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VIEWPOINT

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Dis-united
left...

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crisis In Indonesia

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Europe's FBI in action

While the heads of governments of the EU were discussing the amendment of the Maastricht Treaty at the Amsterdam Inter-Governmental Conference in June, the Dutch capital was under a state of siege.

The Dutch police preventively arrested hundreds of demonstrators, accusing many of "membership of a criminal organisation".

All this was observed with great interest by police liaison officers from other EU-countries.

Nicholas Busch asks if this was a first glimpse of the "area of freedom, security and justice" established by the Amsterdam Treaty?

When the Summit was over, at least 700 people, most of them anti-Summit protesters, had been temporarily detained, sometimes without their arrest even being registered. Preliminary estimates indicate that between 200 and 300 foreigners from EU countries were summarily deported, in many cases without being informed of the grounds for their removal. Many foreigners were deported without their passports, money and other personal belongings. Some were told they would not be allowed to enter the Netherlands for some time and were advised to pick up their belongings at the Dutch embassy in their country.

Approximately 130 Italians were held for hours on the train that brought them to Amsterdam and sent back to Italy under police escort in the middle of the night.

Belgians and Germans were bussed to the borders and handed over to their home countries' police. Scandinavians were put on planes. 4 Swedes and 12 Danes were brought home on a military aircraft, escorted by a Dutch fighter-bomber the first part of the way. Hundreds of people randomly arrested on the streets of Amsterdam were subjected to police abuse and ill-treatment under detention.

On Saturday 14 June, a large, long-planned European demonstration against unemployment gathered some 50,000 demonstrators from many EU countries. Some minor clashes with the police occurred during this march, but both the Social-Democrat Mayor of Amsterdam, Mr Schelto Patijn [incidentally a brother of Michiel Patijn, the Minister of European Affairs and Dutch chief-negotiator at the IGC] and the public relations officer of the police declared themselves very satisfied with the outcome of the march and said that minor damages and disturbances were quite normal at events of that size.

They omitted to say that hundreds of Italians had been effectively prevented from taking part in the march. The police simply held them on the train upon arrival at Amsterdam. Only after the demonstration was over were most of them allowed to leave the station. However, approximately 130 passengers were locked in the train during the whole afternoon. They were later handcuffed and brought to a penitentiary. Their photographs were taken and in the middle of the night they were put on a train back to Italy, allegedly on suspicion of having caused damage in train cars.

Two Italian members of the European Parliament, who wanted to check these police allegations were denied access to the train by the police. Dutch observers question that the alleged damages were the real ground for the mass arrests. Extensive damage to trains is often caused in the

Netherlands by hooligans on their way to football matches, they say, but this has never led to mass arrests. Indeed it seems that the real purpose of the police operation was to prevent as many people as possible from joining the protest march and to remove those Italians regarded as would-be trouble-makers from the Netherlands. A statement of the public prosecutor in the case seems to confirm this: "If you saw what was coming out of this train, you understand what could have happened".

The second wave of mass arrests took place on Sunday 15 June around the Vrankrijk building, one of the information centres belonging to Dutch groups opposed to the Summit. In the late afternoon the police suddenly began arresting people entering or leaving the building, or merely walking around in streets in its wider surroundings. Some people were literally kidnapped - handcuffed, blindfolded and driven away by plain-clothes police in black Mercedes cars. Soon, information spread that the people arrested were being detained and charged on the accusation of "membership in a criminal organisation", in accordance with Article 140 of the Dutch Penal Code.

At 9pm a group of about 350 people attempted to leave 'Vrankrijk' for a demonstration at the police headquarters in protest against the arrests. After only 20 metres, the marchers were surrounded by riot police, whereupon they sat down on the street and began chanting. After having "cleaned" the area around 'Vrankrijk' from passers-by and curious press people, the police arrested all 350 people, as well as some passers-by protesting against the operation. Again, the arrests were made on the charge of suspected "membership in a criminal organisation". It was the biggest mass arrest in the Netherlands since 1966.

On Monday 16 June, the opening day of the official summit, the city centre of Amsterdam had all the characteristics of a fortress. The police were omnipresent. Throughout the city people "disappeared", randomly arrested as possible trouble-makers - a suspicion based only on their appearance. Far away from any security zone, 6 people were arrested under Article 140. Their crime consisted in having somewhat naively, perhaps, asked some policemen for the way to an announced demonstration of Kurdish people.

That evening, a few hundred people gathered near a security zone for what they called a "jubilation march". The marchers intended to approach the hotels where the European heads of government were staying and "cheer" them (somewhat noisily) "for all the efforts they are making". The organisers also carried a cake they intended to deliver to French President Chirac. Some 200 people were arrested. They were released the next day with a fine of 125 guilders (US\$63) for "illegal gathering", according to a provision of the local emergency regulation in force during the Summit.

Most of those detained under Article

140 were released only after the official conclusion of the Summit – without being interrogated. None have been formally charged and Dutch lawyers doubt that anyone will ever stand trial. This is a further indication that the purpose of the arrests never was to actually start penal procedures, but merely to keep them away from the streets during the Summit.

The chief public prosecutor stated several times on television that, long before the Euro Summit, the decision had been taken to get hold of possible trouble-makers through the use of Article 140. Fritz R., a professor of penal law at the University of Amsterdam, said that in considering what had happened he could see only one criminal organisation - formed by the Mayor, the public prosecutor and the head of the police, who had been working in a organised way for some months on preparing these deliberate and unlawful arrests.

Almost 90% of the charges based on Article 140 never resulted in a conviction. The "usefulness" of the provision consisted in its authorising the police to make much wider use of sweeping investigative techniques than in investigations based on other provisions of the Penal Code. In most of the cases the provision has been used not against dangerous, violent criminals but against radio pirates, organisations involved in the trafficking of soft drugs, squatters, football supporters and extremist right-wing parties.

In 1918, a leading member of the Social Democrat Workers Party was sentenced under this article for having called for a revolution in the Netherlands. After World War II the provision was used against freedom fighters in Indonesia, when the Netherlands were fighting their colonial war there. Thus, it has been used before against political groups, but always after something actually had happened and with more substantial evidence and more clearly defined charges.

This is the first time that Article 140 has been used for "pro-active" policing purposes, i.e. to prevent an alleged risk of "disturbances" of public order and security. Dutch critics claim the objective of the operation was not only to prevent people from exercising their basic right to demonstrate at the Amsterdam summit, but also to generally establish a new interpretation of Article 140, extending its use to groups within society whose crime consists in being disliked by the state.

On Tuesday 24 June the Amsterdam city council discussed the events occurring during the Summit. Only the Green Left clearly disapproved of the behaviour of the police. Most other parties approved, because, as the leader of the Social Democrats put it, "it is better to have an investigation as to why the police arrested innocent people than to have an investigation into the question of why half the city was burned".

The majority of parliament did not disapprove of the arrests as such, but said that

the use of Article 140 was not really appropriate and that the time had come to amend the penal code, in order to make this kind of arrest possible under another article of the penal law. Most parliamentary groups carefully avoided addressing the crucial question of whether there were any grounds for the arrests in the first place and whether the state has the right to prevent demonstrations only because it dislikes them.

Minister of Justice, Ms Winnie Sorgdrager, said she personally approved of using Article 140 in cases like this, but that it was ultimately up to a judge to decide whether its application was justified or not.

Most political parties now demand that at least some people be prosecuted under Article 140, so as to allow a court to state whether its use against the anti-Summit protesters was lawful or not. In the meantime, most observers agree that there will be no convictions under Article 140 in this case. Consequently, by calling for "test" prosecutions, the parliament has in fact given the Department of Justice a mandate to investigate an unknown 'criminal organisation' which – in application of the "guilt by association" principle – could theoretically comprise the entire extra-parliamentary opposition in the Netherlands.

Foreign police involved

According to a Dutch police spokesman, German, Belgian and British police were dispatched to Amsterdam during the Summit. The Germans brought with them dogs trained to find bombs. The spokesman insisted, however, that the foreign police did not actively take part in any operations, but were there merely as observers. The Swedish police officially confirmed that they had dispatched an "observer" to Amsterdam. And according to Italian activists, an Italian police liaison officer passed information on protesters on the train from Italy to his Dutch colleagues.

Dutch groups organising the anti-Summit activities claim that German and Italian police warned the Dutch authorities before the Summit about "trouble-makers" from their respective countries planning major disturbances of the Summit, thereby triggering panic among the Dutch police who had earlier shown a rather relaxed attitude in preparing for the Summit.

Weeks before the Summit, a couple of Dutch detectives visited numerous squatted houses in Amsterdam and other Dutch cities and strongly warned the occupants against accommodating foreign guests during the Summit. The detectives particularly encouraged people to ring them if they had "problems with Germans". The occupants (whose squats have been legalised by the authorities), were told that non-compliance with these instructions could entail their immediate eviction.

The Dutch police were not the only ones to collect fingerprints and photo-

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★ Europe's FBI in action

graphs. The German police took photographs and fingerprints of those deported, and told them they would be charged for "disturbance of the peace". German police even tried to take photographs and fingerprints of some of the people on the returning Italian train. And Italian authorities were put under strong pressure from the Netherlands and Germany to arrest their returned nationals upon arrival in Italy, but refused to do so.

As yet, however, there is no official confirmation of any formal structures of international police co-operation, such as Schengen or EDU/Europol, being involved in police action before, during and after the Summit. The Dutch authorities have so far chosen to neither confirm nor deny specific suspicions expressed by activist

circles of extensive registration of protesters in the Schengen Information System.

A test run for Europe's political police?

The novelty with the police operations around the Amsterdam Summit, is, on the one hand, their purely pro-active character and, and on the other, their astounding legal motivation and the participation of foreign police.

Hundreds of demonstrators were arrested before anything happened and after nothing had happened. After several days of demonstrations and protest marches drawing tens of thousands of people, all the damage done consisted in little more than some broken flag-poles and windows, destroyed flower beds, and a

police car turned on the side. Not one police officer was injured. Neither does the police's own list of objects seized from more several hundred people arrested suggest a strong inclination to violence among the protesters. The "weapons" found consisted of 14 (mostly pocket) knives, four screw drivers, a starting pistol and 3 teargas aerosol-sprays.

Random arrests of hundreds of people, including passers-by, were based on the alleged suspicion of "membership in a criminal organisation". This served a double purpose. On the one hand, it enabled the immediate arrest of people who had not committed any more concrete offence. It thereby allowed the police to clear the street of "disturbing" elements until the end of the EU summit. Secondly, and more worryingly, reference to the offence of "membership in a criminal organisation" gave the police authorisation to make use of extensive investigation techniques and to collect comprehensive personal data, far beyond what is allowed in normal criminal investigations. The big question is what is going to happen to these data, in particular if the persons concerned are not convicted or even formally charged. Considering the strong presence of police from other EU member states in Amsterdam and the general European context, the question is particularly relevant.

European co-operation in public order

Improving co-operation both in maintaining "public order and security" and in the fight against "organised crime" has been a constant priority on the agenda of both the Schengen countries and EU Justice and Home Affairs co-operation. The Schengen Information System (SIS) is mainly an instrument "to maintain public order and security, including State security" (Article 93, Schengen Implementing Agreement, SIA). SIA Article 99.3 authorises the creation of personal files for the purpose of "discreet surveillance" and "specific checks". People registered in the SIS according to this provision are not suspected of any specific offence but are regarded by the reporting national police or intelligence services as interesting from a public security point of view. They have no right to information about whether or not they are registered.

It is possible that Dutch authorities exchanged the personal data collected through these mass arrests (including photographs and fingerprints) with police and security authorities in other Schengen member states via the SIRENE-network, and the SIS system. If we assume that other member states decide to proceed the same way with personal data of "undesirable" political activists, the SIS/SIRENE structure will quickly develop into a powerful instrument for the observation of the movements and behaviour of people innocent according to the law, for the purposes of political policing.

Portugal: municipal elections A left which is ready to struggle!

The municipal elections on December 14th will be the first test for the Socialist Party (PS) government of António Guterres, writes Luis Branco

The PS will certainly maintain its control of the major cities. Especially since the main right-wing party, the PSD, which governed the country from 1985-95, is weak, and is presenting minor figures as candidates. Rather than win, their aim seems to be to do as much damage as possible to the PS government's image.

In the run-up to the election, the PS, PSD and the right-wing PP, and in some regions the Communists (PCP) have been trading candidates for the post of Parliamentary Chairperson (Mayor). The ideological indifference of the main candidates has led the media to label the conflict as a "pre-electoral dual" between regional power-brokers.

The main candidates are certainly avoiding the crucial social issues, and any debate on the role of the private automobile in urbanisation, the construction of further concrete monstrosities labelled as social housing, or the ongoing real-estate speculation as Lisbon prepares for the 1998 Universal Exhibition.

All three mainstream parties, and the Communists (PCP), are concentrating their campaigns on their past achievements, and on promises of roads and other infrastructure projects that they promise to build within the four-year mandate at stake.

The Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR) is presenting 18 lists of candidates for Mayors and for the municipal executive and 14 lists for the local parliaments. Most of these 720 candidates are concentrated in Lisbon and Porto, the two main cities.

In 1993 the party presented lists of candidates in some 15 municipalities.

Three local parliamentarians were elected in Lisbon as part of a wider left list, led by Jorge Sampaio (now the President of the Republic).

His replacement, João Soares, has reversed or suspended many of the left's plans for the capital city. His administration is also the subject of corruption scandals. Former CIA director Frank Carlucci, close friend of the Soares family, is currently developing a luxury apartment complex in Lisbon, for which he lacks all the necessary permits, except the personal support of João Soares.

The son of former President Mário Soares, João was a keen supporter of the anti-communist UNITA forces in Angola, a former colony of Portugal.

The PSR refused to endorse Soares's list and decided, in November 1996 to present an alternative list. It is contesting the Lisbon and Porto municipal elections in coalition with Política XXI, a slightly smaller formation, representing independent left and ex-PCP militants. Fully conscious of the weight of tactical voting, the coalition is striving to elect some representatives of the alternative left, to oppose the clientelism and politics of exclusion which currently dominate municipal politics.

It is difficult to predict what will happen outside the major urban centres. The PSR is also running a strong campaign in Amarante, the small town which hosted the 1996 Fourth International youth camp, and presents lists of candidates in newly opened regions for the work of the party.

The media boycott, and the appeal for the vote for the major parties are making it a hard campaign. The PSR slogan is "The left which is ready to struggle" – for ideas, for alternative projects for urban life, for jobs, and for the fight against racism. ★

There is more. Less than a month before the Amsterdam police operation, the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council adopted a proposal (from the Dutch presidency) for "joint action". This means co-operation in connection with events, such as "sporting competitions, music concerts, demonstrations and road blockades", attracting many people from several member states

The Schengen Police and Security Working Group's draft handbook on police co-operation in the field of public order and security (SCH/1 (97) 36 rev 3, 15.5.97) is more specific. It expressly states that co-operation can also relate to the movements and activities of groups, "irrespective of their size", which "may pose a threat to public order and security".

Information exchange is to be improved through the use of a standardised procedure. Questions in a "checklist" in the annex to the document relate to the estimated number of people participating in the event in question, the nature and composition of participating groups, their motives and intentions, their gathering places and times, their travel routes, their means of transport, etc. Furthermore the handbook provides the design of joint ad hoc "operational centres" to be set up in the member state hosting a particular event. This implies that at future EU Summits, police from other member states could officially be part of the police command structure in charge of maintaining public order and security, alongside the police of the hosting country.

The "organised crime" pretext

In recent years the need to fight against "international organised crime" has been used as a pretext for gradually extending the powers of the police, introducing new types of offences and legitimising almost boundless gathering of personal data. The fight against "organised crime" has been the main argument justifying the creation of Europol and of a confusing mass of overlapping structures of police and security co-operation. The public was told that this legal and police re-armament was directed against criminal organisations of car thieves, immigrant smugglers, drug dealers, paedophiles and terrorists.

Few listened to the persistent warnings of civil liberties circles that such poorly defined terms as "criminal organisation", "organised crime" and "membership" in such an organisation opened wide the door to arbitrary infringements of the fundamental rights and liberties of innocent people.

The Amsterdam events are not likely to diffuse such concern. They show that in the EU, the mere expression of political dissent can indeed lead to you being treated as a presumed member of a criminal organisation, with all the ensuing consequences. Ranging from pro-active observation, computerised storage, processing and exchange of sensitive personal

data, to arbitrary detention and removal from an EU member state.

Recent Schengen and JHA documents appear in a new light against the background of the Amsterdam events: Take, for example, the EU Convention on Extradition signed last year. It provides, among other things, for the "automatic" extradition of a person on the grounds of contribution to or membership in a criminal organisation, without the need for any evidence indicating that the person concerned personally committed any offence.

Or the High Level Group's recent proposal for "joint action" to the effect that all EU-member states would commit themselves to make membership in a criminal organisation an offence under their national law.

The implications are obvious. The excessive police action against the protesters at the Amsterdam Summit looks more and more like an advance test-run of emerging European structures of police and justice cooperation. So much for the "area of freedom, security and justice" established by the Amsterdam Treaty? ★

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Documents on the the repression and subsequent protests are at: <<http://www.xs4all.nl/~ac/euengzw/index.htm>>

France's 35 hour week

French prime minister Leonel Jospin announced on Friday October 10, a new bill for the legal reduction of the working week without loss of salary. The president of the employers organisation CNPF resigned, a sign of employers' deep opposition to the new measures.

All the country's trade unions and associations of the unemployed have been calling for some kind of reduced working time. But while the main unemployed associations (AC!, APEIS, MNCP) are united in their demand for a 32 hour week tied to job creation, and without loss of purchasing power for wage-earners, there is no consensus between the three trade union confederations.

This is unfortunate, since only mobilisation by wage-earners and the unemployed will overcome the many obstacles in the path of a reduction in working hours with the creation of new jobs.

The legislative timetable given for negotiations (2 years for business employing more than 10 people, 4 years for the rest) risks being used by employers to apply job flexibility and intensify the work routine, cutting out any positive effects of a reduction in the working week.

Jospin has also stated that negotiations should include "the organisation of work" and "changes in the working schedule." There is a great risk that business will seize new possibilities,

such as the cancellation of a fixed working day, to avoid hiring new labour. This will also cause a deterioration in working conditions, because wage-earners will be forced to work according to the number of hours and length of time chosen by the employer.

Although the government has declared its intention to re-examine abuses arising from previous legislation encouraging part-time employment, nothing has been clarified in these new measures. Meanwhile, part-time work is increasingly imposed and wide spread, to the disadvantage of women in particular.

Jospin stated that 35 hours will be introduced without loss of salary, but would "be tied to a moderation of salaries." In other words, a wage freeze, and a lost of purchasing power. Combined with generous financial incentives for businesses introducing shorter working hours.

The bill on the 35 hour week will not be presented before the French Assembly before the beginning of 1998. By that time, wage-earners, associations and trade unionists should have time to build together a mass mobilisation equal to the stakes involved.

On a European level too, the stakes are high: the creation of a movement for the reduction in working hours concerning everyone. [CA/JD] ★

United fight to challenge New Labour policies

Despite enduring months of calculated insults from Tony Blair, Britain's trade union leaders delivered him the victories he wanted at Labour Party Conference, writes **Pete Firmin**.

The rule changes associated with Blair's 'Party into Power' project now give the Labour leadership a free hand to muzzle any grassroots rebellion inside the party.

"Flexibility" has become the watchword. Flexibility for the Labour leadership means dodging out of any positive commitment party activists were fighting for. Flexibility for working people means being cajoled into accepting part time and short term contracts on worse conditions. It means putting up with attacks on the welfare state and a political party that is long on rhetoric and short on delivery.

And yet, on May 1st this year working people voted Labour: for real change, for an end to the Tories — and an end to Tory policies. Exit polls in that general election clearly showed that a majority of Labour voters, supported radical policies. They voted for redistribution of wealth from rich to poor, an end to privatisation and defence of welfare provision.

