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).<sup>1</sup>

There has even been serious talk of the eventual need for military intervention against

a sovereign Québec, whose mission would include staking out majority English-speaking regions of the province as Canadian territory.

The ground work for the referendum was finally set by hurriedly passed legislation late in the summer, in the weeks preceding Charlottetown. This legislation, which spelled out the rules for the referendum outside Québec<sup>2</sup>, was noteworthy for its total absence of spending limits — clearly, the Tories wanted to ensure that its wealthy friends' support would not be hindered.

In Québec meanwhile, the staunchly anti-independence provincial head, Robert Bourassa, set about containing popular support for sovereignty — felt even inside his own Liberal Party. At first he played to nationalist sentiments (temporarily suspending all public talks with other governments, calling the referendum on sovereignty) but then postponed the referendum by a year, and finally agreed to replace it altogether with the pan-Canada referendum on the Charlottetown offers, which Québec had virtually no role in crafting.

However, it was clear that any attempt to close this particularly unstable chapter of Canadian political history would be fraught with difficulties.

First and foremost, because the national aspirations of the majority of Québécois have proven to be far more resilient than the Canadian Establishment had bargained for.

## Québécois support sovereignty

Polls conducted over the last two years have shown consistent majority support in Québec for "sovereignty", which some respondents define as outright independence and others see as a very high degree of autonomy within a radically overhauled Canadian Confederation. The three major union federations in Québec have taken pro-independence positions, and the main women's and student organizations have declared themselves in favour of sovereignty.

While 56% of Québécois voted "no", early analysis shows the figure was much higher in the francophone population, at 65% — while 85% of Québec's anglophones are said to have voted "yes".

The results are a big blow for Premier Bourassa and his Québec Liberal Party, though by no means fatal. Even while showing majority rejection of the Charlottetown Accord, polls taken during the referendum campaign showed the Liberals ahead of the Parti Québécois (PQ) by a few points. Provincial elections are to be held by 1994; Bourassa has confidently announced that he will make opposition to sovereignty the major issue of that campaign.

Indeed, in spite of the referendum setback,

## Highlights of the Charlottetown Accord

### ● Québec

Québec would be granted a guaranteed 25% representation in the federal parliament and three of nine Supreme Court judges. It would be officially recognized as a "distinct society" within Canada "which includes a French-speaking majority, a unique culture and a civil law tradition."

### ● Aboriginal peoples

The aboriginal peoples right to "self-government" would be entrenched in the constitution, establishing a third level of government similar to that of municipal administrations. The provisions for this new level of government would be negotiated with the different levels of government. If no agreement is reached after five years, it would be settled by the Supreme Court. No aboriginal law could be inconsistent with federal or provincial laws "that are essential to the peace, order and good government of Canada."

### ● The Senate

The Senate would become an elected body, with an equal number of senators for each province, regardless of size. Its powers in relation to the parliament would be strengthened, especially in questions regarding the taxation of natural resources and electrical energy, and language. ★

1. A September 1992 Gallup poll showed opposition to NAFTA at 60%, up from the April level of 51%. The deal remains to be approved by parliament; the Tories will try and ram this through before calling an election.

2. In Québec, the referendum was conducted under its own, fairer legislation.

Bourassa enjoys considerable room for manoeuvre. The PQ, led by Jacques Parizeau, which headed up the official "no" camp in the referendum campaign in Québec, hopes to ride the nationalist wave into power, without for all that presenting any clear plan or strategy for Québec's secession from the Confederation. Parizeau has declared the PQ's top priority to be the economy — which, given his party's abandonment of even its 1970s-era social democratic pretensions, is no cause for celebration.

Moreover, the traditionally militant Québec labour movement is passing through one of its quietest periods, a phenomenon not unrelated to the union bureaucracy's continued attachment to the PQ.

Of course, the Québécois people's national aspirations are not the only "problem" the Canadian Establishment has to contend with.

There is also that of growing radicalization among Canada's aboriginal peoples, particularly since the summer of 1990 standoff in Oka, Québec between armed members of the Mohawk Native Indian nation on one side and the Canadian Army and Québec provincial police on the other.

Some mainstream commentators have described the "no" victory as a terrible setback for Canada's aboriginal peoples. Indeed, Ovide Mercredi, leader of the Native Indian Assembly of First Nations (AFN) was present in Charlottetown and campaigned for the "yes" side, and has described the referendum results as yet another example of Canada's rejection of his people.

However, the AFN itself, which represents 635 bands, refused to support the deal at its October 16 general meeting.

Several Native Indian reservations across the country, including the Mohawk territories around Oka, simply refused to take part in the referendum and barred government elections officials from their lands. And the Native

Women's Association of Canada opposed the deal outright, arguing that it granted neither genuine self-determination nor the protection of women's rights guaranteed in the Canadian Charter of Rights.

There was a low turnout among aboriginal peoples on the reserves, and a majority voted "no". Inuit peoples, on the other hand, were the only national minority — along with Acadians (Atlantic Coast francophones) — to vote massively in favour of the Charlottetown Accord.

There is a clear disaffection among wide layers of aboriginals — both on the reserves and in the cities — with the "official" leadership, which AFN head Mercredi has come to personify.

Finally, while the commanding heights of the "yes" camp would like to interpret the English-Canadian "no" vote as an exclusively anti-Québec, anti-aboriginal phenomenon, its true nature can be found elsewhere — namely, in the unprecedented hatred of the Tory government and the disastrous consequences of its economic policies.

Official statistics place unemployment at 12%, and the real figure is at least a few percentage points higher. Canadian capital has undertaken a massive programme of restructuring and relocation in the framework of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, shedding tens of thousands of jobs, shutting down factories and slashing government spending across the country.

The Tory government has gone down in the record books as the most unpopular in Canadian history — even in the history of Western bourgeois democracy — having consistently hovered around the 12 to 15 percent mark in opinion polls for the two-year period following the failure of the Meech Lake Accord.

Mulroney has, however, done sterling service for the Canadian ruling class, legislating through the Free Trade Accord and the hated

Goods and Services Tax. But his greatest achievement, which may backfire<sup>3</sup>, was having the Québec referendum on sovereignty cancelled — orchestrating a grand consensus of English-Canadian political elites at Charlottetown, including the leadership of the union-based New Democratic Party (NDP) and the majority of the union bureaucracy.

The NDP was actually on a huge upswing in the immediate post-Meech period, winning a series of provincial elections. For a time, the party even was ahead in polls on federal voting intentions.

Now, the NDP has been dragged down with all the other backers of the Charlottetown Accord. As a result of this — and the three NDP provincial governments' implementation of an austerity agenda — the NDP found itself back in its traditional spot behind the Tories and the Liberals, and only marginally ahead of the rightwing populist Reform Party.

### Reform Party chauvinism

The Reform Party, which combines anti-Québec and anti-francophone chauvinism with western regionalism and xenophobic themes, campaigned actively for the "no" side — as did the even more openly bigoted Confederations of Regions Party in the Atlantic region. Without a doubt, their message has struck a chord, and their electoral fortunes are sure to increase as a result.

However, organized English-Canadian opposition to the Charlottetown Accord was not restricted to the populist rightwing. The women's movement, organized in the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), set up progressive "no" committees in Vancouver, Edmonton and Toronto.

They were joined by mostly women activists from the anti-racist, labour<sup>4</sup>, and gay and lesbian rights movements, who argued that a "yes" vote would entrench their under-representation in the country's institutions, and place further obstacles in the way of progressive social legislation. An association of environmental groups opposed the Accord, highlighting the absence of provisions for environmental protection. NAC also played a key role in the pre-Charlottetown period, successfully fighting, for example, to keep a proposed clause on the inviolability of private property rights out of any eventual agreement.

As in Québec, it is not yet clear what impact the "no" victory will have on the struggles of working people in English-Canada. If the advocates of a progressive "no", in English-Canada as in Québec, can continue to pursue common work and exchanges into the post-referendum period, they could provide a valuable leftwing pole of attraction in the coming months of growing instability — with all the opportunities and dangers this instability is sure to present. ★

3. A substantial majority of Canadians want Mulroney to resign or call an immediate election.

4. The traditionally militant 50,000 member Canadian Union of Postal Workers was the only major union to take a "no" position — based on a clear defense of Québec's right to self-determination.

### Where the Left stood

**SOCIALIST Challenge/Gauche Socialiste**, section of the Fourth International in the Canadian State, campaigned for a "feminist and working class no" vote in the October 26 referendum.

In English-Canada, they joined the "no" committees initiated by the National Action Committee on the Status of Women in Vancouver, Edmonton and Toronto.

In Québec, members joined the leftwing, pro-independence "no" campaign initiated by the magazine *Vie Ouvrière* (Worker's Life) and the Montréal-based coalition of social movement activists, FRAPRU. This campaign was conducted outside that of the official "no" camp led by the Parti Québécois.

The *Canadian Tribune* newspaper, voice of the majority which left the Communist Party of Canada (CPC), took no position, printing articles critical of the Accord alongside the union bureaucracy's call for a "yes" vote.

The International Socialists, Canadian sister organization of the British Socialist Workers Party called for a "yes" vote in the referendum. They argued that the Accord should be supported based on the "extremely modest concessions" it made to aboriginal peoples and Québec. They stressed the importance of voting against the rightwing populist Reform Party and Confederation of Regions Party, who were in the "no" camp.

