

international

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VIEWPOINT

• Ready for peace

Colombia's guerillas

• France

Far-left unites for Euroelections

Australia	\$3.30	Ireland	£2.00	Poland	3.50 Zl
Britain	£2.00	Lebanon	US\$3.00	South Africa	R8
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Czech Republic	10 Kc	Netherlands	/6.00	Sweden	SEK 20
Denmark	Dkr 20	New Zealand	\$3.50	Taiwan	NT\$ 100
France	FF 35	Pakistan	Rs 25	Turkey	US\$1.00
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French left unity

France's largest far-left groups have united for the European elections in June. Polls show 5-8% support for the list led by Alain Krivine (LCR) and Arlette Laguiller (LO).

We asked Alain Krivine about their campaign, and what they will do if elected.

by **Laure Favières**

• What are the main challenges for this common list?

Krivine: To make visible, electorally, a current of opinion which is already present in the social sphere: the current of French opinion which is against the right-wing parties, against the far-right, and also against the policies of the current, "plural left" government.

This current has been present in social struggles since 1995. But, on the political front, it has remained marginal — apart from the respectable vote which Arlette Laguiller won in the last presidential elections, and a good score for our two organisations in the regional elections in early '98.

• The opinion polls give you 8% support. Is that realistic?

Let's be prudent about these opinion polls. The only important question is whether we pass the 5% barrier, the minimum to take any seats in the European parliament. For the first time a vote for the far left would seem useful and credible, not just a protest vote.

Make no mistake, if we get more than 5%, it will be a real event, both in France and at the European level.

To the left of the institutional parties there will at last be a credible force which rejects all the capitalist and

neoliberal policies being applied across Europe, by governments of left and right.

A good score will also be a warning to the employers, and to the "plural left" government. Their obedience to the laws of the market will cost them something!

• Communist Party leader Robert Hue says the LO-LCR list seeks to weaken his Party.

Our campaign isn't aimed against the Communist Party as such. But it is certainly aimed against that party's current leadership. The fundamental goal of our list is to organise a front of all those who are ready to resist the right and the far right — these are our major enemies.

We are obliged to oppose the policies of the "plural left" government, in which the Communist Party participates. Their government refuses to respond to the attacks from employers. On the contrary, it goes along with them.

The top of the Communist Party participates in government, but the base of the party is often present alongside us in social mobilisations against those policies.

That party's balancing act cannot last for long. That's why the CP is in crisis.

Many voters, or former voters for the Communist Party feel more attracted to the LO-LCR policies than to those of Robert Hue. Good!

• LO and LCR are not new parties. Why is this list suddenly possible?

Everyone on the left knows about the differences between our two parties, particularly concerning the type of organisation we want to build, and the way our militants should implement "the line" on a day to day basis. This isn't some politicians' agreement which covers up those differences. But there are clearly enough common points for us to collaborate in these elections.

We urgently need an alternative to Maastricht Europe, with its 20 million unemployed and 60 million poor, the expansion of part time and unstable contracts, its anti-ecological and anti-democratic policies. Instead of a monetary union, on financial criteria, we want a social Europe, based on social criteria.

LO and LCR faced an exceptional situation. We needed to act, and act together, to show that there is an alternative to the "plural left" government. That left politicians can and should implement audacious measures to reduce unemployment, marginalisation and job insecurity.

• What are the main elements of your campaign?

Employment is the central focus, much of the rest follows from this. The rise in urban violence and support for the far right is, fundamentally, linked to persistent mass unemployment and the lack of a future for so many people. Thirty years ago, there were 200,000 unemployed people in France, and the fascists scored 1% in elections. Today there are three million unemployed, and the fascists score 15%.

Cuts in the working week, without flexibilisation, annualisation or salary cuts, can create one million new jobs. The amount of overtime registered in 1998 is equivalent to 600,000 full time jobs! The bosses want to use compulsory overtime to avoid the introduction of a 35 hour week. We should make that impossible. A left government could make overtime work so expensive for the employers that they would stop using it.

It all depends, of course, whether you want to stay within the framework of capitalist logic, or confront the bosses. We want to see new taxes on financial transactions and on capital. Lets reform the tax system, end the tax cuts for employers, and increase their share of the tax burden! Drain the wealth of the rich, and redistribute it through a job-creation programme! That will require popular mobilisation and confrontations with the employers. But it can be done.

We will also put forward the demands of the *sans-papiers* (undocumented immigrants), of women, the unemployed and the homeless. We know, too, that our society's social deficit is also an ecological deficit. Who suffers most from the noise pollution of modern cities: the rich in the suburbs or those in the inner cities?



The new list is led by Lutte ouvrière spokeswoman Arlette Laguiller (left) and Alan Krivine, spokesman of the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (right).

• How is the campaign progressing?

It is too early to tell for sure, but there are countless positive echoes and signs – from those around us, and from our own supporters. People don't perceive this as a "Trotskyist unity list," but as the only non-governmental, anti-capitalist left option. "100% left", some call it.

People who would not have voted LO or LCR in the past now see this list as a useful tool. Some are already helping us with posters, meetings, leaflets.

Inside the LCR

The LCR spent several months debating the joint list with LO, culminating in a national conference on January 16th.

The common list was approved by 79%, and the motion on how the campaign would be organised was approved by 76%. Motions rejecting the common list won 14-19% of the vote. Four percent of delegates supported a third option, which would have concentrated more on the LCR's own European project.

Participation in the preparatory meetings for this congress was high by LCR standards, with 13% more comrades than participated in the last regular congress. This reflects a significant growth in the membership of the organisation over the last 12 months.

In a separate congress the same weekend, LO supporters also approved the common list. Their vote was virtually unanimous. [FO/R] ★

Source: *Rouge*, 4 February 1999

• Who are the candidates?

Our list of candidates reflects our various struggles. Most of our candidates are women, including 8 of the first 10 positions. Our candidates come from all walks of life, including immigrants, and two candidates active in other countries of the European Union.

• Why should anyone vote for the LO-LCR list?

To show that the balance of forces is changing, that there is a radical, anti-capitalist wing of the movement which has no confidence in the "plural left" government. To demand a job, a roof, health, education. To reject nationalism and the Europe which is being built above us. The more votes we get, the less people will be discouraged about defending themselves.

These elections are a step towards the construction of a new anti-capitalist force which will not be confined to the far left, but will attract anti-capitalist militants currently working in the Communist and Socialist parties or the Greens. And the much larger group of people who are skeptical about all the parties, and concentrate their energies on the trade union movement, single issue campaigns and voluntary sector activities.

A good vote will enable us to send deputies to the European Parliament. It is an institution without any power, but we can use the credibility of parliamentary status to gain information, and get media coverage when we denounce the secret structures of the Europe which is being planned for us.

We will use our positions as a tribune for the social movements, and use the resources at our disposal to build those movements. In voting for us, people are voting for themselves! ★

Source: *Rouge*, 4 February 1999

contents

europa

- 2 **France: Left unity in Euroelections**
 - Interview with Alain Krivine
- 4 **Greece: School in the streets**
 - Andreas Sartzekis
- 5 **Portugal: "Beginning again" with the new Left Bloc**
 - Fernando Batista
- 5 **Basque protests, left advances**

cover story

- Colombia's road to peace**
- 6 **Introduction** • Ernesto Herrera
- 7 **Interview with FARC leader Manuel Marulanda Velez ("Tirofijo")**
- 10 **Manuel Perez Martinez: Priest, guerilla, Marxist**
 - Zbigniew Kowalewski

americas

- 16 **USA: Abortion under attack**
 - Dianne Feeley
- 18 **Labor Party Convention**
 - John Hinshaw
- 18 **The Labor Party and the big picture**
 - Jane Slaughter and Rodney Ward
- 20 **Canada: Quebec's inertia**
 - Robbie Mahood
- 21 **Quebec's left parties**

asia

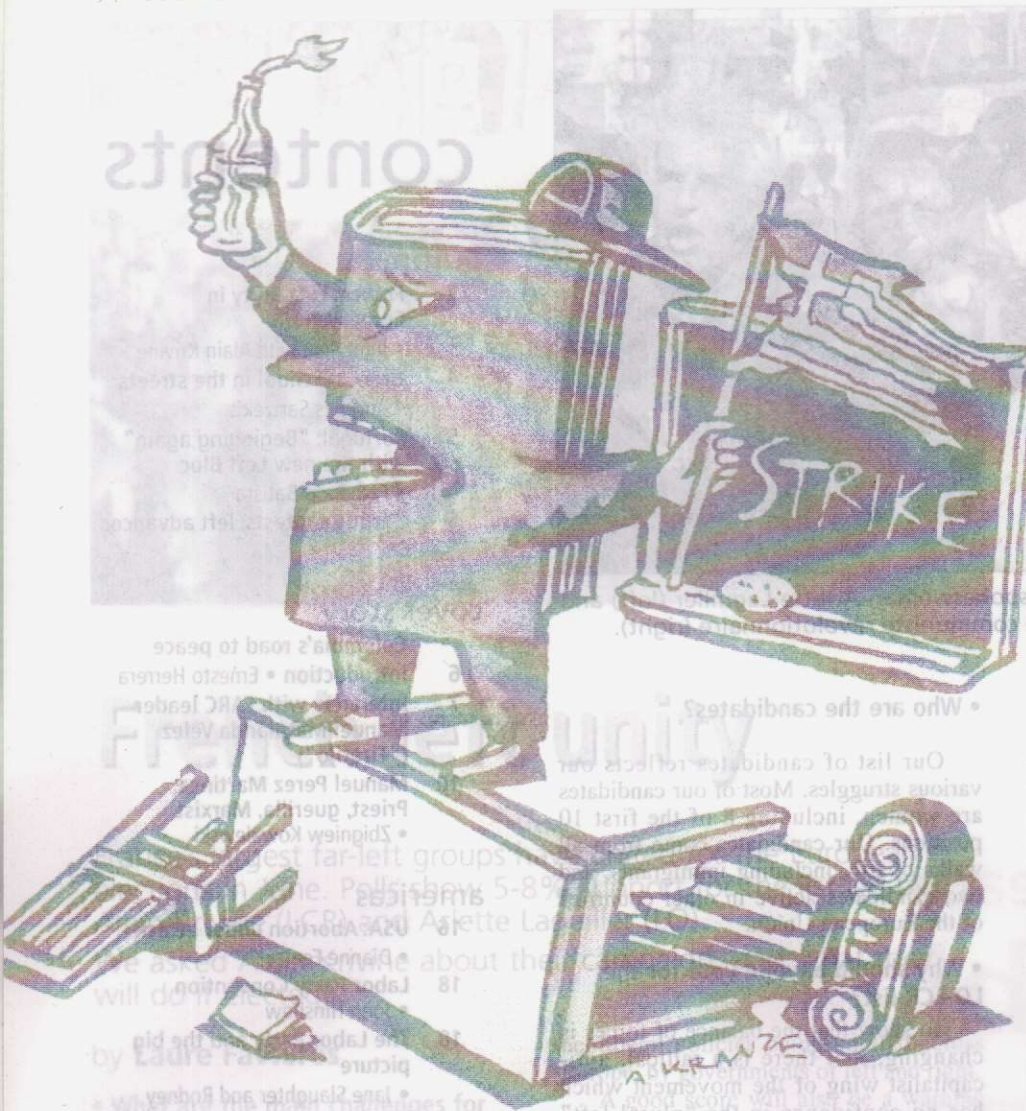
- 22 **Sri Lanka: Wave of violence**
 - P. Sandanam
- 23 **The JVP (People's Liberation Front)**
- 24 **Pakistan: Trade unions suspended** • Farooq Tariq
- 25 **China: Human rights situation worsens** • Jun Xing
- 26 **Jordan: The king is dead**
 - Waleed Kenaan
- 28 **Philippines: Mindanao conflict escalates** • Chris Gaerlan
- 29 **India: Health and safety**

history

- 30 **The rational holocaust**
- 31 **Against pessimism**
 - Ernest Mandel

reviews

- 32 **Conference listing**
- 34 **Obituaries**
- 35 **Books**
- 36 **Left press, Internet**



School in the streets

High school students drifted back to school in February, after ten weeks of occupying schools and blocking roads.

Andreas Sartzekis

Greek teenagers' lives are dominated by preparations for the all-important high school graduation exams. High unemployment and the "modernisation" of the Greek economy has made young people desperate to enter university. Schools are underfunded and overcrowded, and many parents pay for extra lessons in the thousands of private cramming schools. No surprise that the suicide rate among high school students is rising.

Education reform was a central pillar of the centre-left government's "modernisation" programme. Prime Minister Kostas Simitis had promised to "adapt schools to the modern world," (i.e. the

short-term wishes of employers).

