

international  
**VIEWPOINT**  
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## Budget Games and Labor War



Elections in Spain

# Palestine's knot of violence

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The Editors

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# The knot of violence

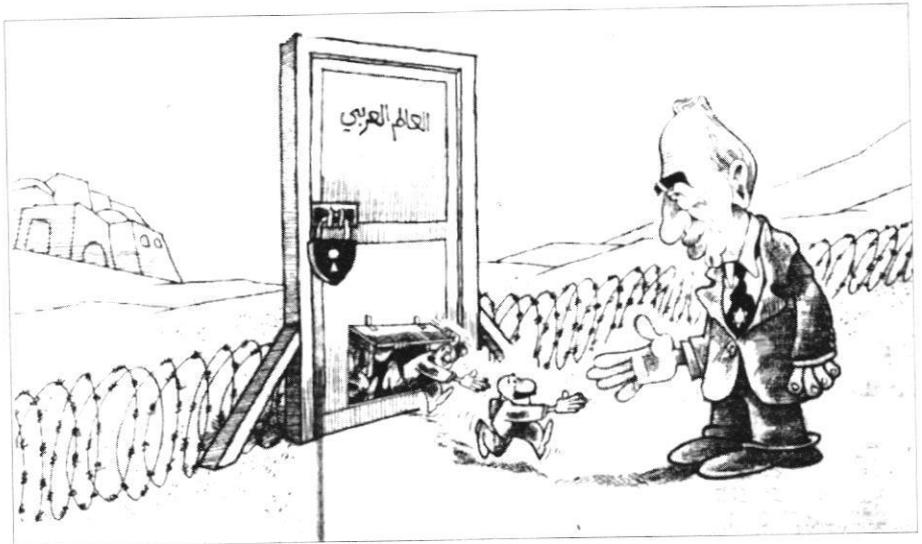
The continuation of the Oslo Process, which were supposed to lead to a solution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, stability in the Middle East, and the consolidation of US hegemony in the framework of the "new order" - is now in jeopardy. The Islamic resistance movement in the territories occupied by Israel in 1967, and its military operations against Israeli civilians (of late, almost entirely in the form of suicide bombings) in the heart of Israel's major cities, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, put tacks in the wheels of the Oslo process. And reduce the chances of Prime Minister Shimon Peres and the Labor Party to win next month's prime ministerial and Knesset elections.

## By Tikva Honig-Parnass

Israeli citizens go to the polls in May this year. There is a possibility that the Labor-Meretz governing coalition will be replaced by a Likud government which will include representatives of the most fascist trends in the Israeli Right, such as Generals Arik Sharon and Rafael Eitan (the latter being the head of the far right Tsomet party, which has entered into an electoral block with the Likud).

Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu has in principle accepted the general outlines of the Oslo Accords, and has promised that he will not seek to nullify those agreements concerning the "intermediate stage" that have already been implemented. This means respecting the redeployment of the Israeli army from Area A: 60% of the Gaza Strip and five West Bank cities (representing 4% of West Bank territory), and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in these areas. The PA would also continue to exercise civil - but not police powers in an additional 26% of the West Bank, known as Area B, which includes 426 villages, Israel retains full authority over the remaining 70% of the West Bank, known as Area C.

Israel's two major parties, Labor and Likud, both support the "partial separation" conception expressed in the Oslo Accords, as opposed to full separation, which would imply the establishment of a Palestinian state, the dismantling of the settlements and the division of Jerusalem. The difference between Likud leader Netanyahu and the Labor Party is the latter's somewhat greater willingness to make secondary, technical and largely symbolic concessions during the final status negotiations, scheduled to open shortly after the elections in Israel. The differences between the two major parties, concerning such matters as awarding the PA symbols of sovereignty - mean that a Likud victory would render impossible Israel and Arafat's common attempt to fool



the Palestinian people into believing that the "interim stage" of the Oslo Accords will lead to a state or "something like a state."

A Likud victory will only help the Palestinian to wake up to reality all the sooner: that the Labor-Meretz plan is exactly the same as Sharon's autonomy plan, which the Likud adopted in the 1980's. In other words, the transfer of civil and police powers in the major Palestinian cities to a collaborationist Palestinian body, armed with a strong police force, in order to ease the burden of the Israel army. The authority of the "self-rule" entity will be limited to internal and municipal affairs alone, without any meaningful authority over foreign links or the economy, and without control over land and water resources, which will of course remain in Israel's hands.

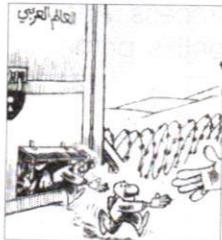
The "interim agreement" is in fact very close to the Israeli government's vision of the final settlement. This explains the ongoing land expropriations and the huge sums allocated to building-up the infrastructure which serves the Jewish settlements, including the so-called

"bypass" roads linking these settlements to each other and to Israel, which are under the total control by the Israeli army, even when they run through Palestinian towns and villages. This is all in preparation for the future apartheid state. Three billion Shekels (approximately one billion US Dollars) was allocated for these purposes last year.

Last month a secret document authored by the senior Israeli and Palestinian ministers, Yossi Beilin and Abu Maazen (both architects of the Oslo Accords), was leaked to the press. It provides a detailed picture of the Palestinian entity that will be agreed-upon in the final status talks - which they call, with a large-measure of presumptuousness - a "state." According to Minister Beilin: "The Palestinians are prepared to accept a solution in which they give up most of the [1967 occupied] territories, without the dismantling of settlements ["communities" in the original], without a return to the '67 borders, and with arrangements in Jerusalem that would leave them with less than full municipal powers."

The author edits *News from Within* magazine

The Israeli plan, which is backed-up by economic agreements, leaves the Palestinian people without hope of escaping continued oppression and exploitation by Israel - under Israeli control, on the one hand, and Arafat's authoritarian regime, on the other. Moreover, the Oslo Accords contain no provisions ensuring the most basic human rights to the Palestinian people - for Israel's need for "security" dictates the continuation of Israel's absolute control over the movement of Palestinian residents



of the autonomy areas and their produce - between the various "cantons," and between the autonomy areas and other countries, including Israel. The denial of this most fundamental human right has severe implications

for their daily lives, in such essential areas as the right to earn a living, and receive health and an education. The Israeli policies of closure, agricultural land expropriations and the uprooting of broad tracts of orchards - are intended to lower the living standards of the workers and farmers, and to proletarianize the latter, in order to generate a cheap and subordinate labor-force for industrial parks inside the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which will mainly benefit Israeli and foreign investors, and not Palestinians.

It is these prospects, along with the present experience of unemployment, malnutrition and Israeli-imposed blockade that induce the Islamic resistance operations - carried out mainly by Hamas, a movement supported by at least 15% of the population - and to lesser degree, by Islamic Jihad, which is not supported by more than 3% of the population. Because of the almost total

marginalization of the Palestinian Left - the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, in both its military and political wings, the Islamic opposition remains the only alternative force able to carry out acts of resistance to the Israeli occupation. Indeed, it is the struggle against the occupation, and not just "religious fundamentalism," which is the main motive underlying the self-sacrifice of the youths who volunteer to carry out suicide attacks. By the same token, the main strategic parameters which at present guide the Hamas movement are impeding the Oslo process, on the one hand, and realizing the national rights of the Palestinian people, on the other - not the establishment of an Islamic state.

Up to two years ago, the armed activity of the Islamic resistance in Palestine was directed exclusively against soldiers and other Israeli military targets. But since the massacre perpetrated by the settler Baruch Goldstein at the Ibrahimi Mosque in the winter of 1994 (which led to additional Palestinian deaths, at the hands of the Israeli army, outside the mosque) - the Islamic resistance began to carry out attacks against Israeli civilians, within the borders of the State of Israel. Suicide operations more and more became the main technique used. The scope of the slaughter caused by this mode of operation was immeasurably greater than the damage a single fighter - or even a small unit, using conventional means, could inflict. Thus, although the number of Palestinian military operations of all types fell from 4000 in 1992 to 600 in 1995 - the number of slain resulting from them rose from 33 to 80.

But the weapons of closure, unemployment and hunger which Israel always employed in response to these operations, and the risk of losing the support of the tired and hungry people which still pinned its hopes on the Oslo process - rendered most of the political leadership of Hamas in Palestine ready to abandon the armed struggle against the occupation, and to strive to integrate Hamas into the framework of the Palestinian Authority (PA), albeit as a political opposition. However, Israel rejected Hamas' overtures, proffered for over a year, to be integrated into the "peace process." Israel also

rebuffed the proposals transmitted by Hamas in the course of its negotiations with the PA, for a cessation of its military operations in return for a cessation of the persecution of its activists and the release of about a thousand Palestinian prisoners identified with the Islamic resistance that are being held by Israel. These overtures did not cease even after Israel assassinated Islamic Jihad leader Fathi Shakaki in Malta late last year and Hamas activist Yihya Ayyash (known as "the engineer") in the Gaza Strip in the first month of 1996 - after six months of undeclared cease-fire kept by Hamas, and just as the PA was about to reach an agreement with Hamas for the movement's cooptation into the self-rule apparatus. Israel deliberately sabotaged the policy of the PA, and also effectively prevented Hamas' participation in the PA council elections by imposing conditions that were not enforced on other candidates, i.e., to declare support of the Oslo accords. This Hamas could not accept.

Israel is not interested in the rise of a militant Palestinian political opposition - either Islamic or secular - which would seek to safeguard Palestinian national interests in the final stage negotiations with Israel. Nor does Israel believe in Arafat's ability to coopt these militants into a loyal opposition. Rather, it wants the PA to crush Hamas in an all-out confrontation, even at the risk of a bloody Palestinian civil war.

Embarking on this course would deprive Arafat of all legitimacy in the eyes of his people, and would lead either to his replacement by another leader, or to a situation in which his power would be totally dependent on Israeli bayonets.

This is why Arafat has resisted Israeli pressure, and refrained from wholesale arrests of the military leadership of Hamas (although he has not refrained from belligerent action directed against Islamic Jihad, a smaller and weaker organization). Nor has Arafat initiated a real war against Hamas' civil infrastructure, with whose political leadership he has continued to negotiate. As the head of Israeli military intelligence told the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Security Committee: "Arafat thinks that torrents of blood in the Palestinian community would endanger him more than does the continuation of the Hamas' terrorism. Today he prefers to reach an understanding with Hamas rather than to go to war against it. Arafat still thinks he has room to manoeuvre in front of Israel and the US, and still hasn't shown any determination in this war."

Israel's consistent rejections of Hamas' proposals and its continuous persecution of the movement's activists, along with the responsiveness of a part of the Palestinian

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security services to Israeli pressure, pushed Hamas to the wall and strengthened the voices within it calling for a continuation of the armed struggle. This led to the latest round of suicide operations.

The repercussions of recent developments on Israeli public opinion threaten Peres' chances in the upcoming elections, and the continuation of the Oslo process. A bout of hysterical anxiety which overcame the media, the senior commentators, and the political and academic establishment. This was accompanied by a discourse emphasizing the "threat to national survival" allegedly posed by the Hamas operations. In support of these claims, recollections from the national collective storehouse of memory were evoked: the fears of generations of Jews of persecution by anti-semites. Not only was the fact that Israel is a nuclear power excluded from the public discussion; there were also almost no attempts to place the Hamas operations in the context of the continuing Israeli occupation. "Jew-hatred," motivated by Islamic religious beliefs, is perceived as the sole motivation for the suicide bombers. Such a claim is inevitable in a Jewish-Zionist society, whose government signed a "peace" agreement in which the word 'occupation' is never once mentioned. Such a claim is also inevitable in a society where the political discourse concerning the roots of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has not really changed after Oslo: even within left-wing Zionism, which still refrains from calling the Zionist project "colonialist."

Ignoring the occupation and the sources of the conflict leaves only one kind of response to Hamas' or any other military opposition: the complete de-humanization of the perceived enemy. Thus, Israeli writer S. Yizhar, an ideological leader of the Zionist labor movement, and known as its "humanist and moral conscience," wrote, after the recent suicide operations, that the Palestinian people are "cannibals," who should be excluded from the category of human beings. Thus he liberated Israel from the obligation to observe any moral limits in the war it has declared against Hamas.

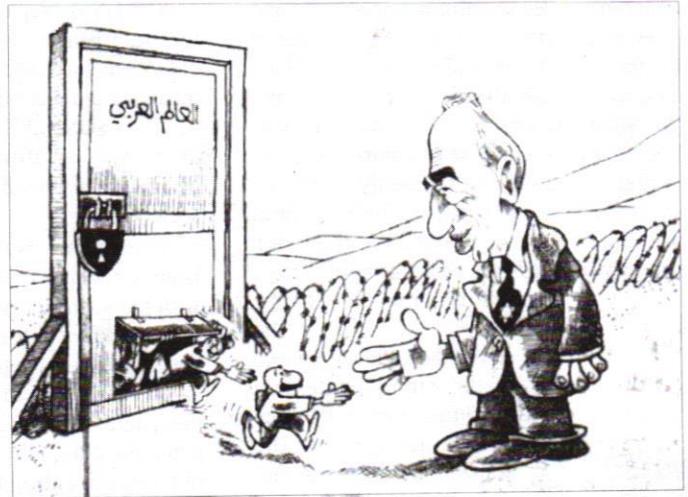
The nature of this war was made clear by Israel's President, Ezer Weitzmann when he declared on March 6: "When you are looking for a needle in a haystack and you cannot find the needle - burn the haystack." Prime Minister Peres added: "In the war against terrorists, Israel obeys only one law: the law of self-defense." In other words, neither international humanitarian or human rights law, nor even the Oslo Accords, will constrain Israel.

Collective punishment has been imposed on the residents of the Gaza Strip and the

West Bank, in the form of a hermetic closure preventing the movement of people and goods to and from Israel and Jerusalem, including the import of food, raw materials and medicines for which Israel is the sole supplier, on the one hand, and the export of agricultural produce to Israel, Jordan and other countries on the other, as well as preventing passage between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. A devastating internal closure (unprecedented in 'peacetime') was imposed on communities of the West Bank, on each of its 465 towns, villages and cities - effectively placing 1.2 million persons under a sort of house arrest.

This is "the most extensive instance of collective punishment in our times," in the words of the British cable network, Sky News. Even at the peak of the Intifada, Israel never dared impose anything like this. The aim seems to be to pressure Arafat to engage in a frontal confrontation with the Islamic opposition, even at the price of "rivers of blood," and to induce the Palestinian population to "support" such a war. Peres has repeatedly declared that unless Arafat arrests six of "the most important wanted people" on a list of thirteen handed to him by the chief-of-staff of the Israeli army, and fulfills certain "other conditions," the closure will not be lifted. The mass detentions of around 800 Hamas (and some Popular Front) activists by Israel, the summary legal proceedings leading to the destruction of houses belonging to the "extended families" of members of the military wing of Hamas activists, and the deportation of their families (a measure which the Supreme Court of Israel has already ruled is permissible) - are additional means aimed at liquidating the Islamic opposition.

The Sharm el-Sheikh Conference held on Egyptian soil "against terrorism" (according to the US-Israeli version), and "for the peace process" (in the version of the participating Arab states) - was hastily convened by the US to save Peres' political skin, prevent the collapse of the Oslo process and strengthen the imperiled stability of the Middle East. The 30 states which were invited via a personal telephone call from US President Clinton included, in addition to the Western states, 13 Arab states, including Algeria, Morocco, Saudi



Arabia and the Gulf Emirates, as well as Egypt and Jordan. Syria refused to attend, as too, of course, did those states such as Libya and Iraq which are outside the Madrid-Oslo process, and which the conference was intended to target and scapegoat as "terrorist states."

The conference expressed unambiguous support for Peres and unconditional 'solidarity' with Israel. In the conference's official final declaration, Israel was the only state mentioned by name as a victim of terrorism. In contrast to past international get-togethers of this nature, this conference did not even bother to try to appear "even-handed." It refrained from issuing a condemnation of the closure and the other repressive measures undertaken by Israel alongside its censure of terrorism. In this way, Arafat was also provided with legitimation for full cooperation with Israel in the "total war" it has declared against the Islamic opposition.

The Sharm el-Sheikh conference was also intended to bolster US hegemony in the region and to force those European states, especially France, Germany, and of late, Russia, which conduct a somewhat independent foreign policy involving a certain degree of support for those Middle Eastern states which are not participants in the Madrid-Oslo process, such as Iraq, Libya, and most importantly, Iran. The intensive US-Israeli effort to demonize Iran and portray it as responsible for all "Islamic terrorism" in the world was not particularly effective. The European countries refused to join the US anti-Iran campaign. Nor were the participating Arab regimes willing to explicitly or openly link their struggle against Islamic fundamentalism to the defense of US regional interests. In the end, Clinton was forced to forego any mention of Islamic fundamentalism or Hamas in the conference's final declaration.

On the other hand, the European and Arab states consented to the US-initiative to

## ★ Palestine

enter into a deeper information-sharing and "security" partnership, under the guidance of the US intelligence agency, the CIA - and to establish a kind of regional Interpol to "fight terrorism." This conference was the first time that Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia agreed to openly cooperate with Israel on such matters. In this respect, the conference represented a giant step forward towards the realization of one of



the principle aims of the Oslo Accords: the recognition and acceptance of the Zionist state as a legitimate part of the new Middle East before the realization of the national rights of the Palestinian people. Moreover, Israel is to be included in an

alliance of repressive Arab regimes directed against a common enemy: those Arab countries and political movements who oppose the US imperialist hegemony in the Middle East.

Israel remains an important strategic asset for the US, since it is the only Middle Eastern state whose loyalty to the US is absolutely reliable. The Oslo process has not diminished the US need for a faithful watch-dog, for it has not yet led to the hoped-for regional stability, which is jeopardized both by those states, such as Iran and Libya, that oppose Oslo, and by the fundamentalist movements which threaten those regimes which collaborate with imperialism. The European refusal to fully surrender to US dictates, such as France's announcement that it will continue economic and technical cooperation with Iran (including in the field of nuclear technology) is also a source of worry for Washington. The refusal of the Arab states which attended the Sharm el-Sheikh to condemn Iran and "Islamic" terrorism is further proof that US imperialism still needs Israel to function as regional "cop on the beat."

The US is prepared to pay a hefty price to assure Israel's usefulness: US economic aid to Israel reached \$US 4 billion last year, including a direct military-aid grant of \$US 1.8 b., a \$US 1.2 b. civilian-aid grant, and an \$US 80 million grant to aid in the absorption of Jewish immigrants into Israeli society.

The recent round of attacks by the Islamic resistance movement inside Israel, with the attendant risk of the disintegration of Oslo and a subsequent Middle Eastern conflagration, have led to what Peres called "a quantum-leap in the level of relations between Israel and the American administration." In a special meeting with the Israeli cabinet sub-committee on security, US President Clinton announced a 100 Million Dollar special aid package to fight terrorism, including special high-tech military and "civilian" equipment that has been developed in the US. A memorandum of understanding concerning US-Israel cooperation "in the fight against terrorism in the region," was signed by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, CIA Director John Deutch, Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak.

Since the latest slew of bombings, Arafat's forces have arrested around 700 people in the self-rule areas of the (West Bank) Northern and Gaza Districts, mostly members of the Islamic movements, but also some PFLP activists. At first, the PA sweeps were mainly aimed at the Iz-a-Din al-Qassam Brigades, including some of its most prominent leaders, such as Abdul Fatah Sutari, believed to be the right-hand man of Qassam beacon Mahmoud Deif (Israel has conditioned any lightening of the closure on Deif's arrest by Arafat. In response to increasing US-Israeli pressure, the PA police also arrested much of the Hamas political leadership in the Gaza district, including those leaders who had conducted the negotiations with the PA. Having outlawed Iz-a-Din al-Qassam, PA

arrests and raids on homes and institutions continue throughout the West Bank and Gaza District. Obviously, in carrying out his war on the Islamic opposition, Arafat has not spurned cooperation with the Israeli secret service Shabak and the US CIA. He met with the director of the latter three days before the convening of the Sharm el-Sheikh conference.

However, although his back is to the wall, Arafat is still straining to avoid stepping over the line which would lead to the "rivers of blood" expected of him by Israel. For example, he still refuses to arrest a number of "notable" wanted persons from the list presented to him by the Israeli chief-of-staff, including Mahmoud Deif, who is thought to be hiding in PA controlled territory.

Thus, Israeli Prime Minister Peres insists on defining the PA's efforts as "insufficient." He has declared that the "testing-period" for Arafat has still not ended, and that Israel will not lift its recently-imposed ban on talks with him, nor evacuate the center of Hebron, due at the end of March, 1996, according to the Taba Interim Agreement - until "certain conditions" are met.

In the end, Peres may be hoist upon his own petard: the all-out war he has declared against Hamas could turn against him. The civil and political arms of Hamas and not just its military wing, have sunk deep roots in Palestinian society, and it will take a long time to eradicate the movement. In the meantime - in order to save himself and the Oslo process - Peres is employing collective punishment - especially the heavy closure, which is raining destruction on Palestinians throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The growing despair and rage will only strengthen the Islamic resistance, which could put the Oslo process in peril and reveal the great deception which underlies it, thus dashing US hopes of the emergence of a "stabilized" Middle East. ★

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# Book notes

## Taslima Nasreen, *The Game in Reverse*



translated by **Carolyn Wright**  
(New York: Braziller, 1995), \$14.95

Reviewed by **Joe Auciello**

Taslima Nasreen wants her readers to “know somewhat too much.” And, with that knowledge, never again accept or perpetuate the social and religious traditions that exploit and degrade women. Although hers are intensely personal poems, sometimes even cryptic, they all refer to a larger cultural context — contemporary life in Bangladesh. To read the poems well, one must keep in mind the social relations of her country which form an essential feature of her work. Nasreen is often the immediate subject of her poems, but not as a woman removed from place and time. Bangladesh itself is her deeper subject; the lives of people there, especially the lives of women, is the focus of her anger, impatience, and sorrow.