With the bosses

The first months of the Labour government have been an eye-opener. Blair and his cronies have been proud to proclaim that they are following the same strategy as the Tories. They have been gleeful that they are getting away with things that their Conservative predecessors could not. Even the apparent commitment to increased spending on health and education is just a massaging of existing funds that are totally inadequate to sustain services already cut to ribbons.

The catalogue of attacks is long. They have "liberated" the Bank of England from political control and thus raised interest rates. They have continued with Tory privatisation plans and further pushed the tottering plans for Private Finance Initiatives in the National Health Service and elsewhere.

Young people and students have been in the front line whether through the introduction of student fees, the "welfare to work" con trick, or Home Secretary Jack Straw's new "law and order" proposals.

Single parents lose their benefits and the unemployed are forced onto schemes as pointless as those introduced by the

Tories, but more attractively packaged. All this has gone hand in hand with a steadfast refusal to remove Tory laws such as those shackling the trade unions and making asylum seekers destitute — policies Labour had opposed only weeks before coming into power.

Chancellor Gordon Brown's latest statement on European monetary convergence — "not going in just yet but preparing the way" goes hand in hand with an attempt to gag any dissident EuroMPs.

The pattern is clear. The bosses' offensive is to continue, with New Labour proud to help the bosses prosecute it.

However while all this may seem evident to left activists, most of those who voted Labour on May 1st remain mesmerised. We have the paradox of Blair being promoted as the world's most popular leader, while government policies attack every aspiration of their supporters.

Another crucial layer of voters are beginning to wake up and see what is happening but lack the confidence to fight back. The long night of Tory rule has left trade union organisation desperately weakened and political campaigners isolated.

Maximising popular resistance

Which leaves the difficult questions: How do you build a fightback against the bosses offensive? What sort of organisation is necessary?

It is clearly not enough to merely continue to beaver away inside the structure of the Labour Party — but neither is it possible to merely proclaim the existence of a new socialist party.

Neither can you just build an effective socialist organisation just by recruiting one by one. The biggest "revolutionary" parties in Britain are feeble shadows of what we need. In themselves, even those parties with several thousand members are unable to change events.

We have to relate to the mood that exists for new realignment. We need to build a united left — inside and outside the Labour Party. This must be based on the practical demands working people are putting forward and real actions attempting to realise them.

Ritual denunciations are meaningless — practical work is the only way to expose Blairism for what it is. Out of that practical work can arise both the unity of the left, and the means of reaching out to new forces.

Drawing people into action on straightforward demands, and trying to force the existing leadership of the labour movement to defend the interests of their members, can mobilise the forces neces-



sary to change society. Even small numbers can be effective — but only by promoting such unity in action.

On this basis it will be possible to build an organisation that can lead a fight against the bosses offensive and pose a threat to the easy ride currently being enjoyed by the New Labour government.

The mood for change needs to be harnessed. We must set clear goals — in the trade unions, inside the labour party, and on the streets. We know the issues, the basic campaigns already exist. The united work must start now.

Positive examples

No clearer example exists than what was achieved this spring with the Euromarch. Broad coalitions were developed both across Europe and in Britain which mobilised thousands of workers and built on the actions of millions against the effects of the Maastricht Treaty.

The Euromarch played a part in changing the policy of some major unions in Britain. Now we have forced the European TUC to call action against unemployment in Luxembourg on November 20th.

The ground work has been laid for further campaigning on this issue which is increasingly recognised as the most important issue facing the British government. On other issues too there are positive signs — such as the ability of supporters of *Workers Liberty* and *Socialist Outlook* to work together with members of the SLP and many activists of no affiliation in the Welfare State Network.

None of this is easy — tensions built on years of suspicion don't go away overnight but without eradicating sectarianism we will never build a credible alternative to New Labour. We must build on these lessons in other key areas, while deepening the debate about what sort of organisation is needed to defend the interests of working people. ★

The author is a regular contributor to *Socialist Outlook*, the newspaper of British supporters of the Fourth International



Unions sell out before negotiations

Everything at the Labour Party Conference went according to Tony Blair's plan, writes **Pete Firmin**.

Conference delivered a "Yes" vote on the "Partnership in Power" reforms which have demolished Party democracy (around 30% of votes opposed).

Most contentious issues were kept off the agenda. And if they weren't, then the movers agreed to remit rather than rock the boat. Blair delivered a very eloquent, cleverly crafted speech which said virtually nothing.

The exception to this smooth running was the National Executive Committee election results. Not only did Ken Livingstone beat the machievellian Peter Mandelson by a substantial margin for the vacant seat, but the proportion of the vote obtained by the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs platform increased from 31 per cent to 39 per cent.

Blair had the trade union leaders to thank for such a "successful" conference. John Edmonds of the GMB, speaking on Partnership in Power, said he didn't support the proposals but the GMB would not be voting against them, and went on to say, parodying Blair's speech to the TUC, "we're watching you Tony".

Concessions

Union leaders did not want to oppose "Partnership in Power" because they calculated it would endanger any concessions from the government on union rights. However, they then ensured that the composites on this issue contained nothing to upset Blair — no figure on the minimum wage, nothing on the anti-union laws.

Representatives of Britain's largest union, the Transport and General

Workers Union (TGWU) even insisted that resolutions on the striking Liverpool Dockers (TGWU members) be excluded from the conference timetable.

In short, the union leaders dropped their demands on the Labour government even before entering negotiations.

Where resolutions were debated which posed uncomfortable questions for the government — on student tuition fees, arms sales to Indonesia, and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) in the National Health Service — union leaders readily agreed to remit them to the party's National Executive Committee.

Even the relatively left-wing RMT transport union eventually "remitted" their resolution on PFI in the rail sector, having been convinced that they should only put it to the vote if they could win. They reasoned that remitting was better than having it voted down. Remission allows the NEC to discard resolutions it doesn't like, before there is any open debate. In fact, the resolution had a reasonable chance of being passed.

The only close call for Blair was on Trident, where the vote went 53-47 against the resolution for scrapping the nuclear missiles.

Stage management, lengthy speeches by ministers, and intimidation of delegates were to be expected. But what does this year's conference say about the state of the movement?

The adoption of Partnership in Power makes it virtually impossible for the labour movement to hold the government to account. It removes the ability of unions and Constituency Labour Parties to submit resolutions critical of the actions of the government. It removes the right of individual members to elect MPs to the NEC, and downgrades the NEC as compared to the newly-established Joint Policy Committee, on which government ministers have a majority.

Union leaders were happy to go along with this — and overturn their own conferences' policy in the process. After all, their ability to have cosy chats with Labour ministers remains unscathed. They dislike the ability of their membership to hold them to account just as much as Blair does.

General Secretaries

Some on the Labour Left refuse to recognise this conflict of interest, simply denouncing "the unions" for their voting records in the Labour Party. The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy prefers to share platforms with left (or not-so-left) General Secretaries, rather than linking up with, and being a part of, the oppositions within the unions, fighting for a change of policy and attempting to call those leaders to account.

Some have taken the NEC result as a signal of a resurgence of the Labour Left, despite the adoption of "Partnership in Power". (Ken Livingstone himself had said before the conference that adoption

of "Partnership in Power" would signal the end of the Labour Party.)

The problem with this analysis is twofold. Firstly, it sees those voting for the Campaign Group 'ticket' as a coherent force, whereas many are members who have become inactive because of despair at the drift of the Party.

Secondly, and more important, it assumes that simply organising to win the NEC votes of the Constituency Labour Parties will change the balance of forces. This strategy is incoherent even in its own terms — the CLP section of the new NEC will only be about a quarter of a body being downgraded anyway. Victory in the CLP section of the NEC elections would change nothing on its own.

In order to achieve such a result in the NEC elections, some are talking of the need for a very broad alliance indeed. They cite the joint effort with Labour Reform around "Partnership in Power" and say this needs to be repeated.

No policies

However, Labour Reform is not — and does not claim to be — an organisation of the Left. If anything it is a section of the old Labour right. They do not have policy positions beyond the ones they took on "Partnership in Power". Individual supporters of the platform freely admit they voted for the scrapping of Clause IV of Labour's constitution, which symbolised the Party's socialist 'soul.'

In order to enter into a joint election campaign with Labour Reform — which represents very little on the ground — the Left would have to drop any idea of campaigning on key policy issues.

Work with Labour Reform around 'Partnership in Power' was not without its problems. Labour Reform were not prepared to oppose the changes, but only to call for deferral because of lack of time to discuss them. A section of the Left went along with this, not as a fall-back position if outright opposition fell, but as their main argument. Deferral was, however, never likely to win support in the unions, and opportunities were missed to argue the case for rejection of the changes, leaving the General Secretaries an easier task in their arm twisting.

Those who want to challenge Blair's capitalist policies will put questions of NEC slates in their rightful context — the need to be part of the opposition to those policies through demonstrations, strikes etc. This strategy can also motivate those who vote for the Left within the Party to become active again.

Unity needs to be forged in action between Party activists and campaigners outside; those in single issue campaigns and other political groups.

The Labour left needs to find ways of openly participating in the developing debate around how to forge an alternative to Blair — an alternative that will be constructed in practice but must also have an organisational form. ★

Building a European social movement

European Union heads of state met in Luxembourg on 20 November, for an empty summit on employment. We reprint the common appeal for an international demonstration "for a Europe without unemployment, without job insecurity, and without social exclusion."

Europe has the greatest concentration of wealth in the world. Today, it is three times richer than it was thirty years ago. So why is there so much inequality, injustice and unemployment? Why is there so much wide-spread poverty, bad housing and social exclusion? Why the attempt to force women off the labour market and back into the home? Why the systematic expulsion of immigrants? Why is the European Social Policy just a lot of hot air?

Social movements

For the first time, we are witnessing the emergence of a truly European social movement. There are two examples: the solidarity movement centred around the Renault Vilvorde conflict, and more recently, the European March against unemployment, job insecurity and social exclusion.

This March started out from every corner of Europe and converged in the Amsterdam Rally, June 1997, bringing together 35,000 people. The Amsterdam demonstrators, like those who demonstrated for Renault Vilvorde, demand a different Social European policy. A radically different policy from that being put in place by the Maastricht Treaty convergence criteria or that of the Stability Pact, signed in Amsterdam. The primary effect of both these treaties involve cuts in social spending as an excuse for reducing budget deficits thereby effectively blocking any attempt to create a dynamic employment policy.

This meeting of heads of state is the Summit of hypocrisy. How long are we going to accept the masquerade of governments hiding behind the "convergence criteria", the law of market forces and profits?

The European Commission has proposed that the European Union fix targets to curb unemployment. The Commission's proposed aims are to reduce the official rate of unemployment over a period of five years from 11% to 7%. This target figure is completely inadequate. Particularly since there are no accompanying obligatory measures that might lend some credibility to such an

engagement. In contrast, the Stability Pact contains a string of measures, (including the possibility of heavy fines) for any government not respecting the [neoliberal] guidelines.

But even these modest propositions on unemployment have been rejected by the Member States, at a ministerial preparatory meeting of the Summit. And the European Parliament has rejected, by a handful of votes, a resolution in favour of the Commission's propositions, and another calling for a 35 hour week.



Mobilisation is vital!

Confronted by such overt cynicism, only a mass movement on a European scale, can change the course of events.

The "official" European trade union movement, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), did not mobilise for the Amsterdam Rally. But now they have decided to call a European-wide demonstration in Luxembourg. That demonstration will take place on Thursday, November 20, at 14.30 (2.30 pm). Hardly a day and time which permits a real mobilisation of the hundreds of thousands of wage-earners, unemployed and young people in Luxembourg and the neighbouring countries who demand an alternative social policy.

Even the ETUC slogans are vague: they demand a Social Europe, but without defining any fundamental demands for a real change.

Consequently, it is important that the European social movement can manifest their unity with the maximum force possible. It is for this reason that the network of associations and many trade unions involved in the organisation of the European Marches and the Amsterdam Rally have launched an appeal for a mass demonstration on November 20, in Luxembourg, with two key slogans:

- a general and massive reduction in working hours throughout Europe without loss of purchasing power, without job flexibility and with job creation. The 35 hour week is the first step. This measure is applicable everywhere!
- an income giving everyone a decent standard of living, whether it be a salaried person employed full time, or imposed part time, or with job insecurity or unemployed. ★

Contact: European Marches against Unemployment, 104 rue de Couronnes, 75020 Paris, France. Tel. +33 1 44 62 63 44 fax. 01 44 62 63 45 Email: <marches97@ras.eu.org>



Later this month Moscow will see the first real municipal elections since President Boris Yeltsin forcibly disbanded the Moscow City Soviet during his 1993 coup.

Boris Kagarlitsky

The present city *duma* (assembly) was created by a presidential decree in December the same year. Elections to it took place simultaneously with elections to Russia's State *Duma*. But while the new Russian parliament has a certain legitimacy, Moscow's municipal elections were an open farce. Representatives of the opposition had no chance to participate, and there was no freedom to campaign.

Residents of the capital evaluated the candidates, and in the great majority of districts voted to reject all of them! Mayor Yury Luzhkov then retrospectively changed the electoral regulations, so that votes to reject all the candidates were not taken into account.

As a result, the capital acquired what was in effect a one-party *duma*, in which only representatives of Yegor Gaidar's party Russia's Choice were seated, along with a few independents.

Gravy train

The deputies used the two-year term allotted to them to the utmost. Soon after the elections the entire city legislature travelled to the USA at public expense to study the latest developments in capitalism. Within the *duma*, the main debates were on the text of the city hymn and other such important topics.

Throughout the whole of its existence, this great organ has only once adopted a municipal law independently, without the help of the city government. The mayor immediately put a stop to this show of independence, using his power of veto.

In 1995, sensing that they would not survive free elections, the deputies arbitrarily extended their term for another two years. The legal justification was a Yeltsin decree allowing extensions to the terms of



Russia

Trouble in Moscow

Personality cult

The mass media have created a veritable Luzhkov personality cult. Several newspapers publish his picture and “wise sayings” in each issue. His portrait is more and more often to be seen in municipal offices and on the streets, and Moscow television every day devotes a whole program of local news to his achievements.

The mayor wields power in the capital with an iron hand, urging on those who do his bidding and punishing those who incur his displeasure. He sends the police to force a private cafe to plant trees by its entrance, and threatens to take buildings away from their owners unless the structures are repainted in a colour to his liking.

Russian provincial governors, meanwhile, appeal to him for help. Luzhkov takes every chance to compare himself to Yury Dolgoruky, the Prince of Vladimir who established the Kremlin. (Dolgoruky acquired his surname, which means “long-armed”, because he was constantly stretching out his arms to take other people’s estates and wives).

The cult of the infallible city chief has also had an unexpected side effect. While Luzhkov has managed to claim the credit for everything good that happens in Moscow, his allies and partners get to answer for everything bad. The city *duma* has been especially unpopular. The 1997 elections are thus presenting the mayor with serious problems.

The leadership of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation is clearly trying to avoid conflict with the powerful mayor. It has particular cause to do this because the vice-mayor is Valery Shantsev, formerly the leader of the Communist group in the Moscow Soviet, and who today does not hide his links with the Communists.

Challenger

However, a challenge to the existing order has been issued by the former chairperson of the Moscow Soviet, Nikolai Gonchar.

representative organs if they had not managed to adopt local electoral laws.

Inconveniently for the leaders of the city *duma*, they had in fact already adopted such a law. As a result, they were drawn into a two-year court case against protesting citizens who viewed the *duma*’s decision as an infringement of their electoral rights.

The *duma* used every possible means to prolong the case, but in the summer of 1997 it ended with a judgment recognising the illegality of extending the *duma*’s term. By that point, the time for the next elections was in any case drawing near.

Meanwhile the policies which Mayor Luzhkov had been pursuing for five years were bearing fruit. Through a curious blend of state capitalism and Soviet-style command methods, the mayor had succeeded in maintaining a high level of economic activity in the capital despite the deep depression in Russia as a whole.

Of course, there is a direct link between the “success” in Moscow and the economic catastrophe in the provinces – the same link that connects the relative prosperity of any capitalist “centre” with the immiseration of the “periphery”.

About 80% of all financial flows in Russia pass through the capital. Moscow is also home to the government ministries, the head offices of major banks and other large national companies and the Russian headquarters of transnational firms. In such circumstances, it would be hard not to record successes.

Huge sums from the financial exploitation of the provinces have been spent in Moscow on the construction of ostentatious buildings, as well as on sumptuous celebrations and various handouts to underprivileged Muscovites.

Meanwhile, the infrastructure has become increasingly ramshackle, housing and municipal services have been waiting years for urgently needed investments, and the city’s debt has risen.

But jobs have been created, the standard of living has been far higher than the Russian average, and the popularity of the mayor has risen.

After the disbanding of the soviet, Gonchar was elected by a huge majority to represent the capital in the Council of the Federation (the Russian “senate”). When direct elections to the council were abolished in 1995, Gonchar was elected to the State *Duma*.

Now he has declared his readiness to renounce his *duma* mandate in order to wage a fight for the post of chairperson of the city legislature.

Originally, Gonchar tried to put together a broad centre-left coalition on the basis of general democratic slogans. But by autumn, it was clear that most of Gonchar’s more right-wing allies lacked the resolve to come out in open opposition to Luzhkov.

The “Our City” movement which Gonchar had founded lost most of its sponsors. But this radicalised it. As the campaign has unfolded, its main core has come to consist of members of the *Komsomol* (Communist Youth League) and of former Moscow activists of the Party of Labour, which collapsed in 1994.

The unwillingness of Moscow television to provide coverage to representatives of the opposition is inducing Gonchar and his supporters to take to “grassroots campaigning”, and this is acting as a further spur to radicalisation. ★

Source: *Green Left Weekly*



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France Truck stop

The truck drivers' mobilisation at the end of October was "faster-moving, though much less massive" than in 1996, admits Claude Debons, Deputy General Secretary of the CFDT transport union (FGTE) which dominated the dispute.

This year's action was prepared by the unions over a long period. "Unfortunately," says Debons, "the employers' new strategy worked quite well. They avoided sending trucks out on the road, and they switched the shifts of shop stewards so that they were not called to work during the dispute.

"There were fewer trucks at the barricades we set up. And, apart from the core of militants, not so many of the drivers who were blocked by the barricades came and participated in the dispute. We thought that there was a very strong feeling among the drivers, but, when it came to action, the results were less than we had hoped.

What were the main demands of this year's strike?

Wages, essentially. Because, although most employers have not implemented the government decrees passed after the 1996 strike, they have been finding ways of re-organising work so as to reduce the total hours worked by each driver. The problem is that our salary structure relies so much on bonuses, overtime, 'on the road' supplements, that this has led to a real fall in take-home pay.

Most drivers do not receive a fixed minimum monthly salary, in exchange for a fixed number of hours. Not all the hours worked are recorded, since many drivers are breaking the legal limits). And not all the hours recorded are paid, since non-driving time is considered as "rest". And it is very difficult to check this from the unclear wage slips most drivers receive.

We succeeded in our three main objectives. A wage increase, and a commitment to future increases; introduction of a "transparent" pay slip, enabling the driver to calculate and compare his income, and a start to the process of re-structuring the various salary and bonus scales so as to lift the basic salaries above the minimum wage zone.

Will companies respect the pay increase?

We agreed to negotiate the introduction of the new salary scale company by company. In most of the large and medium companies, there will not be many problems. But, particularly among the smaller companies, some will try to abolish bonuses, so as to increase, on paper, the minimum wage. We will struggle against this, as we did in 1994, when we actually

built up the union through just such a conflict over the application of seniority bonuses.

The agreement is specific enough to make these kind of tricks difficult. It specifies a minimum wage increase of 4% for depot and passenger drivers, and up to 6% for goods drivers, as from 1 October 1997. By 1 July 2000 we should reach a 15.9% increase for depot personnel working 169 hours/month, and 21.8% for goods drivers. In the negotiations the employers suggested suppressing the bonuses, but we refused to accept this in the final agreement. The text specifically says that monthly and annual take-home pay must not decline during the transition to the new salary scale.