This was bad enough, but what actually sparked the student and parent revolt in December were the government's attempts to introduce "pedagogical coherence." But government technocrats made the old-fashioned and inefficient system worse. In early 1998, Education Minister Yerasimos Arsenis introduced a new teacher recruitment system which left thousands of auxiliary teachers out of work. This provoked a hard, two month strike by the OLME teachers' union, including violent confrontations with the police.

Against teachers and pupils

After the August summer break, parliament approved the introduction of continual assessment, and measures supposed to remove the need for private extra lessons. Instead of one big final exam at the end of two years, students now faced 22 tests spread over the same period! In

the ensuing panic, *twice* as many students registered for private courses.

Under the new rules, students who fail will no longer be able to repeat their final year. Definitively rejected by the education system, they face a future of unskilled jobs and unemployment.

Students, and many parents, reacted angrily, demanding the complete rejection of the reform. Inspired by the wave of student struggles in France, protests spread across the country. Younger students joined in, with school occupations becoming the standard method of protest. By Christmas over half the schools were affected, and neither side was willing to concede.

Talks (and roads) blocked

Education Minister Arsenis made matters worse with an arrogant approach. He refused to recognise the students' deep concerns for their own future. And by refusing to open any talks until the occupations ended, he created a blockage where concession would be seen as defeat.

In the face of this intransigence, the students escalated their protest. "If we are ignored when we occupy our schools," they argued, "then we will come out and occupy the streets." Demonstrations and road blockages became daily events.

By prolonging the dispute, and raising the temperature, Arsenis created perfect conditions for the gradual extension and deepening of the protest movement. Local and national coordination structures were established, with a mandate to establish a unified bargaining strategy by the end of the Christmas vacation. As in the French student protests in 1998, girls were more prominent than ever, reflecting the long-term gains of the feminist movement in terms of personal relationships among the young.

The government responded with provocation. In early January the media began to scream about damage supposedly caused by the occupations, with images of syringes and beer bottles, and overexcited 12 year olds on the fringes of the demonstrations. The aim was to frighten parents, and turn them against the demonstrators.

The right wing and the Communist party were accused of manipulating young minds. Alongside police violence, small groups of anti-strike parents began to appear, often more ready to strike than to talk.

The number of occupations began to decline in January, but there were spectacular demonstrations on 15 and 21 January, with tens of thousands of students in the streets. Students also perfected their road-blocking techniques, causing daily collapse in the country's already overcharged road system.

Fed up with the daily confrontations, even the police federation demanded that

the government find a political solution to the crisis.

By early February, however, most students had ended their occupations, in the hope of saving at least something from this academic year. A few concessions from the government, accelerated this procedure, and the conflict now seems to have ended in a draw.

The aftermath of the protests

None of the major parties have benefited. The socialists neither enforced their reforms, nor withdrew them. They neither backed their unpopular minister nor replaced him. The conservative opposition claimed to sympathise with the student's concerns, but deplore their methods of protest. And the Communist Party had no idea how to deal with a self-organised protest movement that refused to limit itself to the interests of the party's parliamentary fraction. ★

*Includes material from our staff writers.

Left advances as Basques protest

On January 9th over 100,000 Basques marched to protest the dispersal of Basque prisoners across the Spanish state. It was one of the largest demonstrations in Basque history.

The radical independence party Herri Batasuna and its partners in the left-wing Euskal Herritarrok movement continue to benefit from the more open mood following the ETA ceasefire in 1998.

After 20 years of boycott, the radical nationalist left has taken seats in the Basque autonomous parliament, giving external support to the moderate nationalist government, on the basis of a programme for peace (definitive ETA ceasefire, prisoner regroupment and release)

and measures to reinforce Basque sovereignty. EH says that increased autonomy from Madrid, and a nationalist project that accepts all those who live and work in the Basque country, is the only way to win over the 40% of voters who currently vote for the "all-Spanish" socialist and conservative parties.

According to "Trogló" Castaños of the radical left magazine Hika, "much now depends on the struggle between the [centre-right] Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) and the pro-independence left to take the head of this national-building project." [JP/JRC] ★

*The entire former leadership of Herri Batasuna are among the prisoners held hundreds of miles from their families, in contradiction of the Spanish constitution.

Portugal "Beginning Again"

Three radical socialist groups are creating a "Left Bloc" which will stand candidates in the European and national elections later this year.

Fernando Batista

Under the slogan "Beginning Again" the Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc) proclaims that it is time "to remake the left, and begin again. To combat the negative effects of globalisation, with its trail of misery and injustice. To struggle for a Europe able to build a future based on the best elements of its history. A Europe which values all its identities, be they national, class, immigrant or pluri-cultural."

Portugal, is "a country developing at different speeds... Twenty-five years after the fall of the Salazar dictatorship, modern Portugal is just as conservative as before. This cannot continue! We need to break the vicious circle of polarisation of political life between the Socialist Party and the [conservative] Social Democratic Party. there is a discourse of alternance and change, but nothing ever does change."

The project has been approved by the PSR (Portuguese section of the Fourth International), the UDP (of Maoist origin) and Politica XXI, a grouping of militants of different origins around a nucleus of former members of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP).

The founders of the Left Bloc regret that the (larger) PCP "is still unable to understand the complexity of Portuguese society today. This prevents the Party from presenting itself as a party which wants to break with the current society."

The three organisations confirmed their conviction that "we must bring into politics all those who are excluded or marginalised. It is high time for all those who identify with the essence of what we are saying to come together in a new project which will be capable of carrying forward strong and credible proposals for democracy and socialism."

This is not a marginal event. The organisations involved have a real implantation in the social tissue of Portuguese life. PSR leader Manuel Graça is General Secretary of the Shoemakers' Trade Union, and the PSR and UDP are active across the leather-working and shoemaking unions

The UDP has one Member of Parliament, and all three groups are represented in municipal assemblies (Lisbon, Almada, Amarante).

For the PSR "Such a project is a long-standing idea. Many indepen-

dent militants have long been convinced of the need for an electorally viable alternative. People have wanted the intervention of organised militants to be directed towards concretising a politically and culturally force representative of an alternative current in the Portuguese left. But what is new is the decision to assume the responsibility and the risk of doing so. It is time now to do it."

The Left Bloc initiative has already attracted considerable interest. Among the "independents" who have signed up are the historian Fernando Rosus, composer José Mario Branco, and the writer and active feminist Mélice Ribeiro Santos.

Despite the encouraging number of individual members, militants of the three founding groups are still the base of the Left Bloc. Only Politica XXI intends to dissolve itself into the new organisation. The PSR and UDP believe they can contribute more to the struggle for socialism by maintaining their own structures as well as fully participating in the Left Bloc.

This exciting move was approved by the congresses of the three organisations in January. The next step is registering the Left Bloc as a legal political party. That means collecting five thousand signatures, each officially notarised. The time-consuming and expensive challenge will be good practice for the European elections in June, and parliamentary election in October. ★

source: Rouge 11 February 1999, with contributions from International Viewpoint staff writers.



Colombia More peace, more war

Both of Colombia's main rebel groups have opened negotiations with the government. But 60% of the population expects the armed conflict to continue. Ernesto Herrera introduces this report on Latin America's strongest guerrillas, and their peace plans.

More than 20,000 people died, and over one million were "displaced" between 1985 and 1997, in this country's 36 year-old civil war. Human rights groups generally blame the guerrillas for 3,000 of the deaths. The rest were the work of the army and the country's numerous paramilitary groups.

The Pastrama government, and significant sectors of the capitalist class have decided to accelerate the negotiations with the guerrillas, recognising the high cost of the war. The government estimates that the war cost US\$3.7bn. in 1997, and at least \$8bn in 1998 (Colombia's gross domestic product was about \$94bn. in 1997, but fell at least 3% in 1998 because of the conflict.) The nationalised oil company Ecopetrol lost at least \$100m. last year, as the result of attacks by the ELN, the smaller of the two rebel groups.

For years we have been told that the guerrillas were linked to the drugs trade, and degenerating into a red mafia.

In fact, well organised rebel groups have continued to expand their activities. The FARC and ELN were active in 173 municipalities in 1985, 473 in 1991, 622 in 1995, and 622 when negotiations began in 1998. The guerrillas are now present over 60-70% of the country.

Quite simply, there are two Colombias. One controlled by the government troops, the multinationals, the druglords and the paramilitaries, and the other in the hands of the guerrillas.

The FARC control 42,000 km², with 12,000 fighters organised on 62 fronts. The ELN operates in 19 of Colombia's 32 departments, with 5,000 fighters organised on 35 fronts. In their zones, the guerrillas

exercise a real counter-power to the state.

Each group is negotiating separately with the government. The ELN started in July 1998, the FARC began its discussions with President Pastrama in January of this year. Both groups refused to negotiate in secret, and invited a range of social and church groups to participate in their talks with the government.

The talks are extraordinarily complicated. Among other things, the FARC met with US representatives and agreed that, when the appropriate moment comes, it will participate in efforts to eradicate "illegal" coca production and drug smuggling.

Another central question is the disbanding of the paramilitary groups which terrorise much of the country. The guerrillas refuse the paramilitaries' demand of recognition as a political participant in negotiations about the country's future.

Unlike "peace talks" in some other countries, Colombia's guerrillas, particularly the FARC, are dominating the talks, rather than being swept along by stronger forces.

The government is committed to the talks. It has withdrawn its troops from more than 100 municipalities, now entirely controlled by the FARC. If President Pastrama backs down, the public will blame him for yet another failure to end the 36-year old civil war.

Paramilitaries

Progress in the peace talks has alarmed the thugs, profiteers and fundamentalists who control the country's myriad paramilitary groups. They are demanding a place at the negotiating table, and intensifying their violence at the same time.

Their main leader, Carlos Castaño, openly says that the war will be won in the field, and that his offensive is aimed at the social base of the FARC among the peasants. Attacks like the recent massacre of 150 civilians in Antioquia are designed to convince the USA to convince Pastrana to admit the paramilitaries to the talks.

The paramilitaries are active over about four million hectares, including some 400 municipalities. These are the zones dominated by the country's major landholders, and the heavily armed drug-smuggling gangs.

The paramilitaries receive financial support, recruitment help and intelligence from the armed forces. Soldiers and policemen are seconded to work with them on a regular basis.

Paramilitary groups also control much of the private security industry, which has developed thanks to the increasingly violent conflicts between the main cattle-ranchers, landholders and druglords.

The paramilitaries carry out the "dirty work" which the army cannot do directly, because of pressure from human rights groups or their minimal respect for legality. The goal of the paramilitaries is clear: eliminate the guerrillas by destroying their social base among the peasants.

Nothing is resolved

While the talks intensify, so does the war. President Pastrana faces trouble on three sides. Civil society demands the pacification of the continent's most violent country. Part of the army thinks that, with a little more time and money, they can exhaust and destroy the guerrillas. And the FARC and ELN are strong enough to deny Pastrana the power to make decisions that will hold.

The negotiations between FARC and Pastrana open a window towards the end of this cruel, long war. But no-one can guarantee that.

The writer Arturo Alape says Colombia is a country "which counts, among its many qualities and characteristics, a particular talent to cause deaths in all imaginable ways." ★

Source: Rouge, 21 January 1999

Mariela Guerrero interviews Manuel Marulanda Velez, alias Tirofijo, leader of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia).

• The current negotiations on prisoner exchange have attracted a lot of media attention. How important is this for the FARC?

We are experiencing an internal confrontation. This is nothing new it has been going on for many years. In every action, when a hamlet is occupied, during an inspection, whatever kind of action it may be, soldiers are captured. For years now we have been capturing policemen and soldiers. Whenever a soldier or a policeman was captured we would talk to them and later let them go asking them to report to the police. However, our situation has now changed and we can now retain those we capture and ensure their wellbeing.

• What are you suggesting in this regard?

The country has no law that covers the exchange issue because this is an internal, rather than international conflict. We suggest that the parliament conduct a study, that it be analysed, and that a law, to be called the exchange law, be approved.

There are two reasons for this: if we do not achieve a political solution through the talks, then we need something that will provide an opening because the confrontation will continue. Which means that more soldiers will be captured. We need an opening for both parties: for those they capture and for those we capture. We cannot have prisoners being held for 30 years on this side, and prisoners held for 30 years on the other. The situation must be defined between the two sides and this must be done by means of a law of the republic.

• But why does it have to be a law?

True, the other side proposes an *ad hoc* exchange. But we want a law. We believe a law is needed because we do not know – they speak of peace, but who can ensure that, after the dialogue begins and four or five meetings are held in three months, there will be peace followed by the exchange of prisoners? No. Let us draft a law independently of the dialogue table.

• In the meantime what will happen to the soldiers you have captured?

We can hold them for as long as we need to. We have more than 300 of them and that is not a small number. This is why we are suggesting a law. If they do not have the appropriate instruments, then find them. In the meantime, and as long as there is no law, we will continue to hold the soldiers.

• What will happen if there are delays in the process?