While she had been writing and publishing for several years and was already an important figure in her country, Nasreen first came to the attention of Western readers in 1993. A novel, *Lajja* (Shame), that highlighted Muslim intolerance against Hindus in Bangladesh, coupled with statements about the need to revise the Koran, resulted in a “death sentence” from religious leaders — and demonstrations by tens of thousands of aggrieved Muslims who burned her books and demanded her death. As a concession to the fundamentalist Muslims, the government brought Nasreen to trial on the grounds of offending religious sensibilities, allowed her bail, and arranged for her to leave the

country in voluntary exile. She found refuge in Sweden and won the European Parliament’s Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought. Currently she resides in Germany.

*The Game in Reverse*, Nasreen’s first volume of poetry in English, is a compilation from five of her books published in Bangladesh. Nasreen’s style is not what would usually be termed “poetic”; she takes little delight in the play of words and makes little use of descriptive or elevated language. She uses few poetic techniques: juxtaposition, irony, occasional parallelism, sometimes an extended metaphor. Instead, her poems are written in plain language and are structured around blunt statements. Since her poems explore and protest the plight of women in Bangladesh, her style is well matched to her content. Nasreen’s work reminds English-speakers of the feminist poetry of the early 1970s; her simplicity and directness will remind some readers of Langston Hughes or the recent political poetry of Allen Ginsberg. Consider for instance, the opening lines of the poem that gives the book its title:

*The other day in Ramna Park I saw a boy buy a girl.  
I'd really like to buy a boy for five or ten taka,  
a clean-shaven boy, with a fresh shirt, combed and  
parted hair...  
I'd like to grab the boy by his collar and pull him up  
into a rickshaw -  
tickling his neck and belly, I'd make him giggle;  
bringing him home, I'd give him a sound thrashing  
with high-heeled shoes, and then throw him out -  
"Get lost, bastard!"*

The strength of the poem lies in the calm, matter-of-fact assumption that it is entirely fitting for women to treat men as men treat women. In writing this poem Nasreen has presumed, has seized, equality of the sexes, jarring the thinking of both her male and female readers. Nasreen’s writing can project a cold, detached tone. At times her poems sound like clinical reports, befitting her work as a physician for a government clinic. However, beneath the veneer of objectivity are angry injunctions and implicit accusations: “Look at this! See what happens!” Left unsaid but sharply felt are a set of questions for a reader: “Do you approve of what you see? Do you accept it? What will you do, now that you know?”

At least one poem makes such connections explicit:

*"They're throwing stones at Noorjahan,  
those stones are striking my body...  
from the quiver of their cruel eyes, arrows  
speed to pierce her body,  
my body also.  
Are these arrows not piercing your body?"*

Many of Nasreen’s poems delve into relations between the sexes where bitter experience produces a bleak vision. Men in these poems are “bad dreams,” or “monsters,” and are compared to dogs and vultures. Little in the way of sensual pleasure, emotional warmth, hope, or joy is to be found here.

Yet, loneliness and longing drive the women toward men who are inherently unappreciative and unworthy of gifts received. In Nasreen’s poems, sexual relations become a debasing act, a sign of weakness, like an addiction:

*Everyone knows about your lechery,  
but even so it's the fault of loneliness I go  
knocking again at your door.  
People mistakenly think this is love.*

Not surprisingly, marriage is perceived as a trap, a dungeon, or a kind of prostitution in which women exchange their freedom for food and trinkets.

*"Even the mangy cur of the house barks now  
and then,  
but over the mouths of women cheaply had,  
there's a lock,  
a golden lock."*

Worse still, in marriage women give over their minds: “My sister used to sing wonderful Tagore songs, / She used to lovreading Simone de Beauvoir,” but now “... she’s a smart shopper, bringing home / porcelain dinnerware, fresh carp, and expensive-looking bed sheets.” Conversely, an image of freedom that appears in several poems involves a woman stepping past the threshold, going beyond the home and out into the world.

As a spokeswoman, Nasreen is sometimes at her weakest as a poet. The poems too frequently include vague references to the oppression women suffer

from “society.” Her writing is far more effective when exploitation is precise and personal, when everyday cruelty wears a human face. For instance, the poem “At the Back of Progress” tells of a lowly clerk who is humble at his job but who is master over his wife at home. Faulting “society” in general terms is more suitable for an essay. In poetry it is flat rhetoric, at best an exasperated expression of frustration not yet fully realized inverse.

Carolyne Wright’s translation has succeeded in bringing Nasreen’s poems into the English language; no awkwardness obtrudes to disrupt their sound or sense. Some poems were translated with Nasreen herself, while others were completed with the assistance of Bengali collaborators. As a result, the poems read smoothly, forcefully, and naturally. Quite properly, the poems do retain their specific references to Bengali culture, but these, when not clear from the context, are concisely explained in end notes provided by the translator. At their best, there is an undeniable quality to these poems which is to be found in the uncompromising voice of a poet who does not flinch from writing strong statements of a terrible reality. While the purpose of her work is to expose and change social conditions that deaden the lives of women, the poems are not simply pamphlets in verse. These poems reveal the thought and spirit of a woman fighting for her life against the political and religious systems that would smother her.

The emotional truth Taslima Nasreen describes has its parallels in the West, though the specific physical conditions differ. Women, especially, may well recognize aspects of personal experience in these poems. *The Game in Reverse* can strengthen and stimulate the consciousness of its audience, even as readers admire the courage of a poet who knows “somewhat too much” and who, despite the safety of silence, is determined to speak. ★



## Fighting the mullahs’ fire with her own”

Joe Auciello asks Carolyne Wright about her translation of *The Game in Reverse*

● What are your personal impressions of Taslima Nasreen?

She was raised in a conservative family. As soon as she reached puberty, she had to cover her head even in the house, so that nothing immodest or female showed. It made her see the world with resentment. You see that resentment in the poetry and in her columns.

Actually, I have found her to be very reserved, very quiet. Even though she was soft-spoken, she was also very direct. When she would call me on the telephone there would be no pleasantries; she got right to the point, whether it was to arrange a meeting or say what was on her mind. That quality is also in her writing.

● Do Nasreen’s poems present any particular problems for an English language translator?

A.: Her work is much less “literary” and much more hard-hitting and outspoken than most other poets I have translated in Bangladesh and India. Her poems remind me very much of work that had been written within the women’s movement in the late 1960s and early ‘70s. It didn’t have a lot of literary subtlety — like rhyme or meter — the kind of style that is difficult to translate.

Bengali has certain metrical forms which are much like Romance language syllabics. It is a rhyme-rich language, like Italian, so almost everything rhymes with everything else. That’s very difficult to replicate in English, but those problems did not present themselves in Taslima’s work. All of her poems that I translated, except one, are in free verse.

● Don’t Nasreen’s poems exaggerate the oppression of women somewhat?

Clearly, a poem like “Happy Marriage” is full of bitter hyperbole: “if he wishes he can chop off my hand, my fingers. / If he wishes he can sprinkle salt in the open wound.” This is true, but exaggerated. We accept hyperbole in poetry; it’s the “willing suspension of disbelief.”

Taslima generalizes based on her own experience, as writers do. She picks particular incidents and highlights them.

She would never say “although most Bangladeshi men are good and faithful husbands who treat their wives and children well, there are some men who are very abusive toward their family.” That kind of writing puts people to sleep. That would not be a Taslima Nasreen sentence. She would say: “Bangladeshi

men abuse their wives. Bangladeshi men beat their wives. And even if they don’t, they can. No one is going to stop them.” Her critics would say that she is one-sided and unnuanced.

● In 1994 a Calcutta newspaper misquoted Nasreen as saying that “the Koran should be revised thoroughly.”

I think she really meant to say the Sharia, the family law, should be revised thoroughly. When you’re going back and forth between one topic and another, it’s easy for such a slip to happen.

● In Bangladesh, who is Nasreen’s audience?

The 30% of people who can read and write. Much of what she writes about in her columns concerns the problems of middle class women. She herself is from an upper middle class family; her father is a physician. She herself was a doctor. She has written about villagers, mainly in terms of going out to villages and providing health care for rural women.

Doctors, lawyers, professors and writers read Taslima’s work. But do their maids, and the people who cook for them? I don’t think so. Most of these people do not read, and if they could, they wouldn’t have the money to buy books.

Most of the people who have criticized her have not read her work. They are reacting to her as a symbol on whom they can project their own agenda.

● Why should a Western audience read *The Game in Reverse*?

Taslima’s work has generated great controversy in Bangladesh and become a focal point for a major political crisis in that country. She is a symbol of the dangers to free speech and so has gained a wide following all over the world. Her poetry gives a glimpse into the culture that she comes from. She has held up to Bangladeshi men a mirror of their own attitudes toward women; she has fought the mullahs’ fire with fire of her own. She is a writer of powerful poems, and, to many, an embattled heroine. ★

Carolyne Wright is a visiting research scholar at the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. She has been an Associate of Harvard University’s Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies. In 1993-94 she won an Award for Outstanding Translation from the American Literary Translators’ Association. She is currently at work on a book of translations of Bengali women’s writing from India and Bangladesh.

# The left and the elections

by Manuel Garí

THE ANALYSTS GOT IT WRONG BEFORE THE March 3rd general elections. The right won, but the People's Party (PP) hardly triumphed, as the pundits predicted. The PP does not have an outright majority, and cannot govern alone. And while the socialist party (PSOE) is no longer in government, and no longer the country's largest party (which it has been ever since 1982), it was not destroyed by this election. To the left of the PSOE, the United Left (IU) improved its results, but only took 21 seats, compared to the 25-30 it would need to challenge the PSOE's claim to represent the left as a whole. IU failed to win the votes of the left-wing section of the socialist electorate, and made only modest inroads into the youth vote (1.5 million people voted for the first time on March 3rd.)

The polarised atmosphere contributed to high participation: 78% of the country's 32 million registered voters. Polarisation also favoured a concentration of votes for the two largest parties, except in Euskadi (the Basque Country) and Catalonia. This was a two-party presidential-style election rather than a multi-party parliamentary election.

The People's Party of José Maria Aznar won 39% of the vote, not enough of a majority to rule alone. This opens a period of political instability, given the balance of forces within parliament. The economic elites will exert strong pressure in favour of "governability." This implies some kind of agreement between the various bourgeois nationalists: Aznar's "Españolista" People's Party, the Basque National Party (PNV) and Catalonia's dominant political force, the conservative CiU coalition.

Everyone is talking about government pacts of one kind or another. But this was not at all what the PP expected to have to do once they won. The party has always refused to accept the Spanish state's various 'national facts,' particularly in Euskadi and Catalonia. Some PP supporters will find it hard to stomach an agreement with these minority 'national' parties. But, for the moment, negotiations between the PP and the PNV, CiU, and the centre-right Canary Island Coalition have concentrated on the system for collection and redistribution of central taxes to the various national autonomous governments.

The economic elites want governmental stability, so that they can carry out the "adjustments" necessary if the Spanish state is to meet the convergence criteria of the



People's Party leader (now Prime Minister) José Maria Aznar (right) greets fans at a pre-election concert, along with Julio Iglesias (left)

Maastricht Treaty in the relatively short time remaining before the crucial 1997 EU intergovernmental conference. This goal is shared by all the right-wing parties. And by the PSOE.

Unless the PP government can secure stable support from several smaller parties, its resulting fragility will make their goal of immediate application of a reinforced austerity policy much more difficult to implement. The chances of a social mobilisation against cuts and austerity would be increased. Having said this, it is not impossible that the PP will propose some kind of social pact, regrouping most of the country's political parties behind a more modest adjustment programme.

The PSOE is no longer the country's largest political party. But 9.4 million votes is still an excellent result. The party's social-liberal leadership, under former Premier Felipe González, has not been defeated. And it has paid a much lower price for the recent corruption and state terrorism scandals than many commentators expected. Felipe González has reinforced his position at the head of the party, since most analysts see the socialists' respectable score as a result of the 'Felipe factor.' All this means that there is little reason to expect substantial modifications in PSOE policies, beyond the obvious changes that come with the transition into opposition after 14 years in government.

For most people, the PSOE is the political expression of left sentiments. The party clearly benefited from the votes of many people who were concerned about the result which a right wing victory would have on large sectors of society — not just the senior citizens, but the workers, and the middle classes. In Andalusia (where regional elections were also held on March 3rd), the PSOE benefited from a popular

desire for stability. In general, the PSOE appeared to many workers to be the defender of some minimal welfare state, and of the generalisation of social security programmes. Corruption and the GAL state terrorism scandal passed into second place among the priorities of many such voters. Which also indicates a growing moral cynicism among some sectors of the left.

The PSOE's electoral results allow it to behave now as a majority opposition, and to prepare for its eventual return to government, with the support of those minor forces which are currently being invited to collaborate with the PP.

The popular perception of a left-right polarisation, media pressure, and enthusiasm from certain sectors of PSOE is pushing the [Communist-Party led] United Left (IU) to begin considering offering its support to a future Socialist government, or at least adopting a neutral attitude to such a government. And, in any case, in the meantime, to accept a stable common front of the left opposition. Led and dominated, of course, by Felipe González.

The crucial role now played by the minor right-wing nationalist parties, the good results achieved by the left-nationalist Galician Nationalist Bloc (BNG), and developments inside the Catalan Socialist Party (PSC, the Catalan wing of PSOE), have put the question of reallocation of competencies and power-sharing between the central and regional governments in the centre of the debate. There is growing pressure for the recognition of the plurinational reality of the Spanish state. The general dynamic is towards the remodelling of the state in a more federal direction.

The electorate didn't shift as far to the right as some commentators predicted. But March 3rd did confirm that the current period is one of the extension of

conservative values. The claim of New Left (NI), the most moderate part of the United Left (IU), that 'the social majority is to the left', is open to debate.

United Left's results

The score this time was slightly better than in the 1995 municipal elections, which everyone considered to be a forerunner to these elections. United Left's vote increased from 2.59 million votes to 2.63 million (10.6% of total votes cast). The March 3rd score is about 400,000 votes higher than in the 1993 general election.

While this slow rise is respectable, it is less that what it was objectively possible to have won. And objectively necessary to have won. Nor does it meet the expectations that were created and proclaimed by the leaders of IU, and by the media.

United Left co-ordinator Julio Anguita failed in his attempt to convert IU into a decisive electoral force. He cannot now do what he wanted to be able to do after the elections: to propose as a credible goal the regeneration of the left as a whole. Nor can he use an impressive IU electoral result to establish hegemony over his immediate political neighbours. All of this was the real meaning behind his pronouncements about "overtaking" and "outstripping" the PSOE. The central theme of the IU electoral campaign was "IU will be making the decisions [which count]".

While this goal is no longer reachable, IU can still pursue a related strategy: having a real influence on the policy adopted by the socialist party, and by the parliament. Pulling the centre of debate over towards the left.

The post-election debate inside IU has a very 'internal' and 'settling of scores' character. Neither the organisation, nor its leaders, have yet emerged from their perplexity at the moral slap in the face the coalition received in these elections. IU has still not taken the necessary first step: recognising that the coalition did not connect itself to the conscience of one important sector of the left-wing electorate, which could have been won to IU rather than PSOE: the large number of young people voting for the first time. Or win over a segment of traditional PSOE voters. Or some of those who 'voted white' [in some electoral systems called spoiling their ballot papers].

The social left is profoundly attached to the anti-right strand in popular culture. Many people's 'fear' of a PP victory was not some exaggerated worry, but a healthy lack of confidence in a country which was run as a dictatorship by the fathers of those who now dominate the PP. Some leaders of IU were somehow tempted to prettify the

PP, and downplay its heritage. There were some ambiguous moves which enabled the media to speculate about a 'tacit pact' between Anguita and Aznar against the PSOE government of Felipe González. In reality, of course, there was no such pact. In reality, IU was alone in the parliamentary opposition, whenever it came to reactionary laws, particularly the savage reform and deregulation of the labour market.

IU failed to send out a clear message of opposition both to the PSOE government and to the ascendant right, as represented by the PP. IU was unable to differentiate the treatment it should reserve for the PSOE leadership and for the socialists' social base. At times, the socialist party electorate perceived IU's policy and messages as sectarian.

Having said all this, we should also recognise that these elections confirmed the existence of a stable voter base for IU, which continues to spread to new areas of the country, and to younger age groups. This solid base is the capital we can use to build the organisation. And to bridge the distance between the coalition's 70,000 members and the 2.6 million people who voted for us.

There are many barriers to electoral progression for a left wing formation. The general cultural, social and political context is characterised by the ascendance of the right. There is deep, deep demobilisation and passivity. Which means that a force like IU cannot conceive its work and measure its results in exclusively institutional terms. The only way a force like IU can grow rapidly in electoral terms is during the heat of a social mobilisation, during and after a long struggle for political and cultural hegemony in society, around the arguments for a new, transformationist social block. Not that we should turn our noses up at any slower, more gradual growth that we can realise in the meantime!

One main factor contributing to the sectarian image which IU has among some sections of the wider social and political left is the coalition's behaviour in municipal governments. In many localities, a strong vote for IU denied the rightist PP an outright majority over the left-wing parties. But in many municipalities, IU's policy of opposition to the PSOE enabled the PP to take control. In Andalucía, IU's strongest region, the coalition refused to approve the budget presented by the Socialist party regional government, even when we knew this policy would force the holding of fresh

regional elections at the same time as the general elections. The result has been very negative for IU. Key sectors of the Andalucian left did not understand what IU was doing.

Another problem, of course, are the images of internal division and tension



within IU which the media consistently presents. This coverage is intimately linked to the question of the role of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) within the United Left.

For months now, the media have been stressing the confrontation between a Communist Party with pretensions to "hegemony" inside IU, and the "moderate" New Left (NI) current, which already operates simultaneously inside and outside the coalition. This theme of coverage and concern has also affected the public's understanding of the conflictive relationship between IU and the trade unions, particularly the Workers Commissions (CC.OO). IU is neither exclusively nor mainly responsible for this head-to-head. But the coalition's lack of comprehension of the type of political relations which we should strive to maintain with the social organisations has been a real electoral handicap. Many activists in the social movements, to the left and to the right of IU, are repelled by the hegemonistic hunger of some sections of the Communist Party.

But nevertheless, after all criticisms have been made, IU does today regroup the basic nucleus of voters to the left of the socialist party. A large proportion of the country's left activists are members of the coalition. IU is the only organised state-wide force on the anti-capitalist left. The main challenge facing us is to resist both the temptation towards a "swing to the right" to come closer to the socialist party (as New Left would like), and any defensive and sectarian reflex of reaffirmation, as some Communist Party leaders would like. The way forward is through a deepened commitment to strengthening the social movements, reinforcing our work in social mobilisation, and deepening our work on the anti-capitalist, feminist, anti-militarist and ecological alternatives. ★

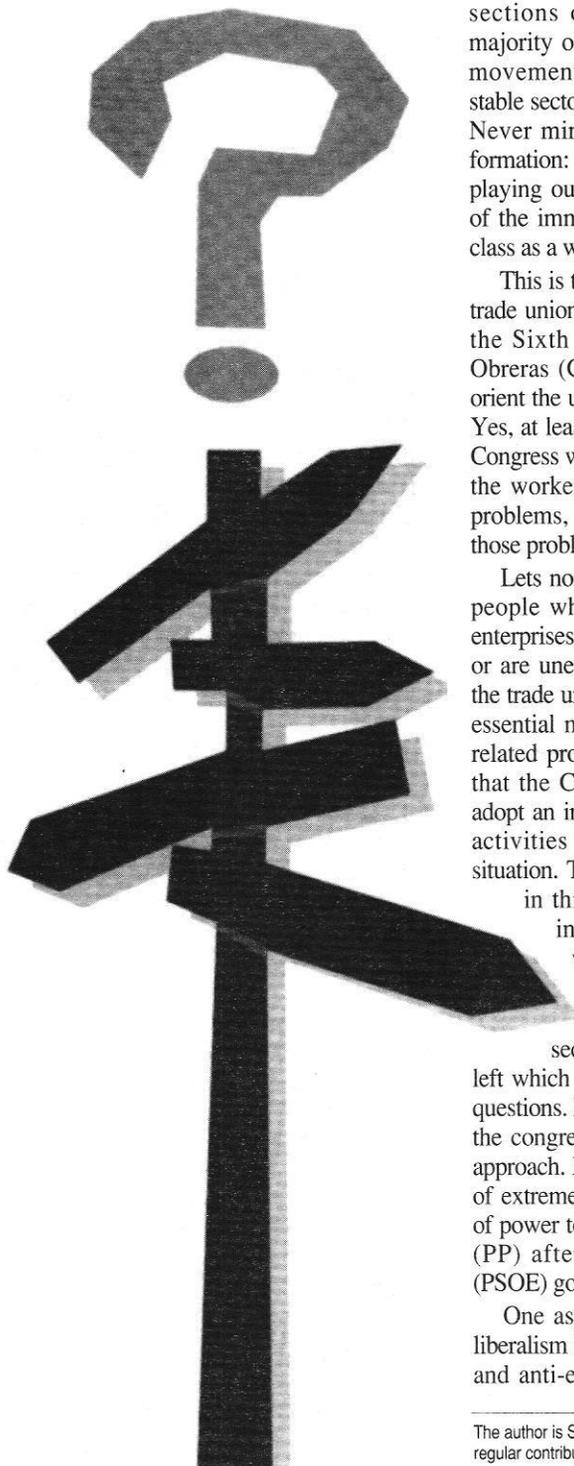
# What's happening in CC.OO ?

**Twenty years after the "transition" of the Spanish state, Comisiones Obreras, the country's largest trade union, is trying to redefine its identity and strategy. The revolutionary left is divided in its support: some comrades give critical support to the majority current, others are active in the minority "Critical Tendency". We invited representatives of both currents to present their analysis of the situation in the union, and their vision for its development.**

Spain's largest trade union, Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO., Workers' Commissions) emerges strengthened from its 6th Congress. The unjustified and dogmatic criticisms of the "Critical Sector" were rejected. But many questions about how the union should relate to the increasingly fragmented world of work remain unanswered.

by Joaquin Nieto

THE MAIN TASK FACING TRADES UNIONISTS is the reconstruction of our movement to reflect the new, fragmented reality of the working population. If we cannot do so, the duality in the world of work will deepen salary inequality, and the gap between those in work and the unemployed. And it will have negative effects on trades unionism as such.