Transport Minister Gayssot (Communist) and Prime Minister Jospin (Socialist) have agreed in principle that Ministry of Labour inspectors will supervise, and impose, this reform, even in those transport companies where there is no trade union presence.

We demanded, until the last moment, the payment of a one-off bonus of 3,000 FF (US\$ 520), but the employers refused.

The two smaller unions did not sign the final agreement, and wanted to continue the strike. Together with the use of police against strikers by a left government, this has left a bitter taste in many people's mouths. As if there was a "front" between yourselves, the bosses and the government on the one hand, and the other unions on the other.

This is a false way of looking at things. The government put a lot of pressure on the employers to negotiate. As for the CFDT's "privileged" relations, look, all governments are materialists. They can't ignore the organisation which is overwhelmingly dominant in a given movement. And the police interventions were mainly at border crossings, and a few strategic points. We advised our militants to avoid violence, which they did.

Although the end of the dispute was certainly confusing, the media have over-emphasised the problems. In most of the country, a majority voted to sign the final agreement.

The real problem is the lack of unity between the unions. Yes, we had a common list of demands, concentrating on a monthly salary of 10,000 FF (\$1,725) for 200 hours worked. But we clearly underestimated the complexity of salary negotiations in this sector. There was not enough discussion between the unions. And, with elections to the prud'homme tripartite labour tribunals in a few months, the FO transport union, which only has 1,500 members, began a rhetorical public bidding game [against the CFDT]. I think the CGT (communist influenced) is closer to our positions. They would perhaps have signed if it had not been for FO's behaviour.

What is clear is that all the new union members are CFDT members. Some

accuse us of treachery, but only 20 members have resigned. And I expect we will win many more in the next 12 months. Seven or eight years ago the CFDT had 3,000 drivers, now we have almost 15,000. Twenty percent of who have joined since the 1996 strike. ★

Interviewed by Dominique Mezzi, for *Rouge*, 13 Nov. 97

Denmark Red Green Copenhagen

The Red-Green Alliance did relatively well in municipal elections across Denmark on November 18th. It scored a record 10% in the capital, Copenhagen. Nationally the Alliance won 2.8% of votes, compared to 1.5% at the previous local elections in 1993.

Refugee and immigrant issues have dominated Danish politics recently. The extreme right, the big bourgeois parties and the Social Democratic party (which is in government) have been effectively campaigning against refugees and immigrants for several months. Several proposals have been made to limit their social rights, and place further restrictions on the right to asylum.

Not surprisingly, an important part of the election campaign of the Red-Green Alliance was opposition to this trend: against racism, in defence of refugees, and demanding better social conditions in the areas where large numbers of immigrants and refugees live. One of the candidates for the Red-Green Alliance in one of the suburbs of Copenhagen was the spokesperson for Denmark's Somali community – a group which has faced particularly severe verbal attacks recently.

Opposition to the privatisation of social welfare and ecological issues, particularly traffic problems, were the other main features of the Alliance campaign.

The Alliance got its best results in the capital and its suburbs. In Copenhagen itself the list got nearly 10% of votes, electing seven members of the city council. According to one opinion poll, the Alliance was the most popular party among first-time voters in the capital.

The list also kept or strengthened its representation in four other local councils in the Copenhagen area and in four other towns.

Those elected for the Red-Green Alliance included one member of the SAP (Danish section of the Fourth International) in the town of Roskilde, while another SAP militant was re-elected in one of the suburbs of

The answer to Tony Blair's prayers?

In November the "unabashed nationalist" Mary McAleese was elected Irish President. Her main role may well be to convince southern voters that partition is inevitable. David Coen explains

McAleese easily defeated the [moderate conservative] *Fine Gael* candidate and great niece of Michael Collins, Mary Bannotti, who came in with 29%. The "left" candidate Adi Roche, supported by Labour, Democratic Left and the Greens, dropped from being a front-runner to a poor 7% of the vote on a turnout less than 50%, beaten even by singer Rosemary Scallon (aka Dana), on 13%.

McAleese is almost universally hated by the Dublin media – her arrival at her first press conference was greeted by hostile silence, very different from the cheers which welcomed the election of her predecessor, Mary Robinson.

McAleese is disliked because of her traditionalist attitudes – she is anti abortion and close to the church hierarchy. The day after her victory, the Catholic primate said the result showed that Ireland was not a "post-Catholic society", as one Labour Party front bencher had called it. Although the office of president is largely ceremonial, Catholic traditionalists see McAleese as a possible antidote to the liberalism of Mary Robinson.

But the main reason the Dublin media



hate her is because of her Northern nationalist background and what she represents. Born a working class Catholic, she was once burned out of her West Belfast home by Loyalists.

Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams offered his support early in the campaign and this was the cue for a concerted attempt to damage her campaign by portraying her as a closet *Sinn Feiner*. At the head of the media pack was former leading member of the Workers Party and *Sunday Times* columnist Eoghan Harris. John Bruton, leader of *Fine Gael*, even questioned how a "non-Irish person" such as McAleese could become President. *Fine Gael* were said to be behind the leaking of a couple of Irish Government documents accusing McAleese of being a *Sinn Fein* fellow traveller. The small proportion of the 26 County electorate which votes *Sinn Fein* supported McAleese.

That campaign misfired: it irritated the republican instincts of supporters of *Fianna Fail*, [the ruling, conservative nationalist party]. Many had been offended by the way McAleese had become their party's candidate, at the expense of Albert Reynolds.

McAleese's vote in Dublin was low. Clearly her Catholic conservatism did not go down well in working class areas. Indeed, this encapsulates the problems *Sinn Fein* have in relating to politics in the South: the majority of people want Irish unity but it is not number one on their list of priorities.

Sinn Fein is too closely associated in their minds with the repressive, Catholic outlook which for so long dominated the 26 Counties and which has now broken down in a series of clerical scandals.

What is now being demanded of McAleese is that she repudiate her nationalist sympathies and "reach out" to Unionists. In other words, that she helps sell the revamped partition emerging from the "peace" talks to doubting Southern (and Northern) nationalists. Britain wants the Irish government to repeal Articles 2 and 3 of the South's Constitution, thereby giving up the Irish "claim" to the North. Or, more accurately, recognising the British claim.

So, paradoxically, the election of the most pro-Irish unity candidate could prepare the way for a settlement which enshrines partition.

The other significant feature of the election is the way in which it cements the *Sinn Fein/Fianna Fail* Alliance. Gerry Adams is relying on this pan-nationalist front to force enough concessions from the British in order to sell a settlement to the base of the Republican Movement.

Fianna Fail leader Bertie Ahern will in the end dictate what the "nationalist family" will accept from the British in return for repeal of Articles 2 and 3. But even his legendary infighting skills won't save him from the political fall-out from the "peace talks".

Like *Sinn Fein*, *Fianna Fail's* reason for existence is Irish independence and national unity. They have not delivered on economic development except with the aid of huge and (short term) EU grants. Should they be seen to fail on the question of unity, then the gradual erosion of the party's support since the Haughey era could become a flood.

The Labour Party was the big loser in this campaign. Its candidate, Adi Roche, a soft focus do-gooder standing on a platform of good intentions, was designed to repeat their "success" with Mary Robinson in 1990.

She made little impact, apart from a few cringe-making remarks on opening the Presidential residence for music sessions. For most Labour supporters such sentimental blather couldn't blot out the memory of Labour's participation alongside the conservatives of *Fine Gael* in the "Rainbow" coalition.

From a historically high vote of 19% and 33 seats, Labour are back in opposition with 10% and 17 seats. To make things worse, the defeat in the Presidential election has ruined their hopes of supplanting *Fianna Fail* as the main opposition party. ★

Source: reprinted from Socialist Outlook

Czech Anarchists win court case

Three Prague anarchists have won a court case protesting the violent dissolution of an unauthorised demonstration, writes Jean Dupont. On October 15, Prague municipal court decided that the District Council for Prague 1 broke the law on 30 August 1996 by using police to dissolving a demonstration called by *Autonomie* magazine.

"Not fulfilling the obligation of announcing a demonstration to the authorities is not a justification for dissolving it," ruled Judge Pechova. The court also agreed with the objectors' claim that until the police took action, the demonstration was peaceful. The police intervention resulted in a number of disturbances amongst the demonstrators, including a few camouflaged antifascists throwing paving stones at the police officers, some of whom were injured.

Ondrej Cakl, one of the three plaintiffs, said that the main point of the objection was to "point out how the authorities inter-

pret the right of citizens to assembly in the case of antifascist and anarchist actions... This is not the only time that this happened. At any action taken by autonomous people, they always encounter state repression."

The demonstration on 30 August 1996 was called by *Autonomie* magazine, to protest the judicial harassment of anarchist groups in Germany. Speakers from Czech Antifascist Action (AFA) and the Trotskyist group Socialisticka Solidarita demanded a "tougher attitude" by Czech state institutions towards fascist activity.

Earlier that month, seventeen members of the German group *Autonome Antifa* had been fined 3000 Dm for "membership of a criminal organisation." The group had organised the physical disruption of neo-nazi meetings. ★

Source: PIA, PO Box 176, 110 01 Praha 01, Czech Republic. <anfocz@usa.net>. www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/6580

Crisis in Spain's United Left

The United Left was supposed to gather Spain's anti-capitalist left under a common umbrella. Though the Communist Party was always the dominant force, a number of smaller republican and 'new left' groups, including most supporters of the Fourth International, have joined over the years.

The organisation has had great difficulty reacting to what Jaime Pastor calls "the new political cycle" in Spain. The decline in the class struggle, after 13 years of Socialist Party government, has led trade union leaders to accept dramatic cuts in pension entitlement, and liberalisation of employment legislation, in a country with 20% unemployment.

Last year's election of Spain's first conservative government since the end of the Franco dictatorship have led some in the United Left to argue for a closer relationship with the Socialist Party (PSOE). But the leadership of the United Left has preferred to increase the polarisation with the Socialists, expelling the most prominent supporters of a *rapprochement*.

The far left is divided in its analysis of these developments. Some argue that the expulsions have avoided an Italian style "big bang", in which opportunist sections of the Communist Party and a corruption-racked Socialist Party collapsed into a centre-left government bloc.

Diosdado Toledano blames the crisis on media and establishment hostility to what is "one of Europe's most radical anti-capitalist parties with a mass base and parliamentary presence... The socialist, revolutionary left has the chance to participate in the reconstruction of a seriously anti-capitalist left, pluralist in its respect for the currents, platforms and organisations which it encompasses."

Others, like Jaime Pastor, who recently resigned from the national leadership of the United Left, argue that the organisation has reacted in a centralised, sectarian way, taking it further from its initial project.

Given the importance of this debate, we invited both comrades to give their analysis of the causes of the current crisis, and the priorities facing the United Left at its 5th Congress later this month.

Jean Dupont

A Necessary Rupture?

Jaime Pastor

When Spain's *Izquierda Unida* (United Left - IU) holds its conference later this month (December), not everyone will be able to participate. The process of rupture which started in May means that the *Partido Democratico de Nueva Izquierda* (PDNI) is now outside IU. So are several IU federations in Galicia, Cantabria and Castille-La Mancha, the Greens in Andalucia, and a good part of the "Third Way" current. More recently IU has split with its Catalan partner *Iniciativa per Catalunya*, and called on IU sympathisers in Catalonia to form a new organisation there.

IU is still pluralistic: alongside the various currents in the Communist Party, there are a range of smaller socialist and republican groups. But, as a result of the crisis, many IU supporters and voters no longer see the United Left as what it set out to be: a regroupment of forces to the left of the Socialist Party (PSOE). This, obviously, has reduced IU's credibility.

How did we come to this? Part of the explanation lies in the unfavourable political and cultural context, with the social movements retreating, and support for anti-capitalist values and ideas declining. Some sections of the old social left are "adapting" to the neo-liberal hegemony. Others show a healthy determination to resist, but limit themselves to simplistic "communist" arguments, and try to establish a firm barrier between themselves and everyone else. Including those who share their concerns, but refuse the methods used to resolve the differences inside IU.

Many of us who joined IU in the early 90s recognised that, despite the existence of diverse and partially incompatible projects inside IU, the originality of the formation, and of similar projects in other countries, was in its capacity to encourage cohabitation between diverse currents, so as to join their forces in a counter-offensive against neoliberalism. For a while, as IU received growing electoral support, and with significant social mobilisations, particularly the general strikes of 1985 and 1994, this seemed possible.

But things changed. A large part of the responsibility is born by the leadership of Spain's two main trade unions, CCOO and UGT. Opting for the "lesser of two evils," trade union leaders have encouraged social passivity.

The May 1995 municipal elections marked the limits of IU's electoral growth,

and revealed the organisation's difficulties in adopting tactics in its institutional work which would allow IU to maintain its autonomy from the ruling Socialists (PSOE), without allowing the old right-wing *Partido Popular* (PP) to take control of town halls and regional governments in the 17 Autonomous Regions. Leaders of IU talked of "two banks of the river" — with IU on one side, and the PSOE and PP on the other. But this only confused left wing voters.

The March 1996 elections saw the PSOE replaced by a PP government. It also ended any IU ambitions of "overtaking" the PSOE as the largest left-wing party (though the leadership has not made a critical evaluation of its previous orientation, and its sectarian implications). The United Left was stagnating, unable to relate well to the "old" and the "new" social movements.

Although IU articulated a progressive criticism of the way the trade union leadership negotiated counter-reforms of the pension system and labour market with the PP government, this did not translate into practical initiatives and proposals. Instead there was a reliance on verbal aggression, and a lack of pedagogical work. The trade union leaders exploited this, to convince most of their members to "close ranks" in the face of IU's criticisms.

IU's relationship with youth movements or the anti-Maastricht movement were hardly helped by its votes in favour of the new Penal Code (which still criminalizes refusal to do military service, abortion for social reasons, and squatting) and its reluctance to relate to platforms and initiatives which it considered "relics of the far left." IU did not move to the left in practical terms. To say nothing of its participation in "anti-terrorist" pacts, and support for Spanish demands for the extradition of members of the armed Basque separatist group ETA.

Conspiracy theory

The Spanish Communist Party (PCE), the largest element within IU, had always had a contradictory relationship with social democracy: oscillating from subordination to sectarianism. It was hardly a surprise when the PCE reacted to the electoral victory of a conservative bloc (the PP in coalition with right nationalist parties in the Basque country, Catalonia and the Canary Islands) by imposing a new, tense debate about IU's relationship with the PSOE, now in opposition.

One current in IU (now called the PDNI) argued for a strategic alliance with the PSOE. The leadership of the PCE reacted in a purely defensive way, arguing that this minority initiative was part of a



Japanese soldier, years after the end of the second world war

Julio Anguita, years after the fall of the Berlin Wall

El País

“conspiracy” led by the PSOE and the PRISA industrial group, which also owns Spain’s largest newspaper, *El País*.

The aim of this conspiracy was allegedly to destroy IU and its *Coordinador General*, PCE leader Julio Anguita. Since April 1997, this “theory” has been used to justify a “war” which, inevitably, has meant breaking IU’s own statutes in order to finish with the “enemy.”

The result was the expulsion of the PDNI, transforming a current which would not have won even 20% of votes at this coming congress into victims. As a result, the PDNI has been able to pull whole federations of IU with it on its way out.

Espacio Alternativo [the IU current led by the author and some Fourth International supporters] argued that initiating a rupture was not the best way to deal with the PDNI “operation” inside IU. We did not see why a small minority, despite their considerable media support, should dominate the agenda of the rest of the organisation. We also refused to accept that the conflict with the PDNI was the main reason for IU’s obvious political disorientation, institutional inertia and introspection.

True, the PDNI strategy of seeking permanent, public differentiation with the IU leadership made cohabitation difficult. But we distanced ourselves from the IU leadership’s autistic attitude, and its refusal to accept legitimate criticism over some specific votes in parliament, or pointing to its poor relations with some of the social movements. We rejected the old argument that “the ends justify the means,” and so we protested the violations of the statutes used to marginalise PDNI supporters... and others.

Plurality problems

This is the main problem. What started as a struggle against those who later formed the PDNI increasingly became an

aggressive response to any sector of IU which the leadership suspected of seeking regular collaboration with the socialist party, or which disagreed with the leadership in the way it was handling the crisis.

For instance, the IU leadership in Galicia was expelled for forming a coalition with the socialist party in Galicia’s regional elections in October. They justified this coalition by the need to defeat Manuel Fraga (PP), a former minister during the Franco dictatorship, and President of the Galician Autonomous government (*Xunta*) for the last eight years. Local IU leaders also hoped that the coalition would entitle them to the privileges of a parliamentary fraction.

While we agreed with the IU federal leadership in Madrid that the Galician coalition was short on programmatic content, and lacking in references to the Maastricht criteria and NATO, we disagreed with Julio Anguita and others over how to resolve the conflict with the IU leadership in Galicia. We also argued that we should prioritise some agreement with the increasingly popular left-wing Galician Nationalist Bloc (BNG).

Unfortunately, Anguita insisted on splitting with the Galician IU leadership, in the name of “coherence,” and a centralist conception of what IU should be. We, in contrast, argued for respecting the right of the Galician IU to develop their own strategy in regional elections, even if we disagreed with their decisions.

Instead, the IU federal leadership helped create a rival ‘real IU’ electoral list in Galicia, which won an unimpressive 0.8% of votes. The left-nationalist BNG won 25.5% (up from 18.4%) while the PSOE-IU-Green coalition won 19.4%, compared to a total of 27.1% in the previous elections. The PP was re-elected, with a slightly smaller absolute majority than before.

The breakthrough of the BNG has pushed debate on an Italian style coalition

between the Socialist Party and most of IU into the background.

The problem is that the IU federal leadership made support for their ‘pure’ IU electoral platform in Galicia into a point of conflict with the leadership of IU’s Catalan partner, *Iniciativa per Catalunya*, and with several IU federations. The result was a series of splits.

As over the Galician IU, we disagreed sharply with the way the IU federal leadership handled the conflict with *Iniciativa*. While we disagree with the [rightist] positions of the leadership of *Iniciativa per Catalunya*, we think that the debate should have happened at the 5th Congress. The centralist way in which Anguita has encouraged the formation of a new pro-IU Catalan force to the left of *Iniciativa* has given the United Left a hispanocentric image, much resented by parts of the Catalan left.

The perverse effects of this “war” also led the IU federal leadership to reject my own text on the need for a federalisation of the Spanish state, including the right to self-determination for the various nationalities. The text had previously been approved by a large majority, but, since I had in the meantime voted against the sanctions imposed on supporters of the PDNI, the secret vote went against me...

There is a serious risk that IU will retreat into an old-style, centralised, homogenous party of the presidential type. That is what the new statutes proposed at the coming congress imply. They will make it difficult to guarantee respect for pluralism of views, and a truly federal structure.

So far, this model has been used against the right-wing within IU. But in the future it could also be used against the organisation’s alternative left minorities. Particularly over differences of opinion concerning the solution to the Basque conflict, and the relationship between IU and the Basque separatist party *Herri Batasuna*.

Looking forward

Although there is an obvious divergence between the PSOE and most of the PDNI on the one hand, and a range of anti-neoliberal forces on the other, the situation in Spain cannot be reduced to a confrontation between “two lefts.”

The Spanish and European left is, in reality, extremely diverse. The anti-neoliberal left contains a range of views on how to oppose capitalism; in the social and ecological fields, in responding to the pluri-national nature of the Spanish state, and (still) in explaining the fall of “real socialism.” There is no overriding consensus on what forms of action, or what organisational form the left should take.

In this context, how can we ensure that the United Left emerges from this 5th Congress in the best possible conditions for rebuilding the anti-capitalist and internationalist left?

★ Spain

One of IU's main problems has been its delay in understanding the nature of the change in the political cycle in recent years. This change obliges us to redefine our relationship with the ruling conservative Partido Popular, creating a strategy of full-on opposition.