We have already told them: the longer you take to draft the law and make it into something important, the more people will be detained. They are constantly detaining eight or 10 civilians and reporting: "We captured 20 guerrillas and among them a very important commander." In another region they detain another 15 or 20 civilians and again they report: "We captured 30 very important guerrillas who are guilty of everything that is happening in the country." And they are really detaining civilians. They have captured very few of our guerrillas. Not more than 100.

We gave them the list of officers, noncommissioned officers, and ordinary soldiers. The idea behind this is that when the time comes, the government will set aside the 100 guerrillas of ours they are holding and we will do the same with their soldiers.

• But the list you submitted has approximately 500 names

The others are people who the state wants to prosecute as guerrillas because a law has put an end to the term political crimes. These are now considered criminal offences.

Dialogue with the government

• What is the real reason why you did not attend the meeting with President Pastrana?

Some military command agents were sent to check out the area and find adequate places to position snipers. They selected some high places, the sides of the church, across from the plaza. They were not very lucky because one of their men gave us the details, showed us maps and told us how the plan was drafted. If they could "drop" Pastrana and me there would be no problem. That would solve the problem.

• Do you really think someone could have killed you in San Vicente, surrounded by thousands of your men?

It is always good to be careful. One never knows. They could always find themselves a gunman to carry out the action on behalf of Carlos Castano [leader of the Colombian United Self-Defence Groups, AUC]. It is very difficult to spot a gunman in the midst of the townspeople. It is very difficult to know who is earning a salary and willing to die as well. They killed Carlos Pizarro Leongomez and Carlos Toledo Plata of the 19 April Movement, M-19. They

killed the liberal Guadalupe Salcedo. They killed EPL leader Oscar William Calvo. So, it is better to be cautious.

• **When will you get down to the really important matters at the dialogue table?**

A political front has been opened for the search of solutions to a social crisis. We will work based on this. We will hold meetings, and we will talk and talk, and see what comes from the table. If nothing happens, if we do not reach an agreement, surely the chapter will be closed.

We believe that the three-month time limit we established is more than enough time to see if we are really going to get somewhere. After agreeing on a working agenda, we will begin to discuss the 10 points. But before we do that we must decide on an agenda and the participation of the people.

• **Surely the negotiations are between the guerrillas and the government?**

The former and current governments have always wanted the talks to be held between the two parties: guerrillas and government. They do not want anyone else to know what is being discussed. We want to talk facing the people.

The political parties, the various power sectors, the civilian society and all those interested in finding a political solution to the conflict should be represented at the dialogue.

The workers are the ones who must say what their problems are and how they believe these should be solved. Same thing for the peasants and the land issue. The students must be represented at the talks because they know the problems they confront and how they should be solved. And so on with each issue. The talks must be held facing the people and not behind their backs.

Agenda for talks

• **Isn't the negotiating agenda too broad?**

No. It is an agenda that covers all the problems that need solving. For example, at the table we are going to bring up the problem of the national and international moneylenders and the control of the dollar, an extremely complicated issue.

That is going to create big problems because we will be discussing economic power and the handling of the dollar. We cannot continue to tolerate the fact that interest rates for a worker who requests a loan is 25, 30 and sometimes 40 per cent. It is impossible to live like that. We cannot continue to tolerate an exchange rate of more than 1,500 pesos to the dollar.

• **Can the establishment give in on**



all those points?

Well, we know that the fight will be a hard one when we broach those issues. They are all smiles about the 10 points. However, when we expand on them, when we begin to discuss each issue, they can be pretty broad. Then who are we going to challenge? The large capital groups and families, those that must be curbed. We cannot allow our people to continue dying of hunger, without a home, without a car, without a roof over their heads, without education, without health, while others have huge buildings filled with dollars. No. That must be changed. It will not be easy because the confrontation will be with a state that has given nothing and wants to give nothing.

• **How does the issue of paramilitarism work its way into the agenda?**

That is one of the future issues to be discussed at the table. We will discuss it when we come to it. We must wait and see how the government is going to broach the subject because paramilitarism is the state.

They like to blame others. Every time the police or the army commits a crime or a massacre they blame it on [paramilitary leader] Carlos Castano.

Members of the Cazadores Battalion travel to a place, arrive in uniform and set up camp. Next day they dress as civilians, and head for a nearby hamlet. When they arrive, they look like paramilitaries. That is the way it is all over the country.

Demilitarization

• **Why did the start of dialogue take so long?**

When [presidential candidates Horacio] Serpa and Pastrana were campaigning we informed the people that we

were interested in initiating talks. We said that there were two conditions. We said that we were willing to talk with whomever won the elections and that the basis for the talks would be the demilitarization of five municipalities and the dismantling of paramilitarism.

We cannot accept their condition of talking in the midst of war. We had to get them to agree on the demilitarization of the five municipalities because it is impossible to talk with planes flying above and bombs falling. The first conclusion we reached in our analysis was on the need for demilitarization and an agreement that there would be no armed conflict within the area.

The chances for peace

• **There are many Colombians who feel that you are not interested in making peace -**

We are the most interested in making peace. Wouldn't it be nice if the International Bank, the church, the whole world, were to come here and see us working and see what it is we need? Unfortunately, the government refused to listen and today the conflict is much bigger.

• **Would you be willing to submit to a reintegration process?**

We are not fighting so that they will give us a scholarship, a little house or for a little car. That is not what this is all about. We want changes made for the good of a people that has been suffering for many years. These people understand what we are doing. The fact that the number of guerrillas around the country keeps growing is proof of this. And this is one way those changes can be made.

• **What will happen if the process fails?**

We are open. If they close this chapter on us, we will continue. If it is opened, we will be there. If we make progress with our 10 points — or even with eight of the 10 points, then we could begin considering the possibility of a cease-fire. But in the meantime there is nothing that would allow a cease-fire.

• **Why does the FARC aspire to be considered a military force?**

As a matter of fact, we are the authority throughout a vast area of the country. You can see this along our fronts. You can walk into a police station and see two guerrillas arrive and hear the police inspector tell them: I have a problem and need your help to solve it. The guerrillas are the authorities in those areas. The mayors cannot work unless they ask the guerrillas what it is they should do. In practice, we are the other government within the government. This is why we

are seeking recognition as a military force.

Solutions to the drug problem

• FARC recently met with US government representatives to discuss drugs. Has the FARC's position regarding US policy changed?

This is a very recent change, and we are just beginning to discuss it. There are rumours spread by the media and by the narrow-minded people who think: "They met the *gringos*; does this mean they no longer want power? Have they renounced their commitment to struggle for socialism?" It is only normal that some people should think this way. Many times they are not aware of the commitment the FARC has to the Colombian people.

The FARC wants to show the world, including the United States, that we not involved in drug trafficking, do not grow drugs, and do not live off the drug business.

The FARC is willing to invite them to come to Colombia and see for themselves the reasons why peasants plant these drugs; to see, first hand, the problems these people confront and why there is nothing else they can do. We have invited them not only to visit the demilitarized areas but the whole country. They should visit the Middle Magdalena area, [paramilitary leader Carlos] Castano's territory, Cordoba, all those regions where there are plantations, not only coca plantations, but poppy plantations as well. The media only mentions the plantations in the southern areas of the country, but there are other huge areas where raw material for the production of drugs is produced.

• Can you really help solve the coca problem?

We believe that if the government wants to eradicate the drug problem then it must first draft a development plan for the peasants. That is all we want. Thousands of peasants need to produce and grow drugs to live because they are not protected by the state.

This is why we come before the government to say: Mr President, draft plans that will allow the eradication of coca on the basis of alternative crops. I told our international affairs chief Comrade Raul Reyes: Go out there and approach the international organizations. Tell them that if they trust us, to go ahead and deposit some money, which we promise will be used to eradicate the coca crops in, say, one municipality.

• How can you put an end to those plantations?

We can get a group of agronomists, good agronomists, to tell us what other crops can be grown in those areas. It

could be rice, cacao, corn or cotton. On this basis, and depending on what the agronomists have to say, we could use the money to begin destroying the drug crop and planting something else — by the time we finish destroying the drug crops, the new crops will be beginning to produce — but not on the basis of shooting the people, dropping bombs on them, dusting their sown land, killing their birds and leaving their land sterile. That is how we would fight against the coca plantations. A new crop must group before we can destroy the drug crops.

If we do not do this, then we are going to continue the way we are. They want to convince us that we are the ones who must eradicate those plantations. No. That is something the government must do. We are not the government, yet. Once we are the government, we will do it.

• In the meantime will you profit from the illegal crops?

Ah yes. They say we live off that. Even the government's policy claims that destroying the illegal crops will be the end of us. As if that is our source of money. All the government documents state that putting an end to the coca plantations will be the end of the revolutionary movement. It so happens that coca is not the roots of the guerrilla movement, but rather the country's social, political and economic problems.

• What interest does the United States have in the process?

The responsibility for the drug trafficking phenomenon does not fall solely on the producing countries like Colombia. It is also the responsibility of the countries that consume the drug, like the United States. It is also the responsibility of those who produce the raw materials, and the chemical precursors.

We believe that once the United States understands this, it will then have to decide if it will continue to give the Colombian military, army and police money, which is not used in the struggle against drug trafficking, but which could be seen as meddling in Colombia's domestic affairs.

We also want to keep Colombia from becoming a new Vietnam. Colombia must be allowed to develop its own social and economic plan and that the international organizations must let the Colombians solve their own problems.

• Do you think socialism failed? What kind of socialism would you want for Colombia?

First of all, we do not know when we will triumph and reach power and we do not know what changes will have taken place in the world when this does happen.

The socialism we want for the Colombian people is one that will select from the various socialist experiences, the Soviet socialism that no longer exists, the Chinese socialism that still exists, the Vietnamese socialism, and the Cuban socialism.

We will begin by selecting from among them their good as well as their bad experiences, never forgetting that Colombia is not like those countries, but has its own revolutionary culture and roots. We are nearing the 21st century and the FARC cannot repeat the mistakes others have made.

• The US Congress strongly criticized the meeting between President Clinton's representatives and the FARC. It was a pretty unusual meeting!

In a way, yes. They themselves stressed that it is unusual for their government to meet with rebel organizations like ours, especially when we had not begun talks with the government. They must have their reasons for thinking like that and we know that decision was not easy.

This decision made us realize that there is a group within the State Department that feels it is necessary to really look at what is happening in Colombia and around the world.

The decision to meet with representatives of the empire that has kept our people subjugated and that continues to impose subjugating policies on our people did not come easily for us either. But we did it and we are glad we talked with them. We want to continue that relationship.

New political group

• You plan to create a new political group called the Bolivarian Movement for the New Colombia. What kind of a group will it be?

The idea of the Bolivarian Movement is the result of what happened to the Patriotic Union [UP]. We suggested a policy for the UP while the appropriate national, departmental and municipal mechanisms were being created. Once the mechanisms had been created, this policy would become a new political movement born from an armed organization through agreements reached.

It was a policy capable of developing a broad political movement, a third force different to the traditional political parties, capable of confronting the policies of the oligarchy. That was what we wanted. But the UP was riddled with bullets. Later, at the Eighth Conference we agreed to go at it seriously and create the Bolivarian Movement for the New Colombia.

This is a movement that is being created in hamlets, cities, villages,

wherever there are people to hear our platform. Once we achieve truly positive agreements in this country, we will have to show that we are a force that can gather a large number of followers at the public plaza.

• Will you participate openly in an election?

The Bolivarian Movement will have to be a clandestine movement, until the appropriate conditions are achieved for it to act legally. Using the UP experience, many of our people will be elected to support the process and ensure that the past will not be repeated. The people did not understand that changes had to be made. We do not want to make that mistake again.

• Is there anything left of the Simon Bolivar Guerrilla Coordinating Board?

As a coordinating board there is nothing left. The Simon Bolivar Guerrilla Coordinating Board was formed by the M-19 [19 April Movement], the EPL, the "reinserted", the Quintin Lame, and the PRT [Revolutionary Workers Party]. They have disappeared from the political picture and from the armed struggle. Circumstances — which I know nothing about — led them to demobilize and they disappeared. All was left was the ELN [National Liberation Army] and a very small group of Caraballo's EPL. Their demobilization ended the coordinating board.

• How are relations between the ELN and the FARC?

Our relations with the ELN are good, even though they are not close relations. In fact they are somewhat cold. Some time ago we called them and told them that we should end the coordinating board because the actions of one or the other should not be blamed on some or on others. However, we have suggested what we have called the principle of solidarity or action. It means that when they need help, we help, and vice versa. We are trying to find points of agreement with them. And the rest, well, we are working on it. ★

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Priest, guerilla, Marxist

On the 13 February Colombia's second biggest guerrilla organisation, the National Liberation Army (ELN), began its own peace process — a series of discussions with various representatives of civil society on the key social, political and military issues facing the Colombian people.

The formal opening of this "National Convention" comes almost exactly a year after the death of the man who did most to plan and promote it. Manuel Perez Martinez was the ELN's main leader for the last decade. He was a Spaniard and a priest by origin.