In Québec, the Maoist Action Socialiste group called on its supporters to abstain in the vote, arguing that workers had no interest in Canadian or Québec nationalism. ★

# The Serbian opposition

**DIPLOMATIC efforts to end the crisis in the former Yugoslavia are currently centred on building up Milan Panic and Dobrica Cosic, respectively**

**prime minister and president of the rump "Yugoslav Federation" as potential replacements for Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic.**

**Inside Serbia, Milosevic has been trying to strengthen his position against the pretenders; on October 20, the Serbian police, loyal to Milosevic, took control of the premises of the Yugoslav interior ministry and secret police.**

**Christian Pomitzer visited Belgrade recently and reports on the political forces opposing Milosevic.**

**CHRISTIAN POMITZER\***

**H**ARDLY a hundred kilometres away from the Serbian capital Belgrade people are dying in great numbers. I walk down the Kalemegdan, a path to the old fortress that rises up like a cap on the northern side of the Serbian capital, surrounded by water on three sides.

The immediate surroundings are so quiet that it is possible to perceive the background noise from the city centre. Here the war seems to have been hidden away. The waters of the Save River come from Slovenia and Croatia. Its sources a few kilometres onwards, the twin towns of Slavonski Brod and Bosanski Brod, are under siege.

But the war has touched here; a year ago Belgrade's water supply was threatened by petrol from the Croatian refinery at Sisak destroyed by the Yugoslav People's Army.

On the other side of the Save can be seen the high rise blocks of Novi Beograd [New Belgrade]. There is a helicopter over the river. An ivy-covered wall directs the attention to the north, to the wide plains of Vojvodina; in this direction lies the Batajnica military airfield from where transport planes continue to take help to the so-called "Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina". A kilometre further eastwards the Save flows into the Danube. A few cargo ships that have broken through the UN embargo can be seen on the glittering waters. The normality of it all is breathtaking.

Before the First World War, the other bank of the Save was part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. From here in August 1914 the imperial cannon began to shell the Serbian capital. And even now war can be found about 40 kilometres away.

A group of young brown-uniformed soldiers walks along the Kalemegdan. On leave? The helicopter continues to circle.

On the park benches sit old men speaking in soft voices — perhaps about politics or the threat of military intervention or perhaps only about daily rising prices. In one place a small crowd has gathered. Two old men are holding a chess match. At the same time the former American chess world champion Bobby Fischer is playing the Russian Boris Spassky in the Montenegrin peninsula of Sveti Stefan.

There have been no holidays this year for the people of Belgrade. Most of the coast is now a part of Croatia and American warships cruise off those beaches remaining to the remnant of Yugoslavia.

## Myth of Yugoslavia

Here the myth of "Yugoslavia" still has some life in it. Unlike in Croatia, where the flag with the star has been everywhere replaced by the Croat flag, here no signs of either the "old" or the "new" regime can be seen. Slobodan Milosevic and his colleagues do not need it. Only the bright blue uniforms of the police awaken memories of Tito's Yugoslavia.

In the pedestrians-only zone that starts at the exit from the park, a young woman is selling opposition newspapers. She recognizes my Croat dialect and opens her heart. She herself is from Croatia, a Serb from the Krajina. She has fled with her child to Belgrade and gets by as she can. I am reluctant to ask her why she fled Croatia and I wonder if she sells the papers out of conviction or as a way of making money.

The city centre is calm. However there are hardly any customers in the shops. It resembles Baghdad in the period between

the imposition of the embargo and the start of Operation Desert Storm.

It is not possible to find Chetniks with grenades around their waist. They have been banned from the streets for several months. The "new Yugoslavia" officially has "nothing more to do" with the war in neighbouring Croatia and Bosnia.

In the middle of the Terazije, the main shopping street, there is a store selling nationalist memorabilia. Here you can buy caps with nationalist emblems worn by "weekend Chetniks" who travel for the weekend to the war in Bosnia. On the table lie pictures of the king-in-exile and of Draza Mihajlovic, the leaders of the Chetniks in the Second World War, killed by Tito in 1947, and cassettes of speeches by the opposition leader Vuk Draskovic.

"We are from the opposition. We were in the student protests in June" and after a moment's hesitation "we are with DEPOS, the Democratic Movement of Serbs".

This is an opposition association that boycotted the so-called federal elections for a new parliament for the rump Yugoslavia in May. However they are still cautious. They wonder where I learnt their language and are suspicious when I ask them questions in Croat. Previously there was one official language, Serbo-Croat, with two variants — Serb and Croat. Now the new regime in Croatia decrees what is Croat and what is not. In Serbia people are more relaxed about the language question. Here no new state has been founded and the "Yugoslav tradition" still has life in it.

The conversation ends: "So you see that we Serbs are not how you believe. We are for democracy. Tell that to your [Austrian] foreign minister Alois Mock".

## Round table offered

On the other hand, 51-year old Vladeta Jankovic, a member of the Democratic Party of Serbia, gives no impression of nationalism. He is a professor of comparative literature and also the official spokesperson for DEPOS. "They offered us a round table, but it was a farce". If the opposition did not get equal access to state television and lists of voters for the new elections set for November, these would be undemocratic. This is reminiscent of the unfulfilled demands of the opposition in Croatia — where however the opposition parties took part in the elections.

DEPOS supports Milan Panic the head of the "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia". But as an extra-Parliamentary group it has little influence.

Jankovic himself is DEPOS' Western face; the strongest force in DEPOS is Vuk

\*This article first appeared in the October 9, 1992 issue of *Die Linke*, the paper of the Austrian section of the Fourth International.

Draskovic's Serb Renewal Movement. Jankovic is a bourgeois politician who wants to introduce a market economy as fast as possible — along with peace in Bosnia and Croatia. The use of the term "bourgeois" here raises the question of what social basis such a policy has. In Serbia, as in the other successor states to Tito's Yugoslavia (or elsewhere in Eastern Europe), a capitalist class only exists in embryo.

Meanwhile the political scene remains dominated by the old nomenklatura which in the case of Serbia and Montenegro retains the label "socialist" unlike in Croatia. The old traditions are also apparent in the methods used.

### Ruling party splits

A section of the political nomenklatura has gone over to the opposition. Two months ago a faction of the ruling Socialist Party of Serbia formed its own Social Democratic Party of Serbia. Among them is Momcilo Trajkovic who once supported Milosevic and ruled Kosovo with an iron hand. The Social Democrats have offered "Yugoslav" president Dobrica Cosic and prime minister Milan Panic places on their lists in the coming elections. The Democratic Party, formed by intellectuals, will also be backing Panic and Cosic.

Both these men, while brought in by the present rulers as jokers in the international games around the former Yugoslavia have since fallen out with Milosevic. Panic because he has accepted Serbia's co-responsibility for the war in front of the TV cameras and failed to stop the expulsion of the ex-Yugoslavia from the United Nations. On the other hand he has succeeded in obtaining the removal of some top people in the state hierarchy, including the secret police chief.

Cosic, meanwhile has fallen out with Milosevic, whose ideological mentor in nationalist matters he once was, because he has expressed support for Panic. On a parliamentary level, Panic also has the support of the ruling Party of Democratic Socialists in Montenegro. The Montenegrin elite, who have for so many years followed Milosevic faithfully, want to break free from the Serbian grip and are preparing their lines of escape in case of an escalation of the war.

Panic, who has a pharmaceuticals firm in the USA, is the only authentic capitalist in the ring. He plays a double role. As prime minister he is formal head of the executive, but at the same time he has the aura of an oppositionist people's tribune. In opinion polls he has long been ahead of Milosevic.

At the moment there are three opposition groups in Serbia. Close to the Social Democrats, whose only known position is their criticism of Milosevic, we find the Democratic Party, a group of nationalist intellectuals who have supported Milosevic's war against Croatia and Bosnia when even such a former hardliner as Vuk Draskovic has come out in support of peace. Fearful of losing their influence they have not joined the DEPOS coalition. The intellectual public face of the DP is the philosophy teacher and former pupil of Jürgen Habermas, Zoran Djindjic.

You don't need to take up the cudgels for DEPOS (or Draskovic, who wants a return of the monarchy) to grasp that this movement may play a central role in any new political constellation. However, Milosevic retains a firm grip on the television and can use it to influence the reservoir of voters in southern Serbia. People there are too poor to buy opposition newspapers. DEPOS stronghold is essentially Belgrade and its surroundings.

DEPOS also has the support of the left-liberal opposition. There is however talk of some (very mildly) "left-inclined" non-nationalist groupings coming together to form a "citizens' alliance" against the war. In the forefront here is the left liberal Reformist Party — a descendant of the former reform Communist current around Ante Markovic, the last president of the old Yugoslavia. The RP's chairperson, Vesna Pesic is also a founder member of Belgrade's Centre for Antiwar Action. Her son has put his private apartment at the disposal of the peace movement.

Close to the National Peasant Party is also the Reformist Party of Vojvodina. One of its members, Tibor Varadi is Panic's justice minister. From thence he

has drafted an amnesty bill for deserters, but it is unlikely that it will be passed by the federal parliament which is effectively dominated by the SPS and the Serbian Radical Party of Chetnik leader Vojislav Seselj.

Last but not least is the Serbian Social Democratic Association, a tiny group on the far left of the Serbian political spectrum. Its chairperson is Milan Nikolic a student leader in the late 1960s. He served a long prison sentence for his activities as a leftwing pro-democracy dissident. But the Citizens Alliance does not have big prospects in the coming elections.

### Saving Serbia from itself

Back to Vladeta Jankovic. DEPOS does not have any claims on Serb-inhabited regions outside Serbia. "If Serbs are to be saved, then first Serbia must itself be saved". An outside military intervention, they argue, would reunify Serbs around Milosevic. They do not have a clear position as yet on the sanctions, which will only begin to seriously bite in November.

Whatever political direction Serbia takes, a hot autumn seems probable. The situation in Kosovo is becoming increasingly tense — and no Serbian political group supports independence for Kosovo. It is not clear for how long Ibrahim Rugova, the leader of the Kosovo Albanians, can hold back a violent response from his people.

Ethnic conflicts in Sanjak, where there have been clashes between Muslims on the one side and Serbs and Montenegrins on the other, may escalate. "Ethnic cleansing" in Vojvodina, directed chiefly at Croats and Hungarians, may lead to armed clashes.