With the PSOE we should focus on joint action which can pull the social democrats to the left (though while maintaining our autonomy, and without generating illusions in electoral coalitions). We need to work with left-wing nationalist groups across the Spanish state and, above all, with the social movements, from the trade unions to the anti-militarist youth... To articulate the social, ecological and gender questions within one political project...

This will only be possible if IU has a new culture of debate and dialogue. With respectful confrontation where necessary, but without converting any divergence that emerges into something incompatible with "the" project as defined by the leadership. This plurality and genuine federalism must be reflected in the decision-making bodies of IU. ★

A liberating rupture

This split between the United Left and its Catalan partner *Iniciativa per Catalunya* is the final act of a relationship marked by numerous quarrels, and a widening divergence in the political projects of the two organisations. Reconciliation was impossible.

Diosdado Toledano

The rupture with the United Left has caused a crisis within *Iniciativa*, and in its alliance with the Greens and the Catalan Communist Party (PCC), a 'traditionalist' split from the Communist Party during its Eurocommunist phase.

The corridor discussions and manoeuvres of the United Left leadership, in fixing the exact moment of the rupture, have been discussed in minute, sensationalist detail in the media. But the real issue is the growing divergence of the project, objectives and internal life of the Catalan organisation from the United Left project.

Rightward drift

The recent declarations of *Iniciativa* leader Rafael Ribó in favour of Spanish compliance with the Maastricht Treaty are the latest step in what has been a long evolution towards the right. *Iniciativa* is now even to the right of classic social democratic positions. Not as a result of "tactical" or superficial adaptations to deal with the neoliberal offensive, but as the result of a shift in the convictions of *Iniciativa's* leadership. These repeated concessions to the neoliberal dynamic have led to the terminal crisis in which *Iniciativa* found itself even before the split with United Left.

How could *Iniciativa* build a left opposition when it openly supported the European Union project, making every effort to

prove its sincerity, and pledging collaboration in the transition towards the single currency? The leadership of *Iniciativa* has tried to calm every single social conflict in recent years. It opposed the broad movement of community and neighbourhood groups (led to a large extent by *Iniciativa* militants) against the increase in water prices (in preparation of privatisation). It has opposed the industrial action of Barcelona metro workers in defence of their early retirement agreement. And, unlike the United Left, *Iniciativa's* deputies in the Spanish parliament have supported the counter-reform of pension rights, and the labour market reforms that cut redundancy payments to make dismissal cheaper.

The social movements which carried *Iniciativa* into the institutions now find the organisation to be part of the institutional straightjacket. *Iniciativa* is dominated by professional politicians, in a tight alliance with the party *nomenklatura*, secure in the Catalan and Spanish institutions. There are fewer and fewer activists, and less and less motivation to project the organisation outward.

Lack of democracy

This is partly because of the lack of pluralism in *Iniciativa*. Unlike the United Left, *Iniciativa* expects groups which join to abandon all aspects of organisational autonomy. This is why, for instance, most Fourth International supporters in Catalonia remained outside *Iniciativa*, while their co-thinkers elsewhere participated actively in the United Left. The Ribó leadership preferred not to see *Iniciativa* grow, if this meant the entry of other groups, particularly the PCC.

Ribó and his supporters have maintained the 'official' Communist Party (PSUC) in suspended animation. This has atomised *Iniciativa's* main contingent of militants, and blocked the reorganisation of Catalonia's Communists, or their federation with the rest of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE).

The Ribó group has demoralised large

Croatia's racist chief

President Franjo Tudjman has warned Croatian youth against all those who are "genetically programmed... to act against the Croatian motherland."

This reference to the Serb minority came at celebrations to mark the 7th anniversary of the youth wing of Croatia's ruling party, the HDZ.

According to the Croatian Helsinki Committee, the president's latest racist outburst contravenes Croatia's constitution, as well as United Nations and European conventions on human rights. [CHC/JD] ★

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layers of the *Iniciativa* militant base, without winning any compensation on the legal or institutional front. The relative weakness of the left inside *Iniciativa* (corresponding to the majority in United Left) is a direct consequence of the success of the organisation's success in pulling *Iniciativa* to the right. Even so, the militant wing gathered about 1/3 of delegate votes at *Iniciativa*'s recent 5th Assembly.

While demanding full autonomy from the United Left in the name of Catalonia's sovereignty, *Iniciativa*'s leadership has always had an active pan-Spanish and European strategy. Before freezing the PSUC, the Ribó group were those who imported the Italian Communists' successive transformations into the Spanish CP. Ribó is today a fervent supporter of a Catalan and Spanish equivalent of Italy's Olive Tree centre-left bloc.

Disloyal and dishonest

Ribó has negotiated with co-thinkers across the Spanish state in a kind of parallel leadership to the United Left federal council. While no-one in the United Left would deny *Iniciativa*'s leaders the right to spread their ideas, there has been a justified anger at the dishonest and disloyal way the Ribó group has behaved towards United Left: supposedly a sister party. In the Basque country, the Canary Islands and most recently in Galicia, the *Iniciativa* leadership openly built and supported currents and organisations which opposed the national United Left project.

The surprising thing is not that the United Left leadership reacted with confrontation, but that it waited so long before doing so. Though this was only partly the result of the weakness of the leadership of the United Left: it also reflected the absence of a solid left opposition inside *Iniciativa*.

Since its electoral defeat in May 1996, and facing investigations for corruption and state terrorism [abduction, torture and murder of suspected ETA supporters] the Socialist Party (PSOE) has been desperately seeking to broaden its support. Unable to win votes in the centre ground, PSOE leaders are enviously regarding the United Left's electoral base, 10-12% of votes. Not surprisingly, the PSOE seized the offer of Ribó and United Left leaders in Galicia to begin building local Olive Tree-type coalitions. Particularly since the 'left' partner was not demanding that the PSOE change its economic policies, deal with corruption allegations, or reform its 'anti-terrorist' policies.

Such PSOE-United Left alliances are a real threat for the future of the Spanish left as a whole. They open the way for the absorption of a part of the United Left into the Socialist Party, and counteract all the work that has been done in recent years to build the United Left as an alternative to Socialist Party 'management' of the system.

Everybody knew that once an Olive Tree coalition was in place in one of the 17 Autonomous regions, it would generalise



Currencies of Europe, unite!

Jobless of Europe, unite!

El País

across the Spanish state. What else could the leadership of the United Left do, except defend itself with the means at its disposal?

With elections to the *Generalitat de Catalunya* (autonomous parliament) planned for early next year, the Olive Tree project was ready to roll. It would have been suicide for the United Left leadership to wait until this month's (December) congress. To adopt decisions which everybody knows the leadership of *Iniciativa* would never respect. Nor could the United Left leadership wait for the left minority in *Iniciativa* to gain the upper hand.

Acting effectively meant presenting publicly the differences in policy and

project which separate the United Left from *Iniciativa*, and stating the obvious: that there is no longer any fundamental or organic link between the leadership of *Iniciativa* and the United Left project. This was what the United Left leadership did. It was, in fact, the only responsible thing to do. Those who are bleating about bruised Catalan sovereignty are crying crocodile tears. The multi-national nature of the Spanish state must not become a barrier to the interplay of ideas and political programmes! ★

The author is a founding member of *Cuadernos Internacionales*, a regroupment of Fourth International supporters in the Spanish state, and a member of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International.

Floods and refugees

An increase in asylum applications by Czech and Slovak Roma ("Gypsies") has been followed by racist panics in Canada and Britain.

According to the Czech magazine *Socialistická Solidarita*, this exodus was the result of "growing racist tendencies, especially after heavy flooding during the summer. After this catastrophe the media began a massive campaign against Gypsies, blaming them for a multitude of problems (stealing charity funds, looting empty houses, and so on). Of course these were lies. All people arrested for these crimes were "white." In many cases police and rescue teams refused to help Gypsies in destroyed areas.

But the media campaign was successful - Gypsies were seen as the root of all problems. This suited the government because people who talk about Gypsies didn't see the main reason for the

disaster," and the government's poor response.

After this campaign there was a TV report about emigration to Canada and the possibility of obtaining refugee status. TV claimed that the easiest solution was for all Gypsies - to leave the Czech republic. Some families tried this possibility, but the cause for their asylum applications is racism and racist attacks, not television."

There have been 12 racist murders in the Czech Republic (population 10.5 million) since 1991. The number of reported racist attacks has risen from 150 in 1991 to over 650 in 1996. 10% of Czech police identify themselves as members or sympathizers of nazi organisations or the far right Republican Party. And 87% of Czechs say they would not want Gypsies as neighbours.

Source: *Socialistická Solidarita* (Czech group of the IS current led by the British SWP) <socsol@geocities.com>

Canada's new left

New Socialist Group Conference,
August 22-24, 1977

by **Charlie Post***



The New Socialist Group (NSG) was founded in March 1996 by dissidents from the Canadian International Socialists (IS). They were frustrated with the insistence of the International Socialist Tendency, led by the British Socialist Workers Party, that the 1990s were a period of rising working class struggles—"the 1930s in slow motion." They also rejected the vanguardist attempt to transform the Canadian IS into a "revolutionary party in miniature."

The NSG has been quite active in a number of important struggles including the Toronto "Metropolitan Days of Action" (which included a single day of strikes and workplace actions and a march of over 200,000 against the Ontario government's social welfare cuts), the York University Faculty Association strike, the movement against the Asian Pacific Economic Co-operation pact in British Columbia, and student occupations at the University of Guelph.

The NSG's conference combined an ambitious educational conference and a meeting of their highest decision-making body, the "Organising Committee" (OC).¹ Many of the panels and workshops were excellent. But they often left comrades with limited time and energy for the Organising Committee sessions. These dealt with four major issues: the Conservative offensive in Ontario and the labour response, Quebec nationalism and the question of independence, Regroupment and the organisation of the NSG.

The Tory offensive

The Conservative ("Tory") government in Ontario, Canada's most industrialised and unionised province has been leading the capitalist re-offensive. In 1996, the Ontario labour movement met the first wave of social welfare cutbacks with the Toronto "Metropolitan Days of Action". This powerful fight-back movement was cut short when the leaders of the "pink paper" (private sector) unions, led by the Steelworkers, convinced the leaderships of the Canadian Autoworkers (CAW) and the public sector unions to postpone further actions in order to help re-elect the New Democratic Party (NDP-Canada's social-democratic/labour party). As a result, the Sudbury "Days of Action" took place without official Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) support. And the "Days of Action" in Windsor and North Bay did not take place until September and October 1997, one year after

the massive Toronto strikes and demonstrations.

In the wake of labour's demobilisation and retreat, the Harris government intensified its offensive with Bill 136, which would deprive public sector workers of the right to strike.

The teachers' unions (there are at least four) have already taken action, and it is likely that other public sector unions may engage in solidarity actions with them against Bill 136.

The NSG made work in the anti-136 movement, which their magazine called "Labour's Last Chance," the priority for its comrades in Ontario (approximately 75% of their membership). While they are aware that a tiny group of socialists will not be able to effect the outcome of these mass struggles, the NSG hopes to play some role in making links between different unions and social movements, and in helping pull together militants in different unions. Non-labour activists in the NSG also considered how to draw students and other movement (anti-poverty, anti-racist) activists into support of the struggle against Bill 136.

Québec

The issue of Quebec nationalism and independence was the second major issue discussed. The national subordination of Quebec has long been a source of division within the pan-Canadian workers' movement, binding English-speaking workers to their own ruling class in defence of "Canadian unity."

English Canada's revolutionary socialist left has traditionally taken two very different positions on Quebec. The Canadian IS defends Quebec's right to self-determination, up to and including the right to secede from Canada. However, they have opposed any practical moves toward Quebec independence as divisive of the working class. The Canadian Fourth Internationalists (Socialist Challenge/Gauche Socialiste) have argued that Quebec independence, the demand of not only the Quebec bourgeoisie but of the entire Quebec labour and social movements, is the only

realistic road to pan-Canadian working class unity. They also have argued that Quebec independence would constitute, in itself, a major economic and political blow to the Canadian bourgeoisie.

The NSG has reconsidered the traditional IS position on Quebec. As a result of internal discussions and regroupment talks with Socialist Challenge, the NSG has concluded that English Canadian chauvinism has so exacerbated divisions within the pan-Canadian working class that Quebec independence represents the only hope of overcoming these divisions. While not embracing the Socialist Challenge/Gauche Socialiste claim that Quebec independence, in itself, would weaken Canadian capital, the NSG and Socialist Challenge now agree on support for practical moves toward Quebec independence.

Regroupment

The NSG's new position on Quebec cleared the last obstacle to regroupment with Socialist Challenge. Members in Toronto and Edmonton have already joined the NSG, while the rest of SC/GS continues the constitutional process that could lead to a complete regroupment by the end of the year. These moves have brought the NSG membership to 85, and increased its presence outside of Ontario with a branch of nearly a dozen in Edmonton, Alberta.

The creation of a Fourth Internationalist caucus is one of many similarities with the US group Solidarity. Both have a non-vanguardist, pluralist conception of building a revolutionary socialist organisation. Both have a realistic assessment of the class struggle in North America, and the capacities of a small group to intervene. They stress the importance of developing socialist activity in all arenas of struggle, and a desire to develop a Marxism capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century. The close contacts and discussions between the two groups over the last 18 months are likely to continue. ★

*The author attended the conference as an observer from the US group Solidarity

The other America

Jobs with Justice

A US National Day of Action for Workfare/Welfare Justice is planned for December 10, 1997. Activities are scheduled in at least 25 states and 35 cities across the US. Tactics and targets will vary from state to state, but the main themes are; the creation of full-time jobs paying a liveable wage; displacing workers from their jobs and creating exploitative 'workfare' jobs without any rights or protection; protesting the vilification of poor people "while greedy corporations divert scarce public dollars into private profits."

Contact Jobs with Justice at tel. +1 202-434-1106. Fax 434-1482

FBI "sting" against U.S. Communists

On 4 October the FBI arrested three Washington DC activists on suspicion of spying for post-apartheid South Africa. Others have received subpoenas to appear before a Grand Jury.

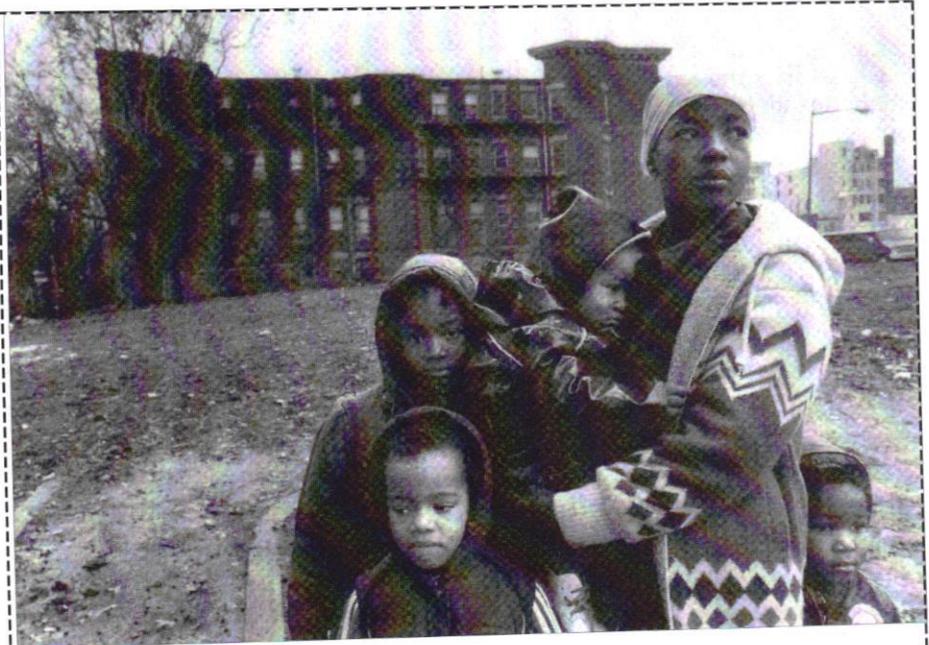
The covert action started when Theresa Squillacote, a member of the Committees of Correspondence (a group of former CP members) wrote congratulating South African Communist leader Ronnie Kasrils about his recent book.

His Christmas card thanking her for her message was intercepted by the FBI, which then forged a letter using Kasrils' name, informing Terry that South African intelligence was interested in obtaining secret documents. The FBI claim that a meeting was set up with an FBI agent posing as a South African agent.

Kasrils, South Africa's Deputy Minister of Defence has stressed that "there was no 'involvement' of the SACP or any of its membership in this covert and misguided attempt by the FBI to set up a 'sting' operation."

According to the CoC, "it is ironic that these people were accused of conspiring to help the new, post apartheid South African government. What is it that the US government fears could be revealed?" [CoC/JD] ★

Contact: The Metro DC Committee of Correspondence
PO Box 11109, Washington, DC 20008-0309, USA



An incredible 1-1.5 million black women gathered in Philadelphia on October 25th, in a grass-roots mobilisation that bypassed bodies like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The official themes: Repentance, Resurrection and Restoration, mirrored those of the 1995 Million Man March, which brought 0.4-0.8 million black men to Washington DC.

That initiative was dominated by Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan. This Women's March had no obvious leaders, though applause was particularly strong for South African activist Winnie Mandela, and Representative Maxine Waters, a California Democrat, who denounced the CIA for pushing crack cocaine in ghettos in the 1980s to raise money for the Nicaraguan contras.

Felipe Vasquez

The mines of Huanani, Bolivia are famous across Latin America, because of a series of dramatic and determined strikes by miners like Felipe Vasquez.

Until his health declined as a result of the hard conditions, Felipe was an active leader of the miners movement. He played a major role in organising 10,000 miners into the "March for Life" from Oruro to La Paz. For several years he was one of the leaders of the FSTMB miners union. Felipe was also a leading figure in the regional branch of the Bolivian Workers Confederation (COB).

Besides his trade union activities, Felipe was an active member of the Revolutionary Workers Party (POR),

identified with the Fourth International.

After several months residence in Cuba, he participated notably in the 1969 Congress of the Fourth International, which re-launched the movement after the great events of 1968-69. He was also at the 1991 Congress, which tried to deal with the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Felipe represented the best proletarian traditions of the Bolivian Trotskyist movement – seriousness, courage in the face of repression and terrible material adversity and continuity. He was an important link with the struggles of previous generations. We will miss him. [Inp/Pg] ★

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Advances and retreats for neoliberalism

Gustavo Cudas, an adviser to Brazil's main trade union federation, CUT (United Workers Centre), outlines the neoliberal crisis in Latin America's largest economy

Brazil was hit by the neoliberal wave later than most of the other Latin American countries. Only the 1994 election of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso finally consolidated a political block capable of imposing the necessary neoliberal "reforms."

Import taxes were lowered from 43% at the end of the 1980s to 16% in the early 1990s. New tariff reductions followed, with the development of the Mercosur common market with Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, and the 1994 introduction of the Real Plan. This brought inflation down dramatically, but involved a 30% overvaluation of the *real* in relation to the US dollar. This contributed to a significant boom in imports in 1995 and 1996.

As in other countries, references to the "world market" have become the centre of conservative political discourse over the last decade. The essential preoccupation becomes that of the "competitiveness" of corporations (and the "nation"), which means the reduction of "Brazilian costs," principally labour costs. "The question is not deciding whether globalisation is a good thing or not; it is simply a fact,"

repeated Cardoso at an international seminar on employment in April.

The economic and social results of these policies are disastrous. Entire sectors of industry and agriculture have been destroyed, for example, textiles, shoes, toys, auto equipment and capital goods. The production of electronic goods is increasingly occurring with foreign parts. In sectors that have resisted, there has been a strong movement toward the fusion and absorption of national enterprises by multinational financial groups and companies.