A trade union's capacity to represent and organise the majority of workers is not given, once and for all. It is won and re-won, day by day, in the precise historical situation. Today, in many European countries, particularly in those where the percentage of workers organised in unions is very low, there is a real risk that the union movement will become increasingly distant from the most dispersed and unstable sections of the working class — the majority of the class. This will leave our movement implanted only in the more stable sectors: above all in the public sector. Never mind our dreams of social transformation: we will no longer be capable of playing our fundamental role, the defence of the immediate interests of the working class as a whole.

This is the main challenge against which trade union strategies must be judged. Was the Sixth Congress of the Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO) useful? Did it help re-orient the union towards this strategic goal? Yes, at least partially. We emerge from the Congress with a unionism which is closer to the workers, more adapted to their daily problems, more useful for trying to solve those problems.

Lets not fool ourselves. The majority of people who work in small and medium enterprises, [1] have a precarious contract, or are unemployed, do not at all perceive the trade unions as a practical instrument or essential mediator for solving their work-related problems. It is a very good thing that the CC.OO. has begun, recently, to adopt an image, a discourse, proposals and activities which attempt to reverse this situation. Though it is unfortunate that it is in this order that we have begun to integrate new elements into our work!

But this effort has not been properly understood by the sections of the social and political left which are most sensitive to ideological questions. Never-theless, it was positive that the congress approved and confirmed this approach. Particularly in the current context of extreme neo-liberalism, and the transfer of power to the conservative Peoples' Party (PP) after 14 years of Socialist Party (PSOE) government.

One aspect of the dominance of neo-liberalism is the progression of conservative and anti-egalitarian ideas in society as a

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whole. Including, let us hope temporarily, in the working class. This is one factor behind the recent electoral victory of the right.

In this new context, the complete autonomy of the CC.OO, and the UGT trade union confederation from the Communist and Socialist parties (respectively), to which they have had such a close relationship in the past, is essential if we want to maintain and consolidate unity in action. The affirmation of the autonomy and independence of the CC.OO at this congress was very valuable. History will remember this as the single most important step taken. Without complete autonomy [from the Communist party], pluralism is not possible. And without pluralism, unity is impossible.

Unity of action between the CC.OO and the UGT seems well consolidated. And the root cause of their separate development — their different political references, and their different models of trade unionism — have lost their *raison d'être*. Both are increasingly autonomous of their political reference points, and both support the unitary representation of their members, as put into practice at the last elections of workplace representatives. Programme development is also developing in harmony. There is no real significance for their separate existence, beyond the historical reasons and the preoccupations of the apparatuses. And while this explains the division, it hardly justifies it.

Not that organisational unity is round the corner. It is still too early even to propose such a process of unification, since such precipitation would fall flat on its face, and have the opposite effect. Better to act than to talk, in such a situation. Without forgetting that there are dynamics other than those towards unity at work in both unions. There is also a political dynamic which would make the UGT into the centre-piece of the reconstruction of the socialist [social democratic] opposition. This would obviously bring new tensions to any common action with the CC.OO. Nevertheless, unity of action is so well developed and mature that it seems possible to overcome these contrary internal and political dynamics. But we must avoid any excesses, and exploit every possibility of making a real step forward towards trade union unity. This will create much better conditions for increasing the number of union members, and developing trade unionism in this universe of small and medium private enterprises, where deregulation, and crude exploitation are at their highest.

The CC.OO leadership came to the conference with two important gains: an increase in membership, and a strong result

in the recent workplace representative elections.

Despite unfavourable objective conditions (the highest unemployment in the European Union, particularly among the youth, widespread use of precarious and part time contracts) the number of CC.OO members rose 6.5% between June 1994 and June 1995, reaching 698,814. In fact, after declining in the 1970s and early 80s, union membership has been rising for ten consecutive years now! [2] And, in workplace representative elections, the CC.OO. have regained the first place position (relative to the UGT, the anarcho-sindicalist CGT, and the 'professional' unions) they lost in 1982. The CC.OO has 37.8% of representatives, a 1% increase on the 1990 elections [3].

In these circumstances, one might have expected the minority 'Critical Sector' to present itself as a force capable of giving a new impulsion to the CC.OO, capable of making suggestions and stimulating debate in a positive sense, so as to help prepare the union for this new situation. In fact, they chose the opposite approach. They denied the progress made by the CC.OO, which enabled their current to close ranks, but hardly enabled dialogue with the rest of us. And, thanks to the clumsy support which they received from the Communist Party (PCE), the Critical Sector appeared at the congress as an element of resistance to the irreversible process of the CC.OO's autonomy from the Party. The minority also oriented the debate at the Congress more towards an evaluation of past practice than a discussion of perspectives. They lacked alternative proposals, so they artificially inflated their differences with the majority. They deformed the history of CC.OO., both in terms of strategy and internal functioning, so that they could accuse the majority of having taken the path of rightist bureaucratic degeneration. Something which it is difficult to prove. After all, since the last Congress there have been two general strikes. And the current minority benefits from unprecedented democratic rights within the union. Which empties their criticisms of any and all credibility.

The Critical Sector has refused to establish itself as a stable trade union current, with all the rights and duties which this implies. [4] And yet, they present themselves as an alternative in practically every field. What alternative? For months now, they have dominated debate with their accusations that the leadership of CC.OO. supported the Socialist Party (PSOE) government of Felipe Gonzalez. Even that we had an explicit alliance with the government. This debate was effectively closed at the very beginning of this

Congress, when delegates approved a general report which made a hard criticism of government policies and the electoral promises of the PSOE. Many delegates noticed the Minister of Labour storming out of the Palace of Congress. They also heard Julio Anguita, the main leader of Izquierda Unida (United Left, a PC-dominated coalition) comment favourably on the reporter's comments on the PSOE, the conservative People's Party (PP, now in government) and the Maastricht Treaty.

All that was left for the Critical Sector was an exercise in gesticulation, mainly concerning the operation of the Congress Presidium, and the issue of Marcelino Camacho. [5]

We have to admit that, given the present situation of the working class, our enormous ideological retreats, the neo-liberal offensive, the enormous changes in the world economy and the global organisation of production and the work process, it is difficult to put forward propositions which incorporate our concerns with ecology and North-South solidarity. It is certainly difficult to formulate proposals for an alternative unionism worthy of that name.

Nevertheless, what makes the Critical Sector such a big alternative, given that, in practice, their method of trade unionism is indistinguishable from that of the rest of us? What practical differences exist between the trade union work which is done in regions where the CC.OO. majority has a local majority, and the work done in the Balearic Islands, Barcelona, Seville and Grenada, and in the Energy, Madrid Mass Transit (EMT) and Railway (RENFE) sectors, where the Critical Sector has a majority? In these regions and sectors, is the Critical Sector really more democratic? More militant? More efficient? Or more alternative?

The "great debate" never materialised. But tens of thousands of union members, and hundreds of local organisations prepared and proposed amendments and propositions. Less spectacular, but not less substantive. Here is "another pluralism," more diffuse, more micro-organic, based on sectoral and territorial experiences and interests. This too deserves to be understood and expressed. [6] The majority is not homogenous. It is differentiated and pluralist. Much more so than it might seem to be. Partly because of ideological diversity, some people only timidly challenge the existing order, while others adopt a more radical form, partly because of their particular preoccupations and accents, but also partly because such a pluralism corresponds to the subjects which, today,

are fermenting inside CC.OO. The union today is wider than we used to think it was.

Looking forward, it seems that Congress left some of the fundamental questions unsolved. How should we present the essential demands of the workers to the new government? How to open a relationship of dialogue and negotiation, without being paralysed, without stopping our denunciation of the antisocial nature of the government's programme, and without abandoning the strategy of public demonstrations as a riposte to the anti-worker measures which we already anticipate?

How can we reformulate our demands concerning the growing inequality of working conditions, without contributing to the consolidation of differential 'castes' of workers within a single enterprise or sector? What to do about companies which only offer part-time and precarious contacts? What to do with the unemployed? How to develop a practical trade unionism, closer to the world of small and medium sized companies? How to put forward general and concrete alternative suggestions for economic and industrial policies which are compatible with the economic imperatives we face, and also with a more solidarity-based North-South relationship? How to put into practice a more confederate trade unionism, which defends the common interests of all the workers in the Spanish State, but also respects the particular situation and legitimate rights of each national group? How to re-establish an adequate relationship between the trade union movement and the other social movements? How to maintain the political independence which we have just re-affirmed, without degenerating into an apolitical posture? How to develop new areas of work for the unions, in the domain of equality and non-discrimination [7] and working conditions?

The tasks which we face as a result of the implementation of the Law on Health at Work imply a full struggle for the improvement of working conditions. The (newly-introduced) election of delegates responsible for supervising accident prevention gives the unions a new, useful tool for increasing the priority of this, eminently practical intervention.

In conclusion, let us hope that a less tense internal situation develops. This would enable a more open debate on the future tasks which we all face, whichever current we are in. A debate in which we all have something worth saying. But, until the waves from this congress die down, we can expect repercussions in the federal and territorial congresses currently under preparation. The tension will continue. And,

since the confrontation in the CC.OO. is largely of political origin, we can expect that, after the March 3rd general elections, there will be a political realignment within the union. ★

#### Notes

1. 54% of workers work in an enterprise with less than 50 employees; 81% of these workers have no workplace trade union representative.
2. In the period 1991-95 the average number of members paying a union contribution was higher than during the period 1988-91, even though the total number of those in work declined by 8%. CC.OO. currently has some 700,000 members, which guarantees our financial independence.
3. The UGT's share has declined from 42.04% to 34.71%. This gives the two major confederations a large majority (though, in Euskadi, the Basque nationalist ELA-STV union has a majority of delegates).
4. The right to form a current implies a democratic life even during the preparatory phases of the congress. If the Critical Sector had organised themselves as a current, they would have received sufficient resources to be able to conduct a loyal and constructive debate. This would, however, also have required them to be more clear about their orientations and the sources of their support.
5. Let's not forget that, in a democratic organisation, there should be no posts which are not regularly renewed. Collective bodies should be chosen through a mechanism of proportional representation, guaranteeing the rights of minorities. Individual posts should be filled by the individual who obtains, democratically, the support of the majority. As



far as Marcelino Camacho is concerned, he had the right to criticise the leadership of CC.OO., and to express his ideas publicly. He also had the right, obviously, to support the Critical Sector, as he did. But if Camacho is no longer a member of the collective leadership after the congress, this is only because the Critical Sector did not include him on their list.

6. More than 1,600 amendments were presented by majorities or qualified minorities, from a range of organisations: 300 amendments concerned the minority, 1,300 concerned the "other pluralism" mentioned above. 300 amendments were adopted, 200 'negotiated' and 800 withdrawn. 300 were discussed in open plenary.

7. The election of women to 30% of positions in the Federal Executive Commission exceeds the minimum percentage fixed by the earlier "CC.OO., A Union for Men and Women" conference. But, unfortunately, only 15% of delegates to this congress were women.

## CC.OO: the critical perspective

The increasingly authoritarian leadership of Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO) faces a growing challenge from the dynamic "Critical Sector." The struggle for the "class struggle" soul of CC.OO. against a leadership whose political project is the recomposition of the social democratic left continues.

by Jesus Albarracin, Pedro Montes and Agustin Moreno

A deep debate about the various models of trade union strategy and practice did finally take place, more in the preparation of the 6th Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO, Workers' Commissions) Congress than at the Congress itself. Those of us in the Critical Sector were determined to open such a debate, and to propose our alternatives to the various official texts. Among other things, we proposed:

- rejecting the neo-liberal project of European construction, as formulated by the Maastricht Treaty;
- a different Europe, for the benefit of the citizens and the workers, with a referendum on the revision of the Maastricht Treaty. Imposition of full employment and social security as the real criteria of European convergence;
- a more expansionist economic policy, incorporating a struggle against unemployment and for full employment, as the central element of orientation and mobilisation of the social, political and trade union left;

- a law gradually reducing the working week to 35 hours by the year 2000, without loss of salary;
- a new strategy for negotiating collective bargaining agreements, prioritising stable, dignified and high quality employment. Recognition that the current situation, where 35% of workers are in an extremely precarious situation, is socially and economically insupportable;
- the reversal of the [previous, Socialist Party] government's 'counter-reform' of labour legislation, coupled with the fight for adequate collective bargaining agreements;
- active industrial policies, defence of the public sector, and the fight against privatisation;
- improvement of the social security system;
- increased spending on retirement pensions, health, education, unemployment benefits and public services;

The authors are leading members of the "Critical Sector" minority, and regular contributors to *Viento Sur* magazine.

## ★ Spain

- rejection of the application of the Toledo (social) Pact;
- improving eligibility criteria for the old age pension, reducing the retirement age, and reducing pension contributions for lower qualified workers.

On the more directly trade union front, we proposed a more combative collective bargaining, which would be a brake on the labour reforms, demand an increase in the buying power of the employees and demand a democ-ratisation of labour relations. We also dem-anded the reinforcing of the participation of the workers, more flexible ways of organising, which would give sectoral, professional and regional structures more autonomy, and wider functions. We demanded more pluralism and democracy at all levels, and the rejection of practices which limit participation, or which are authoritarian or discriminatory.

We were, and still are, very firm as far the politics of doing trade unionism is concerned. We were, and still are, confronted with practices which favour a centralised, pyramid structure, feeding gigantic bureaucratic structures, which employ coercive mechanisms to guarantee their self-preservation. And which require large financial resources, or permanent constitutionally-guaranteed financing, in order to be viable.

These proposals of ours provoked a hard, stimulating debate. As did our evaluation of the last few years, which concentrated on CC.OO's critical support for the Maastricht Treaty, the strategy of co-ordination and the 1993 Social Pact for Employment, the confrontation with Izquierda Unida (United Left, Communist Party-dominated coalition), the larval support from the Socialist Party (PSOE, in government for 14 years, until defeated on March 3rd this year) and the refusal to participate in the civic platform initiatives. The entire left could only welcome this debate, whatever their particular opinions.

After the debate, it is impossible to pretend that there was and is no significant difference between the position of the official current and that of the critical sector, or to claim that the tension is essentially between two different fractions of the bureaucracy, or that this is a political dispute which has been carried into the union, and which, as such, threatens the autonomy of the CC.OO.

### THE CONGRESS

The preparatory debate unfolded in a climate of harsh confrontation, generated by the apparatus of the union. Not one of our amendments for increasing the transparency of the congress and the preparation of the delegates was accepted. The official current used all the "bureaucratic tricks" imaginable: profiting from their control of the apparatus, recognising a large number of non-elected delegates, organising small, limited-participation preparatory meetings,

arbitrary and irregular application of congress norms and statutes, one-sided decisions in most of the controversial or borderline cases, manipulation of information, media intoxication, and so on.

Given all this, the fact that we represented over 30% of delegates is a real sign of support, and shows a real step forward in

our work. No minority in CC.OO. has ever had such a good result.

Our amendments were in general well received by the base of the union, particularly wherever there was most discussion and high participation of the rank and file. We won a majority in a range of sectors and regions: Energy, Pensioners, Diverse Activities, Balearic Islands, Murcia, Asturias, La Rioja, Melilla [Spanish enclave in Moroccan territory], Granada and Barcelona. We also won almost half of the delegates for Catalonia and Andalusia, and an important proportion of votes from the Public Sector, Transport and Commerce sectors, and in the region of Valencia. We were also represented in all the other federations and territorial organisations, and in most of the large companies where CC.OO exists. We demonstrated ourselves to be an organisation which exists across the union. Which is the essential prerequisite for a credible alternative project which seeks to win majority support.

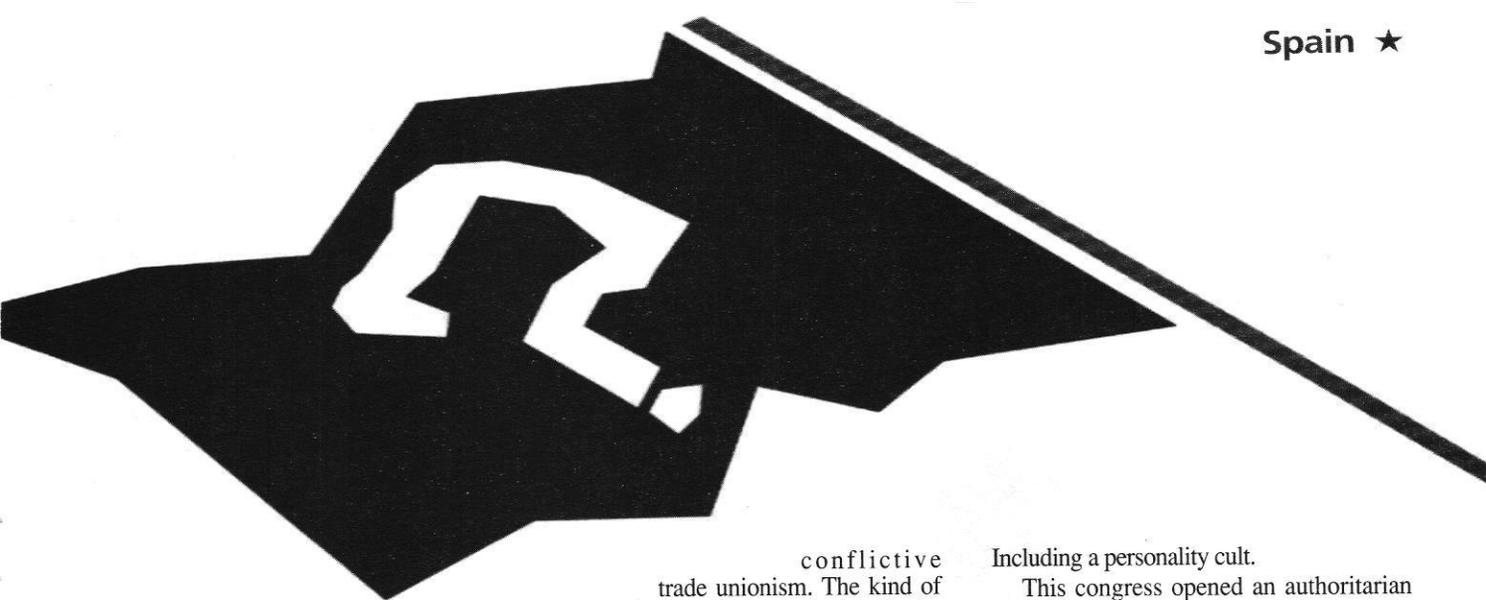
There was plenty of interest in the congress: 999 of 1,001 mandates were taken up! Unfortunately, this 6th Congress did not produce any new proposals and alternatives for dealing with the principle problems which workers face. There were no answers, wherever you looked. The official reports were all weak, and not one amendment from the critical sector was accepted.

Rather than analyse our recent activities, the Report on Activities was little more than a political speech, addressed above all at the notables gathered in the front row during the opening ceremony. The reporter employed diversion tactics, protesting that the CC.OO "doesn't want to be a political party mark II," even though no-one had suggested such a thing. His goal was to avoid any discussion on the union's strategic errors, such as its mis-management of the 27 January 1981 general strike.

Next came General Secretary Gutierrez. He didn't reply to any of the remarks made by delegates, majority or minority. He structured his concluding remarks round an attack on the critical sector delegates, coupled with a cold provocation of Marcelino Camacho.

In the amendments debate, the official sector employed classic obstruction tactics. First they presented twice as many amend-ments as the critical sector. Then they cut the time for real debate in half ("to avoid split-ting hairs"). When the debate came, they didn't even bother speaking in favour of their own amendments, and the time allocated was not used up. None of the critical





sector's amendments was adopted; they won more or less 40% of delegate votes.

The new federal leadership met at the end of the congress. One of its first steps was to exclude the seven minority members (from a total of 19) from all responsibilities. A clear desire to marginalise us. This will obviously have serious consequences on the organisational structure and leadership capacities of the union. But what is worse is that the real decisions will, from now on, not really be taken by the executive committee, or by any other collective leadership body, but by Gutierrez, after consultation with whichever "counsellors" he adopts at any given moment.. These methods strengthen his personal power.

### GUTIERREZ' PROJECT

The reason for this dramatic move is Gutierrez' political strategy. He, and his men, are convinced that the actually existing forces of the Spanish left are incapable of struggling against the new People's Party (PP) government of José María Aznar. The Socialist Party (PSOE) is discredited by its corruption, and its involvement in state terrorism. The United Left (IU) is too hegemonised by the PCE, its positions are too dogmatic and too linked to the past. In other words, its electoral potential is low. Gutierrez and his supporters want to regenerate Spanish socialism, on the basis of the two forces which they consider viable and useful: the part of the PSOE which is not implicated in the corruption scandals, and Nueva Izquierda, the most moderate component of IU.

This project implies a greater unity of action between the CC.OO and the (pro-PSOE) UGT confederation. This model of trade unionism would accept political theses such as the inevitability of neo-liberalism, integration in European economic and monetary union, the social pact as axis of trade union activity, absolute priority to negotiation over mobilisation everywhere and at all times, and so on and so forth. In other words, weak trade unionism. Non-

conflictive trade unionism. The kind of trade unionism the majority inside the CC.OO has imposed on us these recent years. The leadership never stops talking about union autonomy, but their key personalities are dedicated to the transformation of the CC.OO into a classic trade union, a transmission belt for the new political force which they want to create.

Apart from any other objective difficulties and sources of opposition which may emerge, Gutierrez has one big problem. The CC.OO is not the same as the trade unions in other countries (see the same author's article in IV nº273, January 1996). It was forged, under the Franco dictatorship, striving consciously to be a new type of union; alternative, anti-capitalist, pluralist, autonomous, participative and socio-political.

Gutierrez' new project must, sooner or later, mean re-founding the CC.OO: suppressing its socio-political character; and reducing the level of pluralism and internal democracy. And this is precisely the direction in which the reports approved by this congress take us. This is also why the majority has chased Marcelino Camacho out of the presidency: they need to appropriate the history of the union in order to change its very nature.

The second big problem facing Gutierrez is us, the critical sector. The echo and the support which our amendments generated show quite clearly the level of resistance which the majority can expect.

### CONCLUSIONS

Liberty and pluralism are retreating inside the CC.OO. The most outrageous sector of the apparatus has imposed a policy of exclusions, transforming the congress and the post-congress period into a period of "settling scores". This is a clear process: Marcelino Camacho was expelled from the presidency, the seven minority representatives in the Executive were excluded from the real management of the union, and the personal power of the General Secretary was reinforced. However, paradoxically proclaiming the need for a modern image, they take us back to the oldest orthodoxy, and the worst methods of the past.