The nature of this alternative peace process, which seeks to make the Colombian people the protagonist of peace, and not either of the belligerent parties, has been completely ignored by the international media, and very little understood by the international left. Yet it stands as a fitting tribute to its main architect.

Zbigniew Kowalewski looks back at the life and politics of Manuel Perez, one of the most original and inspiring figures of the Latin American revolutionary movement.

On 14 February last year, in Colombian guerrilla territory, Manuel Perez Martinez, leader of the Camilista Union-National Liberation Army (UCELN), died. He was fifty-five and had been suffering from a serious illness.

The UCELN comprises several thousand fighters operating in several dozen guerrilla fronts in a number of regions. Along with the biggest guerrilla movement, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-Popular Army (FARC-EP), the UCELN is one of the two main political-military organisations of the Colombian left.

Before the beginning of the present peace process, there was an increasingly

intense war going on in Colombia. The military machine of the decaying bourgeois state was losing more and more battles and the control of more and more territory.

Backed by far-right paramilitaries, it spread a bloody terror amongst the civilian population. This paramilitary terror has continued even after the opening of peace talks.

This homage to the memory of Manuel Perez aims to promote the solidarity so urgently needed by Colombia's rebels and popular movements.

ZK

In July 1966, in a service in the Sistine Chapel, Pope Paul VI ordained some seventy new priests chosen from seminaries across Europe. They had been specially selected: they were to work as missionaries in Latin America, from where the Vatican had been receiving alarming news.

The spreading shock wave of the Cuban revolution had begun to shake the Catholic church itself. It was widening and filling the breaches opened by the Second Vatican Council, which had only just finished.

Even in a bastion of conservative Catholicism like Colombia, it had produced an event without precedent which was echoing around the world. A Catholic priest, Camilo Torres, had tried first to mobilise an independent, united and revolutionary mass movement which would aspire, if necessary through violent means, "to seize power for the popular classes" and build socialism. Then he had joined the National Liberation Army (ELN).

Soon after joining this "Castroite" guerrilla movement, the Cuban magazine *Bohemia* had commented: "At no time did Camilo find any incompatibility between the purest Christianity and Marxism, socialism or communism — on the contrary he found great affinities".

Bohemia suggested that if Marxists and Christians united, they would inevitably free humanity from exploitation and oppression.

The Uruguayan magazine *Marcha* had reported that: "Camilo Torres defines himself as a nationalist, a revolutionary and a Christian. His platform contains nationalist measures combined with fundamental socialist ones. His method, the armed struggle of the masses to seize power and carry out this programme, is the beginning of a socialist revolution."

Just five months before that ordination service in the Sistine Chapel, Torres had died, gun in hand, in a battle with government troops.

Manuel Perez was one of the priests ordained that day. He felt irritated by the all the pomp and ceremony of the service. Neither the Pope nor any other member of the church hierarchy present had the least idea that he shared Father Camilo's belief that "it is very difficult to serve two masters: God and mammon", and that his desire was to follow the same path as Torres, if possible in the same country and as a member of the same revolutionary organisation.

Perez was convinced that in admitting Torres into its ranks, the ELN had resolved the complicated relationship between Christianity and Marxism which concerned him so deeply.

"Incarnation in those most exploited

Perez came from a village in Zaragoza province in Aragon (in the Spanish State). His family were poor peasants and

deeply religious. During the civil war, his father, convinced it was a religious war and that he had to defend the catholic faith, fought in Franco's army.

The only place the son could afford to study was in a seminary, and so he decided to become a priest. Before he and his two friends, Domingo Lain and Jose Antonio Jimenez, were ordained as priests, they travelled to France. They were driven by "the desire to be close to the poorest and most exploited" members of society and "to live amongst them a commitment of incarnation".

They shared the life of poverty, over-exploitation and xenophobic or racist oppression experienced by immigrants from the Spanish State and other countries of southern Europe and North Africa. In Paris, Lille and Arras, "we joined the world of capitalist exploitation", Perez would later recall.

They began to question many aspects of the traditional faith. They stopped routine praying and developed an aversion to ritual. "Why go to Sunday mass in a church if we live a more profound 'mass' being in the immigrants' shacks?"

The traditional catholic conception of sin also fell by the wayside as they realised that "morality depends on the social class to which you belong and there is a bourgeois morality and a working-class morality".

Back in the Spanish State, they collaborated with the *Comisiones Obreras* (Workers, Commissions) which, under the Franco dictatorship, were beginning to build an independent workers' movement, and with communist activists. But they knew that elsewhere in the world — in Latin America for instance — there were more people exploited and oppressed than in Europe. That's why they entered the Hispano-American Seminary in Madrid.

"Two things began to resonate: firstly, the death of Father Camilo, and secondly, the guerrilla struggle for a socialist revolution. At that time in Europe the relationship between Marxists and Christians was developing around the debate over worker-priests", Perez recalled.

Once ordained, the three were sent to the Dominican Republic, but they decided that Lain should go and explore the lie of the land in Colombia.

Perez and Jimenez worked in a parish on the border with Haiti, inhabited by Haitian cane-cutters. They refused to act as agents for a church in which "everything smelt and tasted of *gringos*" and which was the "ideological guardian" of appalling toil, extreme poverty, total illiteracy, savage racism and severe repression.

The government decided to expel them from the country and the Church supported this decision. They moved on to Colombia and together with Lain, himself threatened with expulsion by Cardinal Concha Cordoba, they took

refuge in a poor neighbourhood of Cartagena.

At that time, Pope Paul VI visited Colombia to exhort the masses "not to put their trust in the revolution". For Perez and his friends, the trip's only purpose was "to counteract the impact of Camilo Torres' choice on a Christian, mostly catholic people". "We were very worried that the church was acting as an instrument of ideological domination."

Fifty priests, meeting in what became known as the "Golconda Group" and led by bishop Gerardo Valencia Cano, launched a public challenge to the church hierarchy and the ruling class by declaring themselves ready "to commit themselves more and more to the different forms of revolutionary action against imperialism and the neo-colonial bourgeoisie".

They fused Camilo Torres' slogan that "the duty of every Christian is to be a revolutionary" with that of Fidel Castro that "the duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution".

The three Spanish priests joined the Golconda Group. They soon became local leaders of the popular movement, filling the vacuum left by the leaderships of the social organisations which either sold out or were eliminated through the terror.

One day it became clear that they had acquired a formidable capacity for mass mobilisation. The authorities decided to destroy the San Jose neighbourhood, a poor slum near Cartagena airport. The three priests called on the inhabitants of other poor neighbourhoods to come and help and led a confrontation which stopped the bulldozers, held off the police and the army and culminated in big and militant solidarity meeting. The strength of the mass protest forced a public consultation, with the presence of the mayor, the governor and counsellors, where the authorities reconsidered their decision.

The following day the three priests were arrested. The secret police ordered their expulsion from the country. It was then that Manuel Perez and his two colleagues took an irreversible decision and communicated it to the Golconda group — to join the guerrillas. They were expelled from Colombia in April 1969, but managed to make contact with the ELN abroad.

They received guerrilla training in Cuba and that same year returned secretly to Colombia and joined the guerrilla group operating in the Magdalena Medio region.

In February 1970, the ELN announced publicly that Domingo Lain was now a member. "In accordance with the public nature of the priest's role in our society, I have decided to fulfil my duty as a guide to the people by joining the ELN guerrillas", he explained in his declaration which also expressed the convictions of Perez and Jimenez. "I have chosen the

socialist revolution because it is the only way of uprooting the causes of man's exploitation of man."

Lain denounced "the complicity of the Church in acting as a guardian and main pillar of this [exploitative] regime, thereby abusing the influence it exerts on the consciences of large numbers of the proletarian masses".

With the guerrillas

The guerrilla movement which Perez joined was very different from the one he had imagined. It had only 60 or 70 fighters and was unable to consolidate even a second guerrilla front. It lacked the most basic resources, and operated in a very difficult natural environment. It rigorously applied the principles of constant movement, vigilance and mistrust, often pushing its members to the very limits of human survival.

The urban network had been hit very hard. The trauma of a bloody factional battle still weighed heavy. First Jose Ayala, a member of the leading faction had been murdered by members of the rival faction in an obscure settling of accounts. Then three members of this rival faction, including Victor Medina Moron, the ELN's former second-in-command, were judged and shot under the false charge of plotting and enemy infiltration.

The crisis was the result of political and tactical differences emerging in a framework where militarism and *caudillo* leadership ruled, with no space for regular debate or internal democracy. "To political problems, were put forward not political solutions, but military ones", Manuel Perez would later recall.

What's more, the ELN's commander-in-chief, Fabio Vasquez Castano, promoted an extremely "pro-peasant" line, which led to a ferocious "dictatorship of the peasantry" over guerrillas from urban backgrounds.

The internal regime was hierarchical and repressive. Human relations were very hard. For eight months Perez was submitted to a kind of test which he thought he would never be able to pass, physically, psychologically or morally, and which he later considered far harder than the circumstances had warranted.

Jose Antonio Jimenez, the oldest of the three priests, did not survive; eight months after joining the guerrillas he died of an unidentified disease. Contrary to Perez' expectations, the ELN remained silent about the specifically Christian character of Camilo Torres' commitment to revolutionary struggle.

As soon as he'd grown used to life in the guerrilla movement, Perez had to face something even more difficult. Whilst serving in a guerrilla commission headed by the ELN's second-in-command, Ricardo Lara Parada, he took part in a discussion amongst several guerrilla members in which criticisms were raised of the fact that "Ricardo lived in better

conditions than the other fighters".

The guerrillas involved, including Perez, were accused of planning to split the ELN, murder Lara Parada, desert, and so on. They were judged and condemned to be shot. "Probably some influential opinions", said Perez, probably referring to the leaders of the Cuban revolution, "played a part in our sentences being reduced". He was expelled from the ELN, but in the end Fabio Vasquez agreed to let him rejoin the guerrilla movement.

The ELN claimed that "the working class has been infiltrated by the cunning workings of bourgeois ideology; it raises only economistic interests, concentrates on struggling for limited demands and is backward in assuming the revolutionary process". Until this class manages to become "the fundamental factor", the vanguard of the socialist revolution can only be "the peasantry, which has placed itself there without any prompting or leadership from the working class and which is the one which has armed itself with the proletarian ideology. This ideology is not the exclusive property of the working class; it is a great contribution to the cause of all the exploited of the world", and therefore the

in reality is just an artificial transplant of failed trade-union, sectoral and reformist struggles from the towns into the countryside".

According to him real revolutionary political work consisted "fundamentally in armed actions which create consciousness and channel it, weaken the enemy and strengthen our own (guerrilla) forces".

In 1971, a year in which the peasant movement in Colombia was radicalising, demanding "land without land-owners" and invading 645 ranches, the ELN leader declared such land invasions and expropriations to be useless and counter-productive, just like the "activities aimed at achieving better living conditions and wage increases" amongst the working class. He claimed that "these objectives, if achieved, far from bringing the masses closer to their strategic objective [which is the seizure of power], would distance them from it, by conditioning them to reformism".

Manuel Vasquez Castano, a man of greater political vision and with a deeper understanding of Marxism than his brother Fabio, questioned this orientation. This coincided with the beginning of an upturn in the workers movement.



peasantry can take it on in its own right.

At the same time the ELN followed a militarist line quite alien to Camilo Torres' emphasis on mass organisation and mobilisation. It behaved as if the revolution could be, fundamentally if not exclusively, the work of a specialised apparatus, in this case a military one.

Nothing had changed since the time four years earlier when Torres had told Vasquez that he "saw much stagnation in the camps and no permanent work in the peasant areas" and that "in his opinion, the guerrillas should never stop political work amongst the peasants".

Vasquez was totally opposed to "what others call 'mass political work', which

"[Manuel] said that in this country, with the developments going on, the vanguard of the revolutionary process was the working class; this was part of the classic discussion of who should be the vanguard in the building of socialism" recalls ELN leader Nicolas Rodriguez.

Manuel Vasquez pushed for the guerrillas to move from the agricultural frontier (areas of peasant colonisation in the forest) in Santander province towards the modern capitalist ranches of Antiochia province, and to begin to orient towards and recruit broadly amongst the agricultural labourers there, establishing links with the leaders of the workers' movement in that department.

The ELN greatly extended its area of action. It developed much bigger military operations than before, like the simultaneous seizures, in January and February 1972, of the towns of San Pablo and Remedios and various other locations. It grew rapidly, reaching at one point 270 guerrillas.

But in the course of this over-rapid progress it committed some serious mistakes which the government took advantage of to mount a major counter-insurgency operation.

In October 1973 at Anori, the army wiped out a whole column of one hundred guerrillas led by the brothers Manuel and Antonio Vasquez, killing them along with dozens of fighters. Ricardo Lara deserted. Domingo Lain died in another clash.