(Slave) labour

One third of industrial jobs have been destroyed. According to the DIESSE Inter-union Institute, the unemployment rate has increased from 10% in the 1980s to 14% in the 1990s. Between 1994 and 1996, 400,000 agricultural jobs were lost. And 20% of middle management jobs were lost between 1989 and 1994. These losses continue, leading to the new phenomenon of mass unemployment among the "middle class." The jobs of more than half of the work force are precarious, while the average length of work contracts has decreased.

The use of child labour has increased considerably. Brazil has almost four million child workers, earning an average salary around 20% of the minimum wage. About 30% of these children work more than 40 hours a week. Working conditions bordering on slavery have also expanded.

The neoliberal program has degraded income distribution; the ratio of the income of the richest 10% and the poorest 40% was 6.36 in 1996, higher than during the "lost decade" of the 1980s.

Brusquely confronted by international reality, corporations have reacted with massive layoffs and a pitiless pressure on the pace of work. This is supported by intense ideological propaganda demanding "Japanese methods" and "total quality." This has resulted in an annual 7% increase in productivity during the 1990s, despite an investment level that has fluctuated between 15 and 17%, in comparison to 25% during the 1970s.

Moreover, around half of the labour force has been forced to accept overtime, so that businesses continue to lay off workers even during periods of strong demand.

This new situation has had a very clear impact on union activity and led to a clear reduction in the number of strikes. The peasantry has been the only popular sector capable of confronting the situation.

In the context of an increase in the level of misery, the resolute action of the rural Landless Movement (MST) has won the support of the majority of the population for its demands and checked the attempts of the federal government to ignore the problem and politically marginalise it. At the moment, the Workers Party (PT) and the CUT (United Workers Centre) are attempting to re-launch popular mobilizations.

Privatisations

Since 1990, dozens of public enterprises (or those partly owned by the state) have been put on sale in areas such as steel, petrochemicals and fertilizers. These sales at first gave preference to national industrial and financial capital. The latter were allowed to pay with public bonds that were not (and are still not) worth their face value, and were therefore converted on extremely advantageous terms. The privatisations thus raised 13.6 billion dollars on paper, but only 5 billion in real income for the state.

Multinational groups were allowed to participate in a second round of privatisations. The Cardoso government unleashed a process of constitutional and legislative reforms in 1995 to enlarge the arena of privatisation to new sectors like oil, telecommunications, electrical energy, ports, railroads and roads, as well as a giant mining company, the Vale do Rio Doce (CVRD). At the same time, the government tried to increase the presence of private capital in education, health care and social security, from which the state was trying to withdraw.

The second wave of privatisations re-

Don't buy a Hyundai!

The San Diego-based Support Committee for Maquiladora Workers and the Washington-based Campaign for Labor Rights launched a national boycott of Hyundai products on October 25. The aim is to pressure Hyundai and its associated Han Young feeder plant to recognize the Independent Metal Workers Union (STIMAHCS) affiliated with the Authentic Labor Front (FAT).

Supporters of the Han Young workers distributed leaflets and demonstrated at plants in several cities. In Salt Lake City, Utah, for example, a group of AFSCME and OCAW members, Teamsters, University of Utah and high school students held a demonstration and press conference in front of the local Hyundai dealership.

"Under NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement we live in one common market that includes Canada, Mexico and the United States," explains organiser Dan La Botz. "The multi-

national corporations of Europe, Asia and America stalk workers in the NAFTA area, looking for prey, for workers who can be forced to accept \$4.00 per day.

"We say that if there is one North American common market, then there is also one North American common labor movement: Canadians, Mexicans, and Americans must stand together to demand human rights for workers, to demand workers' rights to organize a union, to bargain collectively and to do so without fear of firing or other forms of reprisal." ★

Mexican Labor News and Analysis, Vol. 2, No. 20, 2 November 1997

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enforced the presence of foreign capital. This was one of the goals of the *Real Plan*: attracting capital to finance the growing national debt. This corresponds to the recent tendency of international capital to invest mainly in the service and infrastructure sectors. The problem for Brazil is that this type of investment has a smaller impact on exports and the chronic balance of trade deficit than investment in extraction or manufacturing industries.

Labour market deregulation

The centre of the neoliberal program concerns the labour market. The high level of unemployment, the fragility of mechanisms for protecting the unemployed and the defensive posture of the union movement has given free rein to the creation of a new regime of professional relations. Brazilian neoliberals propose the withdrawal of the state from its role as guarantor of the right to work, and on the contrary take action against the unions in order to weaken their ability to organize and struggle.

Thus the government is in the process of modifying legislation to allow the development of temporary labour and make layoffs easier. The Labour Court, which in Brazil is charged with intervening over working conditions, has established precedents threatening elementary rights that have been part of labour contracts for many years. New legislation on strikes threatens fines so large that union treasuries could not possibly pay them.

Whenever this does not suffice to control labour conflicts, the Cardoso government has resorted to police and military violence to defeat the struggles. In 1995, it ordered the military occupation of striking oil refineries. At the end of 1996, the army held training exercises in Rio Grande do Sul state, simulating an assault against worker occupations of plantations. The government of various states have also utilized police against demonstrators, strikers and landless peasants.

The Real plan

The great leap forward for neoliberalism came in 1994, when Cardoso was Finance Minister. Since 1992, Brazil had registered a net inflow of capital after a decade of outflows, and the *Real Plan*, introduced in 1994, took advantage of this to finance a new wave of imports, which allowed a reduction of inflation. The plan allowed the combination of all the aspects of the neoliberal project, designed to obey so-called "objective" economic laws. But the model has not kept its promises.

Almost all the categories of the balance of current accounts are in greater and greater deficit, except for the cash

remittances of Brazilians working in Japan. The estimated trade deficit for 1997 is 30 billion dollars.

To finance the deficit, it is necessary to attract an increasing flow of foreign capital. This is done through the privatisation programme, and through the very high real interest rates offered by the state-controlled banks. Although this has allowed the balancing of the foreign debt to a certain degree, it has also increased internal contradictions, in the form of a considerable increase in the internal public debt. This reached \$259 billion in 1996, and carries an average interest rate of nearly 20%. The sale of 16 state enterprises in 1997, including the Vale do Rio Doce mining group, will only generate income equivalent to three months of interest payments.

To deal with the weight of this debt, the government is trying to organize a decrease in public expenditures, especially public services essential to the population. Of course, this also serves their other ambition: opening these sectors to private capital.

The interest on the debt represented \$48 billion in 1996 (6% of the GNP), while government budgets for education and health were only \$24 billion (including less than \$500 million in investments). The salary of public workers has been frozen for two years despite 33% inflation over this period.

To restrain the threat of a two-sided crisis, both budgetary and international, the government is combining two types of measures. It is accentuating traits of social barbarism – reducing social protection, attacking wages, increasing the insecurity of employment, etc. – under the pretext of increasing the country's "competitiveness" and increasing exports. At the same time, it is increasing state intervention in the service of protecting markets reserved for certain big companies, especially multinationals, giving them subsidies and cheap loans in exchange for investment or increases in exports.

The average level of import taxes is only 12%. But this average is deceptive: some products are taxed at 35 to 70%, which creates real commercial barriers, while some raw materials, semi-finished products and equipment are taxed at less than 2%. These rates are encouraging the transformation of the country into a giant free trade zone on the model of the Mexican *maquiladoras*.

Social barbarism

The government has not succeeded in ending the stagnation of exports (and a decrease in their value added), nor the deficit in the trade balance that threatens

to grow to \$12 billion this year. The only truly effective measure to restrain imports has been the deflation of the economy at the end of 1995. But repeating such a measure would provoke new political tensions in a country which already has some 10 million unemployed. Such a scenario would also lead to a mediocre level of economic growth, on the order of 3% per year. This would barely allow for the absorption of youth joining the labour market, never mind reabsorb the army of unemployed.

In the face of this increase in social barbarism, the Brazilian left must renew popular mobilization and re-adopt a programmatic confrontation with neoliberalism. The National March for Agrarian Reform, Jobs and Justice organized by The MST that reached the federal capital in April was an important step on this path; it won impressive popular support and placed the federal government on the defensive.

The significant reduction of the inflation rate thanks to the Real Plan helped Cardoso win the 1994 election against Lula da Silva of the Workers Party (PT). But it is unlikely that continued low inflation will have as dramatic an effect on voters in the next elections. They will be looking for more. ★

The truth about the apartheid debt

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is supposed to confront the enormity of Apartheid's crimes, so as to allow South Africa to move forward. The Cape-Town based Alternative Information and Development Center (AIDC) says the country's foreign debt is part of that burden, and should be abolished.

The Apartheid regime left the new South Africa with huge debts that are crippling any chance of implementing real reconstruction and development. In a bizarre twist, the people who suffered at the hands of the apartheid government are now being expected to pay again for their pain and suffering.

The South African government has a debt of R311 billion (1US\$ = R4.81, £1 = R8.0) and it is growing all the time. In the last budget presented by Minister Trevor Manuel, the amount the government spends just in interest payments is now said to be greater than on anything else. R39 billion was allocated in the budget for interest repayment.

Added to this debt of R311 billion, must be added billions of rands that are owed to foreign governments, banks and other financial institutions, which now must be repaid in foreign currency. In repaying these debts the Reserve Bank uses very scarce resources that damages our economic standing. Our foreign debt is R90 billion. Compare this with R82.8 bn., which is the amount needed to employ all the country's unemployed for one year.

Most of the government's debt comes from apartheid. When the government of De Klerk realised their days were numbered they incurred huge debts so as to prevent the ANC, when it came to power from implementing programmes of redistribution and social upliftment.

Many people's organisations have begun to campaign for this debt to be cancelled. The new democratic government stands in a strong position to negotiate the cancellation of the Apartheid debt. Firstly, it is not a debt incurred by them. Secondly, it is immoral to make the victims of apartheid pay for their victimisation. Thirdly, in international law there is a doctrine that

allows new democratic governments to cancel the debts incurred by an undemocratic, illegitimate regime which it has replaced. Where the undemocratic government incurred debts at the expense of the majority of its people these debts are seen as odious. All loans made by the Apartheid regime were as odious as they were illegitimate.

Trade unions, civics, women's and youth organisations are suggesting that the money saved from debt cancellation should be placed in a community controlled development fund. This fund would be directed to putting the Reconstruction and Development Programme at the centre stage of our efforts to free our nation from poverty and the misery brought by apartheid.

The debt burden

Many people know what it feels like to owe money, even if only to a bank for a mortgage. But it is a different matter altogether to be deeply indebted and unable to pay. And it is even worse to be in that situation if someone else ran up the debt and left you to repay it.

This year 20% of the national budget was spent on interest payments on debt. The current government debt is R310 bn. The government regularly says that the interest payment is seriously obstructing its growth and development programmes.

In 1989, the debt was only R80 bn. Yet, by 1996, it had grown enormously to over R300 bn. What lies behind such rapid growth?

The largest single part of the answer lies in the pension fund for government employees. The assets of this fund have increased by well over R100 bn. since 1989 (from R31 bn. in March 1989 to R136 bn. in September 1996).

The reason for this ten-fold growth is that, in 1989, the government moved from a "pay as you go" system to a "fully funded" scheme. In a "pay as you go" system people who are working today pay into a pension fund and those who retire receive payment from the money put in by those still at work.

This way of funding pensions is well-established internationally and continues to be used by the government to fund the state's welfare pension scheme. A "fully funded" scheme, as its name implies, means that it has the reserves available to

meet its obligations even if all the workers currently paying into the fund were mysteriously to all stop working at the same time. "Fully funded" schemes operate in the private pension market as a protection against the company going bankrupt.

The PIC monster

The conversion to the "fully funded" scheme has involved a massive injection of government money into the fund. Between 1990 & 1996, government contributions to "pump up" the fund totalled R66,359 bn., or an average of almost R10 bn. a year. The Government didn't have this amount of money so it raised it by selling "bonds", effectively IOUs on which interest is paid.

The Government then proceeded to sell these bonds to itself! It sold the bonds to PIC (the Public Investment Commissioners), a shadowy office within the Department of Finance specifically responsible for the investments of the State Pension Fund. The PIC is run by the Minister, the Deputy Minister, and Director General of Finance who are advised by senior officials in the Department.

Naturally, PIC gets interest on the government bonds it has bought — very high interest to be sure. Last year the government paid itself (PIC) no less than R10 bn. in interest. This means that the government (through PIC) is not only lending itself money but is using its money to pay itself enormous interest on the money it has lent itself.

The result of this madness is that PIC is now sitting on an enormous pile of money worth R136 bn. last year. And it continues to accumulate as the government continues to feed it through direct contributions and interest payments. More recently, PIC has placed large investments in the stock market. These market investments last year earned PIC an additional R4 bn.

Putting the R10 bn. interest from Government bonds into perspective is the fact that the total cost of the state pensions paid out last year was only R9.2 bn.

Here are a few indications (from the Reconstruction and Development Programme) of what could be done with the surplus money the government has sitting in PIC — while it continues to tell us that it has no money:

- 1,060 new clinics — R1.2 bn.
- 300,000 new homes — R10 bn.
- Electrification of 2.5 m. homes — R11 bn.

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Eric Toussaint and Peter Drucker (Eds.)

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Laughing all the way to the (apartheid) bank

Why did the apartheid government go for such a bizarre scheme? It would appear that they feared the in-coming ANC government might not maintain pensions to the employees of the apartheid state. It seems that the apartheid government saw the fully funded system as a secure way of both meeting gravy-train pensions for apartheid bureaucrats and allowing for substantial golden handshakes and early retirement packages. It also seems that the apartheid government implemented a deliberate strategy of imposing a great debt burden on the in-coming democratic government to severely limit possibilities for redistribution.

Whatever the reasons might have been, the consequence is that our country's first democratic government is crippled by a scheme that requires the victims of apartheid to continue to live in poverty so that those privileged by apartheid can continue to enjoy their privileges.

The government does not face a real resource constraint but a financial constraint left over from the period of transition. South Africa's government has enormous room to manoeuvre in terms of dealing with the debt and this can be done without harming a pensioner.

Instead of implementing severe austerity measures that lead to cuts in social spending and once again penalises the victims of apartheid, challenging the apartheid debt and channelling resources into fighting poverty would bring the RDP back to centre stage.

Challenge the foreign debt

Democratic South Africa is expected to pay the R90 billion foreign debt of Apartheid. This is a vast amount of money in anyone's language. The debt has to be paid back in foreign currency. Therefore, every time the rand falls in value against the US dollar the amount increases.

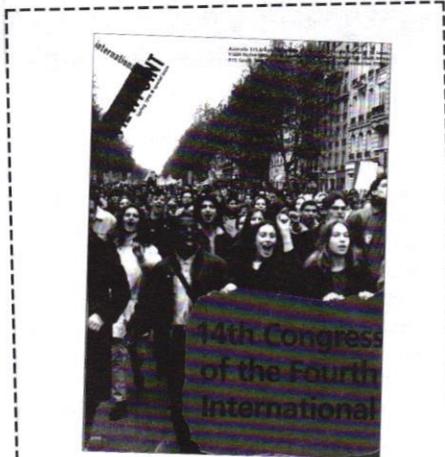
Some people have said that the foreign debt is not a problem because it represents only 5% of the total government debt. This is true but the South African Reserve Bank has to pay all the foreign debts — those incurred by the government as well as parastatals like Eskom, banks and big corporations — which by December 1993 totalled R90 bn.

The Reserve Bank uses scarce foreign currency reserves to repay these apartheid-incurred debts which has severe consequences for our economy.

The loans made to apartheid South Africa either directly to the government or to private banks and corporations was vital in keeping apartheid alive. Through these



Policemen who testify to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission can avoid prosecution for torture or murder, and keep their jobs. The Commission is unpopular among victims of apartheid. "These men are asking the state for forgiveness," complained one torture victim. "It is us they should be asking."



Transformation and regroupment

Reactions to the socio-economic crisis all too often take the form of reactionary tendencies of an ethnic, nationalist, racial or religious character. Hence the urgent need to rebuild a world-wide movement of anti-capitalist struggle, taking account of the recomposition of the workers' movement which is underway as a result of the double failure of social democracy and Stalinism.

Regroupments of forces determined to learn the lessons of the historical abomination that was Stalinism and to continue, against the winds and the tides, to fight against capitalism are being realised in a number of countries.

In all the countries where such possibilities exist, the organisations of the Fourth International are ready to be part of the re-groupment process. We consider this as an important step towards the recomposition of the anti-capitalist left on a world scale. At the international level, the Fourth International is an active participant in re-groupment, bringing with it the advantages of a long tradition of combat against capitalism and Stalinism. ★

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loans the apartheid regime was able to offset the effects of sanctions. One effect of these loans was to give comfort apartheid in the face of increasing international isolation. Indirectly these loans helped to free up the resources for the internal militarisation of South Africa and the military destabilisation of the whole of Southern Africa.

The call is not for Government to just scrap the debt unilaterally. Rather, Government should enter into negotiations to get the creditors' agreement to cancel the debt. The basis for this would be powerful moral arguments. The apartheid system was universally condemned as a crime against humanity.

Yet foreign Government's, banks and businesses were deeply implicated in the creation, development and defence of the apartheid system. Doing business with apartheid was highly profitable. By agreeing to cancel the foreign debt they would effectively be internationalising the scope of the TRC by making reparations to democratic South Africa.

Odious debt

In addition to these moral arguments the democratic government can rely on the Doctrine of Odious Debt, an old doctrine of international law. This doctrine allows successor Government's to disown the debt incurred by fallen dictatorships. The illegitimacy of apartheid, according to the Doctrine of Odious Debt, made all loans to the apartheid regime illegitimate and unenforceable.

We anticipate that neither our government nor — for very different reasons — financial institutions and foreign Government's will easily be persuaded by moral and legal arguments alone. On the other hand, we are hopeful that a broad campaign, representing the organs of civil society, both here and abroad, will succeed in convincing the parties to do what is right.

The money saved through debt cancellation should be channelled into re-invigorating the RDP with its focus on providing the infrastructure needs denied the majority of our people under apartheid. ★

The full text of the Alternative Information and Development Centre's submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is available at <<http://aidc.org.za>>

"Hostile forces" demand work and wages

Growing numbers of Chinese workers are taking to the streets to fight for their basic rights. According to our correspondent **Zhang Kai**, the authorities blame this social unrest on "conspiracy by hostile forces within and outside China"

In recent years, more and more state-owned enterprises have gone bankrupt. In 1996, according to statistics of the Supreme People's Court, 4,900 enterprises all over China went bankrupt, of which 2,348 were state-owned. At the same time, 1,199 enterprises were merged.¹

One trick in the bankruptcy business is to transfer the property and some staff of one enterprise to another and then declare the former bankrupt, thus writing off all bank debts.²

Through genuine and fake bankruptcies, the number of unemployed workers has substantially increased. According to the Labour Bureau, in 1996 about four million redundant workers were assigned new positions. But on December 31st, 8.1 million workers were still "temporarily laid off", waiting for a new job.³

By the end of this year, according to the official media, there will be 60 million unemployed workers in the towns, not including the "temporarily laid off".⁴

At the end of March 1997, 11.0 million workers at state-owned, urban enterprises were on no-pay status, a further 2.3 million had their pension suspended, and over 9 million workers were "temporarily laid off". "With financially stranded workers and temporarily off workers reaching an unprecedented high, this has become a critical issue braking the healthy development of society and economy."⁵

The latest issue of *Lookout* reported a 7.5% urban unemployment rate, with 15.5



million unemployed. This is much higher than the 3.1% unemployment rate reported by the Labour Department. Lookout claims that unemployment is 4.5% higher than at the same time last year. Redundancy of state owned and urban collective enterprises had reached 30 million.⁶ The unemployment in counties and townships was even more serious, reaching 34.8%. An estimated 175 m. workers are currently redundant.