Including a personality cult.

This congress opened an authoritarian period in the management methods of the CC.OO executive. And, since their power is based on a Pyrrhic victory, the exercise of their authority may have very negative effects for the future of the union.

Overtures to the UGT about trade union unity will hardly be credible when they come from people who are incapable of realising unity and integration inside their own union.

The new leadership is so absorbed by the internal purge that it is losing any capacity for public initiative. The CC.OO can no longer mobilise its members without the support of the critical sector. So all that the leadership has left is endless negotiation, and pacts at any price.

The critical sector can be proud of its results. We have a project, and real links with the base of the union. We have laid the foundations for the 7th Congress, scheduled for the year 2000. We had the initiative during the debates at this congress. We have been able to maintain collective work and a collective leadership. We provoked a real reaction among the rank and file. We stimulated their participation in the union. We enabled many militants to regain their self-confidence. We demonstrated that a credible alternative trade union project can exist, does exist.

And, at the end of the day, we doubled our representation in the leading bodies of the union. Predictions that we would score less than 10%, and be reduced to the role of "witnesses" proved to be false.

The CC.OO emerges from this congress more balanced at its base. The critical sector has managed to introduce a debate on fundamental questions of strategy, and on the organisational model of the union. We prevented Gutierrez from realising his project: a tame congress where all divergent views would be eliminated without too much noise. He will no longer be able to run the union as if there was no difference of opinion among the members. Providing, of course, that he does not take the irresponsible path of aggression towards the structures and militants of the minority. ★

## World-wide support for striking Liverpool Dockers

Dockers in the British port of Liverpool have been on strike since September 1995, when Torside Ltd sacked its 80 workers, in an attempt to re-introduce casual labour for the loading and unloading of ships. A further 350 dockers of the semi-public Merseyside Dock and Harbour Company and 12 workers from a smaller company called Nelson Freight were sacked when they refused to cross a picket line established by the Torside workers.

This dispute is unofficial under Britain's restrictive labour legislation, because the dockers did not hold a ballot before announcing strike action. If the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) recognises the dispute, it risks the sequestration (confiscation) of its funds.

The outstanding solidarity of dockers round the world, in resistance to attempts to reintroduce the horrors of casual labour, has brought this 'local' dispute to the centre of attention among militants everywhere. Glen Voris interviews Tony Nelson, Shop Steward in charge of picketing, Jimmy Nolan, Chairman of the Mersey Docks Shop Stewards Committee, and Terry Teague, Shop Steward in charge of International Relations.



ballot. So we did. We wanted to prove, to the union leadership as well as management, that support was as strong as on day one. We were proved right.

● The anti-trade union laws introduced by successive Conservative governments have proved the biggest single obstacle to this struggle. What can the unions do to defeat these laws?

**Jimmy Nolan:** These are political laws, introduced by the Tories and the bosses to strangle trade unions, and prevent workers from taking solidarity action. If Labour leader Tony Blair is elected, I don't see him scrapping these laws. The only way to defeat them is by the working class itself resisting. This means overcoming our fear of mass unemployment. Building a mass grass roots movement, based on a national shop stewards' organisation. And trying to force the leaders of each union to break these political laws.



Liverpool dockers' leaders Jimmy Davis (left) and Jimmy Nolan (right) with San Francisco docker Jack Heyman.

● How strong is the strikers' mood?

**Jimmy Nolan:** The general feeling of the men is that we won't go back to work until every sacked worker is reinstated with full trade union recognition. And the proposed introduction of casual labour must be scrapped. The twelve shop stewards, and another 40 dockers regularly speak to meetings up and down the country. Over 2,100 meetings so far!

● What about the union leadership?

**Jimmy Nolan:** Because of the Tory Anti-Trade Union laws, the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) hasn't yet supported us officially. They are too worried about their funds being confiscated. But the leadership has organised a hardship fund. We want this to become a regular commitment, so that the strikers receive hardship money every week. So that they don't end up on their knees. We have been demanding that the leadership campaigns vigorously, and resists all the anti-trade-union laws. But our arguments have fallen on deaf ears. The leadership neither recommended management's latest offer, nor opposed it. They urged us to hold a

● You have received tremendous support from abroad.

**Terry Teague:** Four weeks into the dispute we visited dockers in Bilbao, Spain, the destination of many of the containers which sail from Liverpool. We were very disappointed that the union leadership in Bilbao refused to let us meet rank-and-file dockers inside the port. But they did promise regular financial support, and go-slows whenever containers from Liverpool arrived.

Then we visited Stockholm, Sweden. We hadn't received an official invitation from their union, but the dockers were brilliant. The union leadership organised meetings with the rank-and-file, all of which were very well-attended. The Swedish dockers not only pledged regular financial support. They agreed not to handle any containers coming from or destined for Liverpool. And we agreed to maintain regular contacts.

Two delegates from the strikers then visited Montreal, Canada, while two others headed towards Sydney, Australia. Support in both cities was tremendous. There were

mass meetings in all parts of both ports. The Australian and Quebec dockers promised regular financial support, overtime bans and go-slows, and a 24 hour strike whenever a ship arrives from or leaves for Liverpool. There are cargoes rotting at sea outside both ports! Montreal dockers also organised a meeting with one of the container ship companies, but unfortunately there were no concrete results. In both places, the highlight was certainly the contact with the rank and file. Our two delegates in Sydney spoke to 21 meetings!

The Longshoreman's Union of America picked up our dispute on the Internet! They sent \$5,000 and messages of support before we even visited New York. After our meeting, they agreed to block any ship loading or unloading Liverpool cargo, in all the major ports of the USA, Atlantic and Pacific sides!

This forced Atlantic Containers Ltd, the major customer of Liverpool docks, to meet and discuss with us. They later said that "unless the dispute in Liverpool is concluded with a satisfactory agreement between both parties" they would look to move their ships to another British port. He set a deadline of January 15th.

This forced the Merseyside Dock and Harbour Company to the negotiating table — for the first time since the dispute started. This resulted in the offer we put to ballot on February 8th. Management proposed 40 reinstatements, and a £25,000 pay off (and £30,000 in pension rights) for the other 310. Eighty-five percent of the 350 sacked workers rejected this offer.

After our visit to the US, we drew up a list of where Liverpool trade goes to. On the basis of this analysis we sent delegates to visit dockers in Italy, Greece, Israel, France and New Zealand. Dockers in all these countries have send regular cash donations, organised go-slows, and implemented overtime bans.

When we think about the warmth and solidarity we have met everywhere, we realise that we should have concentrated on getting international support right at the beginning of the movement, rather than going "all out" for national support. ★

Messages of support and donations to the strikers' hardship fund can be sent to "Merseyside Dockers Shop Stewards Committee", c/o Jim Davis, Secretary/Treasurer, MDSSC, 119 Scorton St., Liverpool L64 5S. Interview carried out by Glenn Voris, Secretary of St. Helens TUC.

# Painful birth of a new era

The new Prime Minister, Kostas Simitis, has won support from left and right for his moderate, modernist and pro-European strategy. He wants to end the nationalist hysteria which has transformed the country's political life in recent years. But the situation is so fragile that the ruling party could explode at any time, detonating a recomposition of the entire political spectrum. Unfortunately, after years of collaboration with austerity policies and nationalist extremism, the left is "too divided, too discredited and too disarmed" to intervene in the crisis.

## By George Mitralias

This was no smooth transition. The dying Socialist leader Andreas Papandreou was a patriarch, who had always ruled alone. No-one in the leading circles of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) had ever dared challenge his absolute power.

And Papandreou was also prime minister. How to choose a new prime minister, with Greece in the situation it is in, without risking an explosion! No easy task for a catch-all party like PASOK, built around a charismatic, authoritarian leader, and more used to following orders than anything else.

The intrigues and dramas mirrored the last years of Peronism in Argentina. Including the attempt by Papandreou's young wife to play the Lopez Rega role. PASOK deputies breathed a sigh of relief when Kostas Simitis was finally approved as Papandreou's successor.

Eighty percent of the population was also favourable. After a long period of degeneration in the general climate, "national" frustration and personal and social uncertainty, Simitis' low profile, moderate, modernising image ensured a brief honeymoon with public opinion.

Very brief. Even before Simitis was sworn in, the confrontation with Turkey over the Imia ("Kardak") islands revealed the fragility of his position.

This crisis, which rocked all of society, and all the political parties, seemed to be a clear revival of the preceding nationalist explosions over the Macedonian and Albanian questions. In fact, the issue is much deeper. Conservative leader Miltiadis Evert did not just condemn the "treason" of a Prime Minister who had "let himself be humiliated by the Turks". In effect, left and right nationalists (!) challenged the whole pro-European, modernist strategy of the new Prime Minister. Simitis' abandoning (relatively speaking) of his predecessor's traditional ultra-nationalist and aggressive discourse was perceived as irrefutable proof

of his servility towards the European Union, the United States and Western imperialism. Which, "of course" supports "Turkish expansionism" against our unloved, Orthodox Christian motherland.

Prime Minister Simitis was, however, able to manoeuvre well and exploit his adversaries' contradictions, minimising the damage and shortening the crisis. Bolstered by the support of former conservative Prime Minister Kostas Mitsotakis (New Democracy Party), Simitis went on the offensive with his pro-European Union, moderate agenda. Notwithstanding his concessions to the other candidates for the Papandreou succession, Defence Minister G. Arsenis and Interior Minister A. Tsohatzopoulos, Kostas Simitis' domestic and foreign policy realism won him real points among the elite and the population.

Simitis proposes a clear orientation towards unconditional adherence to the Maastricht Treaty. He exploited the fact that his opponents support the same thing, but are reluctant to say so openly. Simitis also judged that the nationalist wave is running out of steam. He "dared" list the damage it has done to the "national economy." His opponents may agree in private, but you can still see them in public, evoking the spirit of Alexander the Great.

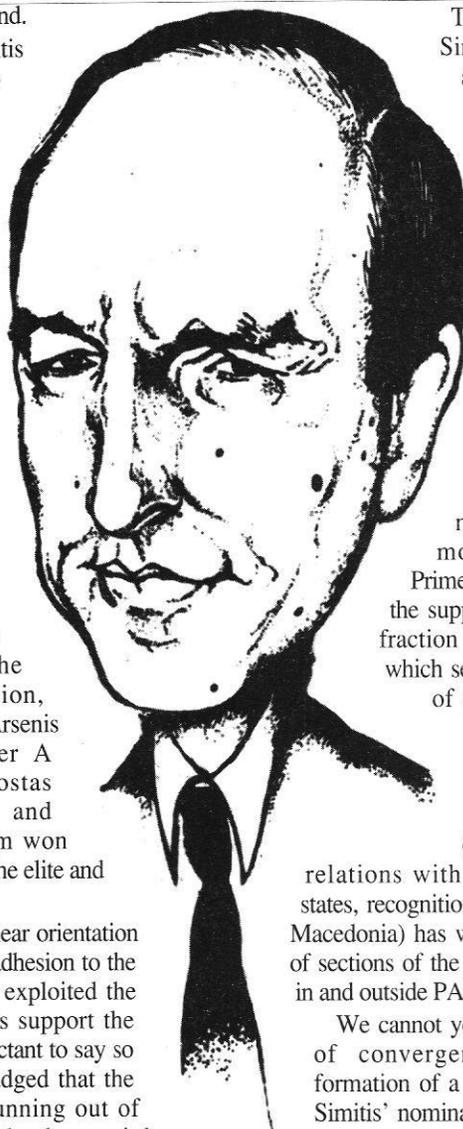
Not surprisingly, the bourgeoisie and the decision-makers have been attracted to

Simitis. Which means that, while the nationalist extremists still mutter about his "soft", docile and "un-Greek" nature, they support, or at least accept his authority.

This is not all. Simitis' new policies are provoking significant realignment within the various left forces, apart from the neo-Stalinist, isolationist Communist Party.

The conservative New Democrats are disorganised and divided, and the neo-liberal, modernist PASOK Prime Minister is winning the support of an important fraction of the Greek right, which seems to be in favour of a recomposition of the political map. At the same time, his moderate foreign policy (normalisation of relations with the neighbouring states, recognition of the Republic of Macedonia) has won him the support of sections of the non-communist left, in and outside PASOK.

We cannot yet call this a process of convergence towards the formation of a common party. But Simitis' nomination was clearly the catalyst for a historic re-working of the Greek party system. The social democratic left is leaving PASOK in disgust at the increasing severity of the austerity and privatisation programme, but



The author is a journalist, living in Athens

## ★ Greece

they are counterbalanced by the support offered to Simitis by a number of right-wing deputies, lead by prominent New Democracy figures like ex-PM Mitsotakis. And the extreme opposition of a fraction of PASOK to any proposal to normalise relations with the Republic of Macedonia, Albania and — to a certain extent — Turkey, is counter-balanced by the support Simitis now received from moderate pro-Europeans of the right and the left.

This is a paradox. Simitis can brandish his audience outside his own party in order to outmanoeuvre his enemies inside the PASOK government, and even inside the party leadership! This cannot last indefinitely. The ruling party could explode at any moment. This terminal crisis of PASOK would provoke the general recomposition of the party-political framework.

Kostas Simitis may not be the head of a PASOK government for much longer. But nothing prevents him returning to office at the head of a new formation, or a coalition government.

The left and the trade unions are largely impotent in the face of these grand manoeuvres, in which Simitis enjoys the support of big capital and the overwhelming majority of Greek entrepreneurs. After having collaborated, or, worse, inspired and managed the submission of the workers' movement to a succession of austerity policies, the left is now too divided, too discredited and too disarmed to even think about spoiling the festival.

The left is paying the price for its betrayal of the workers' interests. Betrayals to which we can attribute concrete figures: Between 1986 and 1994, real wages fell by 12% (compared to an 11.6% rise for the European Union as a whole) while real profits rose by 22% (compared to 13.5% for the EU).

This is not all. This same, respectful left did not just tolerate these shameful policies which have brought misery for many and happiness for a few. Whole sections of the left surrendered, body and soul, to the bourgeoisie's racist, xenophobic, nationalist offensive. They made pact after pact, in the name of the national, even the 'anti-imperialist' unity of the Greek nation. No wonder the workers "agreed" to these "sacrifices" which have brought them to the edge of pauperisation. They had been convinced that their super-exploitation was in the interests of the "besieged motherland."

Things are not completely black. The last two months have seen impetuous popular mobilisations. Peasants, farmers,

pensioners, naval dockyard workers, civil servants and students have begun to struggle again. The explosions are more and more violent (particularly the peasant and farmer demonstrations) but the struggles remain fragmented, uncoordinated and without real political perspectives.

So there is no reason to conclude that all is going well for the Greek bourgeoisie. On the one hand there is a total crisis in its political representation, and at the same time the exasperation of the workers and peasants is such that a growth of social conflict among new sectors of the working class cannot be excluded. The political situation is very precarious, and the credibility of the major parties is disintegrating before our eyes. The

traditional control mechanisms of Greek society are less and less effective. Which makes an upsurge in social struggles easier to imagine.

So this is Greece, at the end of the long epoch which began with the fall of the Colonels' Dictatorship, 22 years ago. Like the people of Spain and Portugal, Greeks are taking stock of their hopes and their illusions, buried under the ruins of actually-existing social democracy. It is a rude awakening. Maybe it will be a refreshing one. It is never too late to present the bill to those who have crumpled so many of our hopes and ideals. ★



## The Contribution of Ernest Mandel to Marxist Theory

Seminar organized by the Ernest Mandel Study Centre  
Amsterdam, July 4-6, 1996

Speakers: ● **Jesús Albarracín and Pedro Montes** (Economists, Bank of Spain): The theory of late capitalism as a Marxist interpretation of post-WW2 capitalism ● **Robin Blackburn** (Editor, *New Left Review*, London): The place of Ernest Mandel in the history of Marxist political thought ● **Alan Freeman** (Economist, University of Greenwich): Economic dynamics: Mandel's legacy ● **Michael Löwy** (Sociologist, CNRS, Paris): Ernest Mandel as a revolutionary humanist ● **Francisco Louça** (Economist, IESG-University of Lisbon): Ernest Mandel's contribution to the theory of long waves of capitalist development ● **Charles Post** (Historian, City University of New York): The theory of bureaucracy ● **Catherine Samary** (Economist, University of Paris XI): The conception of the transition to socialism ● **Enzo Traverso** (Political Scientist, University of Amiens): Ernest Mandel's vision of the relation between capitalism and barbarism.

All introductions and discussions in English.

For information about inexpensive accommodation and entrance fees and for registration forms (reservations necessary: due to space limitations only a limited number of people can attend): contact EMSC c/o IIRE, Postbus 53290, 1007 RG Amsterdam, The Netherlands. E-mail: IIRE@Antenna.nl Fax: (31 20) 6732106. © 6717263

For financial support to the Ernest Mandel Study Centre send your cheques to the IIRE, or make a bank transfer to account 630-0113884-65 at Caisse Privée Banque, Brussels, Belgium.



# Zapatista Army Calls for New Civil Party

In 1992 there was a split in the Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRT), Mexican section of the Fourth International. A minority of the Central Committee, which claimed to represent the majority of the membership, decided to form a public faction. Following its statutes, the International recognised the majority of the Central Committee as representing the continuity of the section, but decided to maintain the presence of 'the faction' within the International, including in its decision-making bodies.

The political views of the two organisations, their reaction to the Chiapas rebellion, and their attitude towards the 'cardenist' PRD were fairly similar. But each developed a different conception of the tasks involved in building the revolutionary movement in Mexico today. Their divergent reaction to the appeal of the EZLN for the creation of a 'Zapatista' political front is the clearest expression yet of this divergence. The official section, which, in September 1995 adopted the name Radical Democracy (DR), recently decided to dissolve itself and formally leave the International, and join the FZLN, where a number of DR members are already present in the leadership. A minority of DR members are opposed to this decision. The Central Committee minority from 1992 and their supporters are now the only organisation using the name PRT. This group has chosen to engage the comrades of the EZLN in a public discussion on their conception of the new front, and the political tasks faced in Mexico.

This debate is of obvious interest to all those who are concerned with the problems of organising the fight against capitalism, not just in Mexico, but in many other countries where there are perspectives for regroupment. In recognition of this, we publish here an article presenting the views of the PRT, by Edgard Sanchez, a member of the PRT Political Committee, as well as extracts from the letter in which the former-DR comrades explain their decision to the leadership of the Fourth International. The Fourth International's attitude towards questions of regroupment is presented in the Building the International resolution adopted at the 1995 World Congress, and recently published as a special issue of *International Viewpoint* and our sister publications in French and Spanish.

by Edgard Sánchez

On January 1st 1996, on the second anniversary of its armed uprising, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) released the Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, calling for the formation of a new political force, the Zapatista National Liberation Front. [See last month's issue of IV]

For months we were expecting this call, which was the logical result of the National Consultation which the EZLN carried out in August-September 1995. One of the six questions of the consultation was precisely whether the EZLN should become a new



political force and how to do it. More than a million answered the question positively.

But independently of this, the call for the formation of a new political force was completely necessary given the national situation. The armed EZLN uprising of January, 1994 triggered a crisis in Mexico's political system. This crisis has not been solved. It is continuing itself, in a context of social decay and decomposition of the political system. All of this is un-

questionably causing a reshuffling of all political forces. They are all in crisis.

Since 1994 the EZLN has enjoyed broad popular sympathy, including within the rank and file of many political forces and parties. It enjoys great moral and political authority. But the EZLN is basically a politico-military organisation. The possibilities of having influence in the political terrain and among the masses is diminished by the lack of a national organisation of its own, beyond its military structure. Many EZLN initiatives have not lived up to their expectations due to the lack of an organised force of its own to carry them out. For all these reasons the call for the formation of a new political force is of unquestionable importance. It should have an influence in the restructuring of political forces and in this way advance the possibilities of a solution to the crisis which is shaking the country. It should advance the possibilities of an outcome which is democratic, popular, and revolutionary in its dynamic.

Given such high stakes in the call for a new political force, the initiative itself should provoke great debate.

This is normal, because even among the sympathisers of Zapatismo who are in agreement with the creation of a new force, defining its principal characteristics requires broad reflection and debate. Some EZLN sympathisers disagree, and think that the Zapatista words are not up for discussion, one simply obeys. For them it was enough to subscribe to the Fourth Declaration as it stands... and wait for the next communiqué from the General Command. They create a caricature of the Zapatista conception of "commanding while obeying." This is a caricature of those who, while attempting to mimic the functioning of a military organisation, assume that in a new political force, one must function like a military structure, with discipline and without discussion.

To command while obeying, as the Zapatistas say, does not mean obeying the leadership without discussion. It means that the leadership must obey the results of the discussion and the consensus among the rank and file. It does not mean arbitrary command. The proposal seeks direct control over the leadership, not despotic control over the rank and file.

Of course, in the discussion motivated by the call for the creation of a Zapatista

Front we distinguish two levels. On the one hand, there is a debate with those who are not in agreement with the Zapatista Front, who oppose the Zapatistas, or those from within the system who mock them and

fight against them. But there is another debate which must also be clarified, even for the purpose of better responding to the enemies of Zapatismo. This is the debate within the sympathising movement, among those who are in solidarity with the Zapatistas. We place ourselves within this terrain to discuss some Zapatista points expressed in the Fourth Declaration, which it is necessary to clarify in order to reach agreement or to know, eventually, the magnitude of the differences. Our discussion takes as a point of departure the need and the support for the existence of a Zapatista Front, but touches on several polemical aspects of the Fourth Declaration. Broad debate has, finally, taken place, and the Zapatistas themselves have had to make clear their concepts, particularly with the videotaped message which Sub Comandante Marcos sent on March 2 to a meeting of civilian committees in the city of Poza Rica.

## FRONT AND PARTY

The first subject of debate has been the very conception of a Zapatista Front. Why a front? Why not a party? Why a front, made up not of organisations, but of individuals?

Before the National Consultation, the PRT and other socialist organisations raised the point that, as we see it, the best thing was for the EZLN to call for the formation of a new alternative party and to invite other interested forces to do it jointly, even on the terrain set by the EZLN.