Internally, sharply rising unemployment and poverty brought about by the embargo, inflation and isolation could put the trade unions in the forefront.

The student movement may also revive. However, the fall or resignation of Milosevic would inspire Seselj's private army to launch armed terror while the "Yugoslav Army" would be released from barracks as the "defender of internal security". It is therefore more likely that Milosevic will postpone the elections or conduct them on his own terms.

If Panic were to fall on the other hand, tendencies to separation by Montenegro would become stronger, favouring a military intervention, however unlikely the latter seems at present.

There is currently an unstable equilibrium in Serbia that can be upset at any moment. ★



## Vojvodina and Kosovo:

# The next flashpoints?

**THE first moves in the unfolding of the current crisis in the former Yugoslavia were the annexation by Serbia of the two formerly autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo. The consequences of this measure will return to haunt Serbia whatever the twists and turns of the military and diplomatic developments.**

**We publish below extracts of speeches by Nenad Canak, leader of the Social Democratic League of Vojvodina and Dr. Skender Gashi of the Democratic Party of Kosovo which were given at a seminar organized by the Austrian Peace after the War coalition in Graz on May 12, 1992.**

## DOCUMENT\*

**C** ANAK: People in the West generally know little about the situation in Vojvodina (between Serbia and Hungary).

To understand the present situation, it is necessary to give you some historical reference points. After the Second World War, which completely destroyed the Yugoslavia that had existed previously, it was necessary to create completely new relations for it to be possible for the state to function. Vojvodina emerged from the war with its own state organs and a very strong anti-fascist resistance, but it was quickly annexed to Serbia in order to act as a counterweight to the prevalent royalist feeling there.

This was but one of many such moves. Later the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina was formed and the Muslims recognized as a nation, with the aim of creating a multi-ethnic buffer between Serbs and Croats.

The Republic of Macedonia was created to protect Yugoslavia from long-standing territorial claims by Greece and Bulgaria. Slovenia found in the new state a bulwark against the Germanization that had been proceeding beforehand. In Ser-

bia itself, the autonomous province of Kosovo was created with the aim of solving the problem of the ethnic Albanians in the new Yugoslavia, after the idea of uniting with the whole of Albania had been abandoned.

In those days Yugoslavia was ruled by undemocratic but pragmatic and intelligent people and, compared to other Communist countries, was a secure country with open borders. The national problems seemed to have been dispelled and more and more people considered themselves Yugoslavs. Yugoslavia had to walk a tightrope in order to prevent any upset to these delicate balances. However the one-party system lacked any social checks and this facilitated nationalist degeneration.

In the mid-1980s Slobodan Milosevic came on the scene representing strong nationalist feeling inside the ruling Communist Party. His nationalist model took over the CP's power mechanism and turned it in a direction that resembled that of the Nazis in the 1930s. His government removed the autonomy of Vojvodina and then Kosovo. These anti-constitutional acts carried out by a legal government were

the beginning of the end of Yugoslavia. There followed today's bloodbath, with war first in Slovenia then in Croatia and now in Bosnia.

Vojvodina was reduced from a constitutive part of the Yugoslav Federation into an anonymous north Serb region. This means that Vojvodina provided 53% of the Serbian budget in 1992 but only 2% was spent by its own authorities. Up to March 1, 1992 106,824 soldiers had been sent to the front from Vojvodina and about 40,000 more since then. This is one third of those eligible for call up in Vojvodina. According to Serbian defence minister Negovanovic the ratio for Serbia itself is one in eleven.

## Refugees and casualties

Officially, there are 92,000 refugees in Vojvodina, but in reality more than 200,000. More than half of the soldiers on the eastern front are from Vojvodina, which has suffered over 19,000 casualties. Vojvodina has also been abolished through the centralization — effectively taking under state control — of the core of the economy.

This includes petroleum, post, energy sector and social security and pensions. The health service is so bankrupt that the new surgical clinic in Vojvodina's capital Novi Sad cannot open because there are no surgical gloves.

The Serb government has monopolized food supplies to create an artificial bottleneck in food supplies as a consequence of which hunger is spreading in Bosnia. Last winter Vojvodina often used maize for fuel because coal was no longer coming from Bosnia. It is for such reasons that opposition to the Serb government is so strong; at the last elections more than two thirds voted for opposition parties.

Indeed, Milosevic did not win these elections in Vojvodina, which voted for the democratic candidate Ivan Djuric.

The creation of the "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" is simply the final act in the disappearance of Vojvodina. This state was founded by the parliaments of two of the former Yugoslav states (Serbia and Montenegro) but now has four members.

From this we can see what may happen in Vojvodina. With the new state the fascist regime in Serbia must start to seek enemies within. The scenario which preceded the wars in Croatia and Bosnia will be repeated; the manufacture of a supposed threat to Serbs living in the region and then intervention to "rescue" them.

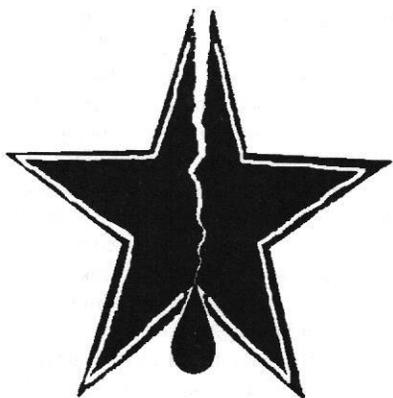
## Provocation of conflict

The provocation of conflict between Hungarians and Serbs would have five consequences:

1. It would consolidate the Serbs around the existing regime;
2. Many citizens would certainly flee Vojvodina and their property would be given to Serb refugees from Croatia.
3. Hungary will be provoked in the hope that it will intervene in Vojvodina, thus providing another enemy.
4. All this will require the suppression of democratic parties in Vojvodina and the expulsion of non-Serbs or even Serbs considered disloyal, as has been seen in Croatian territories currently occupied by Serb troops.
5. the final act would be the creation in the northern part of Vojvodina of a special zone under United Nations protection which would later be given to Hungary.

The only way that peace can be preserved is by a return to a legal and legitimate constitutional framework. By this I mean the 1974 Yugoslav constitution which recognized eight constitutive units

\*These speeches are translated from *Friede nach dem Krieg?* no. 4 of the series *Dokumentationen Alpe-Adria Alternative*, Graz, April to July 1992.



of the federation. In fact we have already made a proposal for a solution to the crisis. This was expressed in the Memorandum on Vojvodina sent to all European governments and the USA in December 1991. The essence of this memorandum is that we are for a Vojvodina that could act as buffer zone between Croatia, Serbia and Hungary and whose autonomy would be internationally guaranteed.

We must not forget that members of more than ten nations and many religions live in Vojvodina. If we can prevent war from coming to Vojvodina there is a chance for everyone.

**Gashi:** I am speaking as a representative of the Democratic Union of Kosovo, the country's biggest party with about 800,000 members. It is a young party; until recently it was not possible to form opposition parties.

For the past hundred odd years Serbian academics, publicists and politicians have sought to prove that the Albanians are simply a nomadic people who had settled in Kosovo. Other research shows that the Albanians are the descendants of the ancient Illyrians — and have been around all the time.

In 1913 the London conference split up the Albanian people so that after another conference in 1918 much of the Albanian people found itself inside the newly formed Croat/Slovene/Serb kingdom of Yugoslavia without ever being consulted on the matter. 1945 once again saw Kosovo's Albanians unable to determine whether they wished to remain a part of Yugoslavia or join the rest of Albania.

### Peaceful demonstrations

In 1981 peaceful and organized demonstrations expressed the will of the Kosovo Albanians for an independent republic in the framework of the Yugoslav federation.

Instead of listening to the will of the people draconian measures were taken against Kosovo's Albanians. In spite of this Kosovo's Albanians declared an independent republic on July 2, 1990,

drew up a constitution on September 7, 1991 and on September 21, 1991 a referendum was held, in which Albanians in Europe, America and Australia took part. 97% of those who voted supported an independent republic.

The Serbian response has been ferocious. The Albanian media has been suppressed, the only university for Yugoslavia's three million Albanians dissolved as have high schools. Around half a million have had to emigrate for political or economic reasons. A big percentage of these are deserters from Yugoslav army. On the day of the army's attack on Slovenia, the DUK issued an appeal for Albanian soldiers in that army not to take part in such attacks and to desert.

We had three options for the solution of the Albanian problem in the Balkans. The first was an independent Kosovo republic inside the borders inherited from the Yugoslav federation. However, the Serb decision to annex Vojvodina and Kosovo effectively abolished these borders.

The second was an independent state of Albanians in Yugoslavia. In fact the Albanians are very compactly settled. Some 92% of Kosovo's population is Albanian. The same is true of the Albanian communities in north west Macedonia and southern Serbia. Even so we are everywhere "a minority". With the Serbian aggressions in Croatia and Bosnia this option has become increasingly attractive.

Until now, Albanians have put up with all the provocations from the Serb side. However the violence from the Serbian side means inevitably a radicalization on the Albanian side. Groups are already forming which call for organized and active resistance. So far the DUK has succeeded in keeping the radical groups at bay and heading off reactions to Serb provocations. But that cannot go on forever. Europe has ignored us. Our official representatives are not invited to the conferences. We have a parliament, a government and legal representatives and they must take part as representatives of Kosovo in the next round of peace talks.

### If weapons talk

If weapons begin to talk in Kosovo then Albanians in Albania Macedonia, Montenegro and southern Serbia will join in. If Macedonia is involved then that brings in Bulgaria. If shooting begins in Kosovo there may be a Balkan war.