Some scholars and officials attending the 15th Party Congress believe that urban unemployment is as high as 8%, and rural redundant labour affects around 200 million people.⁷

Workers fight for rights

Not surprisingly, protests and sit-ins have become more frequent. "In Beijing and provincial capitals of the Sichuan, Hubei and Hebei Provinces, serious incidents of turmoil by temporarily off workers and pensioners have occurred."⁸

In March, workers at the biggest textile factory in Nanchong (Sichuan) went on protest against delayed wage payments. The General Manager Huang He was escorted on street parade by the workers, and the procession was joined by other workers. Over 20,000 workers occupied the city government building, the city

was paralysed, and after 30 hours, the government promised that the bank would give a loan to the textile factory to pay wages to the workers.⁹

On June 20, 200 workers from the Guanghua Timber Factory staged a sit-in protest outside the Zhong Nan Hai Central Government complex. They demanded that the company, partly run by the State Security Department provide them with accommodation, as promised. This is the first mass demonstration outside the Zhong Nan Hai since 1989.¹⁰

In June, workers from several state-owned textile and clothing factories in Mianyang (Sichuan) took to the street to protest the lack of subsidies after they were temporarily laid off. As many as 100,000 workers took to the street at different times. According to China Human Rights Watch, over 100 people were beaten up by armed police on or around July 10, and 80 were arrested. Police prevented hospital staff from treating the wounded workers, who they called "counter-revolutionary rioters." On July 18, *Ming Pao* newspaper quoted the Mianyang City government official as saying that "in recent years, factory bankruptcies in the city have been serious."

Chinese worker activist Han Dongfang, "exiled" in Hong Kong, reported that in Chengdu (Sichuan), in the middle of July, about 500 shoe factory workers blocked the road for 20 hours on a demonstration against factory bankruptcy, until the city government promised to resolve the problem.¹¹ In the latter half of August, in Dou Jiang Yan (Sichuan) about 1,000 unemployed workers had their tricycles confiscated by the authorities, took to the street on a protest and demanded the return of their means of living.

The authorities blame this social unrest on "conspiracy by hostile forces within and outside China" to "negate the Deng Xiaoping line and to strive for the rehabilitation of the "June 4 Incident" – as they call the Tiananmen Square massacre.

Political pretexts are being used to try to crackdown on economic struggles. Unemployed and without an income, growing numbers of Chinese workers are taking to the streets to fight for their basic rights. ★

Notes

- 1 *Wen Hui Bao*, 25 April 1997.
- 2 *People's Daily*, 21 April 1997.
- 3 *Wen Hui Bao*, 31 May 1997.
- 4 *Ming Pao*, 19 July 1997.
- 5 *NCNA*, 28 May 1997.
- 6 *People's Daily*, 4 January 1997.
- 7 *Ming Pao*, 8 August 1997.
- 8 *Ming Pao*, 22 July 1997.
- 9 *Far Eastern Economic Review* 26 June 1997.
- 10 *Ming Pao*, 21 June 1997.
- 11 *Ming Pao*, 6 August 1997.

Source: *October Review* Vol.24 No.4. ∞ GPO Box 10144, Hong Kong. E-mail <or@earthling.net>

Hong Kong labor rights buried by legislature

On October 24th Hong Kong's legislature voted overwhelmingly to strike down a set of labor rights laws, passed by the former colonial assembly just one week before China took control.

Immediately after the handover, the new Beijing-appointed legislature froze the labor laws, claiming that they might make Hong Kong "less competitive."

This latest vote is the latest of a series of moves by leader Tung Chee-hwa to water down civil liberties in the territory.

About 50 protesters unfurled huge read banners outside the legislative council to denounce the debate and vote. "Don't strike down our new labor laws," the banners read.

The laws had allowed collective bargaining and guarded against anti-union discrimination, regulated trade union activities, declared May 1st a statutory holiday and provided compensation for occupational deafness. ★

Source: Reuters

Korea Queer film festival banned

Freedom of speech campaigns have intensified, since the regime repressed two September film festivals dealing with homosexuality and with human rights.

The 1st Seoul Queer Film and Video Festival was banned on September 19, two weeks before it was due to open. According to Festival Director Seo Dongjin, "The local government of the Soedaemun district in Seoul threatened to confiscate the projection equipment and the films, to fine us two million won (US\$22,000), and to jail us for three years.

"However, they are not the only authority involved in this situation. If you want to hold a film festival in Korea, you must get your films passed by the national censors first. And censorship laws and regulations forbid the screening of any films about homosexuality.

"Actually, we did try to find a way to open our festival legally. We submitted four representative titles to the censorship authority to see if this would be possible. They rejected Derek Jarman's *Jubilee*, Nancy Meckler's *Alive and Kicking*, and Mel Chionglo's *Midnight Dancers*. Dirk Shafer's *Man of the Year*, was the only one they said was legally OK. Actually, I think that one is the most explicit in terms of what they are worried about, but on the surface it seems OK because it has no depiction of homosexual acts."

In the face of this situation, the organisers decided to try a technique used by other festivals which have faced censorship: to show the films on video only in a public institution such as a university, in the hope that the authorities would turn a blind eye. In South Korea today, many unclassified films and videos are shown informally in university classes and clubs and similar "non-commercial" screening situations.

Many gay and lesbian-themed films are being shown commercially in Korea. But, according to Seo Dongjin, "the distributors and exhibitors of those films say they are not gay or lesbian-related. They have to cover up the truth... in order to be able to negotiate a way round the censorship clause that bans gay and lesbian-related films."

According to Seo Dongjin, South Korean legislation only recognises homosexual behaviour, "not that there are gay and lesbian people who are citizens and form communities... In a TV talk show, one of the censors said that Korean society was not ready for gay and lesbian films yet. Last Tango in Paris was banned for twenty years, but shown this year, so he said, "please, gay and lesbian audiences, be patient and wait for twenty years."

On Saturday 27 September, South Korea's new Human Rights Film Festival was due to open. University authorities cut the electricity. Opening night went ahead with a video screening, powered by a portable generator. The government surrounded the university with up to 1,000 riot troops during every evening of the festival. Two members of the Hongik University Student Union that co-hosted the festival were arrested.

In a related event, the Pusan International Film Festival in October gave only "restricted" screenings, closed to the ordinary public, for Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai's *Happy Together*. The gay-themed movie has already been banned from public release in Korea.

According to Australian cinema studies lecturer Chris Berry, "in its first year last year the Pusan Festival established a strong reputation partly because it was one of the few uncensored film festivals in Asia." ★

Contact: 1st Seoul Queer Film and Video Festival, Nakwon-dong 195-1, Midong Bld #301, Chongno-ku, Seoul, ROK Korea, tel:82-2-766-5626, fax: 82-2-766-0598, e-mail: "queer21@interpia.net".
Source: *Cine 21* film magazine, Seoul, South Korea.



Korean labour leader runs for president

South Korean union leader Kwon Yong Gil will run for the presidency on December 18, as candidate for dissidents and labour groups. He promises "to introduce a new form of politics ruled by workers, farmers, and urban grass-roots."

Some 2,000 dissidents and labour activists issued a joint resolution nominating Kwon. The 56 year old journalist is president of the 500,000 member Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), which he led during the general strike earlier this year.

As well as the KCTU, Kwon is backed by the 50,000 member National Alliance for Democracy and Re-unification of Korea, an umbrella group of dissidents who supported the radical labour movement during the general strike at the beginning of the year.

The first rally, on November 8th, brought 30,000 people to the riverside park close to the National Assembly building. It was surrounded by large numbers of police with clubs and riot shields. The KCTU is still an illegal organisation in Korea. The rally was completely ignored by the Korean press.

Faced with such intimidation and censorship the KCTU does not expect to

get a big vote in the election, but sees it as an opportunity to expose the fraudulent nature of Korean democracy and to establish democratic rights for labour and other progressive forces in Korea.

While many South Korean politicians face accusations of corruption, Kwon is currently facing trial for Third Party Intervention (involvement in industrial action at Seoul Subway and Hyundai Heavy Industry), Traffic Law (for organising and leading a march following the launching of KCTU), Illegal Collection of Donations (for running a newspaper advertisement for public fund-raising in support of KCTU), Illegal Entry into Private Property (for holding an open air workers rally for the launching of KCTU at a university ground), and Violation of the Law on Assembly and Demonstrations (for holding a workers rally for the launching of KCTU). After many months of working underground, he was arrested in November 1995, and released on bail in March 1996. [JD] ★

Chris Bailey contributed material for this article. Contact: Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), 4th Fl. Samsun Bldg., 12-1 Samsun-Dong 1 Ga, Sungbuk-ku, Seoul 136-041, Korea. Tel: +82-2-3673-0685 Fax: +82-2-765-2011 E-mail: <inter@kctu.org> Web: http://kctu.org See also www.solinet.org/LEE/korea.html

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No smoke without fire

-- South-east Asia's environmental and health disaster

Forest fires in Indonesia have blanketed Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Southern Thailand and the Southern Philippines in thick smoke blocking out the sun and choking tens of millions of people.

B. Skanthakumar

Within South-east Asia it is called the "haze" — an innocuous word which deliberately plays down the seriousness and severity of the situation and is intended to calm an agitated population. Claude Martin of the World Wide Fund for Nature described this environmental and health disaster in starker terms, "The sky has turned yellow and people are dying."

In Sumatra and Kalimantan where the fires were started the smog has reduced visibility to a few yards at its worst. Everything coming into contact with the smog is left coated in grime and hundreds of thousands have been treated for respiratory problems, eye and skin irritations and children for asthma. On September 26th there was an airline crash in Sumatra with all 234 lives on board lost. Poor visibility and communication have been blamed. On the Straits of Malacca, the world's busiest shipping lane, there have been a number of collisions including one which left 29 dead. So far over 2,000 deaths have been recorded in direct consequence of the fires, and countless other fatalities, particularly in road accidents, have been blamed on the smog.

A state of emergency was declared in the East Malaysian state of Sarawak which has been particularly badly hit as it shares a border with Kalimantan. The Air Pollution Index (API) in the Sarawak state capital, Kuching hit a record level of 839. Anything over 100 is unhealthy and over 500 is extremely hazardous. Elsewhere in the region the API has averaged between 200 and 350. Schools, offices and businesses in Sarawak were closed as was its main airport and port. Many flights into

and from regional airports in Brunei, Singapore and Malaysia have been cancelled.

In Indonesia in addition to the short-term consequences on livelihoods, the cost to the agricultural sector won't be known for years. The absence of direct sunlight will stunt crop growth, reduce yields and decimate harvests in seasons to come. Food prices have already rocketed placing fresh fruit and vegetables at a premium and there are severe shortages in fire affected areas.

Surgical masks are hawked on street corners and sold in city shops as the officially sanctioned protection against the pollution. In Indonesia the price of these masks catapulted from 500 to 4,000 *rupiah* (US\$ 1.12) putting them out of the reach of many. The Indonesian Environmental Forum, *Walhi*, criticised the government for not making masks available to the poor in the interior. It has set up a community action centre in Kalimantan for free distribution of masks but also to begin consciousness raising campaigns on the causes of the fires and the importance of forest conservation.

Meanwhile Malaysian NGO activist, Sivarasa Rasiyah, pointed out that the masks "were designed to stop surgeons spitting on their patients, not to keep out pollution." Yet governments were encouraging people to buy and wear them just to soothe their fears. Health advisors believe a wet towel covering the nose and mouth to be more effective than a surgical mask.

Blame El Niño...

Serious forest fires in Indonesia are now an annual ritual. Even the trans-boundary air pollution isn't new and was particularly bad in 1987, 1991 and 1994. In fact in spite of the world headlines and extensive media coverage, this hasn't been the worst year for forest cover loss. During 1982/83 some 3.5 million hectares of forest — an area around the size of Belgium or the Netherlands — was burnt to the ground in Kalimantan. This year the World Wide Fund estimates that so far between five hundred thousand and one million hectares have been torched. The toll on animal and bird life is incalculable. Irreversible damage is being done to rain forest which has greater species diversity per square kilometre than anywhere else in the world excepting the Amazon.

The Indonesian Government initially began by blaming the *El Niño* weather pattern for delaying monsoon rains and creating drought conditions which have made the region a tinder-box where fire can start with the least encouragement. *El Niño* arises from a warming of ocean currents in the Pacific and used to appear in

cycles of four or five years. However in the past 15 years, it seems to have become a yearly occurrence. One explanation is that global warming due to carbon emissions is the culprit. Ironically the present spate of fires will add to those emissions exacerbating the problem in future.

Certainly the tragic starvation deaths which have been reported in recent weeks in Irian Jaya (West Papua) on the island of New Guinea, are a consequence of the absence of rainfall and the poor distribution of relief supplies in that province. The distribution of food and medicine to the 90 000 people at risk has been hampered by the inaccessibility of the villages and thick smoke is deterring relief flights. Indonesian agencies estimate around 500 people have starved to death while others are foraging for insects, tree roots and leaves for food. However it was soon obvious that the alleged cause of the forest fires, *El Niño*, might in fact be a symptom of the fires themselves, and further that there were human and not natural factors which explained why fires had begun in certain areas and not others and the purpose behind the arson.

...or blame the victims

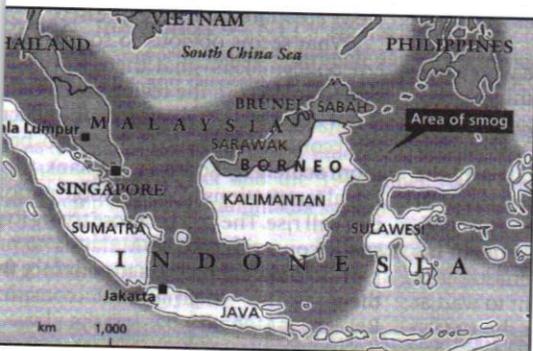
The *Jakarta Post* editorialised on August 13th, "there seems to be no doubt today about the cause of these forest fires. They were deliberately lit to clear land and make way for new plantations, timber estates and new settlements under the government's transmigration program."

Even then the Indonesian government was reluctant to pin the blame on loggers and export-crop plantation agriculture in Kalimantan in which President Suharto's family and the military have personal and financial stakes.

Instead it faulted subsistence crop small-holders principally the indigenous Dayak peoples who practise 'slash and burn' techniques to clear land, plant seed and then after a few seasons move elsewhere allowing old plots to lie fallow and the soil to regain its natural fertility. The controlled burning in shifting cultivation is a method used for centuries without the present environmental harm.

This was another classic instance of 'blaming the victims'. The Dayak communities have been bearing the brunt of Indonesia's trans-migration program which settles people from the densely populated islands particularly Java to provinces like Kalimantan, Irian Jaya (West Papua) and East Timor.

The motive behind these schemes, which until recently received World Bank support, is to relieve population pressure on the main islands and to open up new areas to capitalist development. What it



also does is encourage the *Javanisation* of ethnic groups perceived as "backward" and "uncivilised" through inter-marriage and cultural assimilation.

Many Madurese have been settled in Kalimantan where they are local partners in cash-crop farming of cocoa and palm oil with plantation companies. The government channels huge sums of money into their re-settlement and indigenous Dayaks complain of being marginalised politically and in resource allocation by the settlers. Early this year tensions between the two communities exploded into bloody riots with many lives lost and much damage to homes and property. At the root of which are conflicts over access to and use of land.

Neighbouring governments responding to domestic public pressure were beginning to lose patience with the Indonesian government. President Suharto was forced to make a public apology for the smoke pollution at a meeting of Association of South-East-Asian Nations (ASEAN) Environmental Ministers. In a sharp break with the ASEAN policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states, the meek regional media featured commentaries critical of the Indonesian regime's handling of the situation.

Burning Borneo

The Singapore *Straits Times* published satellite images of Kalimantan which pinpointed the areas where fires had begun and where well into September new ones were being started. These corresponded to logging and plantation concessions including those owned by companies which had been warned in previous years not to burn forest. A. S. Budiman of the Rubber Association of Indonesia candidly explained, "if you do land-clearing in pioneer areas, where no roads are established, the only practical way to get rid of the debris is to burn it." What he didn't say is that it is also the cheapest way and saves companies the expense of bringing in heavy machinery to do the job, when a cheap match-stick and some kerosene would do instead.

Indonesia's Environment Ministry finally released a report in September identifying 176 logging and plantation companies in eight provinces responsible for starting fires and gave them a deadline to show evidence to the contrary. Among these companies are numerous joint-ventures in Sumatra with Malaysian and Singaporean conglomerates which accounts for the "softly, softly" approach of those governments in placing pressure on the Indonesians to take firm action against corporate interests.

The exiled Indonesian academic



George Aditjondro writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (October 1st), exposed the nexus of business relationships between Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's son, Mirzan, and a son of Indonesian President Suharto, Bambang, as well as between Suharto's daughter, Titiek and Malaysian businessman Robert Kuok in an oil palm plantation in Sumatra.

Malaysian and Indonesian timber conglomerates have also begun to attract attention for logging operations in Guyana and Surinam in South America, where indigenous peoples complain of forest denudation, pollution and cultural threat.

Top-level connections

On October 3rd, the Indonesian Forestry Minister revoked the licences of nine companies. Their shareholders read like a roll-call of Indonesia's richest men and President Suharto's closest friends, Liem Sioe Liong (Sudono Salim), Mohammad 'Bob' Hasan, Prayogo Pangestu and Ekta Tjipta Wijaya.

It remains to be seen whether the companies will stop operations. In past years they have ignored bans and licence revocations imposed on them, secure in the protection they receive from their ties to the Suharto clan and special interest groups in the government and military. In August this year Suharto personally opened a pulp factory in Kalimantan owned by his regular golfing partner Bob Hasan. In a presidential decree last year Suharto authorised the transfer of over US\$ 100 million from the state reforestation fund to finance the construction of Hasan's Kiani Kertas paper and pulp plant in East Kalimantan. This decision is currently being challenged in court by the ecological group *Walhi*.

In 1994 Suharto had channelled money from this fund to the domestic aircraft

industry headed by his *protégé* Research and Technology Minister, B. J. Habibie. A legal challenge to that decision by *Walhi* failed. The fund which is financed by timber taxes and which is intended for re-planting of trees and forest conservation has also allegedly been used recently to prop up the Indonesian rupiah, which lost 36 per cent of its value in just two months and to restore foreign investor confidence in the economy.

Indonesia is already the world's largest plywood exporter and aims by 2005 to become the world's largest oil-palm producer. Meanwhile logging companies continue felling timber at unsustainable rates and planting fast growing non-indigenous substitutes in their place creating havoc in the eco-system. Arable land in Java is turned into golf-courses and hotel resorts or inundated by hydro-electric dams while 200,000 hectares of peat bogs in Kalimantan are drained and turned into rice-fields, paper and pulp factories and oil palm plantations.

However once these peat fields are alight they burn on and on and aerial spraying with water nor cloud seeding to induce rain cannot extinguish these fires which can only be quenched by a rise in the water table, which itself is dependent on monsoon rainfall which is also much reduced by loss of rain forest cover due to break-neck logging and land-clearance. Which is where we began.

National interest?

In November, the Malaysian authorities issued a directive banning researchers and academics from making statements about the smog as according to one Minister, "it could give a negative image of Malaysia, causing a scare among Malaysians and preventing foreigners from coming to the country".

Throughout the crisis, worries over the tourist trade have been a higher priority for regional governments than the health of their own citizenry. However the gagging order backfired with public outrage that the government instead of sharing information with the people is trying to conceal the facts and restrict freedom of expression.

Gone are the days when south-east Asian governments could confidently peddle the lie that only interfering foreign NGOs and small local environmental groups cared about the environmental impact of economic growth. A wide-spread consciousness of environmental degradation and of the inter-generational consequences of pollution and deforestation is present among all social classes and throughout society in the region.

What remains to be seen is how much more need be sacrificed and for how much longer, before this insanity is ended. ★

References: *Aliran* Monthly (Penang), *ASIET NetNews Digest* (<http://www.peg.apc.org/~asiet/netnews.htm>), W. H. Auden, *Down To Earth* (London), *Far Eastern Economic Review* (Hong Kong), *Frontline* (Chennai), *The Guardian* (London), *The Independent* (London).
Terima kasih kepada saudari Teresa Birks.