Certainly the sympathy for the EZLN has been very broad. The EZLN has insisted correctly on organising "civil society," those without a party. The National Democratic Convention was an example of that. But the scope of the movement in solidarity with Zapatismo also implied such political heterogeneity that it diminished the force and efficiency of the CND. That is why we think that the new

political force should surpass the heterogeneity of the CND in terms of political coherence. Such greater political coherence, we think, can be achieved with a party-type organisation with individual membership and definition around a political program.

Since the days of preparation for the consultation we knew that this proposal about a party-type organisation was not very popular in the movement in solidarity with Zapatismo. It is not popular, in the first place, because of the discredit of the present party system. There is also a prevalent identification between the party and the party as an electoral instrument. This identification occurs frequently in the statements of the EZLN. That is, there is an identification between the party and the party with legal register for electoral participation, with all the consequences of such an identification.

We do not identify the idea of a party simply with an electoral party. The political struggle which a revolutionary party must carry out is not limited to electoral struggle. Evidently this idea is based on our own experience and conception, and on the conviction that a Zapatista call for a new alternative party would accelerate political regroupments.

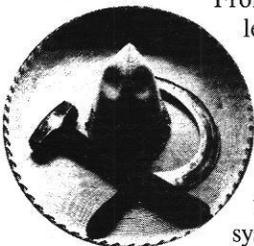
We also disagree with the criticism of Sub Comandante Marcos, contained in his message of March 4, in which he says that a political party has only two levels of participation for its militants: participation in elections and internal election of leaders. Once again, one is thinking here of the experience of electoral parties and particularly bourgeois parties. Obviously, this is not the conception of a party which we put forward, but rather the conception of a party which organises effectively to participate in the daily class struggle and which does not reduce its participation to the electoral terrain. The EZLN rejects, as a consequence, the call for the formation of a political party. It calls, in the Fourth Declaration, for a Zapatista Front. This proposal apparently constitutes a solution, one which deals with the breadth and heterogeneity of the movement in solidarity with Zapatismo, forming a decidedly Zapatista force, which is at the same time a plural solution which implies a political front. The PRT put forward its willingness to participate in a political front in this context.

Nevertheless, in the message of March 4 Sub Comandante Marcos has pointed out explicitly that this is not a "front of organisations" and therefore, whoever wants to participate in the Zapatista Front must join it individually and renounce his/her organisation, or else organisations

must dissolve as such to leave their members at liberty to join the Zapatista Front.

The result is that the Zapatista proposal stays halfway between a party which one joins individually, with a structure in many ways similar to a party, with organisational structures of local, municipal, regional and state committees, proposed by Marcos in his message, on the one hand, and on the other, the proposal of a Zapatista Front which other political currents may join openly on the same grounds as the EZLN, which is not dissolving. On the contrary, Sub Comandante Marcos says in this message that affiliation is on an individual basis. Since the EZLN is not dissolving (and obviously it cannot do so after having declared war on the government) its General Command will review the applications for admission to the Zapatista Front for final accreditation and acceptance. Even though Marcos states that the front will not be made up of organisations, but is rather a front of diverse currents of thought in which "communists, trotskyists, and people without a particular ideological affiliation" can coexist, at the same time this precludes the presence of organised political currents as such in the new political front. This decision impedes the integration of those of us who have openly stated our political militancy and affiliation. One cannot say, as some have irresponsibly said, that one is not a party militant, that one is dissolved into civil society, and function nevertheless as an organised group, although in a veiled fashion.

The foregoing does not necessarily mean a total political break between the EZLN and the forces that have been in solidarity with the EZLN. At the same time that the EZLN insists in defending the idea of a broad opposition front which will constitute a front for national liberation composed of a very broad and plural spectrum of forces, it is now proposing a new meeting space: a left front which will in turn be part of a broad opposition front. The PRT will have to decide formally about the new Zapatista proposal but will surely be in favour of continuing the struggle in solidarity with Zapatismo and the demands for which it took up arms while participating and promoting the left front. The criticisms which Marcos himself launched against sectarianism and those "political methods which we fight against," which have been used to promote the broad opposition front by some currents, facilitated the participation of the PRT and a whole sector of the left in the CND, also in opposition to sectarianism, and will now facilitate the participation in the efforts to build a broad opposition front.



## DO WE WANT POWER OR NOT?

Another debatable aspect of the Fourth Declaration is the shocking declaration that the Zapatista Front does not struggle for power.

It seems contradictory that a force which emerged calling for the end of the party-state system, which has even declared war on the current government, which has denounced the government and the present system as responsible for the sufferings of the people, which has called for the ouster of Salinas and of the current government, which talks about conquering democracy, it seems contradictory, we repeat, that this same force should say that it does not struggle to take power.

It would be a mistake to equate Zapatismo with a pressure group to achieve some changes or to equate it with an instrument for moral claims and pressures to achieve specific goals, sectional or corporate demands. That is not what Zapatismo has meant, especially since the uprising of January of 1994. Zapatismo has insisted on a political struggle, a national struggle, showing itself as an example while insisting that its demands are not sectional or limited to some municipalities of Chiapas. It has done this precisely against those who shield themselves in radical language to cover particularistic demands.

We think, therefore, that in order to achieve the goals raised by the EZLN one has to carry a struggle fundamentally against the power of the party state system. This has become obvious throughout the trajectory of struggle of the EZLN. Ending the actual party-state system is a must. Partial victories are not enough.

To oust the present powers, to substitute them with the power of the people — as called for in the Fourth Declaration — is not in contradiction with the statement that the Zapatista Front does not wish to seize power. Indeed, the conquest of democracy is not merely the alternation of the parties in office, no matter how democratic a specific party may say it is or may appear to be. In this sense our objective cannot be simply to substitute the current power of the PRI to put the EZLN or now the FZLN in its place.

It is common that some parties identify the conquest of democracy with the conquest of power precisely for themselves. But this is not necessarily democracy, and instead runs the risk of being converted exactly into its opposite. When a party has the objective of conquering power for itself, all other democratic considerations can be subordinated to that objective. We understand this concept as part of our history as a political current, since we fought from the beginning against the erroneous identification between the

## Labor Union Strategies

Manuel Garcia Urrutia M. outlines recent labor meetings which sketch out the strategies which will determine the rise of a new labor unionism in Mexico.

**MEETING NUMBER ONE** WAS the celebration of the 119th Regular General Assembly of the National Council of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), marking its 60th anniversary. This meeting represented the collapse into senility of a kind of labor unionism which refuses to die, but which now has no place in the development of a modern, democratic and just Mexico. Three moments sum up the CTM meeting:

- the long applause for Fidel Velazquez, offered as homage to the system which he has served, accompanied by a presidential speech about the battered “historical alliance” [between the unions and the government], with special nostalgic reference to old union leaders who played their part in the deterioration of the population’s decline in living standards;
- the presence of top businessman Carlos Abascal, representing the most conservative employers’ organization, COPARMEX, asking that we give our selves to the Virgin of Guadalupe — an implicit recognition of how bad things have gotten — and attempting to inaugurate, for the “n”th time, the “new labor culture,” which is recognized in the speeches and agreements which are imposed upon us from on high, which have nothing to do with employer practice and the everyday reality which the workers live;
- the CTM’s censure of “divisive” organizations within the Congress of Labor (CT). A clear allusion to the Federation of Unions of Goods and Services [FESEBES]. This basically reflects the CTM leadership’s interest in not being displaced from the leader-

ship of Mexican labor unionism.

The CTM leadership has miscalculated. Because they will not be able to keep their leadership position in the labor movement with a strategy that is ever more docile, servile to the government, tied to the state, isolated and corrupt. For there are other federations [CROC, CROM, etc.] which do that even better.

It is union democracy, respect for differences of opinion within the union, and the development of wider social alliances, at both the national and international level, which will provide the basis for the union project which the country needs.

The second important recent meeting was the Third Forum of Labor Unionism before the Nation: Security and Social Justice, organized by 21 organizations with different histories, characteristics and perspectives, but which have as a common denominators: leaders who are representative, are elected, and have proposals for the challenges to the productivity of the Nation. The drawing power of these unions, their key place in production and services, the richness of their analysis in confronting diverse problems— derived from their diverse composition —and their possibility of acting in a united, mature and responsible way, not only represent a milestone for the labor movement in recent years but also aim at changing the correlation, shape and hegemony of the historic leadership.

Recent weeks also saw a San Francisco meeting organized to discuss action against the transnational corporation Sprint, under the Labor Side Agreements of

the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Labor organizations attending from Mexico, the United States and Canada have recognized the necessity of forming some regional labor union relationship to protect the interests of workers negatively affected by NAFTA. They also argue for a Social Compact which would include protection of the rights of migrant workers, independent of their legal status. A similar tri-national meeting in Cuernavaca shared concrete experiences of unity, action and organization, involving union, environmental and farmers groups which have been working together.

The conclusions of these international labor meetings laid out the challenges which the process of regional integration imposes: the construction of trustworthy partners in order to avoid actions such as that of the Teamsters in their opposition to Mexican truck drivers using the highways of the United States; the need to push, in the same direction, an alternative development strategy which gives meaning and priority to the social dimension of integration; and, last but not least, solidarity. Participants were also invited to the meeting against neo-liberalism which will take place in April in Chiapas.

These meetings are no longer closed to independent unions. The CTM monopoly has been broken. The Mexican unions which came to relate to their U.S. and Canadian counterparts share different visions of the national reality, and seek agreements on strategy between Mexican organizations. ★

Source: *La Jornada*, March 4, 1996.

supposed existence of socialism and workers power on the one hand, with the real existence of the power of a party and a bureaucracy at the expense and on the backs of the workers on the other hand (even if these parties called themselves "communist").

In this sense, we can agree that we do not fight for power.

For this reason, incidentally, we do not consider as part of the definition of a revolutionary party the seizure of power for itself, as Marcos insists in his messages. The call for a front, however, is not apolitical. It is a call which understands the need for a struggle against the present powers and the need to oust them.

The same Fourth Declaration at several points confirms this (against the centralisation power, again the idea that those who rule must do so while obeying the people, government of the people, for the people and by the people, etc.). The Zapatista struggle goes beyond immediate demands and beyond the idea of becoming the moral conscience of politicians, as some have claimed. It certainly struggles for a new power, not for the Zapatista Front, but for the people, recognising the pluralism (regional, political, ethnic, and cultural pluralism, which becomes more evident each passing day). This is implied in the points against the centralisation of power.

All of this has to do with another notion which appears in several documents of the EZLN. We are referring obviously to the document on "the mirrors," but the idea appears in several others. The idea is that the central objective now is the conquest of democracy and ending the party-state system.

This is the reason why it is possible and necessary to promote a Broad Opposition Front which is very pluralistic not only politically but socially. Plurality means that we can all have particular national projects, even different ones, but that convincing the people to freely support any of them requires a different system, it requires the conquest of democracy. Because of this, in spite of our differences, we can all agree in the struggle for democracy and the end of the party-state system.

Therefore those of us who have "the heart, the will and the ideas in the left side of our chest", as the Zapatistas say, know that we have our own project, but that project, to be achieved, requires first the achievement of a common objective, that is to say, democracy, so that we can then struggle under other conditions for our programs. We need, as the document of "The Mirrors" says, a revolution that will

make possible the Revolution. Therefore our objective is not power itself.

This revolution, the EZLN remarks, "is not a matter of the conquest of power or the installation (by peaceful or violent means) of a new social system, but something prior to both these things. It is a matter of building the anteroom of a new world, a space where, with equal rights and obligations, the different political forces will 'compete' for the support of the majority of society."

There are, finally, other nuanced aspects in the Fourth Declaration which the Zapatistas themselves or Sub Comandante Marcos have modified. One of them, for example, is the issue of electoral participation. In the Fourth Declaration it appeared as an initial definition, as a matter of principle, to participate in the Zapatista Front. In the message of 4 March, the Sub Comandante Marcos has clarified that the Zapatista Front as such does not participate in elections but that its members could support certain electoral processes. This is closer to a tactical definition in connection with each case and not a general definition against electoral participation without taking into account the level of consciousness and organisation of the masses.

The problem with this position is that it should not confuse the criticism and rejection of the current institutional powers with a rejection of all democratic practices, even electoral ones. The EZLN has a commitment on this point since it is one of the positions collected in the National Consultation to achieve a change in the rules of the political game in the country.

Neither should it confuse the current state of the institutional powers, despite their profound level of decomposition, and the current correlation of forces, with a situation which permits the creation of a parallel power to the existing one. Here we should distinguish between the level of consciousness and existing popular organisation in regions like Chiapas, and compare them with the rest of the country, even in important regions where the PAN (National Action Party) is winning elections. Certainly there is the possibility that the emergence of the Zapatista Front could close this gap in consciousness nationally, but always on condition that its actions take into account the uneven level of development of consciousness and popular organisation.

All these aspects will certainly continue to be discussed and clarified in the months ahead. On some points the last word has not been said yet. Several events in the next months will help to clarify and define the project of the Zapatista Front. Without mentioning the political evolution in the country as a whole, one will have to take into account the results of dialogues between the EZLN and the government in San Andres, the new national encounters of the civilian committees, the encounter of the Zapatista Front in June, the Intercontinental Encounter in July, and the development of the proposal for a Movement of National Liberation and a Left Front, recently raised by the Zapatistas. ★

## Renaissance and Revolution

Letter from Radical Democracy to the Bureau of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International

Dear comrades,

When the IVth Declaration of the Lancandona Jungle was made public, we didn't have the least problem in expressing, in a letter sent to the CCRI-CG of the EZLN our decision to support, with a few qualifications, that document and to incorporate ourselves into the FZLN. And we should point out that one of the qualifications was precisely that we were opposed to the FZLN becoming a front in

the classical sense of the term, much less a fusion or co-ordination between the apparatuses of more or less small political organisations. It should, on the contrary, be a new type of political force. This introduction is to remind you that this discussion was not new and that our dissolution had already been voted at our National Conference in September 1995. What we were waiting for was the EZLN's call in order to join in the best way possible.

II. The profound political motives which led us to this conclusion have been laid out in various documents. We will spell out some of them as examples:

a) The EZLN represents for the country and we believe beyond it, especially in Latin America, a kind of rebirth of rebellion which after the fall of the Berlin wall and the "triumph" of neo-liberalism, emerges as a fresh and subversive will that has immediately won people's sympathy. It is not the same thing to keep on resisting, more or less in isolation, as to appear as a revolutionary alternative which is credible for broad sectors of the population.

b) The EZLN is the result of an unprecedented process of putting into practice the precept of Jose Carlos Mariategui, 1 that of fusing the best of Europe's emancipatory political thought with the reality and thought of Indo-America. The mainly indigenous character of the EZLN is not an argument to throw at those in power; it's a challenge to the old Latin American left which never understood the profound meaning of these communities as centres of anti-capitalist resistance. Nobody, neither the URNG, much less the FMLN, nor the rest of the Latin American left, ourselves included, understood this. On the contrary, our peasant work was always weighed down with aid paternalism which ended up developing into corruption and an adaptation to the modernising ideology of the Mexican state. The opposition of a good part of the main leaders of the PRT's peasant work, and much of the leadership itself, to fighting against the Salinas government's changes to Article 27 of the Constitution 2 in 1991, on the grounds that we had been right to channel the peasant movement into struggles over production rather than land ownership, were only the tip of the iceberg of something very profound going on in the thinking of the left.

c) The EZLN was born as a result of the failure of all the projects of the left, especially our own. The PRT was undoubtedly a project which succeeded in drawing the attention of the most important social vanguard in Mexico. Through its ranks passed thousands of Mexicans who represented the best of a generation of revolutionaries. Nonetheless, it was the victim of a process of institutionalisation on the part of the state and of a growing pragmatism which led it to confront problems in terms of obtaining a series of seeming "successes" which encouraged self-delusion as well as the organisation's stagnation and subsequent crisis. The emergence of opportunist currents by the time the crisis broke out has nothing to do with any supposedly intrinsic vices on the

part of those concerned but rather with these two aspects which closed in like pincers on our revolutionary project.

d) The EZLN was born beyond the bounds of the Mexican state and on the edge of civil society. It put forward a policy which it was impossible for the regime to recuperate, which combined a strong dose of ethical opposition to the system along with a very flexible policy of mobilisation and broad unity, starting from the existing level of awareness of large sections of the population, fed up with corruption, with parties, with the government and with impunity. In other words, from some of the premises of neo-liberal ideology it took a few fault lines and action proposals with which to bombard the same neo-liberal ideology. That is why it won so much sympathy when it said explicitly that it was against the taking of power by a political organization and against the participation in the ranks of the FZLN of people who hold elected office as popular representatives in state institutions (imagine how popular that is: a member of congress earns 28 thousand new pesos a month, not counting a series of other benefits, whilst the minimum wage is 600 pesos); or when it said that the FZLN will not be an organisation which enters into any kind of "arrangement" with state institutions and the like.

e) Because of the work we have carried out since 1st January 1994 (for us it was all the easier to understand the significance of the indigenous rebellion because of the position we'd adopted over the reforms to Article 27, over the development of corruption within the left, because of our refusal to seek electoral registration and our refusal to accept money from the state, especially that which was given under the table and with no legal basis - all this before 1st January 1994), because of our work with Rosario Ibarra, because of the seriousness with which we took our relationship with comrades of the EZLN, etc., the conditions have been favourable for a political relationship which has had to be built, not without some quite understandable elements of mistrust on their part. From the beginning we sought a relationship of mutual respect, based on our own self-respect. We presented ourselves for what we were; without exaggerating our strength, we always told them we were a small force of revolutionary militants with a certain experience in trade union and urban work and with a revolutionary theory which was not and is not negotiable.

III. We discussed the possibility of incorporating DR into the FZLN with the Zapatista comrades. They expressed their interest but suggested that this would be impossible without ourselves disappearing

first. The reasons are obvious. The answer which won in the National Consultation (referendum) was Number 4, that's to say that the FZLN should be built based on the EZLN (and not as a front of organisations, as in option number 5 which was defeated - Translator's note). But what is more, the only possibility of building a new political force is to do it in this way - we should not lose sight of the extent to which the old politicians of the Mexican left, especially the most prominent amongst them, have been repudiated by popular movement activists.

The people interested in forming the FZLN want to discuss all the basic documents and organisational questions of the FZLN on an equal footing, not with currents that are already organized and likely to be highly manipulative. The FZLN will be, as has been pointed out, a political organization of a new type and not a front of organizations, but it WILL be, as has also been said, a front of points of view. Nobody is being asked to renounce or go back on their theory or their ideas. In the FZLN there can be communists, trotskysts, Maoists, anarchists or people with no ideology, said recently the "Sub-Comandante Marcos...? Our decision to take this step is allowing various of our comrades to play an important role in building the FZLN. But the way we see this is not in terms of the past, but of the future. As we eliminate our organisational boundaries we do not care who is doing the work nor do we seek to promote former comrades of ours but only to guarantee that the best comrades, regardless of where they came from, take on the central tasks. Obviously the quality of our ex-members means that several of them are centrally involved.

We are on the path to forging a new political identity. We do not renounce our ideas, but nor do we



have the blind faith in them which we had before. We are on the road to the formation of a civilian Zapatista movement which will be plebeian, radical and socialist. We know you will recall that in other countries similar things have been said. But the difference is that these proposals are being made outside of any state institution, and beyond any of the traditional apparatuses of international control. These two aspects are no small thing. You cannot compare this



with what has happened in other countries; this is not a fusion between two far-left groups or between communist currents and the far-left. Here we are building something new on the basis of the most radical and revolutionary current in recent years, and which has mass influence in fundamental sections of Mexican society. DR has been the first organization to take this step.

To do so, we have had to decide on our organisational separation from the IVth International. This was the price we had to pay and it was certainly the most painful. Once the FZLN has been formed, we will

discuss within it the kind of international relations it should establish, as well as the relationship its members maintain with international organizations. The EZLN's position is to maintain fraternal relations with all international currents and to work towards the structuring of a new international which they define as the international of hope. Whilst the FZLN is taking form and these discussions are in course, we will continue to orient our action on the basis of the programme of the IVth International and the theory of revolutionary marxism, struggling for the elimination of exploitation and oppression in all its forms, for the organization of free men and women freely associated, against the bureaucratic and substitutionist deformation of political organizations, and for the building of a mass revolutionary international. In this process, we ask for your understanding and support.

Lastly, and even though this not quite usual, we want to say to you, and through you to all our comrades in the IVth International, that we hold you all very dear; that we have always had your support and solidarity, that you are as human beings the best in the world, and what unites us is not just words or pieces of paper but a vision of the world as radically different, that is radically humane. 34 years of membership of the IVth International has left us only conviction, commitment and confidence; there will be not a single act of any one of our ex-militants which is not influenced by this example and these motives. ★

**Long live the Fourth International !**

**Long live the Zapatista National Liberation Front !**

## Labor Realignment Opens Space for Radicals

Leaders of Mexico's labor unions have begun a process of political and organizational realignment which may open space for democratic workers' initiatives from below.

by Dan La Botz

At the end of 1995, during a debate over the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) government proposal to "reform" and in part privatize the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS), a political split developed within the Congress of Labor (CT) between the long-dominant Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) and the young Federation of Unions of Goods and Services (FESEBES). While the CTM fundamentally supported the PRI's IMSS reform, FESEBES was more critical and helped to organize a large public demonstration against the PRI-government proposal.

Now the split has deepened, and the half-dozen unions which form FESEBES have been joined by a number of others to create a loose coalition of 21 labor unions, some members of the PRI-controlled Congress of Labor (CT), and some independent. FESEBES is led by Francisco Hernandez Juarez, head of the Mexican Telephone Workers Union (STRM), a former radical who because labor's closest collaborator with former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari during the 1980s and early 1990s.

Hernandez Juarez has been the leading Mexican advocate of a "new unionism" predicated upon union cooperation with the employers to increase productivity. He

also played a key role in Salinas' privatization of TELMEX, the Mexican Telephone Company. But also in the 21 union coalition are unions such as independent Union of Workers of the Metal, Steel and Iron Industry (STIMHCS) which is affiliated with the independent Authentic Labor Front (FAT). The new group is frequently referred to as the "Foro" or Forum because of a number of public forums on labor and social issues which they have organized.