It would be a great help if the so-called third Yugoslavia is not recognized. In such a state neither the Hungarians nor the Albanians would have national or cultural rights. Indeed, Albanians have never enjoyed such rights while they have lived in a South Slav state. ★

## The absolutist constitution

**ON September 4 this year Morocco was the scene of a pretend referendum in which the absolutist monarchy put forward a draft constitution for popular approval. The regime employed its usual carrots and sticks to get the citizens to take part and, despite the refusal of the liberal opposition and the union leaderships in its orbit to participate, and despite the indifference of the population, Hassan II was able to announce a massive turnout and a "yes" vote of 99.96%.**

**BRAHIM OUALI —  
September 10, 1992**

**T**HE commotion was set going by a royal address on August 20, 1992 in which Hassan revealed the existence of his constitution to the people, explaining that he felt it was "more advanced than the average European constitution". He invited all to compare it with its predecessors, showing how the new version in no way meant a surrender of his own prerogatives regarding government and parliament. He reassured the people that he would "remain the guardian of their interests" and reminded them that he was the embodiment of a thousand-year old monarchy. He exhorted his "flock" to vote "yes" for they would be proud to live in his shadow.

The constitution is a feeble attempt to camouflage the absolute power of the monarchy taking into account two essential considerations:

1. Hassan II's imperialist allies (in particular France and the United States) want to see the situation in Morocco stabilized to safeguard their interests there. They have therefore insisted that the sovereign

show more flexibility over "respect for human rights and the spread of democracy".

2. The sharp worsening of the situation of the oppressed masses, which has expressed itself in several uprisings since the start of the 80s, with periodic explosions (1981, 1984, 1990).

The new constitution in fact simply sets down in black and white the reality of the autocracy and is in no way significantly different to its predecessors, either in the way it was worked out — which the monarch did not explain — or its content which puts no limit on the king's absolute power (see box).

### Liberal hopes dashed

This new constitution was a great disappointment to the liberal opposition; their repeated appeals that it should be prepared through a "national dialogue and compromise" between itself and the palace went unheard and only faint traces of its requests can be found in the constitution. Also disappointed were Amazigh [Berber] intellectuals who have several times asked for their language to become an official language alongside Arab.

This constitution follows in the footsteps of its predecessors in enshrining the "equality of men and women" in terms of their political rights. However, the king wanted to dissuade women from demanding a reform of the Personal Code (the *Muduwan*)<sup>1</sup> during the referendum and elections, by keeping to himself the sole right to deal with this question as one of his prerogatives as "commander of the faithful" and raising the spectre of a fundamentalist reaction.

The only novelties in the constitution are some pseudo-concessions aimed at buying off the moderate opposition and mystifying the discontented. For example,



we read that the prime minister is able to propose government members to the king... who will appoint them if this seems right to him. Parliament is not automatically dissolved by a state of emergency... but the king has an absolute right to dissolve it if he wishes simply by issuing a *dahir* (royal decree).

The constitution creates two councils: the constitutional council appointed by the king and the economic and social council without legislative powers. The commissions of inquiry allowed for by the constitution have been robbed in advance of any effectiveness.

The reticence of the masses and the lack of enthusiasm of the liberal opposition led the interior ministry and the reactionary parties that revolve around it to declare a general mobilization. Using all the means at their disposal they tried to make people feel the importance of the new constitution, appealing for them to turn out and vote "yes".

### Interior ministry campaign

The interior minister (which is also the ministry of information) was thus able to use the radio and television to conduct a campaign for a "yes" in collaboration with his henchmen in the ministry, French citizens in its pay and even some intellectuals from the liberal opposition at conferences aimed at explaining the advantages of this constitution.

The interior ministry also organized the production of millions of leaflets and posters plastered all over the country and commandeered facilities for the reactionary parties.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, the ministry cracked down on activities by the liberal opposition — Istiqlal, Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), Organization of Democratic and Popular Action (OADP) and unions such as the General Union of Moroccan Workers (UGTM) and the Democratic Confederation of Labour (CDT).<sup>3</sup> Meetings were banned, offices shut and activists detained for supporting non-participation in the referendum.

A week after the king's speech these parties decided together to call for "non-participation", a position which does not wholly reflect the feelings of their supporters. Tendencies favourable to ratification were apparent notably in the USFP, in its press and in the report by its general secretary to the party's central committee on August 28, 1992. This "responsible" opposition did not hide its satisfaction over the sovereign's charity and has declared its willingness to participate in the forthcoming elections.

The reason for "non-participation" was the manner in which the constitution had been worked out — which amounted to a

flat rejection of the liberal opposition's appeals for a "national dialogue".<sup>4</sup>

This was a heavy blow to the liberals who in 1989 accepted a prolongation of two years of the life of the existing parliament in return for a royal promise of a "return to the democratic experience". Months of waiting convinced the opposition that they had been deceived and their parliamentary teams undertook a joint campaign, putting forward a motion of censure in May 1990.<sup>5</sup>

The only mass action of the campaign was the general strike of December 14, 1990 organized through the CDT and UGTM by which they hoped to show the palace their ability to make a noise.<sup>6</sup>

### Back to begging

However the ferocity of the repression they met brought the opposition back to their senses and to their habitual begging. Between October 1991 and June 1992 they sent the king six letters concentrating on the following points:

1. An amendment to the constitution to give full powers to the Chamber of Deputies in matters of legislation and inspection.
2. For the representative institutions to have the means to carry out their tasks.
3. A government appointed by parliament and responsible to it.
4. Free elections and to this end:
  - A neutral commission to oversee them;
  - A revision of electoral laws and lists;
  - The right to vote at 18;
  - The right to be a candidate at 21.
5. Respect for human rights, a general amnesty and an end to the control over political life exercised by the interior ministry.
6. Meeting union demands.

The palace did not deign to reply, undertaking "democratization" according to its own lights. Nothing remained to the libe-

1. The Union of Women's Action sought signatures for petitions calling for:

- The banning of polygamy.
- Divorce.
- An end to masculine rule over women, whether by the father or husband.

This petition met with a violent reaction from the fundamentalist press which published fatwas (religious edicts) against supporters of women's emancipation.

2. A further six right wing parties and a part of the fundamentalist movement called for a vote for the new constitution.

3. With an eye on their rank-and-file, the union leaderships called for non-participation but they did little to mobilize support for this position.

4. Editorial in the USFP's journal of September 3, 1992.

5. The parliamentary opposition did not imagine it could overthrow the regime, but it hoped to influence public opinion and give itself a popular appeal.

6. This movement was crushed by the interior ministry and army with a loss of 600 lives in the poor neighbourhoods of Fez and Tangiers and long prison sentences for those arrested.

## The leading role of the king — highlights of the new Moroccan constitution

**Article 19:** The king, Amir al-Muminin, supreme representative of the nation, symbol of its unity, guarantor of the durability and continuity of the state, dedicated to the respect of Islam and the constitution. He guarantees the independence of the nation and the territorial integrity of the realm in its authentic frontiers.

**Article 23:** The person of the king is inviolable and sacred.

**Article 24:** The king nominates the prime minister.

**Article 25:** The king presides over the council of ministers.

**Article 27:** The king can dissolve the chamber of representatives by decree...

**Article 28:** The content of [his] messages can not be the object of debate.

**Article 30:** The king is the supreme head of the royal armed forces.

**Article 31:** The king accredits ambassadors...

**Article 32:** The king presides over the higher council of magistrates, the higher council of education and the higher council of national social advancement.

**Article 33:** The king nominates the magistrates...

**Article 34:** The king exercises the right of pardon.

**Article 35:** ... the king can... proclaim an state of emergency by decree.

**Article 37:** No member of the chamber of representatives can be prosecuted or pursued, arrested or judged for their opinions... except where such opinions challenge the monarchical regime, the Muslim religion or constitute an act of disrespect for the king.

**Article 66:** The king can ask the chamber of representatives to undertake a new reading of any draft law.

**Article 67:** After such a reading the king can, by decree, put any such proposed law to a referendum.

**Article 77:** [After the dissolution of the chamber] the king exercises, above and beyond the powers granted to him by this constitution, the powers of the chamber of representatives.

**Article 97:** The initiative for the revision of the constitution belongs to the king.

**Article 100:** The monarchical character of the state and dispositions relative to the Muslim religion cannot be the object of a constitutional revision. ★

ral opposition but to return to its old methods of begging and horse-trading.

The great bulk of the population, ground down by absolutist rule and poverty remained outside the "constitutional" agitation. Owing to lack of political education the most developed parts of the masses remain under the influence of the liberal opposition.

Despite their weakness, democratic currents on the whole adopted a correct attitude. They called for a boycott of the referendum and for the election of a constituent assembly. This is shown by the communiqué signed by 26 former political prisoners which points out that the constitution has been decree from above and that the amendments are "partial and do not change the nature of the absolutist power". They also point out the absence of any guarantee of fairness in the procedures for holding referenda.<sup>7</sup>

this was also the line taken by the PADS (which came out of the USFP in 1983)

which also called for a boycott but is demanding a very special type of constituent assembly that would oversee "the formation of a coalition government that would oversee the election of a constituent assembly".<sup>8</sup>

The results that were published in the night of September 4 were no surprise. They are in the grand tradition of frauds imposed on the Moroccan people over the past 30 years. 97.29% of the 11.8 million registered voters had taken part of which 99.96% had voted "yes".

To any who raised their eyebrows the interior ministry explained: the Moroccan people have shown their approval of the man who built the infernal prison of Tazmamart, the cemetery of Kenitra and the grand mosque of Casablanca, and is responsible for the war in the Sahara. They are in near unanimous agreement with the absolute ruler of their country, where ten million people live in poverty and 11 million are illiterate.

In reality the interior ministry had its work cut out to get the required result.

- In the villages the usual methods were used to get the peasants masses, who have no experience of organization, out to vote.

- Rumours were circulated that those who did not take part would lose rooms and services.