Chaos in the markets

It has been great fun watching capitalists squirming with nervousness as the markets rise and fall, writes **Andy Kilmister**

The annual meeting of the World Bank and IMF was disrupted by a vicious argument in the mass media between currency speculator George Soros and Malaysian premier Mahathir Mohammed.

What is the significance of these developments? Are they the beginnings of a lurch into instability for the world economy or are they just the result of stock exchange gambling with few effects elsewhere?

The current currency and stock market turmoil has both short and long term causes. In the short run two things are important.

Firstly, there are problems in the financial sector in a number of Asian countries. Risky property lending in Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia and a growing Thai trade deficit sparked off the initial selling of currencies.

Unsustainability

This has now spread to Hong Kong where the property market has also been booming in an unsustainable way. There are growing worries about the future ability of countries like Thailand to break into the higher value export markets in Europe and the US in areas like electronics.

The second short term issue is that there is a huge amount of speculative money now circulating in the global financial markets. This is because there has been a sustained shift throughout the last decade in the balance between profits and wages throughout much of the capitalist world.

Yet higher profits have largely not gone into productive investment, except in the USA, but have been placed in the financial markets. These markets have been expecting a slowing down of economic activity for more than a year now and are increasingly worried.

As a result speculative activity in both shares and currencies is becoming more

frenzied as traders jockey for position, trying to spot the areas which will fall least when the bubble bursts and avoid the others.

Asian economies are not the only ones which have been abandoned in this process. In May and June there was a speculative demand for, and then selling of, the Czech *koruna* which led to a massive devaluation. The Czech government won the subsequent vote of confidence by just one vote!

We can expect to see share prices everywhere become increasingly volatile as the markets prepare for the inevitable realisation that the boom market of the last few years cannot last for ever.

But there are some longer term influences which have played a more important role in the crisis in South East Asia. Four in particular seem especially important.

Firstly, there is the long running recession in Japan. Much of the development of the Asian economies has rested on Japanese investment. While this is continuing to some degree, the weakness of Japanese banks and the economy more generally has fed through to other Asian countries.

Secondly, there is uncertainty about the future role of China in the Asian region, both politically and economically. Competition from China will have major implications for countries like Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Thirdly, questions have been raised about the future interest of the US in Asia. The USA is the fastest growing economy among the major capitalist powers. Increasingly it appears centred on its own regional economic bloc based on the NAFTA treaty and relations with Latin America.

There are deep divisions within the Asian countries about how to respond to this. Malaysian leader Mahathir Mohammed is gesturing towards an economic break with the US and the formation of an East Asian Economic Community. Other Asian leaders are opposed to this strategy.

Fourth, questions have been raised about the underlying basis of the so-called "economic miracle" in East and South East Asia. In 1995, influential US economist Paul Krugman argued that growth in Asia has depended not on increased efficiency but on the mobilisation of more and more resources. Writing in the journal *Foreign Affairs*, widely read in US policy making circles, Krugman argued that Asian growth is bound to slow down dramatically in the future as the scope for such mobilisation decreases. He drew an explicit comparison between East Asia now and the USSR and Eastern Europe in the 1950s. While Krugman's theses are controversial they point to an important change of mood amongst governments and businesses in the US and elsewhere. The Asian economies are seen less and less as

Malaysia

Protesting the Internal Security Act

A rare public protest against Malaysia's notorious Internal Security Act (ISA) took place outside Kamunting Detention Centre on October 26th. It marked the tenth anniversary of Operation Lalang (Weeds) when 119 individuals were arrested and detained without trial.

The picket called for the repeal of the ISA and other repressive laws and for the release of those currently imprisoned under those laws. According to the 36 sponsoring organisations, these laws "are obnoxious and oppressive instruments of state maintained by the ruling government as instruments of control over our public life and civil society."

Introduced in 1960, three years after Malaysia won its independence, the Internal Security Act consolidates legislation used by the British against the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements. In the 1960s and 1970s the new regime's main dissidents were trade unionists, political and student activists. Since the 1980s, the legislation has been increasingly used against social and environmental activists.

Under the ISA, people have been detained for up to 16 years without any evidence of wrong-doing. Their cases are subject to review only by the Minister for Home Affairs. According to the protesters, these laws "violate the most basic of moral and human rights pre-

cepts: that no one should be punished without clear public proof in a court."

Operation Lalang (Weeds) in 1987 led to the detention without trial of 119 people, including the Leader of the Opposition and a wide range of political, religious, social and environmental activists. None were charged. They were arrested simply to intimidate and crush the extra-parliamentary opposition to the ruling coalition and to deflect attention away from political infighting within the main party and the economic situation.

Although it is the most infamous, the ISA is unfortunately not the only law in Malaysia that allows the government to detain people without trial. Thousands have been incarcerated under the 1969 Emergency (Public Order and Prevention of Crime) Ordinance, and the 1985 Dangerous Drugs (Special Preventive Measures) Act. Detentions are under the complete control of the police and the Ministry of Home Affairs. Since there is no public scrutiny of the detentions by the courts, the detainees and their families suffer considerable abuse.

The organisers, including opposition political parties, labour and consumer groups and social and environmental activists, called on the government to follow the example of South Africa, by reforming the constitution and repealing detention laws. [Suaram/BS] ★

a model among such people in the way they were a decade ago.

All these factors have come together in the case of South Korea. Widely trumpeted as a major success story in recent years, including by some on the left, the South Korean economy has experienced two major bankruptcies this year, with a third, the motor company Kia, only averted by taking the company into state ownership. The economy is plainly racked by bad debts and rampant corruption.

Even worse for the markets, the South Korean workers in January refused to pay for the crisis by accepting worse conditions and wage restrictions. The South Korean example increasingly stands as a warning of what might happen elsewhere in the region.

Repercussions

These tremors are unlikely to be restricted to Asia alone. US and British companies in particular are now sufficiently involved in the regions to ensure that any widespread crisis in the Asian financial markets will have repercussions elsewhere.

What are the implications of this for the system as a whole? Does it mean the onset of a more generalised crisis?

Here we have to distinguish between the currency markets and the stock market.

Currency crises under capitalism are essentially redistributive. If some traders (either private or government) lose then others must gain. If the markets lose confidence in the currency of one country they move on to another.

The events of the last few months do not mean that traders have lost confidence in the system as a whole, but that one particular region is viewed less favourably as compared to others.

Stock market crashes are quite different. In these cases the signal is that the capitalist class no longer believes that profits will be as high in the future as they did before. As a result they are prepared to pay less for a share of such profits.

Such a feeling need not be restricted to one region and it may lead to lower investment and spending in the present and contribute to the onset of a full scale crisis.

However, it is not inevitable that changes in financial markets have such an effect. A whole range of other factors interact with them and influence their effect on the economy as a whole. In particular the build up of debt in the economy is crucial.

The reason why the 1987 stock market crash and the fall in shares in Japan in the 1990s led to recession was largely the mass of bad debts held by the banking system at the time. This factor is not nearly so prevalent now and outside specific countries a collapse in the financial markets is not so likely to lead to a general capitalist crisis on its own.

But that does not mean it is of no significance for socialists. The turmoil in East and South East Asia provides two important lessons.



Firstly, it disproves the view that capitalism can find a 'miraculous' way of organising the economy which can eliminate the possibility of crisis. The Asian economies like all others cannot escape the tendencies to disorder and stagnation which are endemic in the system.

Warning

Secondly, it is a warning to those who believe the view which is increasingly commonly expressed in the media that

somehow the 1990s are 'different'; that because of globalisation, or information technology, or some such development, we are now living in a boom that can continue without end.

The underlying features of the system in which we live have not changed in that way. On the contrary, developments of the last few months can only speed the long run trend indicated by the South Korean strikes at the beginning of this year. Asia is the continent to watch. ★

Sri Lanka Port privatisation

One of Sri Lanka's major labor unions has warned that the government will face strong international action if it goes ahead with plans to lease part of the Colombo port to an overseas investor. In an interview with Dow Jones on 17 October, Bala Tampoe, president of the Ceylon Mercantile Union (CMU), said that the International Transport Workers Federation (ITS) has begun mobilizing to pressurize the Sri Lankan government against its privatization plans.

The government, eager to invite foreign capital, plans to lease the Queen Elizabeth Quay to the Australian arm of Britain's Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Co. (P&O).

In June, several junior and senior executives carrying CMU membership cards were transferred to another port in the southern district of Galle, away from Colombo. This effectively crippled the

CMU, according to Tampoe.

The union leader said that the ITS, which has a membership of around 3.2 million worldwide, will blacklist all foreign ships serving the Colombo Port. Members of the ITS will refuse to provide services to such ships, he added. "There will be commercial repercussions for the government if they refuse to take appropriate action," he said. Colombo port has 16,000 employees, and nearly one third are members of the CMU.

Government officials say that P&O will invest \$600 million to develop the quay, which is expected to take 10 years, and an additional \$350 million to finish it.

In February, Colombo port started operating a modern oil berth at a cost of 2.22 bn. rupees (\$1= 60 rupees) with Japanese assistance via the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund. The Colombo port has a throughput capacity of 1.65 million containers a year, and in 1996 the port handled a record 1.4 million containers. ★

Source: Dow Jones

conference notes

Canada: Gay trade unionists' conference

Canada's first ever "Solidarity and Pride Conference for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Trade Unionists and Our Allies of the Canadian Labour Congress" took place in Ottawa on October 15-17th. Gary Kinsman* reports.

Three-hundred and forty lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and some supportive heterosexual union activists (more than three times the number originally expected) participated in a series of workshops on "making the links," "activism," workplace issues and negotiating for our rights, current legal battles, "finding our histories" (at which a network for recovering queer union histories was initiated), and negotiating benefits along with a cabaret and popular theatre.

A highlight of the conference on the first night was a showing of US gay historian Allan Berube's wonderful slideshow on the history of the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union from the years of the depression to the cold war titled *No Red-Baiting! No Race-Baiting! No Queen Baiting!* This inspiring slideshow gave us all a glimpse into progressive union

history where the struggles against class exploitation were intimately associated with struggles against racism and heterosexism.

Although some participants felt that there was too much stress on group process exercises at the beginning of the conference by the end of the conference it was clear that this first conference of its kind had brought together hundreds of activists who were not only union activists, and lesbian and gay activists, but also were profoundly committed to the struggle against racism and sexism.

While not all unions were represented (there were only a small number of Steelworkers present) and some were more present than others (the public sector CUPE had a good presence) there were many occasions for networking and strategising throughout the conference.

Many called for the conference to be an annual event and some raised concerns that it was not a policy making conference that could submit motions to the next CLC conference. The final plenary was quite energising and people also committed themselves to trying to involve more people of colour in the next conference and to strengthening the struggle against racism.

It has been a long time since I have been at such a large progressive conference with activists committed not only to the fight for lesbian and gay rights but

who saw this as linked to the struggle against class exploitation, racism and sexism. It showed very concretely that hundreds of lesbian, gay, and bisexual activists are playing an important part in the union movement (even though this is not always recognised) across Canada and Québec (and there were a number of delegates from Québec). Queer activists are playing an important part in broadening out, expanding, and transforming the union movement so that it takes up all of the forms of oppression in this society. I hope the second "Solidarity and Pride" conference gets off the ground soon. ★

* Activist in the New Socialist Group and member of the Laurentian University Faculty Association in Sudbury, Ontario.

Organising on the US-Mexican border

Twenty-five activists from both sides of the border gathered in Ciudad Juarez in late October for an eight-day workshop on organizing in the *maquiladora* (border zone assembly plant) sector.

Jess David Kincaid

The event marked the culmination of a year's work for the new Workers Center for Labor Studies (CETLAC). The Center was created by Mexico's Authentic Labor Front (FAT) with the support of U.S.-based unions including the United Electrical workers (UE) and the Teamsters.

Local and national FAT organizers, members of the FAT National Coordinating Committee, and representatives of University of California at Berkeley's Labor Occupational Health Program gave workshops during the week, which focused on democratic union organizing and worker health and safety in the *maquiladoras*. The event also included seminars with lawyers and professors from Mexico and the U.S., including a presentation and discussion with Mexican political-scientist and columnist for *El Universal* newspaper Samuel Schmidt.

Participants in the workshop included activists and organizers from Juarez and other areas of Mexico, including three organizers from Han Young de Mexico, the Tijuana plant whose workers recently became the first on the border to vote for an independent union, the FAT-affiliated Independent Metal Workers Union, or STIHMACS. [See article elsewhere in this issue.] El Paso union representatives were

coming soon

Asia Pacific Solidarity Conference

Sydney, Australia, April 1998

Organised by the Asia Pacific Institute for Democratisation and Development. See full-page advertisement in the September issue of this magazine.

Participants include Jose Ramos Horta, Nobel Peace Laureate for East Timor, Mari Alkatiri, Foreign Affairs head, FRETILIN, Revolutionary Front for Independent East Timor, Dr Jayanta Rongpi, Member of Indian Parliament representing the Autonomous State Demand Committee, Assam, Prof Francisco Nemenzo, founding chairman, Union for Socialist Ideas and Action (BISIG), the Philippines, Renato Constantino Jr., Chairman SANLAKAS democratic federation, Philippines, Anna Maria Nemenzo, Vice-Chairman, AKBAYAN (Citizen's Action Party); National Co-ordinator, Women's Health Philippines Inc. and Malik Miah (Solidarity, USA).

The Bougainville Interim Government, All Burma Student Democratic Front, All Burma Students League (India and Thailand), Peoples' Democratic Party (PRD) of Indonesia, Malaysian Peoples Party (PRM), Communist Party of Nepal (UML), Union of Kanak and Exploited Workers (USTKE), New Caledonia, NewLabour Party (NLP) of New Zealand, Labour Party of Pakistan, Melanesian Solidarity (MELSOL), Papua New Guinea, Indonesian National Democratic Struggle Committee, Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) of Australia, Campaign for Popular Democracy, Thailand New Socialist Party of Sri Lanka (NSSP), Australasian Federation of Tamil Associations, Free West Papua Movement (OPM) and Russia's Communist Youth League (KOMSMOL) will also be represented.

The conference secretariat in Australia is based in the national office of the Democratic Socialists. Contact Max Lane, P.O. Box 458, Broadway 2007, Australia. Tel: 61-02-96901320; Fax: 96901381 <apiaustralia@peg.apc.org>

also present, as well as representatives from several U.S. non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Christine Neumann-Ortiz, from the U.S. publication *Voces de la Frontera* (*Border Voices*), which examines work in the maquiladora sector, was hopeful about the results of the event. "There is a rich experience here from people who have worked for years in the maquiladoras," she said. "Added to that is the FAT's practical experience of years of fighting for independent unionism. The idea is that together we can change how things happen on the border."

In a city where over half of employment is in the maquiladora industry, the birth of an independent union movement could have significant consequences. The population is booming on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande, as masses of people have migrated to find jobs in the maquiladora sector. The rapid urbanization of Juarez has been compounded in recent years with the on-set of NAFTA, as the number of maquiladoras increased due to lower labor costs for foreign companies manufacturing in Mexico. ★

Mexican Labor News and Analysis, Vol. 2, No. 20, 2 November 1997

EuroMarches launched in Luxembourg

The European Marches (EM) movement was formally established in Luxemburg on 4-5 October.

The network will be called European Marches against Unemployment, Job Insecurity and Social Exclusion. 4 and 5. A constitutive motion was approved, establishing, among other things, that "the network has a loose structure and decisions are not enforceable on organisations or collectives who are members. Decisions are not taken on a majority basis but arrived at only after working towards a consensus.

The network is pluralistic. Differences in the economic situation across the European Union should provoke the exchange of ideas and actions, rather than create division within the movement. There is a general acceptance of different approaches to common objectives, such as the fight against unemployment, job insecurity and social exclusion.

The network is in no way a new organisation, nor does seek to compete with existing European union structures (the European Trade Union Congress, ETUC), or with existing organisation of the unemployed, (the European Network of the Unemployed, ENU), or with any other organisation involved in the fight against social exclusion."

The first concrete initiative of the network was the approval of the call for an

EM demonstration on November 20, in Luxembourg city at the same time as the meeting of the European Summit on Employment.

Initiatives

We all know that it would be impossible to relive the Amsterdam Rally every six months. On the other hand, we need to fix long term aims to continue forward from Amsterdam. Delegates agreed that we should not limit ourselves to demonstrating every time there is a European Summit! Though, obviously, organisations in the host country of these Summits will inevitably put strong pressure on the EM to organise something. The next European Co-ordination meeting on 10-12 January 1998 will try to find a way out of this problem.

Delegates evaluated the Marches earlier this year, and concluded that they were part of a series of events that might be pushing EU Member State governments to do something about unemployment. Other factors include the election of social democratic governments in Britain and France, ETUC pressure, the initial promises of France's Jospin government, and the campaigns for full employment of the network of European economists, and members of European parliament, animated by British MEP Ken Coates.

Over 100 delegates were present, representing eleven countries – Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great-Britain, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, the Spanish state, and Sweden. Proof of the dynamism created by the launch of the European Marches. [EMN/JD] ★

Young Finns in Cuba

Finland's Young Communists had mixed impressions of the 14th World Festival of Youth and Students, held in Cuba in late July.

According to the editorial in *Murros* magazine. "Various discussion groups were part of the program, but these were usually so big that no actual discussion took place. Especially as no commentary from the floor was allowed. Thus the level of conversation was quite low and some people slept through the meetings."

The Young Communists of Finland (YCF) came to Havana after an 8 year break in participation in the Festival movement, writes the YCF *InfoBulletin*. With 42 participants (seven YCF comrades), this was among the smallest ever Finnish delegations. Times have changed, notes *InfoBulletin*. The Democratic Youth League of Finland (SDNL), which mainly hosted the 1962 WFYS in Helsinki, boycotted the Havana festival because of "the human rights situation in Cuba".

The editorial of *Murros* was also amazed by the presence of "so called hard-liner "communist" organisations. Among other things, these declared that Stalin was an OK. guy and that his atrocities are only

western propaganda. The Red Youth of London stated in their flyer that Trotsky was an FBI agent and Orwell an imperialist pig. Yeah, and Lenin was probably Santa Claus."

Over 12,000 youth participated in the Festival, which, according to *Murros*, shows that it is worthwhile to organise them in the future. "But they should concentrate on solving the world's problems instead of presenting uncritical admiration of the host country and North Korea."

For the seven participants from the Communist Youth of Finland, the best in the Festival was "meeting people and organisations from other countries," "the spontaneous activities of the participants" and "the positive Cuban attitude on life." Criticisms included "tight schedule" and "limitations on moving around." Excess bureaucracy and "old practices of conduct" in the 'discussion' sessions "flattened the atmosphere.

"Class distinctions in Cuba are greater than I thought", commented one delegate. Another suspected the Cuban revolution of having decayed into the USSR model "right from the start." Delegates were alarmed to see the growing role of the Yankee dollar, dislocating the country's own currency, the peso.

Despite these limitations, "the Communist Youth created international relations with over 40 organisations and the Special Issues we had produced in English were literally ripped from our hands." ★

Source: CYF *InfoBulletin* 3/97

'Disappointing' meeting of Scandinavian Young Communists

A Nordic meeting of Communist Youth, initiated by the Communist Youth of Finland in early August, failed to develop a sound basis for co-operation.

Although participants agreed that Nordic youth have the same problems, like racism and unemployment, and that these could be fought internationally as well as nationally, big differences emerged over "a question as basic for Communist Party supporters as the analysis on Soviet Union... The views of the Finns and Sweden's Revolutionary Communist Youth (RKU) were totally opposed. They think that the shit hit the fan only in the sixties, and that the Stalin line was OK."