Veteran labor bureaucrat Fidel Velazquez is watching the unfolding reorganization of the Mexican labor bureaucracy from hospital. Velazquez, who will be 96 years old in April, has played a leading role in the Mexican labor bureaucracy since the mid 1930s, and has been the dominant figure since the late 1940s in the PRI-government-controlled CTM. If pro-longed illness or death removed Velazquez from the scene, a struggle for control of the CTM and the CT would immediately develop. Velazquez has promised in any case to step down in 1998.

Velazquez and other CTM leaders have criticized Hernandez Juarez, FESEBES, and now the Foro group as "those who seek to divide the labor movement," while calling upon the unions to maintain their "historic alli-

ance" with the PRI. But it seems as if for the first time in decades, some section of Mexican labor officialdom is now prepared to look for a new strategy. What that strategy will be is not yet clear.

One of the central questions facing the Foro group is whether or not to remain within the Congress of Labor (CT). Several of the Foro's 21 member unions are independent of both confederations. So far Hernandez Juarez, FESEBES and the Foro have not laid out a clear program of action, but have confined themselves to a critique of positions take by the CT and the CTM.

Some of the independent unions within the Foro group are also members of the independent and more radical "May 1st Inter-Union Coalition" which formed late last year. The May 1st coalition grew out of the 1995 May Day demonstrations in Mexico City and out of union solidarity with the 13,000 bus drivers who were fired when the government of the Federal District (Mexico City) privatized the Route 100 bus company.

Independent unions and democratic currents within the official unions see this realignment within the labor bureaucracy as opening up space for discussion and debate, and perhaps in the future for joint action. ★



Notes

1 J. C. Mariategui was a founder of the communist movement in Peru and is often described as the first and most original theorist of an authentically Latin American marxism. His attention to the cultural specificities of marxist strategy has led to frequent comparisons with Antonio Gramsci, working in Italy at about the same time. He was politically and theoretically hostile to the development of soviet marxism under Stalin and adhered to something like a version of permanent revolution for the reality of Latin American societies.

2 The reforms to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution were a key part of the neo-liberal programme pursued by the administration of Carlos Salinas (1988-1994). They sought to enable increased privatization and concentration of land ownership, in particular by breaking up the "ejidos" or communal lands which derived originally from pre-colonial forms of social organisation and the right to which was rhined in this article of the Mexican Constitution, as a central plank in the social pact emerging from the "interrupted" Mexican Revolution.

# Bipartisan Budget Heist

The occasional pre-election outburst of partisan politics may still be heard in the halls of the U.S. Congress. But recent weeks have revealed a virtual unanimity among Democrats and Republicans in regard to prioritizing unprecedented and massive cuts in national social programs that have existed for decades.

By Jeff Mackler

**THE FEBRUARY 6, WASHINGTON, D.C.** meeting of the National Governors' Association announced a series of unanimous recommendations designed to resolve the ongoing Congressional budget impasse over the nation's welfare, Medicaid (health aid for the poor and disabled), and related social programs.

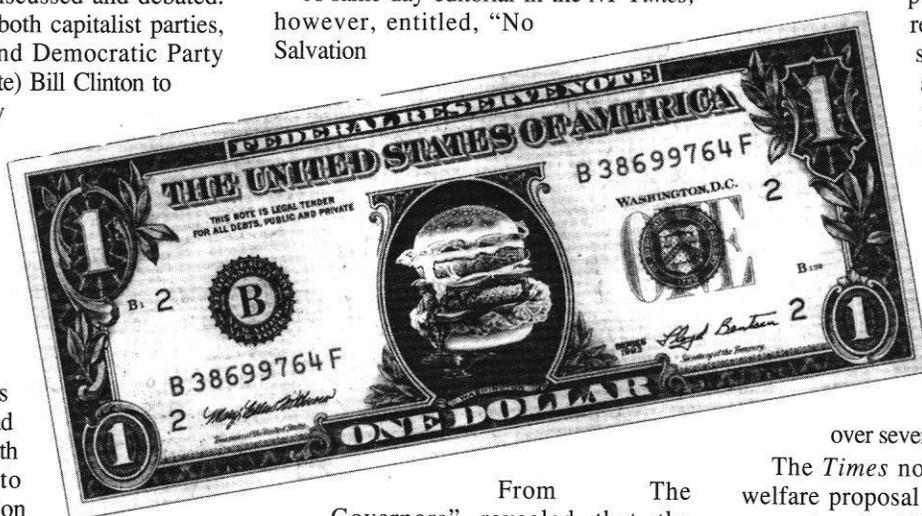
This periodic meeting of the nation's 50 state governors is a national forum where key financial and political issues involving the impact of federal policies on state governments are discussed and debated. Central leaders of both capitalist parties, from President (and Democratic Party Presidential candidate) Bill Clinton to Senate Majority Speaker (and leading Republican Party Presidential candidate) Robert Dole, were active participants.

Prior to this meeting Congress had failed to come up with final formulas to codify into legislation the massive cuts in virtually all social services that both parties insist are necessary to balance the U.S. budget within their already agreed to seven-year timeframe.

The unanimous vote was headlined in newspapers across the country. The February 7 *New York Times* reported "In a speech to the governors this morning, Mr. Clinton said their idea of preserving a federal guarantee of medical benefits for needy people, and of broad new flexibility for states to administer such programs, had 'contributed immeasurably' to resolving disputes between the White House and Congress." The President had similar praise for the governors' proposals for overhauling welfare.

Republican presidential candidate Dole, also praised the governors as "honest brokers." He promised: "We're prepared to act and we believe the President will be prepared to act too." Clinton informed the media that his Presidential opponent had demonstrated "a genuine spirit of cooperation." House Speaker Newt Gingrich promised immediate congressional hearings on the governors' proposals. His spokesman Tony Blankley, described the Speaker as "ecstatic" at the governors' efforts.

A same-day editorial in the *NY Times*, however, entitled, "No Salvation



From The Governors" revealed that the bipartisan agreement represented yet another grave assault on working people and the poor.

The *NY Times* observed: "The nation's governors voted overwhelmingly at their conference yesterday for reforms on welfare and Medicaid that are harsher toward the poor in key respects than anything Congress has passed or that the Republicans privately negotiated with President Clinton in their ill-fated budget talks.

"What they did not achieve," the *Times* continues, "is a proposal that would guarantee a central security for the impoverished." On Medicaid, the governors' plan would, according to the *Times* account, "split the difference

between turning the health insurance program over to the states to run, as the Republican Party wants, and preserving the existing entitlement that poor families have to medical coverage. But the entitlement has shriveled. The governors' plan would guarantee undefined medical benefits to a diminished number of recipients."

Presently, families receiving Federal welfare assistance automatically qualify for Medicaid. Under the governors' plan, states would not have to cover adults or children over age 12, no matter how poor. The governors' recommendation allows states to reduce hospital and other benefits, making the current mandatory entitlement of questionable value even for those eligible. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimated that these proposals would allow the states to cut Medicaid spending by \$200 billion over seven years.

The *Times* noted: "The governors' welfare proposal rips away the Federal guarantee of additional money for states experiencing rising welfare rolls, as the President unwisely invited the Republicans to do. It puts a five-year cap on benefits even for adults who can find no job. The proposal would also allow states to make huge cuts — up to 30% — in the money they spend on welfare. The Federal Government would have little ability to force states to treat their poor residents fairly."

And finally, "The governors' would make unacceptable cuts in food stamps and, borrowing the worst planks from the [Republican] Congressional plan, would allow states to opt out of the Federal food

Jeff Mackler is National Secretary of the US group Socialist Action.



stamp program and cut off childless adults after four months who cannot find work."

This Clinton-praised governors' plan would "guarantee" that the states maintain their welfare efforts at 75% of current levels, as opposed to the 80% that Clinton previously suggested was the minimum reduction he would accept.

On Medicare for the elderly, the Democrats and Republicans have the same massive cuts in mind. A December issue of *The Nation* magazine [left, pro-Democrat - Ed] aptly observed: "Medicare is good politics, but the Republican Medicare plan is similar to that proposed by the President, and trashed by Republicans themselves last year. The spending differences over seven years derive primarily from varying estimates on the rate of inflation." The current debate in Congress is over how to "save" \$270 b. in Medicare costs by a combination of cuts and increased premiums.

### AVERTING A THIRD GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

In early February, in the "new" spirit of bipartisanship, Clinton signed into law a Republican-sponsored proposal to avert a third federal shutdown. A "temporary spending measure" was approved that extended government functioning, albeit at a reduced rate, for another seven weeks. But the bill also cut several programs by "as much as 25% below last year's levels." (*NYT*, January 27). It eliminated 10 programs outright and cut others like the Clinton-supported national service program. Federal aid to family planning programs overseas was slashed. The right to abortion at overseas federal medical facilities was eliminated. It has already been eliminated in federal facilities within the U.S.

Under this bill, \$3.1 b. was cut in a single year in funds for education, with the largest portion a \$1.1 b. annual reduction in Title I aid to school districts with poor children. This represented a 17% reduction compared to last year's spending.

Embarrassed liberals in both parties maneuvered to maintain their credibility among their constituents.

Bemoaning the fate of education, politicians, expert in the game of public deception, ran to the media to protect what they perceived as their own political backside. Vermont's Republican governor James Jeffords complained that "Layoff

notices will have to be sent out in March." Detroit mayor Dennis Archer announced that 419 teachers would have to be sent layoff notices. Kennedy protested that Boston schools would have to institute cuts amounting to 15% of their budget.

### THE DEBT LIMIT PLOY

The most recent bipartisan maneuvers to transfer additional billions from working people to the ruling rich concerned the debate over the new March 1 deadline on raising the nation's \$4.9 trillion debt limit to avoid a government default to U.S. and international creditors.

The U.S. debt reached this statutory limit on November 15. Treasury Secretary Robert E. Rubin, however, was permitted to use monies in pension fund accounts to prevent the Government from defaulting on bond interest and other obligations. But now that the threat to default on the debt, never seriously considered by either ruling class party, has been effectively utilized to justify additional billions in budget cuts, a bipartisan effort is underway to increase the statutory debt limit. An initial bill submitted by New York Senator Patrick Moynihan proposes to increase the limit to \$5.4 trillion.

Look at the mathematics! Moynihan's proposal means permitting the government to borrow an additional \$500 billion to pay off debts to capitalist creditors. The interest on the U.S. debt, the largest in the world, currently amounts to some 27% of the entire annual \$1.5 trillion U.S. budget. Payment of this interest is sacrosanct. Default is unthinkable, unless and until, of course, the degeneration of the economic foundations of U.S. capitalism makes payment literally impossible. Today, however, the mere hint of a possible technical default caused leading investment banking institutions to threaten to devalue key bonds held by the ruling class.

The elimination of the interest on the debt paid annually to the billionaire rich who own U.S. and world financial institutions would more than balance the entire U.S. budget, whose deficit last year amounted to \$190 billion. But this is not what the ruling class politicians have in mind when they refer to "deficit reduction."

The January 25 *New York Times* illustrated quite clearly how the debt issue was manipulated to serve capitalist ends. "Congressional Republicans said today that they would abandon the national debt as a weapon against President Clinton," the paper wrote, "if he would support modest budget and tax cuts as a 'downpayment' on a balanced budget."

In a speech made prior to Clinton's January 23 State of the Union address,

Newt Gingrich proposed that these particular tit-for-tat "modest budget cuts" be limited. "They would" according to Gingrich, "incorporate only elements that Mr. Clinton was ready to accept."

Clinton in his State of the Union address was more than obliging. He urged immediate enactment of the cuts that the Republicans and his administration had in common. Chairman of the House Budget Committee, John Kasich estimated the new agreement could achieve "a total of \$50 billion to \$80 b. in [additional] deficit reduction." Kasich added that the cuts were "not controversial." Translation: they would impact the working class not the ruling class.

Another ploy to transfer additional billions of working class tax money to the rich, centers around the Congressional debate over a tax cut. Republicans initially proposed to grant the ruling rich and the otherwise wealthy \$354 b. in tax cuts over the next seven years.

Clinton has already agreed to give these capitalist elites a more modest \$130 b. over the same period. The Republicans "compromised," pairing their demands to \$177 b. The difference will be negotiated in ways that the American people will never know about.

In the name of "reducing deficits," or "balancing budgets," the political representatives of capital have sought to justify their policies in the name of "preserving the nation." Scapegoating working people, the poor, the elderly, immigrants and oppressed nationalities more generally, ruling class ideologues and their kept media seek to justify their anti-social policies with economic jargon designed to deflect attention from themselves as they loot the public treasury.

The elimination of corporate welfare in the form of tax breaks and outright grants annually paid out to the ruling rich in the United States, would immediately end all budget deficits, for this year and all others. Corporate welfare in America is estimated to run to \$250 b. annually.

But these kinds of measures are unthinkable for the bipartisan politicians who run the U.S. Congress. Their legalized transfer of wealth from the public treasury to their pockets is designed to preserve their system against all opponents, not to meet the needs of the 95% of all Americans who have little or nothing to gain from their actions.

"There is now broad bipartisan agreement that permanent deficit spending is over," said Clinton. But he neglected to say that deficit spending to pay the interest and principal to capitalist banking institution will continue and expand.

Again referring to the deficit, Clinton stated. "I compliment the Republicans for the energy and determination they have brought to this task."

He added, "And I think the Democrats for passing the largest deficit reduction plan in history in 1993, which has already cut the deficit in half in nearly three years." He neglected to mention that the \$365 b. deficit three years ago was a product of Republican, and Democratic Party war spending and other gifts to the ruling rich designed to both police the world and line their pockets, while priming the failing Keynesian capitalist pump.

The single largest budget item, the military, was left untouched. In fact, the \$265 b. military appropriations bill approved by Congress and signed by Clinton, gave the Pentagon more than the President had originally requested.

"We are near agreement on sweeping welfare reform," continued Clinton in his address to the nation. But he neglected to state the costs in human misery.

"I challenge every state to give all parents the right to choose which public school their children attend, and let teachers form new schools with a charter they can keep only if they do a good job." The President neglected to clarify that this was a reference to a coming ruling class project designed to steal funds from public education and transfer them to private enterprise. Clinton's reference to the privatization of public education signals another assault on working people in the interests of capital.

On pensions reform, Clinton was at his ruling class and gentle best. "I challenge every business that can possibly afford it to provide pensions for their employees." Few, if any volunteers for this "challenge" are expected.

On the environment, Clinton also extended an open hand to the corporate elite: "To businesses, we are saying: If you can find a cheaper more efficient way than government regulations to meet tough pollution standards, then do it as long as you do it right." Environmental rhetoric aside, Clinton's last "temporary spending measure," for the first time in years, led a significant layer of environmental groups to protest the hidden measures contained therein to gut major portions of existing environmental legislation and funding.

But on immigration, President Clinton showed the clenched fist: "We are increasing border patrols by 50%, he said. The following week the government announced a record number of arrests of Mexican immigrants. In a single day, some 2,500 were arrested crossing the Mexican border. Scapegoating the poor will

continue. Clinton took another bow for his accomplishments in the arena of federal employment: "Today," he said, "the Federal workforce is 200,00 employees smaller than the day I took office. The Federal government is the smallest it has been in thirty years, and getting smaller every day. The remaining federal workforce is composed of Americans who are working

harder and smarter to make sure that the quality of our services does not decline."

### RULING CLASS BIPARTISANSHIP

"Centrists" like Bill Clinton, "left-wingers" like Edward Kennedy and Jesse Jackson, freshman super-conservative Republicans and their equivalents among the 'Blue Dog' Democrats, all these politicians and their parties are defenders of a declining capitalism that is compelled by

## Debt? Look at the Profits!

Bill Onasch argues that the "Great Budget Battle" has little to do with debt. And the ideological obsessions of the Republican right are leading many capitalists to shift their support to more 'moderate' candidates. Including Democratic incumbent Bill Clinton

Both the Republican-controlled Congress and the Democratic White House consider that a balanced budget is a sacred, self-evident prescription for economic health. In fact there is no consensus about this holy principle among bourgeois economists. Balanced budgets — where the government takes in at least as much as it spends — have been rare in the 20th century. And there has only been one two-year period in US history — under president Andrew Jackson's term — when Washington was debt-free and turned a surplus.

The neo-liberals claim that a state deficit must be balanced, just as every family continually manages its own expenditure in function of its income. But this family budget doesn't hold water. Few people worry about spending more than they earn in any given year. If we did exercise such restraint, we wouldn't be customers for buying houses, cars, or sending our kids to college. Debt financing has become essential to both families and government. As long as debts can be properly serviced they contribute to a profitable economy [...]

The fact of the matter is that the Great Budget Battle has little to do with debt. It has a lot more to do with redistributing wealth and power in this country to

the benefit of the ruling class, at the expense of the working class [...]

Are there any real differences between Clinton and the Republicans? One pundit suggests that Clinton reflects the thinking of the Fortune 500 [the country's largest corporations] while [Republican demagogue] Newt Gingrich's supporters reflect the interests of strip-mall [shopping center] merchants.

The Republican right 'Contract On America' crowd is more ideological, while Clinton and the New Democrats are more pragmatic. Which puts moderate Republican challengers to Clinton such as Bob Dole in a difficult position.

Top ruling circles seem increasingly disaffected from the Republican Right. A recent *Business Week* editorial complained: "The Republicans have stuffed their temporary spending and debt limit-extension bills with extraneous - but politically charged - measures. There is, for example, a death-row rider [amendment] that limits the ability of convicts to appeal their sentences. Not much to do with budgets and deficits there... The major players - President Clinton, Speaker Gingrich, Senator Dole - profess to want to balance the budget. They

are not far from a deal. It's time for politicians to start negotiating in earnest. Stop acting, and get off the stage."

The ruling class has definite practical objectives in Washington. They want to shift more of the tax burden from themselves to the working class. They seek to weaken the "safety net" to keep workers in line. They want more deregulation and privatization. And they want a stable currency and a strong bond market. All this is much more important to them than death-row appeals, trimester [late] abortions, or prayer in the schools.

It is of course futile to call on politicians to stop acting. The political minions of the bosses wouldn't get very far if they frankly stated their subservience to Big Business. The Comeback Kid [Clinton] has, in the past, occasionally stumbled over his lines but he seems to be a good bet to keep his role another season. He will probably get the nod from the show's principal financial backers. And he has already been blessed by the labor bureaucracy, who greeted him at the AFL-CIO [trade union confederation] convention with chants of "Four More Years!" ★

Source: Bulletin in Defense of Marxism #130, January/February 1996



its very nature to cut deeper into the social fabric of American life in order to maximize profit rates.

Every cut, every budgetary minus, in health care, welfare, education, environmental protection, and the myriad of other social services that American workers have fought for and won in past decades, is a direct plus, a direct grant to the ruling rich whose domination or control of government has one purpose, to defend and advance the interests of capital against all comers from the U.S. working class and their allies, to the oppressed of the world who suffer direct U.S. military intervention or indirect methods of maintaining their neo-colonies with the help of their local patrons.

The daily attempt of the ruling class elite and its controlled media, to portray American politics as a vibrant and democratic arena for a debate over essential differences and ideologies, is absolutely essential for the functioning of capitalism. It is needed to convince as many as possible that their interests are being considered by at least one of the two capitalist parties.

This 'three shell game' is not limited by any means to the arena of politics. Literally every government institution of this country operates to advance the interest of the capitalist class. A January 3 headline in the Business Section of the *New York Times* makes this point quite well. It reads, "G.M. Reports Record Profits, Party Because of Tax Gains." The article begins: "General Motor Corporation's core business suffered several reversals last year, but nimble work by the company's tax accountants sent its net income soaring to another record in the fourth quarter and for the year."

G.M., the nation's largest auto maker, reported that a series of problems combined "to reduce its pretax profits for the automotive operations by 42 percent in the last quarter."

"But the conclusion of several tax disputes," the *Times* notes, "some of which dated to 1982, allowed G.M. to post a gain of 19% in net income to about \$1.87 b. in the fourth quarter." How many billions the government's tax courts had to pay G.M. to turn a 42% loss into a 19% gain would not be too difficult a math problem to solve!

Profits are increased by a host of techniques from the most obvious, on site union-busting efforts, lower wages and health care benefits, to the seemingly

incomprehensible manipulation of international currency rates of exchange.

The largest source of "profits" however, is the combined revenue the federal, state and local governments collect in the form of taxes from American working people. It is fight over the redistribution of this income from us to them, that is at the heart of the budget battle.

The fact that there are some differences between the mega-corporations, financial institutions, and their political ruling class leaders, is what generates the "heat" and occasional excess in some of the debates. In the end, however, the booty is shared, more or less in proportion to the relative strength of the contending ruling class factions.

There are no defenders of the interests of the working class in this arena. The working class, lacking its own political party, is

## Snatching T

The recent defeat of workers locked out by the Staley corn sweetener company of Decatur, Illinois follows a three year battle, combining local militancy with inventive solidarity networking and public outreach. Union leadership bears a heavy responsibility for this defeat, which has discouraged labor militants across the country.

by C.J. Hawking

THREE DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS, THE US labor movement suffered a terrible blow. The locked-out Staley workers of Decatur, Illinois brought their more than three-year battle against the multinational conglomerate, Staley/Tate and Lyle, to a close; 56% of strikers voted to accept the company's latest contract.

This contract virtually eliminates safety, seniority, and the grievance procedure and demands the harsh conditions of twelve-hour rotating shifts every thirty days. The same offer had

been rejected by 96% of the membership in October 1992. Members also voted down by 56%, in July 1995, a similar offer, which demanded twelve-hour rotating shifts every six days.

### SO WHAT WENT WRONG?

In early November 1995, John Sweeney, the newly-elected president of the AFL-CIO, promised forty staff members for the Staley campaign, including twelve full timers for the nationwide campaign to pressure Pepsi, which accounts for 30% of Staley's corn sweetener sales. Tens of thousands of callers from across the country complained to Pepsi about their ties to Staley. Sweeney vowed to make the Pepsi campaign the "number one



largely excluded from the Congressional debate.

When big money is involved, the matter is never left to chance. The entire capitalist system, from the construction of the budget, to every tax law, to interest rates, to what country will be invaded, etc., is decided a ruling elite, a tiny number of ruling class families that sit on the top of the ruling class structure, perhaps 1% of the 1% that already owns 40% of the nation's wealth and controls significant portions of the rest.★

# at from the Jaws of Victory?

priority" of his new office.