- Bosses in public and private sectors told their employees to vote.

- Interior ministry agents patrolled the neighbourhoods urging the inhabitants to vote.

However such means — and the fact that the army and police forces could also vote — are still not enough to explain the fantastic figures released by the interior ministry. More direct fraud was certainly used.

- Before the voting began ballot boxes were stuffed with "yes" votes.

- The same people voted several times, this being made possible by the manipulation of electoral lists and the distribution of voting cards.

- Proxy voting for members of families in the villages and by an employer for their workforce in the towns.

- Many polling stations did not have any "no" voting slips.

- The lack of any independent supervision to ensure neutrality in the conduct of the referendum meant that the interior ministry could engage in wholesale rewriting of the returns after the voting.

Hassan II hopes that this victory will show his imperialist allies that he is the only guarantee of stability — without any concession to democratic norms he has successfully carried out a massive fraud, without any protests by the liberal opposition and the population as a whole.

Indeed he can take comfort in the attitude of the liberal opposition which has continued its decades long practice of begging and running about the palace corridors looking for a deal, while holding back direct struggle by the masses. This latest comedy has shown the utter futility of these methods.

### Constituent assembly

Only the class struggle of the disinherited masses can win political freedom. The revolutionary circles must become the instrument of this struggle alongside the oppressed and resolutely take up all the basic democratic demands, in the first place the demand for a constituent assembly. ★

7. This communiqué appeared in the journal *Elufuq* of August 30, 1992.

8. Communiqué of the central committee of the Party of the Democratic and Socialist Vanguard (PADS) of July 18, 1992..

# A catastrophe that needn't have been

**THE overthrow of the regime of General Mohamed Siyad Barre in January 1991, after three years of civil war, went almost unnoticed by a world polarized by the Gulf crisis. More recently, fighting has shaken the capital Mogadishu, where two Hawiyé clans have been fighting over the remains of a moribund state against the backdrop of the spectre of hunger.**

**These events also failed to make an impact on governments and public opinion more preoccupied by the war in Yugoslavia — a conflict that UN General Secretary Boutros Boutros-Ghali has dubbed “a rich man’s war”. However, since last July, there has been a certain clearing of the decks as governments and the United Nations have finally decided to follow the lead of several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who have been working tirelessly to stem the tide of a situation that has continued to worsen.**

FRANCOIS PIGUET

**E**IGHT years after Ethiopia and the Sudan, western public opinion has again been treated to the shocking images of famine and its counterpart, children suffering from extreme malnutrition. However, the economic crisis and the plethora of conflicts on the periphery of the industrialized world — Yugoslavia and the Middle East, not to mention the different republics of the ex-Soviet Union, has prevented a mobilization comparable to that of 1984-1985. In any event, the situation calls for the use of unprecedented measures, including the dispatch of UN troops to guarantee the safety of food conveyes.<sup>1</sup>

## Fighting spreads southward

The clashes in Mogadishu which have continued for nearly two years, have already claimed several tens of thousands of victims. The fighting has spread throughout the south of the country as well as to pockets in the north, in Somaliland and Mijirtein. “Tribal anarchy is paradoxically already a reality in one of the rare countries in Africa that is unified by a single culture and a common language.”<sup>2</sup> This was written in 1989. The fighting has not stopped increasing and spreading since that time.

How could a country situated between the rich Gulf emirates and Africa, in a strategic zone that was an important region

sought after by the great powers reach such a degree of desolation with such indifference?

The colonial division of Somalia at the end of the nineteenth century divided the country into Italian, English, French and Ethiopian spheres of influence. The borders of these territorial jurisdictions conflicted with the nomadic conception of space that was based on watering holes. Such a social equilibrium requires a process of permanent confrontation and negotiation between agricultural groups which in turn involves the active construction of a network of economic and matrimonial relations spanning traditional grazing grounds to city markets. This is a precarious existence where violence with traditional weapons holds sway.<sup>3</sup>

Foreign and non-Muslim domination provoked resistance, particularly the twenty year guerilla war led by Mohamed Abdillé Hassan, who was dubbed the “Mad Mullah” by the English. Emerging from a Darod Ogadeni clan, Hassan defied the British forces from 1899 to 1920. In spite of the lack of unanimity in this struggle as a result of tribal and religious cleavages, history has credited Hassan with contributing to the emergence of a Somali national identity that has spread beyond the borders of



the Republic of Somalia.<sup>4</sup>

From the time of independence, the irredentism of the Mogadishu authorities has constituted its central political thrust. The five points of the star emblazoned against a blue background on the Somali flag symbolize greater Somalia including Somaliland and the ex-Italian Somalia (reintegrated in 1960 into the Republic of Somalia), Djibouti, Ogaden and north east Kenya. Since 1964 Somalis and Ethiopians have clashed over lines of demarcation that had never been negotiated, each supported by guerilla movements operating along the border. While Somalia benefitted from the ethnic identity of the Ogadeni, Ethiopia benefitted from the tribal cleavages in Somalia. These clashes reached a high point in the Ogaden war of 1977-1988. The Somali aggression at a time when the revolutionary regime of Addis Ababa had to confront an offensive on the Eritrean and Tigrean fronts, provoked a turnaround on the part of the Soviets who massively supplied Ethiopia with enough arms and troops to allow it to repulse the Somalis.

The 1978 defeat of Ogaden forced the Somalis to focus on internal problems and clan politics masked under the term “pan-Somalism” were not long in coming to the fore. For ten years, head of state and clan leader, Darod Marehan, successfully manoeuvred by taking advantage of the divisions within the opposition. But it is important to reflect upon the meaning of the struggle led by Mohamed Abdillé Hassan. Today, it is convenient to highlight the antagonism between Issak and Darod. In fact, throughout the war which pitted the English colonial troops against the “Mad Mullah’s” henchmen, the role of the Issaqs who fought side by side with the British in order to guarantee the integrity of their pastoral spaces was not negligible.

From the beginning of the 1980s, the Syad Barré regime had to confront the Mijirtein rebellion, one of the three branches of the Darod tribes that were regrouped within the Somali Democratic Front of Salvation (SDFS). Danger was avoided thanks to the crushing superiority of the Somali army and the relative isolation of the Mijirtein, who were implanted in the extreme northeast of the country. On the other hand, the Issaq dissidents of the

1. According to US press reports, the cost of a peace-keeping force in Somalia is considered to high (\$7.5bn), keeping in mind priority commitments in Yugoslavia and Cambodia, leave alone aid put aside for Russia. *International Herald Tribune*, April 29 and May 13, 1992.

2. Stephen Smith, “Coup de barre chez les Somaaliens”, *Libération*, August 4, 1989.

3. Most 19th century travellers speak of their encounters with sturdy nomadic peoples armed with spears and swords.

4. Pierre Rondot, “Quelques remarques sur le personnage et le rôle historique de Mohammed Abdillé Hassan”, *Bulletin de la société d'études d'Afrique Orientale*, number 8, 1970.

the National Somali Movement (SNM) founded in 1981 would plunge the country into a bloody civil war.

### Civilians flee bombings

In 1988, faced with infiltration by SNM operatives in the cities of Hargeisa, Burao and Erigavo, the army, with air support, methodically bombed these towns in order to retake control. The majority of the civilian population then fled to find refuge in camps installed along the Ethiopian border. This exodus reinforced the SNM whose bases could henceforth benefit from international aid.

The appearance of an armed Hawiyé opposition under the name of the United Somalia Congress (USC) accelerated events. Faced with a double military pressure from the North and around the Mogadishu region, Siyad Barre and his Darod troops were forced to retreat from the capital after a month of fighting, but not before bombing most of the town's neighborhoods.

Since then, the war has not let up in the southern part of the country. Hawiyé and Darod fight over control of the "useful zone" of the country situated between the Wabi Shebelle and Juba rivers. In the capital and its environs, two rival Hawiyé clans the Abgal and their Murosade allies — under temporary president Ali Mahdi Mohamed, and the Habr Gedir supported on their side by the commander of the CSU army General Mohamed Farah Aidid clash in order to control the influx of imports, international aid and khat, a mild, natural stimulant whose effects resemble that of hashish.

Faced with an unstable political and military situation and in a fragile environment subject to drought, famine, too long ignored, will soon hit a third of the Somali population.<sup>5</sup>

Since the fighting of November 1991, several humanitarian agencies have sounded the alarm. One of them, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), decided to launch a sweeping operation without waiting for the still improbable international support. Since earlier 1992, around 600 community kitchens have been set up throughout the country to feed nearly a million exhausted people and thus prevent the pillaging of food reserves. 80,000 tonnes have been provided by the ICRC since the beginning of this year but that amount is notoriously insufficient to meet the estimated demands of between 50,000 and 60,000 tonnes a month.<sup>6</sup>

Around six months after the first appeals, the governments and the media discovered the scope of the catastrophe: "In the face of this non-assistance to a population threatened with death, a small number of non-governmental organizations continue to

provide Somalia with small amounts of assistance. The most important of these is the international Red Cross which will now devote a quarter of its overall 'operations' budget to alleviating what it considers to be the greatest tragedy that Africa has ever known."

As the security of the convoys is not guaranteed due to the persistent fighting, the ICRC has taken the pragmatic position of neutrality and has tried to protect itself by calling for respect of the symbol of the Red Cross.

It has accepted armed escorts for its convoys.<sup>8</sup> Some 3,000 men from the two sectors of the capital participate in this effort supported by the militia chiefs who rent vehicles to protect them. The port has been likewise placed under the "protection" of the militia.