Manuel Perez lost contact with the others and for 26 days managed through superhuman effort to make his way alone across the jungle. He spent two more months looking for the rest of the guerrillas and surviving off the solidarity of local peasants.

It was during this three month period that he finally broke with the idea of God which had served him up until then; from then on, he later confessed, "God for me became the people".

Rebuilding

After the defeat, Fabio Vasquez could barely muster 80 fighters. He insisted on making someone responsible for the Anori disaster, singling out as scapegoats three leaders of the urban network, who were duly judged and shot.

He then travelled to Cuba for medical treatment. In his absence a balance sheet of his leadership was discussed, and he was dismissed. It was decided that he should remain abroad as an ordinary member, and that his position in the organisation should be decided in a democratic assembly. (Vasquez never agreed to attend such an assembly.)

The crisis in the ELN continued to get worse. "By 1978, the worst year of our crisis, there weren't even forty of us guerrillas in the field", Manuel Perez later recalled. The fighters were distributed in two fronts, far separated from each other: it took several months of walking to communicate between the two.

It was in this period that Perez took responsibility for rebuilding the organisation, together with Nicolas Rodriguez Bautista, known as "Gabino". The latter had been part of the group of 17 peasants who in 1964, under Fabio Vasquez' leadership, had founded the ELN. He'd been just 13 years old at the time.

Questions of political line began to be discussed, as did principles of organisation and leadership. They began to build collective leaderships and plan activities which would combine military command with internal political democracy, practical military experience with theoretical and political study, military



action with mass political work, rural guerrilla struggle with political struggle in the towns.

Amongst other things, Perez recalled, the organisation decided "to link itself much more closely to the natural organisations of the masses, in order to understand better their demands, respect their own rhythms, and give priority to their interests and struggles, rather than just seeing the armed struggle as something masses had to support".

The ELN recognised publicly that the executions carried out in the past had been grave errors. It rehabilitated those shot as revolutionaries.

From this painful experience Perez drew three conclusions. "Firstly, the humanisation of the revolution is a must; it may not always be achievable, but it is always the ideal. Secondly, public self-criticism by revolutionary organisations is the best way of overcoming and learning from historic mistakes. Thirdly, it is fundamental to think of the value and dignity of human beings as individuals, and to try to get the right balance between this and their collective worth."

"The aim of the revolution and the new society is that life, mankind's most treasured attribute, should have value and be valued in all its dignity, and that the human being should be the centre of society. That is why, in so far as we can — in our lives, in our struggles, in the revolution and in the society we want to build — we should put an end to the death penalty. And that is why we should try to humanise our own guerrilla movement. The humanisation of the war should be the object of massive education amongst our own fighters."

The process of rebuilding lasted until 1983. Its success was due, at least in part, to three factors. One was the existence, in different towns and regions across the country, of various revolutionary political circles (14 in Bogota, 8 in Medellin, etc.) which against all the odds, and not withstanding the apparent extinction of the ELN, continued to identify with it, and which later joined it.

Another factor was the support of sections of the Christian left and grassroots church communities, supporters of liberation theology, for whom the ELN remained "Father Camilo and Father Domingo's gang".

A further element was the incorporation into the ELN of the Domingo Lain Guerrilla Front, which had emerged in Arauca province out of big peasant struggles and a mass movement which included several regional civic strikes.

The victory of the Sandinistas and the rise of the Central American revolution also gave a big boost to the rebuilding of the ELN.

In September 1983, a collective national leadership was formed for the first time, and by democratic means. Manuel Perez and Nicolas Rodriguez were elected respectively as first and second in command — equivalent to political and military leaders — of the ELN.

Between then and the first national assembly in 1986, the organisation's numerical strength grew three and a half times. It reached the figure of 600 or 700 rural guerrillas distributed in four war fronts, each comprising ten guerrilla fronts, as well as four regional (urban) organisations. The military personnel made up about 25% of the total membership.

In 1987 the ELN fused with an organisation of Maoist origins, thereby changing its name to Camilista Union - National Liberation Army (UCELN).

As it continued to grow and expand the radius of its political and military activity, the UCELN acquired a national profile. Manuel Perez played a prominent role in this, and in the strategic rethinking which was underway. Amongst the UCELN leaders, he was one of those who contributed most to establishing the principle that the development of the revolutionary struggle depends on "an ever greater role for the masses", and at the same time that the role of the revolutionary organisation in giving political leadership to this struggle, "grows in the same measure that the leading role of the masses increases".

Marxism and Christianity

For many years the ELN had had a number of priests amongst its members, and for several years it had had a priest as its main leader. It enjoyed considerable support among Christians, and had an organised Christian section within it. But the situation of Christian members was still far from clear. Manuel Perez noted that in the guerrilla movement there wasn't enough room "to express your faith, to see yourself as both a believer and a Marxist", and that "although the policy is clear enough — that there is no contradiction between being a believer and a Marxist — it still hasn't been possible to break down the barrier of fear that prevents fighters from openly recognising their faith in front of the others".

This contradictory situation resulted from the fact that in the ELN "there were different levels, with a tradition of Christians taking part in the organisation, but



also of very dogmatic Marxist education". Many ELN fighters would argue that "if Marxism speaks of religion as the opium of the people, how can we accept the faith of our Christian comrades?" And "if we are trying to promote a scientific vision of the world, then we must be consistent and reject idealism from the word go".

This debate reached its culmination at the ELN's first national assembly in 1986. Perez remarked: "Once people could see how revolutionary Christians also fight against religion as magic, how they unmask the connections between the traditional church and capitalism, how they denounce the Vatican as the ideological instrument of imperialism, then that helps to put the argument in the right framework. Because for these revolutionary Christians the religion which is used to lull the people to sleep and serve capitalism is just as open to criticism as it is for Marxists.

"[We began to study] religion and the class struggle and to learn how the latter has operated within the church, in order to understand the issue not just in philosophical terms but in historical terms too. And we came to understand better the difference between the traditional church and the popular church in Colombia, because we could see that the ideological struggle was not just between the traditional church and the revolution, but also between the popular and the traditional churches. Another thing we want to do is to try and look at all these questions from the point of view of developing a more Latin American Marxism."

"We have to make Marxism begin to understand this reality, and we also have

to make revolutionary Christianity understand that the guide of the revolution is not Christianity but Marxism."

Perez argued that Christians could be members of the ELN on an equal footing with Marxists, because — as a revolutionary organisation — what mattered was not whether the soul was mortal or immortal, but rather that imperialism and capitalism were certainly mortal.

As for his own attitude, he recognised that Christian motivation was a fundamental part of his revolutionary commitment. "All those things they told me belonged to the other world, I have brought into this one", he said. "I came to the profound conviction that it was here and now, within our own history, that liberation and salvation had their place."

But he added: "Christianity is a motive, it is not the science of revolution. The science of revolution is Marxism." "For that reason we are not going to build a Christian organisation, nor a Christian society, but a Marxist-Leninist organisation and a socialist society."

Perez gave great importance to an idea floated long ago by Fidel Castro, that the revolution in Latin America needed the forging of "a strategic alliance between revolutionary Marxists and revolutionary Christians". However, he observed that "even in Cuba we have to question the kind of education and instruction in Marxism-Leninism which has led people into harder and more dogmatic positions, even though Fidel has remained open to Christians", because many people "were educated in the soviet school of what Marxism-Leninism was".

Explaining the position developed by the UCELN, Perez declared: "We should no longer be talking about a strategic alliance between Christians and Marxists in the revolution, but about a real unity." He believed this was one of the most important things the UCELN "had brought to the renewal of revolutionary ideas within Marxist organisations".

Socialism, democracy and popular power

The fall of so-called "real socialism" has not undermined the UCELN's strategic direction towards national liberation and the building of socialism. "Both components are built into the character of our revolution and into our strategy", the UCELN insists. "There is no doubt that the historic subject of the revolution is the proletariat" which is "the social class called upon to play the main hegemonic role in the Colombian socialist revolution".

On the collapse of the "Stalinism project" we can read the following in the press of the UCELN: "This is the end of a particular way of understanding socialism and trying to build it, a narrow version that sought to squeeze into a single model a body of ideas and a social project which are by nature diverse, complex and flexible, and which tried to convert that single model into a universal truth. This is absolutely the end of a way of thinking which saw the world mainly through the prism of a single nation and sought to direct the socialist movement in function of that nation's interests."

According to the UCELN, "this project implied a profound clash between socialism and democracy", whereas "the full democratisation of society, as well as being synonymous with socialism, may also be seen as the only guarantee a society has of making as few mistakes as possible, of correcting those it does make as quickly as possible, and above all of not becoming alienated from itself".

The result of that clash was catastrophic: "civil society ended up living by and for the state, by and for the party, by and for a line that was decided in the end by and for an elite which some called a state bureaucracy, others a ruling class of a new type, and so forth."

At the same time the UCELN recognises that "many of the deviations that occurred in the socialist countries and many of the injustices and calamities propagated in the name of socialism have also been present in our own social and political practice." But for the UCELN, "the deep crisis of socialism does not put in question the revolutionary road, in fact it frees it from myths and taboos".

It also "frees Marxism from the chains of dogma and schematism, revitalising its materialist dialectic" and "stimulating the creativity and originality of peoples who struggle to forge their own social and national destiny".

Amongst other dogmas the UCELN

has rejected that of the single party. "The crisis of the socialist camp has shown us that for popular and socialist democracy it is healthier to have distinct political tendencies and proposals which, within a revolutionary context, compete for political and ideological leadership in the new society."

Perez insisted, both within the UCELN and in dialogue with the commanders and combatants of the FARC-EP, that "democracy is the essence of building socialism", and that "to guarantee democracy in any future society, we have to begin building it here and now and promote it in the people's organisations that we help develop".

"The best thing is to begin building the new society here and now through the direct democracy of the people in economic development and the participation of the masses in the political decisions of the state." He explained that this was possible where the guerrilla forces and the mass movements exercise "municipal control" (and provincial and regional control as well).

This was the policy adopted by the Second Congress of the UCELN in December 1989. It decided that the strategy of prolonged people's war had to be above all a strategy for building popular power. "Popular power finds its highest expression in the destruction of the old state and the configuration of a new one".

But "it is essential from the very start to begin to develop the masses' vocation for power, helping them to build their own autonomous forms of organisation and creating forms of self-government, in direct relation with the building of the revolutionary organisation".

In the framework of "municipal control", the UCELN "seeks for the people themselves to set themselves up as the new municipal power", "for the communities themselves to make their own decisions".

At the same time, "in order to consolidate this real popular power which is built in conditions of war where the enemy is stronger than we are", the UCELN also promotes a "combined struggle inside and outside the existing institutional spaces, within the strategy of people's war".

For example the intervention by the revolutionary forces and the mass movement into bourgeois democratic institutions, through the election of mayors and local counsellors, must be combined with the building of new institutions of popular power, because "popular power does not exist without direct democracy and self-management by the masses".

The continuing validity of socialism

Right to the end of his life, Manuel Perez saw the question of power as a fundamental question for all revolutions

The Zapatistas in Mexico have

repeatedly argued that the left needs to rethink its understanding of power, not as something that's there to be seized, like the Bastille or the Winter Palace, but as something that needs to be built from below, here and now.

This argument has informed their attitude to armed struggle, to participation in elections, and to the formation of a Zapatista political movement.

Shortly before his death, Perez commented that "to some extent we agree with the Zapatista comrades when we talk about building popular power and not waiting for the revolution to triumph before helping the people to organise their own self-management in whatever form they see fit.

"However we do not share [the other part of the Zapatistas' view], because as a part of the vanguard that we are, we do aim to play a part alongside the people in the seizure of power."

Towards the end of his life, Manuel Perez gave this reply to those who claimed that "socialism no longer has any relevance in Latin America". "We say it has more relevance now than it ever had. What we are aware of is that it will have to be a socialism particular to Latin America. Particular to our identity and our assimilation of Marxism-Leninism to the peculiar conditions of our reality.

"This means that we cannot copy anybody's models, and what's more we will have to be very careful to correct the mistakes which others have made in the building of socialism. One aspect we see as especially important is that of democracy. And socialism by definition defends democracy. That's why we raise this as our flag. That's why we have to work hard for direct democracy so that the people can participate in building socialism." ★

Drop the debt!

In preparation for the G7 (+1) annual summit, 19th to 21st of June 1999 in Cologne, Germany, the Brussels-based Committee for the Cancellation of the Third World Debt (COCAD) is collecting signatures for the following petition.

The text was originally written by the Argentine group Dialogo 2000 in the framework of the "Jubilee 2000" debt initiatives. The final paragraphs are by COCAD

"We want the new millennium to be one of justice and peace for all of humanity, and that our common home, the cosmos, be preserved. This is why we ask, in the spirit of Jubilee, that the unpayable External Debt be cancelled by the end of the year 2000.

Contribute to a change by supporting this petition. With it, we are joining millions of persons in Latin America, the Caribbean and throughout the world who share the same hopes.