The only other group which attended was Norway's Rød Ungdom (Red Youth). Denmark's Rød Ungdom apparently failed to find the location. Other invited organisations didn't respond. No surprise that, according to their newsletter, "for the Communist Youth of Finland, this meeting was a disappointment." ★

Source: CYF *InfoBulletin* 3/97

book notes

Inside Cowley: Trade union struggle in Britain in the 1970s

by Alan Thornett

reviewed by John McIlroy

Anyone who believes macho management and attacks on shop stewards began with Mrs Thatcher and the victimisation of Derek Robinson should buy this book.

As you read the extracts of 1970s newspaper reports, stating that new investment in British Leyland was dependent on the hope that "militant moderate union officials can destroy the Trotskyist power base in the vital Cowley plant", you will see in a new light TGWU General Secretary Jack Jones's alleged transfer of power to shop stewards.

Inside Cowley demonstrates convincingly the disastrous impact of union leaders' enforcement of Labour's 1970s Social Contract in weakening workplace trade unionism and softening up the union membership for the brutal offensive of neo liberalism in the 1980s.

Alan Thornett worked in the Cowley assembly plant of BL from 1959, becoming a shop steward in 1963 and TGWU full time deputy convenor in 1967. The plant was unique in Britain. It harboured a factory branch of the Socialist Labour League (later Workers' Revolutionary Party) over 40 strong which played a leading role in factory politics.

In his earlier book, *From Militancy to Marxism*, Thornett chronicled the making of militancy at Cowley, the winning of key stewards from the CP and management's strategy for regaining control, centred on the imposition of Measured Day Work to replace the traditional piecework system, and thus remove direct control over pay bargaining from the stewards.

Inside Cowley documents in absorbing detail the continuing attempts of the company to break the militant factory leadership and regain control over pay and production. Anchored in an analysis of events in Cowley, it is also an outline history of trade unionism in the car industry – and wider – in the 1970s.

1974 saw the birth of the Social Contract and the intensification of the management offensive. Removing Thornett was seen as beheading the stewards' organisation, and he was duly set up on fabricated charges. The book traces the complex interactions between membership, stewards, union officials and management.

The officials viewed militancy – and their exclusion from the plant – as a challenge to their function of accommodation with the company. Their role was to

develop and finesse the attack on the leading stewards, although there were partial exceptions, notably Moss Evans.

Militancy in a car factory has perforce to be sectional at times, and often has costs for trade unionists. Management and officials were able to exploit sections of the membership who ignored the benefits strong leadership had brought them, and sometimes wives insulated from workplace struggle.

They used embittered ex-Trotskyist Reg Parsons, who had already been in touch with Jack Jones, to orchestrate an opposition in the shadow of a virulent media witchhunt against the left. Years later, TGWU full time officer David Buckle reflected on the crusade to "break the power of the Trots – we did everything we possibly could to try to break the backs of these people." The result was an important defeat for the left: the Regional Committee split the 5/55 branch, the power base of militancy, and substituted a secret ballot of all members for election of convenors by stewards. As the media feeding frenzy climaxed, the convenor Bob Fryer and deputy convenor Thornett were removed and a new leadership around Parsons was elected.

It was nonetheless a partial defeat. Thornett retained his steward's card and his base in the transport section because of the depth of support he enjoyed from the drivers. An inspiring section of *Inside Cowley* deals with the fightback, a crucial episode in the history of trade unionism in the car plants.

By December 1977, against all odds, the left around Bob Fryer and Alan Thornett had gained the leadership of the new 5/293 branch and won key positions in the convenor elections. At the heart of the matter was the fact that the Buckle-Parsons leadership opened the workforce to the management offensive: events proved militancy was the best protection.

But if a key lesson of the book is that a strong base in the grassroots is indispensable another is that it is insufficient. Lacking the resources to build adequate support at District and Regional level, the plant leadership was soon under renewed attack from higher levels of the TGWU.

The flimsy charges of "disruption" for challenging minutes; of breaking union confidence by distributing branch bulletins on the gate when management prohibited distribution inside the factory; the TGWU bureaucracy's kangaroo courts; attempts to ban the left from stewards' meetings; the manipulation of ballots – all beggar belief – unless you know the TGWU.

It hasn't changed a great deal. If some sections of the trade union leadership

fought against the bosses with a fraction of the ferocity they deploy against their own members we would be in Utopia today. But the story exemplifies, too, the imagination, determination and stamina of our best militants.

Trade unionism in Cowley was far from simply a factory affair. The Assembly plant branches were keenly involved in supporting local struggles – in the university, the hospitals and various battles for union recognition. The most notable of these were at Blackwell's bookshop and the Randolph Hotel, the Ritz of Oxford.

The book charts how principled support for these and other struggles incited the rage of somnambulant full time officials in a variety of unions. It depicts as well as the fortunes of the left on Oxford Trades Council and the fight for solidarity with groups of workers throughout the country. The fight against the social contract continued in the plant and at TGWU conferences.

As the social contract lost the support of union members, "left" union leaders, such as Jones and the AUEW's Hugh Scanlon, imposed it through devices such as the "one increase every year rule" and "an orderly return to free collective bargaining". Again, Thornett sees in the undermining of union democracy and the crucifixion of groups like the BL tool-makers who challenged wage restraint, the seeds of division and disillusion amongst union members which were to blossom under Thatcherism.

In a similar way the Ryder Report on BL, with its establishment of corporate bargaining and introduction of participation bodies disarmed the unions in BL. It also prepared the way for a new boss, Michael Edwardes, who would make more ruthless use of the ideology of joint interest. The left lost crucial battles for plant-level pay against corporate bargaining – which was advocated by members of Militant, who espoused an abstract concept of workers' unity divorced from the reality of the time.

Corporate bargaining developed the process – which commenced with the abolition of piece work – of removing economic conflict further from the control of the rank and file and the point of production. This strengthened the ability of full time union officers to horse. In turn the three tier "participation" structure at plant, divisional and national level sought – with some success – to imprint leading stewards with the logic of capitalist production and recreate them as cheer leaders for competitiveness and speed-up.

Very soon key stewards like Derek Robinson from Longbridge were pronouncing in Cars Council reports "we can grab that extra bit of the world markets and give ourselves the reputation we undoubtedly deserve."! Fighting off sustained attacks by the leaders of their own union, the Cowley stewards had to wage war on wider fronts.

Inside Cowley documents in macabre detail how Edwardes obtained the consent of convenors and officials for sackings and closures. Combine committee leader Derek Robinson built on Communist Party (CP) support for participation by leading a standing ovation for the BL undertaker.

Jones and Scanlon appeared with Edwardes in adverts captioned: 'We're all on the same side of the fence'. Once again there was a price to pay, commencing with Robinson's victimisation, ironically for signing a pamphlet supporting militant policies he had opposed in the combine committee. The AUEW leaders' sacrifice of Robinson again prefigured the future.

The CP was another important actor in this story, and as a former member Thornett well understands its role. The party claimed to have 48 members in a factory branch in Cowley in the late 1960s and early 70s. This provokes serious incredulity on the part of those who were around at the time. Whoever they were, they certainly didn't punch their weight at Cowley.

As I write I have in front of me a copy of the CP's *Comment*, April 29 1978. A letter complains: "For weeks now the ultra-left presses have been screaming about the threatened victimisation of Alan Thornett by right wingers in the Midlands TGWU. Hardly a peep from the *Morning Star*".

The reason for the absence of coverage was not, as the complainant believed, because of the *Morning Star's* inadequate coverage of the labour movement. It was of course because the CP was in partnership with the TGWU bureaucracy in witch hunting Thornett. At Cowley, as this volume demonstrates, CPers were conspicuous by their absence, emerging at crucial points to cast their votes for participation.

When the Robinson affair erupted, the response of the CP Midlands secretary was to call on the Combine to organise a 'deputation' to management at Leyland House, Coventry. Their 110 per cent support for participation and its key ideological component, company viability meant the CP were unable to mobilise members to defend Robinson once Edwardes played his key card, claiming it was a choice between Robinson or closure – and the AUEW took the threat at face value.

After years of living with the daily possibility of victimisation, Thornett's career inside Cowley ended in anti-climax as he was sacked in 1982 for failure to renew his HGV licence. As he observes, those immersed in wider problems often neglect their own. By now, as Thatcherism developed, the ground was slipping away from the left.

Thornett's dismissal opened the way for further victimisations and the drastic rundown of BL's operations in Cowley.

The book might have benefited from some account of the organisation of production and working conditions inside the plant, the essential background to the struggles depicted here.

It has little to say about the development of the Workers' Socialist League which Thornett established after his break from the WRP in 1974. No matter.

A major strength of *Inside Cowley* is its insistence on the need to ponder experience to learn lessons from history. It has some useful points to make on the struggles against sexism and racism. It demonstrates in numerous ways how the lessons of yesterday can help counter today's attempts by management to mobilise individualism and self-interest against collectivism in the working class.

Inside Cowley is a significant contribution to the story of workplace organisation and a valuable addition to the history of Trotskyism. It is a chronicle of past struggle and a handbook for future battles.

The conditions for remaking militant trade unionism exist, the fundamentals propounded here still apply. Suitably fashioned for new contexts and cultures, new generations and new problems. *Inside Cowley* is indispensable reading for all trade unionists facing this challenge.

440 pages, 30 photographs (190,000 words). Published January 1998 by Porcupine, London. Mail order: Britain £14.45, Europe £15.75, North America surface £15.75, airmail £18.95, Aus/NZ surface £15.75, airmail £20.45. Special offer -- Alain Thornett's earlier work, *From Militancy to Marxism*, for only £5 extra, including postage. (Or £6 separately including postage, other countries £7 surface, £8 airmail. Cheques should be made out to Alan Thornett and sent to 14 Colyton Rd, London SE22 0NE

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Adam Hochschild,

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The Zapatista dream

Subcomandante Marcos: El sueño zapatista, by Yvon Le Bot

Yvon Le Bot's new book (published simultaneously in Spanish and French) offers one of the most intelligent and critical examinations of the Zapatista movement and its politics to date. This book represents a turning point in the literature dealing with the Zapatista movement, opening a window and letting fresh air circulate in academic and political circles.

The first half of the book is a long introductory essay by Le Bot, while the second is comprised of interviews with Zapatista leaders Marcos, Moises and Tacho. What makes this book so important are the questions Le Bot asks or implies, both in his introduction and in his interviews. How did the EZLN's politics evolve? What was the relation between the original Guevarist project and the Indian movement? How democratic was the traditional Mayan village? How democratic is the Zapatista Mayan village? What is the relationship between the Zapatista project in the Maya lands, and a possible democratic project in Mexico as a whole?

Le Bot—and Marcos—suggest that the answers to these questions are more problematic than many of their supporters understand. This book cannot be recommended too highly to those interested in the Zapatista movement or engaged in solidarity organisations.

Mexico: Plaza y Janez, 1997. 376 pages.

Reviewed by Dan La Botz

La Rebelion Zapatista y la Autonomia.

Hector Diaz-Polanco, an advisor to the Zapatista Army of National Liberation

★ 1997 index

(EZLN), has been one of the foremost interpreters of autonomy movements in Latin America and one of the strongest advocates of regional, territorial and political autonomy for the Indian peoples of Mexico. A Dominican by birth, Diaz-Polanco spent time in Nicaragua as an advisor to the regional indigenous movements there.

In this book Diaz-Polanco argues that the EZLN-led Chiapas rebellion of 1994 put the issue of autonomy at the top of the political agenda in Mexico. As Diaz-Polanco sees it, one of the greatest contributions of the EZLN was to link the Chiapas Indians' demand for autonomy with the national struggles for democracy and social justice, and to link the guerrillas and the Indian movement to the broader struggles of Mexican civil society. This comprehensive book discusses the history of the indigenous peoples' autonomy struggles in Mexico since the conquest, the contemporary social and economic situation of the Indians of Mexico, and the political struggle between the Indians and the Mexican state. Diaz-Polanco examines the autonomy agreements between Greenland and Denmark and between Nicaragua and its coastal regions as models for future autonomy agreements in Latin America and other parts of the world.

Finally, Diaz-Polanco follows the current negotiations between the Mexican government and the Zapatistas from the uprising of January 1, 1994 to the San Andres Larrainzar agreements. I found this book particularly helpful in correcting some of my own political misunderstandings about the autonomy issue.

Reviewed by Dan La Botz

Mexico: Siglo-Veintiuno Editores, 1997.
This review is reprinted from: Mexican Labor News and Analysis, 3436 Morrison Place, Cincinnati, OH 45220.
<103144.2651@compuserve.com>

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Analysis with Attitude

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Industrial Worker

"While most reports claim that the Teamsters won a sweeping victory in their 15-day strike against United Parcel Service, on closer examination the proposed settlement looks to be more of a draw", argues the October issue of the US radical newspaper *Industrial Worker*. "The Teamsters clearly won on pensions, defeating UPS' efforts to pull out of the union's multi-employer pension plans and forcing UPS to increase its pension payments. . . . However, most UPS workers are not covered under the pension plan, because of extremely high turn-over among the part-timers who make up nearly two-thirds of UPS workers."

Subscription to the *Industrial Worker* costs \$15 a year, from IWW, 103 West Michigan Avenue, Ypsilanti MI 48197, USA

Out at Work

America's Public Broadcasting System recently refused to broadcast "Out at Work," a film about three workers who came out in the workplace and what happened to them as a result, because labour unions and a lesbian-oriented foundation provided some of its funding.

Murros 4/97

(In Finnish) "A comment by the Supreme Court judge Eeva Vuori, which stated that a crime committed by a poor person is more felonious than the same crime committed by a rich person, has stirred up Finland. Everyone, including from the President, rushed to shut the judge's mouth. Not because she had made a juridical mistake, but because it is not appropriate to say this sort of thing in public." (from the editorial)

Other contents include the popularity of rightist populism in Norway, Co-operatives, 14th World Festival of Youth and Students, Nordic meeting of Communist Youth, future activities of the Communist Youth. The next issue will be published in mid-November.

Subscription to five issues of *Murros* costs 60 Markka (US\$12). This includes an English summary, e-mail bulletin, and copies of posters, leaflets, etc.). The editors also welcome exchange subscriptions with other publications. Preferred languages are English and Swedish. Contact: *Murros* 4/97, PL 288, 00171 Helsinki, Finland Tel. 358-9-278 2244, Fax: 358-9-278 2244. <komnuor@dlc.fi>, www.dlc.fi/~komnuor/

Socialistisk Information #113

In Danish. The November issue looks at municipal racism and the privatisation of Tele Danmark (Danish Telecom). Bodil Rasmussen & Finn Kjeller discuss the approach of the Danish and Italian far-left towards the budgets proposed by their centre-left governments. The SAP also discusses "Copenhagen's choice: A future with car traffic?" and "Local elections: Revolt or adaptation?" An 8-page supplement contains "Solidarity and freedom — Deregulation, youth and the trade union movement", a discussion paper issued by the 14th congress of SAP.

Published by Socialistisk Arbejderparti (SAP), Danish section of the Fourth International. <socinf@inet.uni2.dk>

Palestinian refugees

This (Arabic language) reader summarises the papers and debates which lead to the convention of the first popular refugee conference, conducted in Deheishe Refugee Camp/Bethlehem, on 13 September 1996.

Order from: AIC-Bethlehem, Project for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights tel/fax (2) 747346; email: <badil@trendline.co.il>. The price of one copy is US \$5 (or equivalent), including postage. Special prices for larger orders can be negotiated.

EuroMarches

The network responsible for organising the European Marches against Unemployment, which culminated in the June 14th rally in Amsterdam, has decided to continue its principal role and function of supplying information on current struggles and mobilisations in Europe.

A bulletin will be published 10 times a year. Subscription costs 100FF for individuals, and 200-500FF for organisations, associations and trade unions. French and English versions will be published. The current E-mail list server will be maintained and expanded.

Contact: Marches Europeennes, 104 rue des Couronnes, 75020 Paris, France. Tel: +33 1 44 62 63 44 Fax: +33 1 44 62 63 45. E-mail: marches97@ras.eu.org

International Socialist Review

The International Socialist Organization, US component of the International Socialist current (led by the British SWP) has started a quarterly theoretical journal. Issue one (Summer 1997) includes: From Mao to Deng (part 1 of 2) by Ahmed Shawki • A New Labor Movement? by Lee Sustar • 50 Years of the International Socialist

Tradition (interview with Tony Cliff) • The Communist Party and Black Liberation in the 1930s by Paul D'Amato
Issue two (fall 1997) includes: Contradictions of the "Miracle" Economy by Joel Geier and Ahmed Shawki • The Resistible Rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen by Katherine Dwyer • Deng's Legacy (part 2) • Engels and the Origin of Women's Oppression by Sharon Smith
Subscription: US\$18, (Canada/Mexico US\$20, other countries US\$25). Contact: International Socialist Review, P.O. Box 258082, Chicago, IL 60625, USA
www.internationalsocialist.org/html/isr.html

Desde los cuatro puntos

A new Spanish-language monthly review of the revolutionary press. Articles from *International Viewpoint*, *Em Tempo* (Brazil), *Revuela* (Ecuador), *Combate* (Portugal), *Debate para una Nueva Epoca* (Paraguay), *La Bola* (Mexico), *Correspondencia* (Uruguay) and *Viento Sur* (Spain).

Subscription: Latin America US\$20, Rest of World \$25, including airmail delivery. Contact your *International Viewpoint* seller or write to Xola #181, Col. Alamos, México, D.F., CP 03400, Mexico. Tel/fax (5) 590 0708, e-mail <csapn@laneta.apc.org>

Russian labour

Moscow-based journalist Renfrey Clarke on the current wave of strikes in Russia, 'neglected' in the Western press, and Alan Wood on the effects of the attempted capitalist restoration in Russia, the situation in the CP and perspectives for the labour movement.

Both pages are part of Ted Grant's "In Defence of Marxism" web site. His new book *Russia: from revolution to counter-revolution*, is on-line too.

easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~socappeal/russia.html

Spanish readers can also try
www.arrakis.es/~rev.rusa

Russian revolution

Sweden's Socialist Party (4th International) has a Swedish and English page with contributions to the current debate on the Russian revolution. Two articles criticise the works of Harvard history professor Richard Pipes, former advisor to president Reagan.

www.internationalen.se/sp/rr.htm

Trotsky FAQ

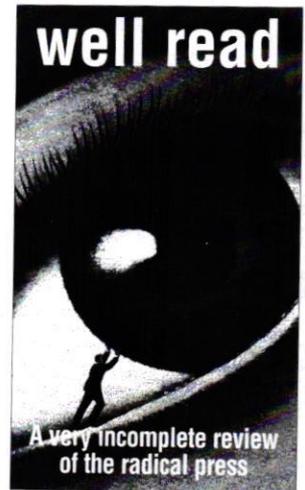
Trotskyists from a range of currents are collaborating on a project "to get as much material from the 'movement' on-line as possible, such as names and dates of papers and magazines, brief biographies of key figures, texts, etc." The best piece on this "experimental" site is Shachtman's pamphlet on the origins of Trotskyism. There will be, in the future, profiles of most major and minor world tendencies, with links, to their sites and press.

www.igc.apc.org/~walters/project

Czech anarchists

Foreign-language news on Czech anti-authoritarian, anarchist, and autonomous groups

www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/6580



Net Working



Germany: RSB

The "Revolutionärer Sozialistischer Bund / IV. Internationale (RSB) is at
www.geocities.com/capitolhill/lobby/1204

Revolutionary Marxism Today

Issue #2 of this US magazine will be out soon. The new website is at
members.aol.com/RevMarxism/RevMarxism.html

Socialist Outlook

Finally updated! Readers will find much of interest on this beautifully laid-out homepage of British supporters of the Fourth International.

www.gn.apc.org/labournet/so/

Inprecor

Our French sister magazine has moved to:
www.total.net/~agnes/Inprecor/index.html

International Viewpoint

Our own website now includes more than 80 pages. Visit our new Che Guevara section! Or the extended books review section. Or brows our archive, which includes full text of most articles published since March 1997 onward, including some that never made it into the magazine.

We now have an alternative URL, easier to type than the first...
come.to/international-viewpoint