Trade in the stores of aid provide comfortable income for these "war lords" and this has been increasing. Today only militiamen can be sure of eating. There has been a revival of the caravan tradition where camels have been rented and the safety of caravans has been assured for pay for the duration of the trip.<sup>9</sup>

The other disputed market is tied to the *khat* trade. Amongst the populations of the Horn of Africa, the daily use of *khat* has risen dramatically along with urbanization. The result has been a considerable market in this which has benefitted by the war because all of the soldiers chew it and the price has risen. The advance of *khat* which must be consumed fresh has stimulated the setting up of distribution outlets near the Kenyan border. Small aircraft have been used to transport *khat* to the Mogadishu region where fighting has occurred over control of the air fields.

### Famine strikes Kenya

Faced with such a situation the exodus of more than 300,000 Somalis towards Kenya as well as the population concentrations in certain localities like Baidoa, has contributed to the spread of the famine. It is now striking at a neighboring country affected by the drought and which must at the same time deal with an influx of refugees coming from Somalia, Ethiopia and South Sudan.<sup>10</sup> The famine is even more spectacular in that many poverty stricken nomadic farmers have waited until the last moment before deciding to leave their grazing lands and traditional watering holes. Deprived of their leased out cattle-capital and of their mobility, the nomadic populations are particularly vulnerable.

While much sincere concern could be noted throughout the first semester of the year 1992, the images of the dying town of Baidoa have since July had the same effect on western public opinion the famous reports on the Korem camp in Kenya that

were broadcast in October, 1984.<sup>11</sup>

To be sure, direct responsibility for the catastrophic military situation that has shaken the country cannot be directly laid at the door of the Western countries, although the latter were largely responsible for providing the arsenals upon which the military force of the militias is based. But it is striking to see how barely eight years after the Ethiopian famine, next to nothing has been done to avoid a new major catastrophe.

Following the media attention given to the famine there has been a pronounced rush of humanitarian organizations to establish themselves in the country. The lack of coordination of aid efforts and the improvisation of those involved have prompted the press to write about "humanitarian bottlenecks"<sup>12</sup> and has led to severe criticism being levelled against the United Nations. The United States has decided to grant a massive food aid package of 145,000 tonnes. Here again it is striking that the initial distributions could not be carried out due to a shortage of stocks of the World Food Program (WFP).<sup>13</sup>

Thus, apart from several NGOs, no food aid was in place in the region. Considering the cerebral damage that undernourished young children face, can it not be said that once again it is too late?

These last minute charity efforts do not achieve their stated goal, and their cost in terms of human labour and supplies is huge. Recourse to air bridges costs astronomical sums per tonne.<sup>14</sup> Viewed from television sets, the participation of governments and aid organization seems massive. However, six months earlier, the catastrophe could have been limited to the combat zones and the extension of the famine to certain regions in Kenya. In short, all the political and economic consequences for the fragile country of Somalia could have been avoided. ★

5. Somalia's population is estimated to be six million, according to World Bank figures. *Report on World Development*, 1990.

6. Unfortunately, Somalia has not received more attention. Every day, 500 children die of malnutrition. *Tribune de Genève*, June 2, 1992.

7. Stephen Smith, *Libération*, July 29, 1992.

8. "Le CICR doit recourir à l'escorte armée", *Le Nouveau Quotidien*, February 19, 1992.

9. A. Bardey, Barr Adjam, *Souvenirs d'Afrique orientale 1880-1887*, CNRS, Paris, 1992.

10. Refugees are arriving at the Kenyan border at the rate of 100 per day (July 11, 1992). Here are the UNHCR's statistics on Somali refugees: Ethiopia 500,000; Kenya 300,000; Europe 100,000; Yemen 65,000 and Djibouti 15,000 (August 18).

11. J. Perlez, *New York Times*, July 19, 1992.

12. *Libération*, August 26, 1992.

13. The setting up of the American "Provide Food" air bridge was delayed until August 28; as a comparison, the EEC's food aid commitments in 1992 totalled 185,000 tonnes. *Le Monde*, September 15, 1992.

14. In 1985, it cost \$1000 for each tonne of food aid sent by air bridge from Khartoum to Darfour. *Earthscan Feature*, Octobre 18, 1985.

# Big victory for Colombo portworkers

On September 16, a one-month work-to-rule campaign by Colombo's 16,000 port workers came to an end.

Described by Lloyd's of London as "the leading port in South Asia", the Sri Lankan capital's state-run facility ranks 25th in the world, and has been targetted in the United National Party (UNP) government's privatization plans. Indeed, the *Colombo Daily News* titled its September 10 editorial opposing the workers' action, "Don't kill the golden goose".

In the following article, a leader of the Ceylon Mercantile, Industrial and General Workers' Union (CMU) describes the events, while examining the historical background and analyzing the factors which contributed to the victorious outcome.

## BALA TAMPOE — September 17, 1992

**O**N August 17th, shortly after the 13th anniversary celebrations of the Sri Lankan Port Authority (SLPA)<sup>1</sup>, the entire blue and white-collar workforce of the Port of Colombo began a work-to-rule campaign over the issue of a Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) indexed to the Colombo Consumers Price Index. Payments had been sporadic from the opening of the SLPA until they were finally frozen in July 1988.

The action was initiated by the CMU, which represented only 2,600 of the port workers. Nevertheless, all 16,000 workers joined, in spite of the fact that the leaders of the other unions present at the port did not extend any support.

At the outset, the UNP-led Jathika Sevaka Sangamaya (JSS) was the biggest union at the port, with some 6,000 members. Ever since the UNP secured a two-

thirds parliamentary majority in the 1977 elections, the JSS has been the biggest union throughout the public sector.

From its inception, the Port Authority was able to maintain absolute sway over the port workers, with the active collaboration of the JSS leaders. At its peak, the JSS had 9,000 members at the port, but its influence has been declining steadily.

The next biggest union before the work-to-rule campaign was the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP)-led Sri Lankan Independent Employees Union, with about 3,000 members. It prospered under the pre-1977 SLFP governments, only to see its fortunes decline in tandem with those of the SLFP.

The Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP)-led Harbour and Dock Workers Union was the smallest of the four, with some 500 members. It held tremendous sway with workers when its leader, Philip

Gunawardena, was a key minister in the MEP government of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike which lasted from 1956 to 1959.

The leaders of the UNP and SLFP-led unions organized a press conference on August 25, at which they declared that they were not associated with the trade union action underway, but that they were in support of the demand for payment of the COLA.

The action lasted one month. In addition to the go-slow, workers refused to do overtime work during meal hours and between 4:00 and 6:30 in the morning. They also rejected the incentive payments frequently paid by individual private shipping agents to speed up work — which often obliges the workers to dangerously overload trucks and equipment.

As a result, productivity is said to have dropped by anywhere from 50 to 75%<sup>2</sup>, with estimates putting the loss incurred by the SLPA at Rs. 200m.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the action, the SLPA claimed it was under a strict government order to resist payment of the COLA. The government feared that there would be a domino effect — particularly among state plantation workers — if port workers were to join the ranks of workers in the Ceylon Electricity Board and Petroleum Corporation, who receive COLA payments by statute.

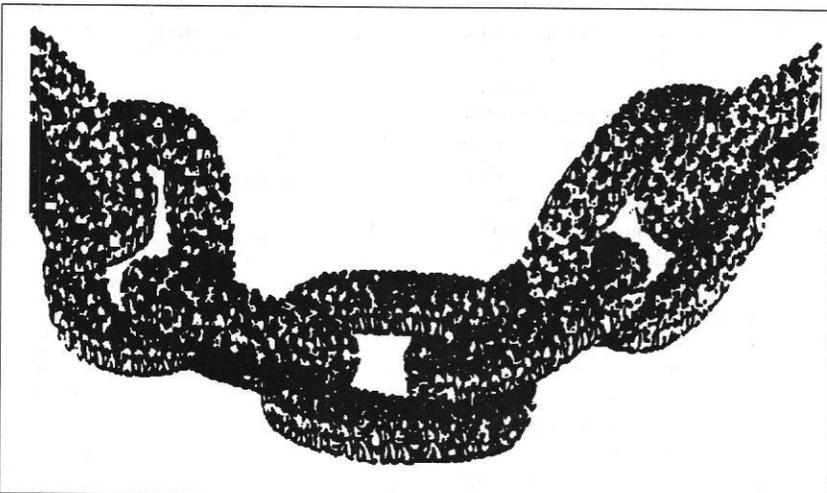
In early September, the SLPA produced an offer to pay a "profit-sharing allowance" in lieu of the COLA payments. While accepted by representatives of the UNP, SLFP and MEP unions, the CMU rejected it — based on the unanimous decision taken by a quickly organized general membership meeting of its port branch, which now counted 5,000 members in its ranks.

## Management schemes

It was argued that an allowance determined by profit-sharing was not secure, subject as the Port's fortunes are to SLPA's various management schemes, which include the privatization of the engineering division by December next.

At that same meeting, it was decided that the CMU should seek a signed mandate from all port workers to negotiate a satisfactory settlement, thereby bringing all the workers engaged in the work-to-rule campaign into a united framework. Nearly 13,000 signatures were gathered over the following week.

The CMU rejection of the SLPA's offers were supported in the September



1. The SLPA was established under an Act of the Sri Lankan Parliament, with effect from August 1, 1979.

2. *The Island*, September 12, 1992.

3. *Haraya*, September 11, 1992. One Sri Lankan Rupee is worth about \$0.02.

15 pledge of solidarity from the United Federation of Labour and Government Workers Federation (led by the Nava Sama Samaja Party, Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International), which saw developments at the port as signifying a major development in the fight against the government's privatization plans, and as a big step forward towards bringing workers together in a single, united trade union body. They pledged their support for any future stepping up of industrial action.

Faced with the determination of the port workers, the SLPA returned with another offer on September 15 granting payment of a special port allowance linked to the cost of living index along with a payment of arrears owed since the 1988 freeze, to be spread out over the next year.

By the end of the work-to-rule campaign, the CMU had nearly doubled its membership to 6,000. It gained the new adherents through its role in the recent action, seen as a fruit of its class struggle policy, its political independence and democratic functioning.