We, the undersigned, believe that the start of the new millennium should be an opportunity to generate new hope for Life for millions of people now imprisoned by poverty due to the illegitimate indebt-

edness of their countries.

In order to make a fresh start possible, it is vital that reparation be made for the injustice of an External Debt whose payment is demanded of those who neither contracted, nor were consulted, nor benefited from it.

A debt which has been repaid many times over but which continues to grow day after day. A debt for which those who made the loans are as responsible, if not more so, as those who received them.

We therefore call on the governments of the creditor countries to cancel these unpayable debts before the end of the year 2000, and to take effective measures to restore to those peoples who have been impoverished by them the means necessary for a dignified livelihood, by disactivating the mechanisms which helped to create the indebtedness.

[To be signed by the citizens of indebted countries]

We demand that those who govern our country, together with the leaders of other indebted countries, invest the resources that are now used to maintain the cycle of foreign indebtedness, so as to cancel the Social and Ecological Debts that are due our people as a consequence of the Foreign Debt.]

[To be signed by the citizens of industrialized countries]

In solidarity with the citizens of indebted countries, we demand that those who govern these countries invest the resources that are now used to maintain the cycle of foreign indebtedness, so as to cancel the Social and Ecological Debts that are due to the people of these countries as a consequence of the Foreign Debt.

Return petition sheets to: COCAD, 29 rue Plantin, 1070 Brussels, Belgium
Fax: (32-2) 522.61.27
Email: cadtm@skynet.be
Web: <http://users.skynet.be/cadtm>



Abortion under attack

Although the religious right has failed to recriminalise abortion, they have gradually succeeded in limiting women's access to information and medical procedures. **Dianne Feeley** reports.

Four years after the U.S. Supreme Court's decision, *Roe v. Wade*, which legalised abortion, conservative politicians, led by Congressman Henry Hyde (R), denied funding for abortions to women on welfare, except in cases of rape and incest.

In a country where health care is just another commodity, the idea that women of all incomes should have the right to abortion seemed utopian.

Access to abortion is blocked in a number of ways. State laws impose a waiting period, prohibit teenagers from obtaining abortions without their parents' consent, and force women to listen to anti-abortion propaganda disguised as "counselling".

In some states, the clinics, (which perform most abortions) must keep absurdly detailed records, or pay prohibitively high insurance premiums. Abortions are impossible to obtain in more than 80% of all U.S. counties.

Most recently the right has attempted to prevent federal approval of RU486, an abortion pill, often used as a "morning after" solution to contraceptive failure.

Conservatives have also tried to ban late-term abortions. They have focused their campaigns on the dilation and extraction method of abortion. It is used late in a pregnancy when the woman's life or health is in danger, or when an extremely severe fetal abnormality has been discovered. Less than 0.04% of all U.S. abortions actually involve dilation and extraction.

Each year a couple of hundred bills seeking to limit access to abortion are introduced into state legislatures and several dozen into the U.S. Congress. The last Congress (the 105th) passed fifty-three reproductive rights measures, thirty-nine of which restricted access to services. These included banning abortions in U.S. military hospitals, denying funding abortions for women in prison and eliminating abortion coverage in federal employees' health plans. Congress also provided \$US17.7 million for an Adolescent Family Life programme advocating sexual abstinence for teenagers.

In 1989 and 1992 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on various anti-abortion laws

and reaffirmed the central tenet of *Roe v. Wade*, that the state cannot outlaw abortion before the fetus becomes capable of independent life (the 'viability' test). However in 1992 the court loosened its rulings, by declaring that restrictive legislation which didn't place "undue burden" on women is constitutionally acceptable.

In addition to the myriad of state and federal legislation that restricts abortion, the medical establishment has always avoided implementing the law. Most U.S. hospitals have never performed abortions and medical schools don't train physicians in the procedure. The majority of physicians who perform abortion are older people – their commitment to performing abortions is grounded in their memory of what it was like for women when abortion was illegal.

Sexual health

Despite all the limitations that have been imposed, the U.S. rate of abortion remains high. There were 1.4 million abortions in 1994, 24 per 1,000 women of childbearing age. That is significantly higher than other industrialised country.

The high abortion rate is directly related to the unavailability of birth control. The rate of teenage pregnancy is also high, with teenagers obtaining 22% of all abortions and delivering 13% of the babies. Even in the age of AIDS, sex education in the schools is highly contested, and information about birth control methods and services is inconsistent.

Many health plans don't cover contraceptive services and for many poor women the cost of birth control is beyond their reach. 10% of all sexually active women don't use birth control and this group accounts for more than half of all unplanned pregnancies.

Two-thirds of the women having abortions intend to have children in the future, 55% are younger than 25 and 63% are unmarried. White women obtain 61% of the abortions, but Black women are nearly three times as likely to have abortions as whites and Latinas are twice as likely.

The anti-choice lobby concludes that the problem is too much sexual freedom. The pro-choice movement interprets this data as illustrating how vulnerable women of colour and young women are, and the need for a support system allowing them to make meaningful reproductive choices.

In October 1997 the federal government began a five-year plan for dealing with teen-age pregnancy, earmarking \$850 million for teaching abstinence. As part of the welfare law, the program must teach that "sexual activity outside of... marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects." It was enthusiastically signed by President Clinton, somewhat of an expert in the field.

The "Just Say 'No!'" campaign is piously supported by most politicians from President Clinton on down but no research suggests that such "education" can succeed.

Programs that support teenage mothers are also under attack. These include prenatal care, child-care centres in high schools and parenting classes. Critics contend that such programs send the message that "it's okay for high school women to have babies."

Abortion plays a contradictory role for the Republican right wing. It is a central issue in mobilising their core constituents, but on the other hand it alienates them from the majority of the electorate, which remains pro-choice.

With the right determined to push on against all odds, feminists tend to support those who veto the right's legislation. For example, women and Blacks, more than any other constituencies, have stood by Clinton during the Monica Lewinsky/impeachment hearings.

The war on clinics...

Between 1992 and 1996 the number of facilities providing abortions dropped 14%, to 2,042. This is primarily due to the war that is being conducted on providers.

Three physicians and four clinic workers have been killed in the last five years and another seventeen wounded. But this is the tip of the iceberg: the right wing has tracked the license plates of cars parked at clinics, confronted clinic patients with "Operation Rescue" teams

and set up phony clinics to confuse those seeking abortions.

Those supporting a woman's right to reproductive freedom have counter-demonstrated, organised pro-choice escorts of clinic patients, exposed the right-wing's clinics and sought legal redress.

The anti-abortion highwater mark occurred in 1992, when 1,107 acts of serious violence (bombing, arson, invasion, vandalism, chemical contamination) were unleashed against the community-based clinics where more than two-thirds of all U.S. abortions are performed.

...provokes popular revulsion

Things changed on March 10, 1993, when Dr. David Gunn was murdered in front of a Pensacola, Florida clinic. Later that year Dr. John Britton and James Barrett were shot and killed in front of another clinic in the same city. Pro-choice demonstrations and memorial services indicated public revulsion to these acts of terrorism.

As a result, Congress passed the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE), which imposed a prison fine of up to eighteen months and fines as high as \$25,000 for blockading clinics, damaging clinic property or harassing clinic patients and staff. (It attempted to draw a fine line between protest and harassment, with both civil liberties organisations and women's groups involved in refining the legislation.)

The passage of this law and the National Organisation of Women's successful suing of Randall Terry, Operation Rescue's guru, has diminished the right's mass demonstrations and prayer vigils in front of clinics.

According to the National Abortion Federation, in 1993 there were 66 blockades, 133 acts of vandalism and 188 cases of medical staff being stalked. Over 1,200 protesters were arrested. By the first four months of 1994, right-wing activity outside clinics declined significantly: 16 blockades, 108 arrests, 24 acts of vandalism and four cases of stalking.

But the intimidation continues

But the attacks against clinics and medical personnel have not stopped. In January 1998 a bombing of an abortion clinic in Birmingham, Alabama killed a security guard and seriously injured a nurse. In October 1998 Dr. Barnett Slepian was shot and killed by a sniper's bullet fired through the kitchen window of his home in a suburb of Buffalo, New York. (This murder fits a pattern of four earlier attacks on physicians who performed abortions in New York and Canada.)

What is "new" in the right wing's arsenal is an Internet site (the "Nuremberg Files") that invites readers to send in photographs, names, addresses and personal details (including the names and ages of their children) about abortion providers. It lists over 225 doctors and

hundreds of others associated with reproductive services and advocacy. Shortly after Slepian's murder a red line was drawn through his name.

The site was set up by Neal Horsley, who declared that "the most accurate name for legalised abortion is war." In addition to the lists, the site includes a section called "Save the Babies" by B. Lokey, who declares that "Even homicide is necessary to protect human life" and a lengthy statement entitled "Why I Shot an Abortionist" by Paul J. Hill, who was convicted of murdering Dr. John Britton and his escort, James Barrett.

Taking the "antis" to court

Currently a trial underway in Portland, Oregon seeks \$200 million in damages under the federal law that prohibits force or threats of force against providers of reproductive health services. It seeks a declaration that the web site and various "wanted" posters are illegal threats.

The civil suit names the American Coalition of Life Activists, which was originally listed as a sponsor of the web site, as well as the Portland-based Advocates for Life Ministries and a dozen prominent members of the anti-abortion movement, including Andrew Burnett and Michael Bray.

Burnett is one of the founders of Operation Rescue and the American Coalition of Life Activists. Bray served four years in prison a decade ago for setting fires to clinics and is the author of *A Time to Kill*, a book that justifies the killing of abortion providers.

The plaintiffs in the case - the Portland chapter of Planned Parenthood, the Portland Feminist Women's Health Center and five physicians--must show that even through the materials did not specifically threaten violence, they were "intended to be threatening" and were perceived to be so in the climate of fear under which physicians who perform abortions live.

Twenty-six years after abortion has legalised, most doctors who perform abortions wear bulletproof vests to the clinic, vary their route to work and attempt to shield their children from possible harm.

Abortion remains legal and available to those who can get to a city and have the funds to obtain one. Almost a million and a half women obtained an abortion in 1998, and almost forty million women have obtained legal abortions since *Roe v. Wade*. But given the level of ambivalence about sexuality and women's independence, the war over abortion in the United States will continue. ★

Sources: The Alan Guttmacher Institute and the National Abortion Federation.
This article was written for the US magazine *Against the Currents*

Labor Party Convention

John Hinshaw reports from Pittsburg on the slow, steady consolidation of the Labor party.

These delegates represented trade union bodies whose memberships total over one million (and several thousand individual members). They recommitted the LP to the comprehensive programme adopted at the founding convention in Cleveland in 1996.

Most of the 1996 convention had been spent hammering out the framework of the party, its constitution and programme. Little time was spent developing specific strategies to build the party. Thus two years later in Pittsburgh, delegates needed to deliberate on how they would build the party through issue-oriented and electoral campaigns.

Four major issue campaigns were launched: single-payer health care under the banner "Just Health Care," no privatisation of social security, a workers' bill of rights, and fair trade. These campaigns are designed to root the party in the struggles of organised workers and help attract a mass membership. These campaigns complement the 28th Amendment campaign, which seeks to guarantee everyone a right to a job at a living wage.

The convention also adopted a resolution initiated by the Black Caucus demanding a new trial for Mumia Abu-Jamal, "courageous defender of the rights of the working class," currently on death row.

The LP has approved a plan for running candidates in the future, but will only endorse candidates who are party members (i.e. no "fusion" tickets) and

only in localities where labour support and finances are sufficient to mount a credible campaign.

Why a labour party?

Most working class Americans are worried about their situation and that of the country: worried about the lack of jobs that pay decent wages and benefits, about healthcare costs, about the high cost of childcare and education. They are terrified that social security won't be there when they retire.

Many trade unionists know that policies like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) do not work in the best interests of the people and environments of the United States, Mexico and Canada.

Those who have tried to organise a union know that workers have to jump through successive rings of fire (while the boss and government soak them in gasoline) just to gain effective freedom of speech, association and sometimes even a union contract.

The belief that big business has too much control over the policies of both major parties and the government is

The Labor Party in the Big Picture

Over 1400 delegates from six national unions, over two hundred local unions and thirty-nine chapters of the Labor Party met in Pittsburgh in November, for the party's first Constitutional Convention.

This was an inspiring convention. At the Detroit chapter's report-back meeting, locked-out newspaper workers talked about how good it felt to be in a convention hall where everyone would support you, "unlike the Democrats and Republicans."

The differentiated strategy on electoral participation means that, in the places where those happen, we have the potential to attract a whole different layer of members.

Of course, what we have here is really an organising committee for a labour party. There is no shame in that; given the forces that back the Labor Party—a sometimes uneasy coalition of small unions and the left. In fact, it is remarkable that the group has held its own for so long.