But the United Paperworkers International Union insisted that they were in control of the campaign. Sweeney, reluctant to challenge a union president so soon after his close election, bowed to UPIU President Wayne Glenn and apparently ordered his staff to back off.

A reliable source inside Pepsi-Co sent word to the Decatur workers that Pepsi would find another supplier if Staley did not end the dispute by January 1, 1996, the expiration date of their Pepsi contract.

Despite this strong situation, the UPIU imposed a third vote on the striking workers. An assistant to UPIU president Wayne Glenn told a Decatur radio station he would "hate to even think" about the contract being rejected. The International blatantly undermined the local union leadership, while stating its position was "neutral" on the contract vote.

The UPIU International was quick to cite the \$2 million in picket pay provided to the local as a sign of its loyalty. It has also been quick to take credit for the campaign which convinced Miller beer to stop buying Staley product in November 1994. In fact, this victory was the result of tireless efforts by the Decatur local spreading its message against Miller across the country, rather than any efforts from the International. Likewise, efforts of the UPIU International on the Pepsi campaign were mediocre at best, relying heavily on the solidarity committees already established by the local. Twice it thwarted efforts for effective demonstrations at the Pepsi headquarters in Purchase, New York. Consistently, it cautioned workers and supporters in actions against Pepsi, in fear it would be sued for promoting secondary boycotts.

## LOCAL HARDSHIP

In addition to the International's sell-out and blatant undermining of the local's campaign, sustained internal organizing within the local became problematic. The local became splintered as demands for national organizing grew. The local's activists were invigorated by the support of unionists across the country and the success of the Miller campaign, but attention to the less militant members waned. The split in the union became more pronounced when in early December, 1995 Jim Shinall became the Local president-elect. While militant "Road Warriors" were out of town, Shinall

and his supporters were going to the picket lines and organizing disgruntled workers into surrendering. Preaching surrender, hefty severance packages, enhanced pensions, and flagrant lies about Road Warriors stealing money, Shinall found a tired and demoralized audience.

## THE BETRAYAL

The day after Shinall's election, the company announced its new contract offer. The company sweetened the severance, offering workers with over twenty years in the plant a \$30,000 severance. The company, however, was deceptive about the pension plan, which Shinall also endorsed.

## THE LONG WAY BACK

Of the 760 locked-out workers, only 181 will return to the plant. Most of those returning are in their late 40's and early 50's - too young to retire, too "old" to be hired elsewhere and accumulate a decent pension. After undergoing drug and alcohol testing and a week of "orientation" during which supervisors have already predicted there will be firings, workers will be "trained" by scabs for four months. The contract's unlimited subcontracting, twelve-hour rotating shifts, loss of seniority, grievance and safety conditions have, in effect, snuffed out fifty years of collective bargaining.

## SPARKING A NATIONAL SHIFT

Although the surrender by the 56% majority of Staley workers is a major and tragic defeat, their fight will have a lasting impact with significant lessons for the future. Not only did they educate and inspire unionists across the globe, their battle changed the leadership within the AFL-CIO.

In February, 1995 seventy union members from Decatur went to Bal Harbor, Florida to confront the AFL-CIO leadership at their annual meeting. The "New York Times" carried this front-page story as the red-t-shirted unionists questioned AFL-CIO officials in the hallways on their way to meetings. The question was posed with urgency: "What are you doing about the union people in Decatur?" For the first time in history an AFL-CIO President, Lane Kirkland, stepped down from his position shortly thereafter. Several Washington insiders have revealed that Kirkland could not

withstand the pressure brought to bear by the Staley workers and their nationwide network of supporters.

In the subsequent October election, Kirkland's appointed successor Tom Donahue was defeated by John Sweeney, who ran on a vow that "I'd rather block bridges than build bridges," referring to the futility of labor-management cooperation and the need for "a new voice" from labor. The newly elected Sweeney invited locked-out Staley worker Dan Lane, who was fifty-seven days into his hunger strike, to address the convention delegates, marking a rare moment indeed that a rank-and-file member addressed the AFL-CIO assembly.

## BUILDING NATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Close to 100 people attended the founding meeting of the Chicago Staley Workers Solidarity Committee just three short weeks into the lockout. The local welcomed these supporters, union and non-union alike. Solidarity committees were formed shortly thereafter in other key cities. As the local designed its strategy, key leaders from Chicago and other cities were invited to participate and advise.

Solidarity committees were then able to mobilize hundreds of people to Decatur rallies and to pressure Miller and Pepsi. Soon committees were holding their own local rallies in support of the Staley workers. The local welcomed unpaid, full-time organizers from Detroit, St. Louis and Chicago into their Campaign For Justice Office, further strengthening the ties to the solidarity committees.

In contrast, when the unions from Decatur's Caterpillar and Firestone plants went out on strike in June and July 1994, the UAW and United Rubber Workers (URW) Internationals became fierce gatekeepers of their fights, relying on traditional strategies which discouraged involvement from outside supporters and lacked creativity. Instead, the UAW opted to hire a public relations firm to design a campaign to draw support.

This top-down approach was also used in their in-plant strategy, where the International would turn the work-to-rule campaign on and off like a faucet, leaving workers baffled and disempowered. Although the UAW and URW workers faced egregious union-busting working conditions similar to the Staley workers, the Internationals halted grassroots organizing that could have invigorated workers and supporters.

Before the lockout, the Staley workers went door-to-door in Decatur explaining the principles of the local's stance. Most Decatur residents were sympathetic and,



when the lockout occurred, hundreds posted signs of support for the local on their lawns. Community outreach continued during the lockout as workers sought a meeting with local clergy and congregations. Workers were encouraged to talk to their pastors, citing the Biblical basis for the dignity of work.

Six months into the lockout, sixty Decatur pastors placed an ad in the local Sunday paper calling for the company to end the lockout. Subsequently, the company met with the pastors, but the result wasn't exactly what Staley desired: several pastors committed themselves to further strengthen their support for the local. Decatur clergy then reached out to other clergy, nationally and internationally, sparking coverage and supportive actions across the globe.

The African-American workers were organized into a caucus and first undertook building for a labor presence in the annual Decatur Martin Luther King parade. The city of Decatur, which organized and controlled the parade, told the workers that they were welcome to march but that union banners and placards were not permitted because "Dr. King had nothing to do with labor."

Outraged, the African-American workers defied the order by carrying signs and banners which attempted to liberate the ignorance of city officials. Under Black-organized leadership for the first time, scores of white union members marched, forming the largest contingent in the parade.

Three months after this event came the largest interracial parade in Decatur's history, as workers commemorated the anniversary of Dr. King's assassination. After marchers carried banners proclaiming "Labor Rights Equals Civil Rights" and shouted "Black and White, United We Fight," through the streets, they streamed into

Decatur's largest Black church to hear speeches from national civil rights and labor leaders.

Three weeks later, marking the first anniversary of the lockout, over 400 people crossed over the Staley property

line in non-violent protest. Police sprayed the crowd with pepper gas, with the rank-and-file Staley workers in front suffering the worst of its effects.

As in any union, problems of racism and sexism troubled the local and initially

## Biggest General Motors Strike in 25 Years

by Dianne Feeley

What started on March 5 as a local labor dispute at two General Motors brake-parts plants in Dayton, Ohio snowballed into the largest strike against GM since 1970. By the end of the 17-day strike, most North American assembly plants, and 30 parts plants were shut down. Over 165,000 workers were out at the strike's height: the vast majority laid off because of a shortage of brake parts. Because the Dayton plants supply more than 90% of the brake components used in GM vehicles - and because just-in-time inventory makes the system vulnerable - the strike cut GM's North American production by 75%. GM's losses totalled approximately \$750 million.

At the heart of the strike was the issue of outsourcing, the growing practice of buying parts from independent parts suppliers. "Lean and mean production" is based on a two-tiered production system, with the second, lower tier being the parts suppliers, whose labor costs are typically one-third lower. The secret to the cheaper cost? Only one in five parts suppliers is unionized. Spending on outsourcing in the United States will exceed \$100 billion this year.

Of all the auto makers, GM has the most extensive network of parts plants. It has been the slowest of the big three to cut costs aggressively by selling off its plants. Outside suppliers account for 67% of the dollar value of a typical Chrysler, 61% of the value of a Ford, and only 57% of the value of a GM vehicle.

Although the General Motors-United Auto Workers (UAW) contract doesn't allow strikes over outsourcing, the Dayton local charged GM with not keeping its promises for additional jobs and investment to upgrade the plant's technology. This failure led to GM's recent decision to equip the 1998 Camaro and Firebird with Robert Bosch antilock break systems. This would cost Dayton workers 128

future jobs.

Over the past 25 years both unemployment and forced overtime has been increasing. According to Juliet Schor's *The Overworked American* (NY: Basic Books, 1992), the average U.S. worker puts in an additional 168 hours a year, or nearly an additional month's worth of work. This is particularly true in the auto industry, where the nine-hour day and six-day work week are typical. In fact, the UAW estimates that 59,000 jobs would be created if plants were limited to a 40-hr. week.

The media portrays auto workers as highly paid, with no right to complain about their jobs because they are so well compensated. But the successful 1994 Flint strike to force GM to hire more workers (and thus reduce forced over-time) dramatized the fact that workers want to be able to do something else with their lives besides work. That strike was led by militants from New Directions, a small but articulate reform caucus inside the UAW. GM agreed to hire 779 workers - the first new hires in the entire GM system in eight years.

The International UAW authorized the Dayton strike in order to strengthen its hand in the weeks before the bargaining opens for a new three-year contract with the Big Three. (The current contract expires on September 14.) Since his election last year, UAW president Stephen Yokich has vowed to take on the out-sourcing issue. Yokich's militant speeches, if backed up by UAW muscle, would be a big turnaround for the union, which has lost half its membership over the last 15 years, primarily as a result of out-sourcing.

GM drew a line in the sand because it must cut costs, beat back competitors and arrest a market-share drop. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, GM is more committed today to its cost-cutting efforts than it was two years ago, it had more cash to sustain a strike, and it showed it was willing to

sacrifice market share and profits to win major concessions from the UAW. GM is determined to preserve its right to outsource whenever and wherever it needs to do so. The dispute was really about GM's fight to remain "competitive" in a global economy versus the needs and aspirations of its work force.

A GM-UAW agreement was ratified by a vote of the Dayton workers on March 22. While the mainstream media has been downplaying the significance of the agreement, it appears the Dayton workers got what they asked for: GM reaffirmed its promise of 128 jobs, agreed to new technology at the Dayton plants and will pay the work force \$5 million in compensation for past grievances. Within this framework, the agreement does allow GM to use outside suppliers. Therefore this strike did not resolve the issue of outsourcing. However no one expected that it could.

From the beginning of the strike the UAW International leadership consciously confined the issues to very limited demands. They never used the media's spotlight on Dayton as an opportunity to attack corporate America's insatiable need to cut back on decent jobs. At the strike's conclusion Richard Shoemaker, UAW vice president in charge of GM workers, commented, "This doesn't set the stage for anything, it simply puts behind us the issues in this dispute."

GM intends to shed more of its parts plants and accelerate its outsourcing. Only a union committed to organizing the unorganized work force can turn that situation around. What this strike showed was that a section of the U.S. working class is prepared. ★

The author is a leading member of the U.S. group Solidarity.

## The UAW's Disastrous Bargaining

hampered broader support. But, during the lockout, and as a result of the Dr. King marches initiated by the African-American caucus, Jeanette Hawkins, the first African-American woman to be hired into the plant, was elected to the Bargaining Committee. Three white male candidates who supported diversifying the leadership withdrew their own candidacies and campaigned for Hawkins' election.

Prior to the King marches, only one African American had been traveling regularly with the Road Warriors. After the marches, a number of locked-out African Americans went on the road, sometimes as a Black caucus but most often with the white workers and appealing to the previously untapped support of African Americans within the labor movement.

At the beginning of the work-to-rule campaign, weekly solidarity meetings were initiated and spouses and children were invited to attend. The support from the spouses, mostly wives, cannot be understated. The wives and women workers later formed a bi-monthly support group during which the women would share the hardships of the lockout on family life.

Garnering support from other women, many wives were empowered to sustain being the main family wage-earner, and others were encouraged to enter or reenter the work force.

### FIGHT OF THE DECADE

No other local has drawn the line and waged the fight as the Staley workers have done. And the pain of knowing that Pepsi was soon to collapse from the pressure is almost unbearable.

Yet this one tragic defeat also holds 1,000 lessons for the next union to take a stand for the labor movement.

Local 7837 should be proud of those who gave of their lives for thirty long, grueling months and left workers and labor history forever changed.

Thank you, Local 7837. We shall never forget you! ★

The United Auto Workers union has forced 8,700 Caterpillar workers to end their strike. But it couldn't make them approve the "total flexibility" contract the union has negotiated with management. But UAW leadership's "bargaining relationship" will let Caterpillar's "lean and mean" management get most of what it wants anyway.

by Kim Moody

THE OFFER WAS AN ENDORSEMENT OF WHAT labor relations professor Victor Davinatz calls "Caterpillar's three-and-a-half-year commitment to restructuring its relationship with the UAW and freeing itself from the union's penchant for pattern bargaining."

As the *Wall Street Journal* put it, the major theme of this restructured relationship is, "Management is in control." They will now attempt to control the shop floor and implement total flexibility to a degree they couldn't have dreamed of under employee participation.

The agreement, which 78% of strikers refused to approve, would have carved this new regime into stone for the next six years. Management will unilaterally implement much of the contract anyway.

### TERMS OF SURRENDER

A look at the defeated contract shows that the issues go far beyond the deep economic concessions it contained. As Larry Solomon, president of UAW Local 751 in Decatur, Illinois, says, it "dismantles representation in the plant."

The plant bargaining committee would be cut by half, with no full-time representatives and no stewards at all in some areas of some plants. The remaining representatives have to get company passes to do grievance work. Further, there are restrictions on the amount of company time the union can use to write, investigate, and negotiate grievances. The number of arbitrations is reduced.

Perhaps most outrageous, the company would have the right to unilaterally reject grievances it regarded as "repetitive" or "frivolous"; there would be no appeal. To enhance in-plant competition among workers, the union's own bargaining structure would be reorganized along the lines of new "business units."

A "Temporary Special Moratoria" on free speech would ban use of the word "scab" and bar workers from in any way harassing scabs. Nor would they be able to wear apparel with anti-CAT slogans. To head off future in-plant actions, the no-strike clause would be amended to ban

about every form of "concerted" activity once guaranteed by U.S. labor law.

In case all of this is not enough to teach the workers who is boss, UAW leaders have agreed that the 150 strikers who were fired for alleged picket line militancy will be denied arbitration.

As if to mock their own pretensions to labor-management cooperation, the settlement would have made participation in employee-involvement groups a mandatory condition of employment.

### LEAN OR JUST MEAN?

The settlement swallowed every piece of "flexible" work organization Caterpillar wanted: permanent two-tier wage and benefit structure for new hires; 12-hour alternative work schedules that are "voluntary, if possible"; a part-time or temporary workforce amounting to 15% of total employment; nonunion employees doing bargaining unit work; more company authority over job reassignments; and the downsizing of the workforce as people leave or retire.

Most of the economic features are similarly lean and mean. Over the next six years, the company would take \$1.50 off the cost of living allowance. The medical plan would restrict workers to company-picked doctors and hospitals; they would have to pay 300% more to go elsewhere.

The one thing that was in the settlement for the union was the union security clause, making everyone — scab or striker — a dues-paying UAW member. In the eyes of the International union, this union security clause defines the union's relationship to management. And what hovers over the history of this long fight as a theme is the UAW leadership's continued effort to treat Caterpillar like a normal bargaining partner.

Even in the face of a company-written proposal and an overwhelming rejection, the UAW leadership will continue negotiating in what it thinks is a "bargaining relationship." Perhaps the legacy of the one-

This article was originally published in the March-April issue of *Against the Current*, with the title "Snatched from the Jaws of Victory? Staley Workers End Lockout". It has been edited here for space reasons.

Kim Moody is editor of *Labor Notes*, a monthly bulletin for the left in the American labor movement. This article is reprinted from the March issue of *Labor Notes*.

way labor-management cooperation efforts embraced by the UAW for the past decade contributed to the International's indecisiveness in this prolonged conflict.

For whatever reason, it is clear that from the start that the UAW was never willing to take off the gloves in what management saw as a bare-knuckle fight from day one.

The first strike from November 1991 through April 1992 seemed designed to avoid angering management. It began when the company had nine months of inventory [stocks]. Bill Casstevens, who was in charge for the International UAW, actually negotiated with the company to let them produce parts, thus building up inventory even more.

Casstevens was so in love with his former bargaining partner he tried to "kill 'em with kindness," says Larry Solomon. The company, of course, greeted this weakness with the announcement it would hire permanent replacements. The International collapsed before this threat and ordered members back to work.

## PUBLIC RELATIONS

The in-plant campaign that followed the first strike was an on-again-off-again affair. Most big actions were directed from UAW headquarters in Detroit. Jerry Tucker, a former UAW regional director who pioneered the inside strategy in the 1980s, explained why the Caterpillar campaign didn't work. "You can't run an in-plant strategy by remote control," he said. "It has to depend on the workers' own self-organization and creativity. And it must be meant to hurt." Many Caterpillar workers demonstrated such creativity, when given their head. But the overall conduct of the fight was confused.

In the midst of this would-be campaign, the International hired Greer, Margolis, Mitchell, Burns & Associates (GMMB&A) to advise them on strategy. This Public Relations firm, which masterminded Bill Clinton's 1992 media campaign, has worked for other unions. But it is still a PR firm, not a consultant in strike strategy.

GMMB&A advised the union to drop its "war zone" rhetoric and appeal to the general public — as though CAT, which doesn't sell much to the general public, would be impressed. Playing on the theme of bargaining versus conflict, the firm told the UAW that its strategy "is not designed to help bring the company to its knees; it is designed to bring it to its senses."

Caterpillar's business sense, however, told them to ignore such appeals and go for the cost-cutting reorganization its competitors like Komatsu were pursuing. In any case, PR could not beat raw power.

The renewal of the strike in June 1994 was an inadvertent admission that the union's in-plant strategy hadn't worked. While the renewed strike targeted most of CAT's operations, there was little innovation or creativity in the union's strike tactics. If the line-crossing was large, it was

at least in part due to the confused messages the International had sent over the last several years.

## ON THE PROWL

Caterpillar management is becoming the guru of work-place reorganization and

## The Rise and Fall (?) of Pat Buchanan

by David Finkel

By March 7 the contest was over: Senator Bob Dole will be the Republican nominee to face Bill Clinton in the November presidential election. To be sure, there remain numerous state primary elections and the party conventions to come — the United States is probably the only country with a presidential campaign lasting longer than the Stanley Cup playoffs.

The real story of the Republican primary season, however, isn't Dole's victory but the ascendance of one of his defeated rivals, Patrick Buchanan. Buchanan, long-time conservative columnist, television personality and a speechwriter for the Nixon and Reagan administrations, for several weeks terrorized the Republican party elites with the specter of winning enough delegates to force a multi-ballot or brokered convention.

While it's now clear that this won't happen, Buchanan still might win enough delegates to force floor fights over abortion or immigration, or to gain prime-time coverage as he did in 1992 for his speech demanding "cultural war" against homosexuals and non-European Christian values.

In a rare display of ruling class anxiety, the March 4 issue of *Time* was largely devoted to a Buchanan-bashing spread, exposing the dangers of his opposition to free trade and his crude brand of racism. The reactionary prejudices to which Buchanan appeals are profoundly useful to bourgeois political elites, of course, so long as they are kept in the shadows and delivered in code. Not when they are starkly presented, and linked to a quasi-populist rhetoric

about corporate greed, falling wages and downsizing.

Roughly speaking, Buchanan combines the least savory features of Canada's Reform Party chief Preston Manning with the ethos of France's Jean-Marie Le Pen and Russia's Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. His political project is to bring together the grievances of working-class victims of economic globalization with the religious right and elements of the "Patriot" (militia and white-supremacist) movements. In this sense he accurately reflects the political exorcism of the past decade: the rise of right-wing ideology and the decay of the labor movement.

Nonetheless, these elements are an uneasy amalgamation. Buchanan's long-time flirtations with anti-semitism make him highly attractive to elements on the fringes of neo-nazism and the Ku Klux Klan. But they have to be deeply hidden from the evangelical Christian right, which for its own messianic reasons is fanatically pro-Zionist. And while appealing to working class concerns, Buchanan must try to conceal his long-time hostility to unions.

These contradictions partially explain the fanatical zeal with which Buchanan attacks abortion rights and gays: convenient targets for fundamentalists and Aryan Nations types alike. Yet the Republican elites understand that such a frontal attack on abortion is the sure road to national electoral defeat.

This made it all the more important for the Republican leadership to defeat Buchanan first. Thus, only after on March 6, after it had become clear that Buchanan's momentum had been checked, did one

leading Republican ideologue, Jack Kemp, come out in support of another of Dole's rivals, Steve Forbes, who is attempting to revive Reagan-era "supply-side" economics and a "flat tax" that would give hundreds of billions of dollars in tax relief to wealthy Americans. Kemp would not have made such an endorsement at a time when it might have fatally weakened Dole and opened the door for Buchanan.

For their part, Democratic Party liberals seem determined to ignore the lessons and the warning that Buchanan's appeal holds. No one challenged Bill Clinton from the left in the Democratic primaries, aside from the Winnipeg professor who briefly campaigned in New Hampshire. The issues of massive layoffs in the face of rising corporate profits, of unfair taxation and declining living standards — issues that normally and naturally belong to the left — have been effectively hijacked by a crypto-fascist because the left remained silent about them.

Rallying around Clinton, the Democrats will probably hold the White House against a lackluster and vacuous Bob Dole in November. In any case, the differences between these candidates will be the smallest since the Carter-Ford contest in 1976. Yet the politics of Buchanan, amalgamating racism, misogyny and false promises to the working class, are likely to continue gaining ground — just as they are in Canada, in Europe, the former USSR and elsewhere, and for the same fundamental reasons. ★

The author is a leading member of the US organization Solidarity

union humiliation. Following the end of the first strike in 1992, the "Wall Street Journal" reported, CAT called together a meeting of managers from other construction, farm implement, and auto companies. The topic was breaking pattern bargaining.