### General strikes of CMU membership

Earlier in the year, the CMU attracted workers across the country into its fold through the two separate one-day general strikes of its members for the repeal of all "Emergency" regulations suppressing or restricting trade union, democratic and human rights.

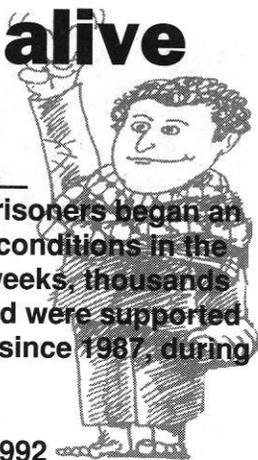
The work-to-rule campaign was the first major workers action at the port since December 1969. The sixty-day strike in 1969-1970 — joined by workers at the Trincomalee port in the northeast of the country — came to a victorious conclusion ten days after the CMU called out its entire national membership in a sympathy general strike.

With this recent victory, the port workers may well have gotten the wind back in their sails. ★



## The intifada is alive and well

**ON September 27, Palestinian political prisoners began an open-ended hunger strike against living conditions in the prisons and detention centres. For two weeks, thousands of detainees participated in the action and were supported by a level of mass mobilization not seen since 1987, during the early days of the *intifada*.**



MICHEL WARSHAWSKY — October 20, 1992

**M**ORE than 5,000 people and prominent leaders of all the factions of the PLO followed the two coffins in Jerusalem. The slogans and flags of the Democratic Front (DFLP) were side by side with those of the Islamic Hamas movement; those of Arafat's Fatah alongside those of George Habash's PFLP.

On October 17, Hussein 'Abeidat and his cousin Mustafa 'Abeidat were buried in the Jerusalem suburb of Jabel Mukaber. The former died of exhaustion in the prison of Ashkelon on the last day of the hunger strike by Palestinian political prisoners; the second was killed by police during a demonstration in support of the prisoners in central Jerusalem.

The burial was a symbol embodying all that had taken place in two weeks of struggle and sacrifice involving several thousands of Palestinian political prisoners held in Israeli prisons and detention camps: the determination of the prisoners prepared to face death and the united solidarity of the population of the occupied territories.

At a press conference Tikva Parnass, a worker at the Alternative Information Centre, gave shocking details of the conditions in the Hebron prison on the occupied Left Bank: "The appointment a year and a half ago of Gabi Amir as Governor General of prisons was a declaration of war on Palestinian political prisoners. Shamir's government had given him a clear mandate: one by one to take back the gains won by the Palestinian prisoners over two decades of struggles and at the cost of many victims".

### Nothing to lose

After summarizing the appalling sanitary conditions, the poor food, the overcrowding and the harassment, she concluded: "At Hebron, as in all the other prisons, the prisoners now have their backs to the wall and feel they have nothing more to lose. An explosion is

near, and, if nothing is done, it may be bloody".

That was at the start of August. On September 27, more than 2,000 prisoners declared an unlimited hunger strike. Within a week the number of strikers had risen to 10,000.

The 25 demands put forward by the prisoners' leaders include such obvious things as the right to collective prayer, improvements in visiting rights and air conditioning. But we should also underline the demand by the prisoners that they be allowed to choose their own representatives and the possibility for their delegates to move about in the prisons.

This right was won in the 1970s but was abolished 18 months ago by the Shamir government, after removing the former governor Levy Shaul amid accusations that he had "turned the prisons into holiday centres for terrorists".

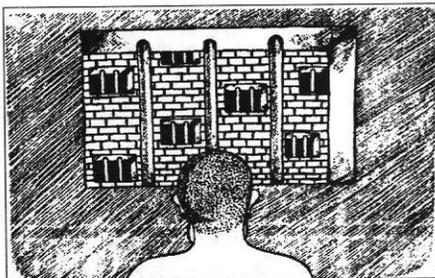
Lawyers, freed prisoners and families spoke with one voice. The inhuman physical conditions of detention and the impossibility of putting forward demands and negotiating even at a local level, would inevitably lead to an explosion.

### Unity of different factions

Two conditions had to be met for the hunger strike to be effective: unity in the prisons of members of different factions and for the Palestinian community as a whole to take up the prisoners' demands.

The strike committees were united, including both the Hamas fundamentalists and Communists, supporters of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations such as Fatah and opponents connected to the PFLP or the Democratic Front. Such unity has been rare in recent years, but it was indispensable not only for the organization of a strike in more than 20 prisons and detention centres but also to encourage the movement on the outside.

As Hani Baydun, a PFLP leader in the occupied territories who has just been released from jail, said: "The political



meaning of this strike does not lie in the strike itself, in which all currents have taken part, but in its enormous popular support.

This shows that the most important force of the Palestinian people is not Fatah, Hamas or the Popular Front but the prisoners and their families. It is they who are paying the price and they who have forced Rabin, the security services and the politicians to reconsider the political situation”.

The hunger strike has shown the enormous reserves of the Palestinian masses of the occupied territories and refuted superficial claims about their passivity or weariness. In recent weeks the atmosphere has been like that at the outbreak of the *intifada*. The Left Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem (and even the Palestinians of Israel and the Syrians on the occupied Golan) have once again acted on the same wavelength with the active participation of the great majority of the population: mass demonstrations, confrontations with the army, hunger strikes by mothers and wives of prisoners, serving as a leaven for all kinds of solidarity actions with the strikers.

This resumption of popular combativity has obliged the army to react with extreme violence, killing several and wounding hundreds of demonstrators.

### Israeli peace movement

The cycle of resistance, popular solidarity and repression even succeeded, with a certain delay, in reawakening some elements in the Israeli peace movement who organized solidarity demonstrations in the last days of the hunger strike.

We can thus understand why many Israeli commentators have begun to ask themselves whether they had not buried the *intifada* too soon, and some have even suggested that the whole thing is looking like a repeat of the start of the *intifada* in December 1987.

This is also apparently the fear of both the Israeli government and the official Palestinian leadership, who, owing to Jewish feast days, were in the occupied territories rather than in Washington when the strike erupted. This is why after ten days of stating their firm resolution not to negotiate with the strikers' repre-

sentatives, Rabin and police minister Moshe Shahal decided to do just that.

Just before the Yom Kippur holiday, the police minister announced the setting up of a special commission to study the prisoners' demands. At the head of this commission is Levy Shaul, the former governor of prisons fired for his "leniency" towards the political prisoners.

On the evening of Tuesday October 13, the president of the Association of Palestinian Lawyers in the occupied territories Mr. Ali Ghozlan, announced that the hunger strike had been suspended to allow serious negotiations with the Israeli authorities and that when these negotiations were over, the prisoners would decide if their demands had been met. If they decided they had not, the strike would resume.

At the same moment, the president of the bar in the Gaza Strip, Mr. Freih Abu Meidan announced that the hunger strike in the prisons of the south, including the huge Anssar 3 detention camp, was continuing. Two days later, however, it seemed that prisoners in all the camps had accepted food.

While all Palestinians see that the Israeli government has retreated, the decision to suspend the hunger strike has been the subject of controversy both among the Palestinian community as a whole and the prisoners in particular. As everyone was aware, more was at stake than simply prison conditions; everything suggested that the hunger strike might give a new boost to popular mobilizations against the Israeli occupation and a substantial improvement in the balance of forces for the Palestinians.

### Popular movement frightens negotiators

This was precisely what Rabin and Shahal decided they had to prevent by opening negotiations. But this is also apparently precisely what the leadership of the main current in the PLO and of the delegation connected to it wanted. They were terrified that a resumption of the popular movement in the occupied territories would upset the current negotiations underway in Washington.

If such is the case, it would be a sign of terrible political shortsightedness on the part of the Palestinian leadership in failing to understand that a better relation of forces in the occupied territories would tend to extract better terms in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and reduce Israeli and American pressure on the Palestinian delegates.

As a union militant close to Fatah and by no means hostile to the negotiations put it: "the Palestinian delegation has, for the past year, rightly refused to make the negotiations conditional on an end to the *intifada* and could not in any case stop it. However the decision to halt the hunger strikes seems to run counter to this policy”.

The advisers of the new Israeli prime minister also understand this, and a few prison reforms — however important they may be for the prisoners involved — are a very small price to pay to avoid the risks of an escalation of resistance. The latter might have upset the agenda of the negotiations — an agenda written by the Israelis, amended by the Americans and forced on the Palestinians. ★

### Willy Boeples (1911-1992)

ON September 22, 1992 Willy Boeples died aged 81. Three days previously he had taken part in a conference in Mannheim of the German supporters of the Fourth International.

Willy joined the German Communist Party (KPD) in 1930. When Hitler came to power in 1933, as a KPD full-timer, he was arrested and sent to concentration camp — he was released at the end of that year. He was called up for military service in 1940; he deserted in 1945. After the war Willy became disillusioned with Stalinist policies in Eastern Europe and the party line of peaceful coexistence with imperialism. In 1950 he joined the Fourth International.

In the darkest days of the Cold War, in the 1950s and 60s, he and Georg Jungclas were the leaders of the FI in Germany — at that time working inside the German Social Democratic Party. He was prominent in campaigns in solidarity with the Algerian war of liberation and against militarism in West Germany as well as contributing to many West German leftwing publications.

In the late 1960s the German section changed from a worker to a student dominated organization. Organizational disputes and poor health led Willy to withdraw from activity. Towards the end of the 1970s he made contact again and translated many Marxist and socialist works for the movement's German journals and publishing house. He also took part in the movement's debates.