Whether we get from here to a party, however, depends first and foremost on a revitalisation of the labour movement. Any expectation that we can grow into a powerful force just by our own hard work could lead to demoralisation.

It is no accident that the Labor Party in Detroit has attracted activist

newspaper strikers but made few inroads in the stagnant Union of Auto Workers (UAW).

What the Labor Party can do is prepare well to participate in and build on the upsurges that activists are working to bring about in the labour movement.

Labor Party leaders have met one important goal: to establish the party as a legitimate part of the labour movement. It's not a pariah. Their idea from the beginning has been to situate the Labor Party as an alternative. We will be there when union leaders finally give up on the Democrats.

But look what the party is up against: Evidence indicates that there is no insult the Democrats can hand out to working people that is too great for our current labour leaders to bear.

The people who are running American unions today believe in corporate competitiveness, not class independence. Unions that declare the boss the partner in the workplace will not mobilise to fight the boss in politics.

When labour leader John Sweeney brags about the movement's independence, he means that they sometimes endorse Republicans. No matter what great work the Labor Party does, it will not win such

leaders over. Worse, the Hoffa victory in the Teamsters is a bigger setback to the Labor Party than a good health care campaign will be an advance.

Qualitative growth of the Labor Party—growth that could make us a force to be reckoned with—depends not only on what we do as part of the Labor Party but on how successful we are in building movements willing to take on the boss and take back the unions.

The LP's leading organiser Tony Mazzocchi has said that he knows he can't recruit top labour leaders. His plan is to win over local and regional leaders, who will then pressure the higher levels. Quite right. But it will take more than the Labor Party's own campaigns around health care and Social Security for sizable numbers of those leaders to make the break.

The Labor Party won't sit around and wait for big developments. Its campaigns will provide excellent education about the class nature of American society and be a vehicle for activists from different unions to meet and support each other.

With the Labor Party continuing to spread the notion of labour's political independence, the opportunities provided by any upsurge in the labour movement will not be lost. ★

Jane Slaughter and Rodney Ward

widespread. And yet in the last election, over 98% of the incumbents who ran for Congress were reelected. The AFL-CIO continues to endorse politicians who voted for NAFTA, because their opponents were even worse.

This is the daunting problem facing the Labor Party, as an organisation of, by and for working people. It is the workers' equivalent of David going up against the corporate Goliath, the first such attempt in decades.

Corporations have fantastic amounts of money which enables them to own most of the mass media and almost all the politicians. Even when unionists realise the Democratic party is selling them short, they know that the Republicans would be even worse. Furthermore, most have worked so long within the Democratic party that they can't even imagine how to break free.

It gets worse: Over 85% of workers aren't even unionised. Thus the problems of the LP go to the heart of the complex relationships among the U.S. political system, capitalism and the labour movement.

Only those who enjoy a challenge, or the prospect of a gruelling political marathon whose benefits will likely accrue to the next generation, should read on. The faint of heart can stop reading here.

An organising approach

The (limited) media coverage of the LP has focused on the question of its electoral strategy. The 1996 founding convention ruled out alliances, endorsements and running LP candidates. This confounded most political analysts.

Many left-wing journalists followed *The Nation's* Alexander Cockburn and JoAnn Wypijewski, who viewed the non-electoral position as evidence of a reluctance to truly break with the Democratic Party.

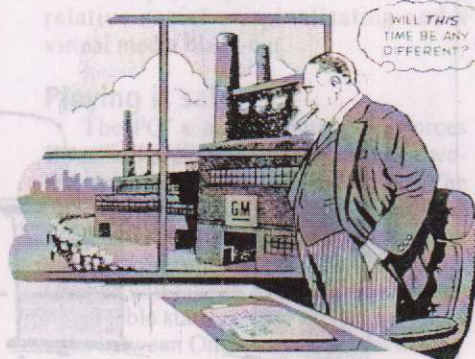
Even LP supporters, like veteran labour journalists Jane Slaughter and Kim Moody, were skeptical. In a recent issue of *Labor Notes*, Moody and Slaughter argued that the LP should run its own candidates since most people cannot understand the purpose of a non-electoral political party.

Such views dovetailed with some party members who argued that the electoral process will attract members, organisers and the backing of local unions. In the coming years, this theory will be put to the test as localities determined to run candidates will put forward proposals through the local, state and national levels of the party.

The party has called for an "organising approach to politics." This would signal a departure from past practice for both labour and the left. The AFL-CIO has proven effective at getting candidates elected through endorsements, donations and mobilisation of staff and members, but "prolabour" politicians have rarely stayed loyal to workers.

Even in 1993, when Democrats controlled Congress and the Presidency, the union movement got NAFTA as its reward. Clinton-style Democrats are not so much the "lesser of two evils" but proof of the "evils of two lessers."

While the AFL-CIO undoubtedly aided the Democrats in the recent elec-



tion, it is extremely doubtful that these politicians will enact any substantial reforms.

The typical electoral campaigns of the left might be "educational" in nature, but they have hardly transformed the country's socialist parties into major players in the country's political life. No one in the LP wants to be a two per cent footnote in the history textbooks.

The Greens have succeeded in becoming the third party in much of New Mexico and Maine, thanks to specific local conditions. But if the Labor Party stands where the main parties are evenly balanced, the result will be the election of more right-wing Republicans. The resulting "tsunami" in the labour movement would sink the LP. So the "spoiler" option is not open to the Labor Party.

The goal of most LP members is patiently building the party and its platform. They resisted the idea that the LP could endorse Green candidate and consumer advocate Ralph Nader in the presidential elections. The LP also rejects the fusionist approach of the New Party, which has almost exclusively elected Democrats.

The base of support

Unionist support for the LP is fairly broad, but strongest amongst those unions unafraid of confrontation with corporations. These are generally modest-sized, notably the United Electrical workers (with 30,000 members), the Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers (80,000), the California Nurses Association (28,000) and the United Mine Workers (40,000).

Several large locals (branches of national unions) attended the Pittsburgh convention, including Teamsters 705 (15,000 members), International Brotherhood of Dupont Workers (23,000), District 1199P (12,000), SEIU 250 (40,000).

Since the last convention, support amongst the unions has grown. For instance, while the UMWA had almost no

presence two years ago, at this convention 75 delegates from numerous locals were in attendance.

Party membership is uneven. One small UE local in Massachusetts has 45 LP members, while another in Pennsylvania with 3,500 members has seventeen.

Several SEIU locals have affiliated with the LP, a process aided by a letter inviting them to attend the LP convention by its President Andy Stern. That may not be repeated. After the success of the Democrats in the last round of elections, Stern began to criticise the LP as "premature."

The labour movement is proving to be relatively open to new ways of thinking. Even a staunch Democrat like Steelworker President George Becker spoke at the convention. He blasted the greed of corporations, but certainly didn't say that American workers face a class struggle. Instead he resorted to nationalist protectionism, especially against the import of steel cheapened by the Asian currency collapse.

Canadian Auto Workers President Buzz Hargrove was more impressive. He told delegates in Pittsburgh that "there is a class struggle and working people need a party that represents them."

Campaigns and party building

A Labor Party with a million members, and much broader and deeper support amongst the unions would represent a real and hopefully genuine alternative to business-as-usual politics. The problem is that there is no easy path to get the party to that happy point. There is no sure-fire candidate, no clever advertisement and no single campaign that will work the magic spell.

It took over fifty years for US labour to get into its current mess. It shouldn't take that long to get out of it, but it is likely to be a long time, and a lot of hard, unglamorous work. As David Campbell said, given the nature of the class struggle, we will not simply elect ourselves to power.

The LP has chosen five campaigns designed to recruit members or unions to these issues and ultimately to the party. In the future, these campaigns will complement elections. Right now, they are designed to attract members and raise workers' expectations and to shift the national debate (or lack thereof) on workers' issues.

One campaign designed primarily for industrial workers focuses on fair trade. Five years after the introduction of NAFTA, LP members report that unionists are still furious. Not surprising, since its effects continue to ravage industrial workers.

Organising for a workers' bill of rights is a long-term campaign designed to change the workplace. Most workers are so used to giving up our free speech at the workplace, we hardly notice the irony that protecting corporations' rights

to free speech are the justification for a broad range of anti-union tactics protected by the National Labor Rights Board.

Extending the Bill of Rights to the workplace would protect workers, and sharply curtail the privileges of corporations. At present, the First Amendment protects citizens from the government, not from corporations.

The social security campaign is primarily defensive. It rejects calls to privatize social security. There is no "social security funding crisis" that can't be fixed, once we accept realistic estimates of economic growth and family size. Any shortfall in social security funds (and the LP calls for broad improvement of the social safety net) should be financed through taxes on the rich.

Both the Social Security campaign and the call for a single-payer "Just Health Care" system are designed to attract the support of non-LP members to fight for reforms that are easy to understand and would improve virtually everyone's lives.

Unity and the right to choose

Debate on the health-care campaign largely focused on the language used in the debate on abortion rights. The founding convention had adopted language that linked a universal health care system to a "full range of family planning and reproductive services to men and women."

The Pittsburgh convention strengthened this language, by adding "including the right to continue or terminate a pregnancy. We oppose any forms of coerced sterilisation."

Some groups demanded that the term "abortion" be included in the platform. This move was firmly rejected by the convention as a whole and by the women's caucus. Attempts to delete the whole section were also decisively rejected.

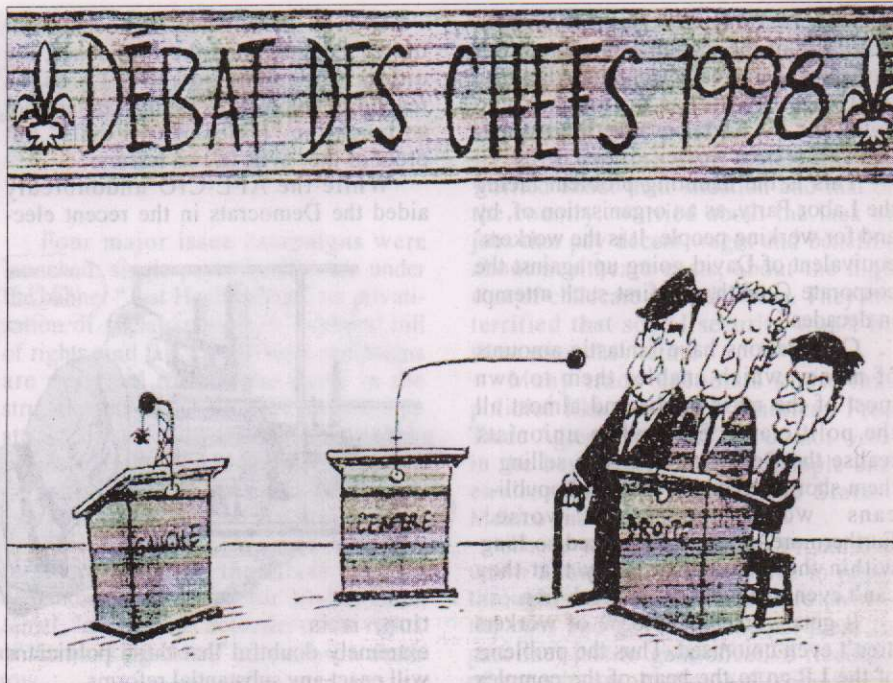
Baldemar Velasquez, President of the Farm Labor Organising Committee (FLOC) told delegates that he and his members believed that life began at conception — but he eloquently argued that building unity in the class struggle was more important.

The question, Velasquez stressed, was "not whether FLOC would accept the LP, of course it would. The question was whether the LP would accept the FLOC." The response was a standing ovation.

A generation's struggle

What party members make of these campaigns, issue or electoral, is largely up to them. The struggle to make principled labour politics a practical matter will be this generation's pivotal struggle. ★

This article first appeared in *Against the Currents*



All three main parties occupied the right-wing in the electoral campaign. From the left, Bouchard (PQ), Charest (Liberals) and Dumont (ADQ)

Quebec's inertia

Billed in advance as a date with destiny, Quebec's provincial election last November was a pretty dull affair.

Robbie Mahood

Parti Québécois Premier Bouchard easily outmanoeuvred his Liberal opponent Jean Charest. Charest's strident pro-business and anti-referendum rhetoric allowed Bouchard to portray himself as a more effective defender not only of Quebec's constitutional interests but also of the role of government in alleviating social tensions.

Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien didn't help Charest when he discarded the possibility of renegotiating Quebec's relationship with the rest of Canada ("the Constitution is not a grocery list", he said).

In fact, it was remarkable how much similar ground was occupied by the PQ and the Liberals on the constitution, as well as on social and economic policy. Michel Auger writing in *Le Journal de Montreal*, said "the two leaders are like Siamese twins joined at the Achilles tendon." Andre Picard in the *Globe and Mail* said "the campaign (had) the feel of an interminable company board meeting with two overly-ambitious vice-presidents pitching competing proposals to win favour with the shareholders."