Today, in the wake of its victory Caterpillar appears to be on the prowl again. One of its executives showed up at the Three Rivers, Michigan plant of American Gear & Axle, an operation that General Motors sold to private investors in 1994. The company is still a GM supplier.

It may be that the Big Three auto makers won't go as far in bargaining next year as CAT did, and suppliers like American Gear & Axle may not yet be ready for a confrontation. But Caterpillar's agents are out there encouraging their colleagues. Labor should take note and do the same. ★

# Ontario's Labour Upsurge

by Julia Barnett

Activists in Canada followed media coverage of the recent French strikes with great enthusiasm. On December 11th, 10,000 of us found ourselves in the streets of London, Ontario in below zero weather on a one day strike called by the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL), "Hey Mike, hey Harris, we'll shut you down like Paris!". The current wave of strike action in Ontario and the many planned mobilizations to come are a result of a political/economic course which began in the mid 1970's under the Federal Liberal Party government. Within a Canadian context this meant the movement to control the public sector and slashing the social welfare state as Canadians knew it to be since World War II. Today in Ontario under the Tory government led by Premier Mike Harris this dismantling is occurring at an unprecedented speed.

The 1980's Federal Tory government led by Brian Mulroney marked a major shift in the strategy of Canadian business, which demanded a comprehensive attack on the social welfare state. The Tories' main accomplishments were the severe cutting of federal transfer payments to provinces' social programs. The Tories also paved the way for cuts to unemployment insurance benefits and eligibility, tax cuts, low interest loans and handouts to private corporations.

The international Neo-Liberal agenda is transforming the highly decentralized Canadian State (the ten provinces [1] and two territories are directly responsible for health care, education, social welfare and labour relations).

The Federal government in the 1980's took the lead in the neoliberal offensive but didn't have control over all the provincial governments. The New Democratic Party (NDP)[2] had control in the two most industrialized, populated and richest in resource provinces. In Ontario the entire labour movement endorsed the NDP and to all (especially the NDP) their victory was a great surprise. At the time in Ontario the

Labour leadership had no criticisms of the NDP, nor did it generate a political analysis or debate on how to relate to the NDP once in power. The same held true for most of the social movements. A few organizations did put pressure on the NDP government, including the Ontario Coalition For Abortion Clinics (OCAC) [3] who demonstrated to demand further funding for free standing abortion clinics throughout the province. But social movements including feminists and the labour movement (some of OCAC's key allies in the fight for abortion rights) harshly criticized OCAC for demonstrating against the NDP and for criticizing the "voice of working people".

Two years into office the Ontario NDP imposed public sector rollbacks that even the Federal Tories wouldn't try. The Social Contract included wage freezes, mandatory unpaid leaves and the paving of the way for thousands of public sector jobs to be eliminated. NDP governments in Saskatchewan and British Columbia announced similar policies.

While the NDP provincially was introducing some of the worst austerity measures in years, the Liberals came back to power at the Federal level, with the pretence of making the federal deficit the number one issue of the day. The North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA) was passed during this time, while in Quebec, the Parti Quebecois (PQ) re-opened the National Question.

After the defeat of the NDP in Ontario's last election, Conservative Premier Mike Harris openly declared a zero deficit goal, 30% reduction in taxes, pro-workfare, etc... in the name of a "Common Sense Revolution" — Ontario's own Newt Gingrichification.

Since Harris' on June 8, 1995 we have seen more movement and opposition to government policies than in the previous decades. June 28, 1995, the day Harris's cabinet was sworn in, 1,000 people demonstrated at the legislature. One month later 3,000 welfare activists stood at the

same place protesting 21% cuts in their welfare payments. On September 27 more than 5,000 returned to Queens Park to mark the reopening of the legislature. Similar demonstrations took place throughout the Province. This was the first of many demonstrations where police began using batons to beat demonstrators. Wherever Harris goes in Ontario there are demonstrators and/or protest actions.

This is all taking place with a divided labour leadership, fragmented and small organized left and for the most part single issued social movements. The Ontario Federation of Labour at its November convention rallied against the Harris government Bill 7, the new Tory "right to work" legislation that replaced the NDP's labour law. On December 11th a one day strike in London, Ontario was called by the OFL. On January 13, 37,000 Catholic school teachers and supporters marched on the legislature — the largest demonstration at Queen's Park in half a century. February 6 was a National Student Day of Protest organized across universities. Demonstrations were held to protest against the cuts to federal transfer payments for education and against tuition hikes. In Toronto 1,200 students held a sit-in at the legislature. The result was the arrest of four students charged with the draconian old "intimidating the legislature" law, which carries a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment. Polls showed that public support for Harris had shrunk from close to 60% in the summer, to 37%.

Meanwhile the Ontario Labour Leadership has not been willing or able to mobilize against the architects of NAFTA, Neo-Liberalism, or even examine the real divisions between organised labour and the NDP. This is due in part to its 1960's model of "Business Unionism" and partly to its blanket support of electoralist strategies for the NDP every four years.

Five big "Pink Slip" unions [4] disagreed with the OFL's decision to break with the NDP after the Social Contract.

These labour leaders openly support purging critics and want to produce a centrally controlled OFL-NDP alliance. This strategy was played out at the OFL convention when Leaders of the largest public sector union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), had its leading progressive and critical voice to the NDP pushed out by the OFL slated candidate, supported by the pink slip "gang of five". Every action called by the OFL since its convention has been based on opportunistic relationships with social movements, a lack of alliances with trade union movements in other provinces or with Quebec's labour movement which is tied to the bourgeois nationalist Bloc Quebecois Party.

The Ontario Federation of Labour under the leadership of Gord Wilson called for another day of action against the Harris government, in Hamilton, Ontario. This was the largest labour demonstration in Ontario and even in North America, 25,000 came on Friday 23rd and over 120,000 on Saturday 24th to protest the Tory Party convention being held in Hamilton. These days of actions or strike days are impressive and invigorating but still limited and defensive. Nor are they tied to the similar struggles underway in the Maritime provinces, British Columbia, Alberta or Quebec. The labour leadership has no real strategy nor support for a broad based united fightback, and would rather wait four years, then try to elect a new NDP government.

What does all of this mean for the 67,000 Ontario government workers who voted in a two to one margin strike vote in mid February? The Tories have promised to cut up to 27,000 government jobs. Under Bill 7, the Tory labour law, the government has the right to take away "successor rights" (the right to keep jobs), unions and collective agreements when services are contracted out or privatized. At the same time the Tories gave themselves the right to unilaterally re-classify jobs and cut wages. The Tories slashed a pension entitlement of OPSEU members laid off before reaching early retirement. The Tories aim is to roll back seniority, job security and anything that is a barrier to privatization and the restructuring of provincial health, social, or welfare services. The only gain made under the NDP labour law that was left under Bill 7 was the right for OPSEU to strike. The current OPSEU leadership is in a very real bind. They are negotiating their terms of surrender rather than make real gains for their members. However, the union has the real potential to galvanize broad based support against the overall Harris agenda. Since the strike began there have been strike support demonstrations across the province. Over 90% Of OPSEU workers are on the

picket lines.

The challenge now is to link the fight for OPSEU members' jobs with the fight to defend union rights, welfare, and health care — Metro Toronto Hospital Workers are in the middle of negotiations and facing an 18% cut in pay with 12 hospitals being threatened to close. We need a united front strategy. Socialist and labour activists should work to bring a range of forces together to make an impact both within labour movement and in the various social movements we are active. We mustn't let the labour bureaucracy derail a real grass rooted political movement to bring down

## Power in the union

J. Melton watched as 120,000 demonstrators marched past the Hamilton Convention Centre, where Ontario Premier Mike Hariss' Tory party was meeting.

Riot cops had secured the building. The Convention Centre — apparently a product of the "bunker nouveau" architectural school — was now revealed to have been a smart tactical choice by the Tories. I found the place where the parade route passed the Convention Centre's semi-underground entrance. Parade marshals in orange-skull-caps formed a line there. Big guys. About six metres behind them were piled gargantuan concrete blocks, like tank traps from Stalingrad. And behind that cement, rows of bullet-proofed riot cops with POLICE emblazoned on their chests peered out.

I asked the orange-caps why they were there. "We're just trying to keep anyone from getting hurt," one told me. "We're Hamilton Steelworkers and we're just trying to protect Hamilton." And they practiced a comradely sort of crowd control, laughing and joking with people as they asked them to leave the cops alone.

In a few minutes, the march came into sight: "Hey Mike! Hey Mike! How'd you like a general strike?" The riot cops all stopped talking and stood very straight. Most marchers didn't realize what they were passing at first. But one glimpse of the riot police made it clear: here were the Tories holed up. This was it.

The marchers — teachers, nurses, students, factory-workers, the unemployed —

shouted at the police behind the Steelworkers: "Look at those assholes!" "Traitors!" "You're jobs are next!" "Join us!" "Shame! Shame! Shame!"

The Steelworkers let them voice their anger, as long as they kept moving — which was the key to calm, they told me. "It's the ones who know how to move as a group you have to worry about," one said, indicating the passing Canada's National Student Organization. They were chanting in perfect unison and slowed to jeer. But the rather frail-looking youth didn't present much of a challenge to the Steelworkers. And they soon passed.

"What we're worried about is OPSEU," one said. His brothers strained their necks to look up street for the banners of the OPSEU [civil service union]. "They are fucking angry. They're going on strike tomorrow. And the government's going to use scabs to replace them. That's who we're really waiting for."

I nodded politely and pretended to study the police camera atop CityHall. But I was really wondering how I was supposed to take seriously a bunch of angry office workers. I used to work concert security. I learned how to tell who was a threat and who wasn't. I doubt an OPSEU worker would have overly concerned me...

"Oh fuck," a voice came from behind. A Steelworker nudged me. "OPSEU", he whispered.

the Harris government — as the OPSEU slogan goes: "No justice, no peace!" ★

### Notes

Julia Barnett is a member of Socialist Challenge/Gauche Socialist, the Fourth International section in the Canadian State, and a member and activist in the Canadian Union Public Employees (CUPE) Local#840.

1. This includes Quebec.
2. The Ontario NDP was in power for the first time between 1990-1995 with a majority.
3. In the mid 1970's and 1980's OCAC was one of the key mass action pro-choice feminist organizations responsible for striking down Canada's Federal Abortion Law.
4. United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW), Service Employees International Union (SEIU), United Steel Workers of America (USWA), Canadian Electrical Power (CEP), and the International Association of Machinists (IAM).

"Over there," he pointed. The OPSEU section of the parade had stopped. Just like that As a single, disciplined unit, OPSEU halted on the proverbial dime. It was about 30 feet from the thin-orange-line. The parade sections in front of OPSEU continued, leaving a big gap.

It became clear why OPSEU workers were to be taken seriously: Unlike the drunken, atomized crowds I'd dealt with in concert security, these people were organized. And all eyes were on them.

It was the dramatic moment of the entire Days of Action. It was the message. The Steelworkers understood everything implicit in it. The Steelworkers knew that, with one word, that unit could have accelerated over that 30 feet, made a hard right turn right through the thin-orange-line and probably run right over the riot cops. (Not that they'd get to any Tories, there were many more cops inside, choking off the far narrower bottlenecks, like stairs and halls. I'd seen them through windows, loitering in stairwells.)

Having cocked the revolver, and stood there holding it, OPSEU returned the hammer to rest. And marched on.

"The fuckers," the Steelworkers laughed a little nervously. And then everyone settled down for a gentle good time around Copps Coliseum. ★

# Networking

The editor's selection of **Internet news, addresses and debates.**

## Pentagon monitors Peacenet

Internet users beware, David Corn writes in *The Nation* (March 4, 1996). A report by Charles Swett, from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict suggests using the Internet for the routine interception of global e-mail, for covert operations and propaganda campaigns, and for tracking domestic political activity, particularly that of the left. Swett reports that the "Internet could also be used offensively as an additional medium in psychological operations campaigns and to help achieve unconventional warfare objectives."

A significant portion of the report is devoted to the San Francisco-based Institute for Global Communications, which operates several computer networks, such as PeaceNet and EcoNet, that are used by progressive activists. I.G.C. conferences that might be considered noteworthy by the Pentagon, including those on anti-nuclear arms campaigns, the extreme right, social change, and "multicultural, multi-racial news." "Although it is clearly a left-wing political organization, without actually joining I.G.C. and reading its message traffic, it is difficult to assess the nature and extent of its members' actual real-world activities," writes Swett.

"We must be doing something right," reacts George Gundrey, program coordinator of I.G.C.'s PeaceNet. "But it is interesting that all of these examples [in the Pentagon report] are the most left-wing items [on our network]."

Swett proposes that the Pentagon and intelligence services conduct "routine monitoring of messages originating in other countries" in the search for information on "developing security threats." The data will be fed into filtering computers and then, if it contains any sensitive keywords, forwarded to the appropriate analyst.

Another growth area is the dirty tracks department. Noting that government officials, military officials, business people, and journalists all around the world are online, Swett envisions "Psychological Operations" campaigns in which U.S. propaganda could be rapidly disseminated to a wide audience. He adds, "The U.S. might be able to employ the Internet offensively to help achieve unconventional warfare objectives."

Swett does point to a few potential problems. The Internet is chockfull of chit-chat of no intelligence value. Retrieving useful nuggets will require monumental screening. [...] And opponents of the Pentagon might try to exploit the Internet for their own devilish ends: "If it became widely known that the Defense Department were monitoring Internet traffic for intelligence or counterintelligence purposes, individuals with personal agendas or political purposes in mind, or who enjoy playing pranks, would deliberately enter false or misleading messages." The study ends with a series of vague recommendations — to be carried out "only in full compliance with the letter and the spirit of the law, and without violating the privacy of American citizens."

Swett's office — the Pentagon's dirty tricks shop — is a newcomer to the 'electronic warfare' scene, according to David Banisar, a policy analyst for the Electronic Privacy Information Center. Banisar's group has been helping international human rights groups use encryption to protect their global e-mail, "so the spooks don't listen in".

Either the left has made much more progress in cyber-organizing than the right and "harmless" fringe groups [like the UFO-watchers], or Swett, true to institutional tradition, is overwrought about the use of the Internet by a certain parties. In any case, the would-be watchers in the defense establishment ought to be watched closely — especially if Swett's report reflects broader sentiment within the Pentagon.

David Corn is the Washington editor of *The Nation* magazine (tel. (800) 333-8536). If you have any comments or leads for follow-up stories, please contact the author at tel. (202) 546-2239 fax (202) 546-1415 E-mail <dacor@aol.com>. The Pentagon document cited in this article can be downloaded from (<http://www.fas.org/pub/gen/fas/sgp/>).

Send your contributions and questions about this column to <100666.1443@compuserve.com>

## Portugal: Youth Camp

The 13th annual youth camp of organisations in solidarity with the Fourth International will be held in late July 1996 near the town of Amarante in northern Portugal. We asked Jorge Costa of the PSR (Revolutionary Socialist Party, Portuguese section of the Fourth International) about the preparation of the camp.

### ● What are the reasons for organising the camp in Amarante?

This is where the PSR has one of its most long-standing groups. We have good relations with the municipal council. And by holding the camp here, we hope to develop the local youth section of the party. But in any case, we don't have that many branches in provincial towns.

### ● Why did you propose to host the camp in Portugal?

The youth of the PSR have, over the last four years, won an important role within certain layers of young people. Not only among students but also in wider layers, through our campaigns on some specific political themes. Our campaign for the legalisation of drugs, our intransigent anti-militarist stance and above all our participation in the students associations — both in the universities and secondary schools — in an unprecedented period of mobilisation from 1992-95 have made the PSR a political reference point for young people seeking an alternative outside the traditional political forces.

During the last elections, the PSR made a particular effort in direction of those voting for the first time in the urban centres with a high concentration of young people. We won between 3 and 5% of this vote.

For the Portuguese section, organising the camp is an opportunity for mobilising a large number of young people and establishing political and personal contact with new activists.

### ● Why are you proposing the question of Europe as a central theme?

1996 is the year of revision of the Maastricht Treaty, the time for a balance sheet on the practice and perspectives of European neo-liberalism. We conceive of Europe as a space for solidarity: which puts the struggle against Maastricht, against the attacks on workers' rights, against social exclusion, on which monetarist Europe is based, at the top of our agenda.

By organising the 1996 camp around the central theme of Europe, we hope to open space for a discussion around themes more linked to the daily activity of the youth organisations affiliated to the Fourth International. Anti-racism and immigration policies, ecology, women's struggles will of course be central themes of the camp.

Above all the goal is to make the camp into a place for education and preparation so that young activists are better prepared for the next period of struggle. In a Europe where we have to develop political alternatives to neo-liberal regression.

## Big start to Rifondazione's election campaign

Over 200,000 people demonstrated in Rome on Saturday 24 February, in response to a Communist Refoundation Party call to oppose the "authoritarian" reform of the country's political institutions. Centre-left and right-wing parties had earlier agreed to establish a French-style semi-presidential system, and implement electoral reform designed to reduce the number of parties in parliament.

But when this agreement fell apart in mid-February, the demonstration became, in effect, the opening meeting of "Rifondazione's" electoral campaign: "putting social questions back at the centre of the debate".

What a start! At the end of the 20th century, the construction of a mass communist party is not just a dream for a nostalgic few! The extraordinary participation on February 24th was much higher than at similar Rifondazione meetings in 1992 and 1994.

The following day, the party's 250-strong National Political Committee approved a non-competition pact with the centre-left Olive Tree coalition. This is expected to guarantee the party fifty deputies and senators. The link with Olive Tree is weaker than in 1994, and the two parties will stand for election under separate logos. The militant base of Rifondazione is hardly enthusiastic about the deal, but sees no alternative.

The left wing within Rifondazione refuses that such an electoral alliance be made, as if nothing has happened since the last time. After all, the Democratic Left Party (PDS), which is at the centre of Olive Tree, agrees with the right on the kind of constitutional reform needed. And it is the centrists who are strongest inside Olive Tree. With the result that Lamberto Dini, former Director of the national bank, and Treasury Minister in the Berlusconi government, has now associated himself with the centre-left coalition, along with other technocrats linked to finance capital.

"We need to reinforce Rifondazione's autonomy," Fourth International supporter Roberto Firenze told the party's National Political Committee on February 25th. "And the party should work towards the construction of a third pole in Italian politics," a combative alternative to both the right and the centre-left.

A majority of committee members eventually approved the proposal of party president Bertinotti. But, for the first time since June 1995, nine leaders of the left, including the former leaders of Proletarian Democracy and the Italian section of the Fourth International, abstained. Eight representatives of a minority current voted against the document.

**Alessandro de Robertis, Rome.**

## Youth conference in Uruguay

Over fifty youth organisations are expected to participate in the First Conference of the Southern Cone for Human Rights and Against Repression, in Colonia, Uruguay, from 3-7 April. Organisers expect 3-4,000 participants, including Fourth International comrades from the Youth Front of Uruguay's Socialist Workers' Party (PST) and the young women's group Teindira, as well as our comrades from Socialist Democracy (DS) from the Brazilian state of Porto Alegre.

Workshops will include Police and Institutional Repression; Abortion; Drugs; Alternative Means of Communication; Education; Land and house occupations; Marginalised social sectors; Games and recreation; Work and

unemployment; Urban security; Marginal culture; and Social ecology.

Contact: fax: (598 2) 95 02 47, e-mail: mundafro@chasque.apc.org. The PST can be contacted at fax: (598 2) 48 10 62

## Ukrainian miners' strike

Coal miners in Ukraine returned to work on February 16 after one of the hardest-fought strikes in the former Soviet republic in recent years. The resumption of work followed an agreement by the government to negotiate with the miners on their demand for the payment of wages owing since October, and after an initial pay-out offer had been substantially increased. As the government tries to meet insistent IMF demands for reductions in the state budget deficit, miners' wages have fallen repeatedly. By late January, the coal unions put the total unpaid wage bill at the equivalent of US\$122 million. Some disability payments to injured miners had not been paid since July.

The latest strike began on February 1. A total of 142 mines, accounting for more than 70% of industry output, shut down entirely. At almost all the remaining mines, workers refused to load coal for shipment. Trade union sources put the number of miners and other coal industry employees on strike as high as 800,000. The stoppage affected pits not just in the traditionally militant, mainly Russian-speaking Donbass region of eastern Ukraine, but also the mines of Lviv province in the Ukrainian-speaking west. As well as payment of wages owed, the miners demanded that the government pledge US\$1.5 billion in subsidies in order to renovate the industry.

On February 12, the feared energy crunch arrived, when the Russian government cut off electricity sales, after the frequency of the current in the Ukrainian network fell to critical levels. Extended blackouts followed in most areas of Ukraine. In the industrial centre of Dnipropetrovsk, electricity supplies were cut by 40%, forcing the closure of most plants. By this time, threats and promises from the government had eroded the strike to the point where the miners were no longer capable of forcing a decisive victory. On February 13 union sources reported that only 40 mines remained fully shut down, with workers in another 87 refusing to load coal.

The government's options were limited by an extensive solidarity movement. On February 14 it was reported that the Coordinating Council of Trade Unions of the Machine Building and Defence Complex, and the Association of Trade Unions of Basic Industrial Sectors, had called for an all-Ukrainian protest action on February 21. This was to include a general one-hour stoppage, around demands that included meeting the miners' claims. Nevertheless, the miners were forced to drop their call for massive state support to the coal industry, and to limit their demands to the payment of wage arrears. On February 16, with 25 mines still fully on strike, the miners' leaders announced that they had decided to suspend the stoppage and take up a government offer of talks.

The miners' movement has emerged from another hard-fought conflict with its militant traditions and popular backing recharged. For the government and the IMF, eager for the implementation of a long list of anti-worker policies, the combativity in the mining centres presents an obstacle that will not be easily overcome. But the steady collapse of the Ukrainian coal industry places a question mark over the miners' longer-term prospects.

The output of Ukraine's coal mines fell by a further 11% in 1995, to a figure less than half that of 1990. Once a leading centre of the Soviet coal industry, Ukraine is now a coal importer. The refusal of the government to invest in the coal industry has made work in the mines mortally hazardous. On February 18, three miners in the Donetsk region drowned when a cage was lowered into a shaft that had filled unexpectedly with water. The miners' deaths brought the number of fatalities in the Ukrainian mines this year to 43. The death toll continues to rise, even as output plunges. ★

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