In his greetings on Willy's 80th birthday Ernest Mandel wrote that Willy was one of those few "in Germany and the world... who embody in their own person the historic heritage of communism and guarantee its future". ★

# Papal celebrations and repression

**THE 500th Anniversary of the "discovery" of the Americas by Christopher Columbus was fittingly celebrated in the Dominican Republic.**

**ANDY BROCK**

**H**EAVILY armed soldiers were placed at every street corner and all the police forces were on the alert to prevent any assembly or demonstration. Traffic was periodically held up to permit various civilian, military and religious dignitaries to pass down empty streets. Street traders and beggars were rounded up and deposited onto the streets of a provincial town. Such was the "wall of shame" constructed around the Columbus lighthouse.

It was here, in the Dominican Republic, that Pope John Paul II chose to relaunch his mission to bring the word to Latin America. Just like 500 years ago the violence of ruffians accompanied the conquest of souls.

Many Catholics and priests asked themselves how the Pope could accept such circumstances to call together the fourth conference of the Latin American bishops.

## Balaguer celebrates Christian West

It was surely not due to ignorance. Dominican president Balaguer had made clear his approach to the 500th anniversary years ago. Not for him any reference to the genocide of the native population, slavery and colonial pillage or even the vapid "meeting of two worlds" version preferred by social democrats.

The 86-year old Balaguer intended to crown his career with a great celebration of the Christian West, and of the 500th anniversary of the "Discovery and Conversion of the Americas".

This required a monument to the glory of Columbus. This consists of a horizontal concrete and rose marble cross which throws up laser beams to draw another cross in the sky. Thousands had to be evicted and \$70m spent to build this Mussolini style monstrosity.

Meanwhile, Dominicans have had to put up with power cuts, the sick have died in hospital for lack of oxygen, antibiotics, syringes or even cotton wool and the streets have been littered with refuse. Some 45,000 here are HIV positive, with an attendant increase in tuberculosis which affects some 300,000 in the capital alone.

Ninety percent of the population have

seen their purchasing power decline over the past 20 years and officials have few concerns apart from feathering their own nests. Some 110,000 people became "boat people" in 1991, about 11,000 of whom died at sea. Tens of thousands of women have left the country to sell their bodies or feed the tourist boom.

The drug networks run by the Dominican military are tied up with the US mafia and the Haitian putschists. Finally, we should note that the DR devotes all of 1.3% of its budget to education.

Balaguer wished to closely associate the Catholic church with his great colonial celebration, and, despite many appeals from both inside and outside the church, the pope obliged.

The man he obliged was a faithful servant for decades of the tyrant Trujillo architect of the massacre of 17,000 Haitians in 1937, and a puppet replaced in power in 1967 by the United States army. He remains in power today thanks to US support, electoral fraud and the discredit of the social democratic opposition, which spent its spell in power (1978-86) feeding hungrily at the trough of corruption.

In the preceding months popular organizations made clear their refusal to have

anything to do with the celebrations, Pope or no Pope. So Balaguer and co. decided to shut them up.

After months of threats and police harassment, the young lawyer Efraim Ortiz was murdered on September 20 in the capital while he was accompanying a group of children on a march by the Continental 500 years of Native, Black and Popular Resistance Campaign. A demonstrator was also killed in Azua as well as dozens of wounded and hundreds of arrests throughout the country.

None of the heads of state expected for the opening of the Columbus lighthouse arrived; the tourists also failed to turn up. Only the Pope and his bishops were there to launch their mission. However even the mass in front of the lighthouse was only attended by some 30,000.

## Marxist, feminist and ecologist plot

The religious enthusiasm and the big crowds that greeted the Pope on previous visits were absent this year. For months the Cardinal Primate of the Americas, the Dominican Nicolas de Jesus Lopez, has been denouncing the campaign against the 500th Anniversary celebrations as a Marxist, feminist and ecologist plot. But it seems that the Dominican people themselves were less than wildly enthusiastic.

The Pope left on October 14 and it is too early to analyze the results of the bishops' conference. However the tone was already set a year ago in neighbouring Haiti: the Vatican is the only state to have immediately recognized the government produced by the military coup against radical priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide and remains alone.★

## Guatemalan Indian leader wins Nobel Prize

**THIS year's winner of the Nobel Peace Prize was Rigoberta Menchu, a leader of Guatemala's native peoples. For the past ten years she has lived in exile in Mexico.**

**Asked her reaction to the award, she explained: "it is a big responsibility because I represent many people who have suffered much".**

**The Guatemalan government was obviously less than delighted by this award. On the eve of its announcement the country's foreign minister declared that "she is associated with certain groups that have done grave harm to Guatemala" (El Pais, October 17, 1992). The next day, however, Guatemala's president Jorge Serrano had discovered that the Nobel prize was "a recognition of the efforts by all the native communities to improve their living conditions" (Ibid).**

**In fact under Serrano's presidency 398 assassinations took place in Guatemala in 1992 according to figures from the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission.**

**Rigoberta's award represents a recognition of the past history of barbarous repression of Guatemala's native peoples. But above all it represents the hundreds of thousands of native people, peasants, students and workers currently struggling in that country. — Ulises Martinez Flores ★**

# Poland's public enemy number one

**JOZEF Pinior, one of the historic leaders of the Polish worker-based democratic mass movement Solidarnosc has been denied a hearing by the minister of justice to appeal his conviction stemming from the 1988 strikes that were called to demand the legalisation of Solidarnosc. As a convicted criminal Pinior, a licensed lawyer, is effectively banned from exercising his profession.**

JAN MALEWSKI

**J**OZEF Pinior was for a long time considered public enemy number one by the martial law regime of General Jaruzelski. As the Solidarnosc treasurer for the Lower Silesian region, he took the initiative on the eve of the December 13 coup d'état to withdraw union funds from the bank and use them to set up a war chest to enable Solidarnosc to reorganize itself underground.

He was president of the union's underground regional leadership and, from 1982 to 1987, a member of its national leadership. In March 1990, he gave a detailed report on union finances for the underground period at Solidarnosc's second congress in his region. The balance, which he returned, was \$50,000.

His activity cost him several criminal convictions. Arrested in April 1983, he was condemned to four years in prison in May 1984 though he was amnestied shortly afterward. Accused of "theft" of union funds, he lived for eight years under the constant threat of having his wages and property seized.

After the fall of the bureaucratic regime, he opposed the pro-capitalist course of its replacement. Pinior, now a member of the Fourth International, was one of the founding members of the Polish Socialist Party in 1984. In May 1988, he and his comrades organized a meeting at the Dolmel factory in Wroclaw during the strike wave that was called to demand the legalization of Solidarnosc. The police intervened and arrested the speakers.

Pinior was held for five months and then in October 1988 given a one year suspended prison sentence and, to absolve the government of its compensation responsibilities, a fine equivalent to the length of time he had already served.

Three years later, after futile attempts to

find work in his profession, Pinior has appealed to the minister of justice to demand a revision of his many trials. Other Solidarnosc activists have been able to win such rehabilitation and in some cases have received large financial compensation. For his part, Pinior has not demanded money, only that his convictions be lifted and his record cleared.

## Official doubletalk

But this has been too much for the minister of justice Zbigniew Dyka of the reactionary National Catholic Union (ZChN) who told Pinior that he "was not in a position to consider his demand to intercede and conduct an extraordinary revision of his case." It is worth quoting the formal charges leveled against Pinior by the Stalinist regime and repeated by the new minister.

"It has been established that the accused J. Pinior, refused to leave the grounds of the factory where he was found without the permission of the management, and that he actively resisted the factory guards who intervened. As a result of the following scuffle and kicks by the accused, K. Woznica suffered a bruise on his right hand which prevented him from using it for seven days...Likewise, it is not possible to overturn the judgement that accused J. Pinior of having used insulting language against the people who arrested him."

Over and above a display of hostility towards a union leader, the "Pinior affair" reveals an attempt to threaten the right to strike. Twenty-eight Solidarnosc union commissions from the largest factories in Wroclaw, the Lower Silesian Solidarnosc women's commission and the Alternative Youth Committee have been amongst the

first to protest. They have been joined by all of the Wroclaw representatives of the Democratic Union, the party of the former premier Tadeusz Mazowiecki. The Social Democratic (SDRP — the former CP) parliamentary representatives have also protested and one of them, Marek Mazurkiewicz, explained the origins of the convictions against Pinior:

"The penal code was used in this case to isolate through imprisonment a representative of the democratic left opposition that threatened the authorities at the time."

Comparing the Pinior case with that of President Lech Walesa (who also took part in the May 1988 strike), the daily newspaper *Nie*, managed by Jerzy Urban, former spokesperson of the martial law governments, wrote that "the only difference is that Walesa has work and the other strikers are now likewise well placed dignitaries. But not Pinior who remains a left wing worker militant...Jozef Pinior is a marked man, condemned for activity that has enabled others to govern the state."

As a result of the pressure exerted by these forces the ministry of justice was forced to make a gesture to the pro-Pinior forces. On October 22, the Polish press reported that the minister of justice agreed to review his case. However, they have only agreed to review two of his four convictions. Pressure must therefore continue.★

## SOLIDARITY NEEDED!

**THE decision of the Polish minister of justice concerning the case of Jozef Pinior should outrage all those who oppose acts of injustice and defend human rights such as the right to strike.**

**Protests can be sent to Zbigniew Dyka, Minister of Justice, Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwosci, Al. Ujazdowskie 11, 00-950 Warszawa, Skr. Pocz. 33, Poland. Copies to: Jozef Pinior, c/o Pracowniczy Fundusz Przemyslowy, Rekordzielnicza 16, 50-991 Wroclaw, Skr. Pocz. 1442, Poland.**

**Jozef Pinior and his comrades are also in urgent need of funds to meet the exorbitant legal costs of obtaining a total rehabilitation. Financial donations can be sent to:**

**Jozef Pinior, Bank Zachodni, Wroclaw, Poland, account #389206-01020386-017879-152-1. ★**