As expected, the PQ retained its comfortable majority, winning 76 seats in Quebec's 125-member National Assembly. The British-style electoral system enabled it to win this majority with only 42.7% of the popular vote; two percentage points below its score in 1994.

The Liberal vote fell marginally as well despite the infusion of Charest, who left the federal Conservative party in a bid to unite Quebec's federalists. Although the Liberals actually scored 1% more than the PQ, their vote was concentrated in a small number of Risings (constituencies), reflecting the party's base among English-speakers, immigrants, and French speakers who live in the Quebec districts which border with Ottawa, the federal capital and a major employer in the region.

PQ malaise

The PQ's lacklustre performance reflects a profound crisis in its relationship with the nationalist movement. The party is caught in a trap of its own making. Peddling backwards or at least sideways on independence wins no new converts. On the contrary, it sows confusion and hesitation in the ranks and gives the federalist side a badly needed second wind.

The PQ was hit harder than expected by the fallout from its 'zero deficit' crusade. There is widespread anger over its deep cuts to education, social services and especially health care. The PQ's hapless Minister of Health, Jean Rochon, eked out the narrowest of victories in his Quebec City riding.

Like the NDP in English Canada, the PQ is not easily forgiven for its right-wing sins in office. The result — abstention from the campaign and at the polls,

as well as a small but significant defection to the ADQ.

Liberal decline

While claiming a moral victory based on the narrow Liberal plurality in votes, the federalists had in reality very little to cheer about. The election confirmed the continued slide in Liberal support within the majority francophone population. The Liberals could muster only 31% support among French-speakers, down from 45% in the 1980's.

The federalist press tried to blame Charest's failure on tactical errors and inner-party intrigues. But this is to miss the forest for the trees. The Quebec Liberal Party is caught between the pumped-up Canadian chauvinism of its nastier big brother in Ottawa and the Quebecois nationalist aspirations it must address if it ever hopes to regain power in Quebec City.

Demagoguery is rewarded

Only the Action Democratique du Quebec (ADQ) had any real satisfaction, seeing its popular vote almost double to 11.7%, although Leader Mario Dumont remains its sole Member of the National Assembly.

The ADQ's strong showing revealed an important undercurrent of alienation from the Liberals and the PQ. The appeal of the ADQ is diverse. On the one hand, it rallies soft nationalists still nervous about sovereignty but for whom the Quebec Liberal Party (PLQ) is no longer credible in advancing Quebec's interests.

To this 'middle way' on the national question, the ADQ added a right-wing appeal pitched to younger voters. Mario Dumont, for example, promised to reduce the civil service by 25%. In keeping with his origins in the Young Liberals, Dumont is even more right-wing in his social and economic philosophy than Charest.

English Canada's right wing Reform Party recognised this when they identified Dumont, rather than Charest, as the man who could "unite the right" in Quebec.

Unions' silent complicity

Quebec's trade union leaders offered no political guidance let alone a coherent alternative in this election. Under pressure from the ranks, the Teachers' Union (CEQ) organised a one day strike and mass rally mid-campaign to press their demand for pay equity.

The FTQ (Quebec Federation of Labour) confined itself to friendly exchanges with Jean Charest over how to amend Quebec's labour code and proclaimed its support for the proposed takeover by Loblaw's of Provigo, the big Quebec grocery chain. The CSN spoke out for underpaid childcare workers but was otherwise nearly invisible.

The silence of the union leaderships contributed in no small way to the res-

trictive pro-business discourse that dominated the campaign. In this way, the ADQ had a virtually free hand to court the protest vote with its conservative bombast.

It was left to the smaller parties of the left, notably the PDS and the RAP, to inject some real debate but their efforts were hampered by their scant resources, relative social marginalisation and a virtual media black-out.

Playing it safe

The PQ's muted victory reinforces Bouchard's cautious brand of conservative nationalism for the time being. The referendum will be postponed for at least two years and the watchword will be "good government". In the meantime, Quebec will take its place at the constitutional table starting with the 'social union talks between Ottawa and the provinces.

The left parties

For the first time since the early '80s there was an attempt to regroup the radical left.

The Parti de la Democratie Socialiste (Socialist Democracy Party) ran 97 candidates, on a programme of socialism and independence including self-determination for Quebec's aboriginal peoples. This was the first time a left party presented candidates in so much of the territory. The party received over 25,000 votes but at 0.6% fell short of the 1% needed for official party status. In 1994 the party's predecessor, NPD-Q, scored 0.85%.

The PDS' 500 members make up just under half the membership of the Rassemblement pour une Alternative Politique (RAP). This pro-independence social democratic movement, formed at the end of 1997, has strong anti-neoliberal rhetoric and calls for wealth redistribution, but lacks a programme. It tends to attract disillusioned former PQ supporters.

The electoral efforts of the PDS encouraged and obliged the social-democratic wing of RAP to present seven last-minute candidates, with a demagogic campaign calling for a guaranteed "citizenship income," and accepting that full employment will never return. Their leading personality, an octogenarian trade unionist, scored over 5,000 votes against Lucien Bouchard. He attracted considerable media attention, giving the left an exclusively redistributive image.

RAP candidates stood without any party label, some in Ridings where the PDS was already present.

They attracted similar low scores

On the domestic front, the PQ imagines that, having played "hard ball" for the business class in its first mandate, it will have the luxury of presenting a 'gentler' face over the next four years.

There is the pledge to introduce universal C\$5-a-day childcare by the year 2004 and there were hints in the campaign of addressing the inequities in the new Quebec drug plan. Evidently, the PQ 'lefts' will be given some scope to repair the party's tarnished social democratic image and this if for no other reason than to improve the prospects of winning a future referendum.

All this is predicated on highly dubious assumptions: sustained budget surpluses, falling unemployment, and continued labour peace. It can't work. ★

Robbie Mahood was a candidate for the PDS in Mont-Royal. He is a member of Socialist Action. See page 35 for contact address and subscription details.

as the PDS, for a total of 0.17%.

The Parti Marxiste-Leniniste du Québec and the Parti Communiste du Québec do not support independence. They ran separately, but scored less than 0.12% of the vote (up from 0.06% in 1994)

The International Socialists (English Canada's largest Trotskyist group) see Quebec nationalism as diversionary, and as a consequence are largely confined to the anglophone student milieu. They did not run candidates and refused to call for a vote for any of the other left parties.

Bloc-Pot stands for the legalisation of soft drugs, attracting younger people disgusted with politics, but often keen to be active in the political sphere. They scored 0.24% of the vote.

This division, and the failure to combine PDS and RAP efforts do not fully explain the left's disappointing score. The mainstream parties certainly benefited from the fall in unemployment, now under 10% for the first time since 1989.

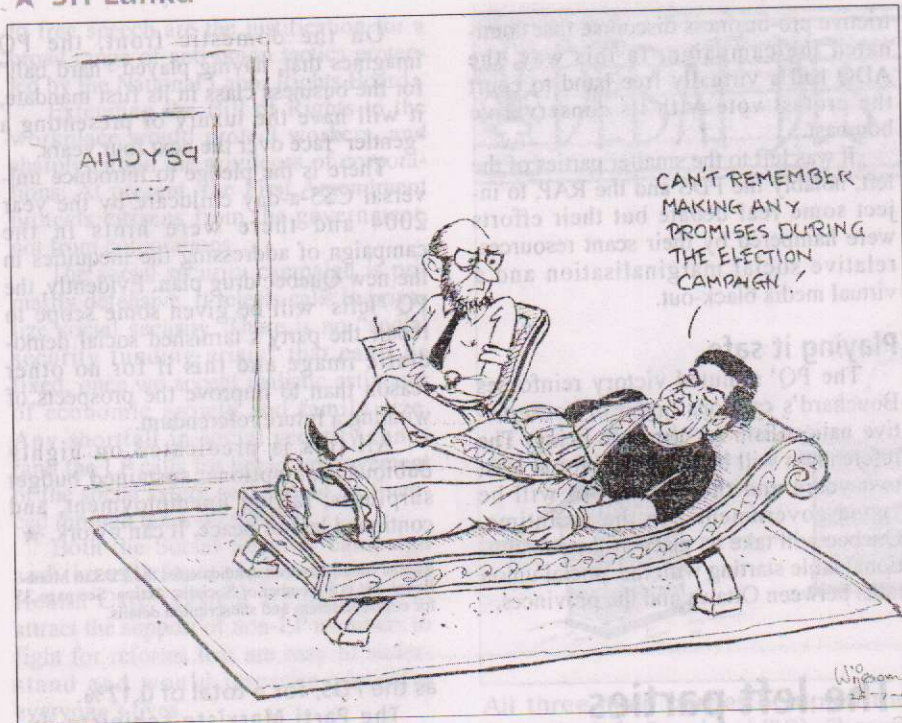
Only 1.8% of voters supported the smaller parties, compared to 4.8% in 1994. Voter participation fell from 81% in 1994 to 78% in 1998. About 2% of voters spoiled their ballot papers.

The partitionists

Parti égalité is an extremist party of English-speaking Quebecers who want the partition of Quebec if it declares independence.

English speakers and immigrants who prefer English to French make up over 20% of Quebec's population, but Parti égalité scored only 0.31%, up from 0.29% in 1994. Most English speakers voted for the Liberals. ★

[RM/MB/JD]



Wave of violence

Despite a wave of violence from the ruling People's Alliance, the left won over 5% of votes in the country's first provincial elections.

P. Sandanam*

The ruling People's Alliance (PA) has won provincial elections in the North Western (Wayamba) Province, a former stronghold of the right-wing United National Party (UNP).

The election campaign saw a marked increase in accusations of violence in this Sinhala dominated part of Sri Lanka.

The left-wing Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP — Peoples Liberation Front) won over 4% of the vote. A further 1.2% of votes went to the New Left Front.¹

The JVP originally opposed the provincial councils, claiming that devolution would play into the hands of Tamil separatists. But under new leadership the JVP have made a sharp turn to the left (see separate article). As well as participation in the provincial elections, they are closely allied with the New Left Front in all types of struggles against the onslaught of neo-liberalism in Sri Lanka.

It is encouraging that as many as 5% of voters have supported the left. After all, the present People's Alliance government came into power in 1994 as a coalition with the support of the Communist Party and the ex-Trotskyist Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP).

The formation of the People's

Alliance was a defeat for the Sri Lankan left. The Trotskyist NSSP lost their most popular leader, Vasudeva Nanayakkara, who split away with a group and joined the coalition to "create a left from within the forces of PA".

Peace, when?

In this election 'Vasu' made a personal statement asking the voters to vote for candidates who are campaigning for the progressive ideas that the PA supposedly stood for. Asked by the media whether he saw anyone in the PA who fitted his criteria, he was forced to answer no. He said only that "the Left" should be given a vote.

According to NSSP leader Vickramabahu Karunaratna, the election result has actually strengthened those leftists who have tried to build their forces from elements who are disillusioned with the PA, rather than "from within."

In 1994 the PA claimed that they would be able to reach a just settlement of the Tamil question. They have failed. At the time, the NSSP explained that the bourgeoisie would not be able to deliver peace with their market orientated policy.

Many liberals, journalists and activists in the NGO milieu have found it hard to break from the PA, despite the party's record since 1994.

They preferred to call for a blank vote, or a vote against "those who employ violence," rather than support the anti-neoliberal candidates of the JVP and NLF, who represent the only "third force" outside the PA and UNP.

Violence

The elections were marred by a shocking wave of violence, reminding many people of the dark days when the right wing UNP was in power. The non-governmental Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) documented that there were 675 reported incidents of violence including two killings and the stripping and parading naked of women election workers in the 45 day campaign in this small country of 18 million people.

The main culprit in this wave of violence was the PA. But the UNP certainly don't have clean hands either.

New Left Front leaders Patrick Fernando and Vickramabahu Karunaratna, General Secretary of the NSSP, were hospitalised after an attack by PA thugs wielding iron bars. The assailants are still at liberty, despite being clearly identified by their victims.

'Bahu' Karunaratna is the NLF's candidate for Chief Minister of the Western Province, which includes the capital, Colombo. According to an NSSP statement, "the racist chauvinists selectively targeted him for his forthright stand to recognise the right of self-determination of the Tamil nation of the north & east of the island."

Protest

Two days after the results were announced, 4 000 people, mainly workers, attended a protest in Colombo. Their demand was that the election result should be declared null and void, given the massive violence and ballot rigging. The demonstration was called by the JVP, the NLF and the radical Muslim United Liberation Front. The CMEV and the UNP have made similar demands.

According to Karunaratna, "the left within the PA coalition, which planned to wag the dog by its tail, has failed utterly. They remained tight lipped while all these atrocities were committed." Voters failed to reward the left components in the PA government — neither the LSSP nor the CP attracted preference votes.

"The ruling coalition showing its complete inability to deliver [on its promises] and resorting to violent means of gathering votes clearly exposes its oppressive character. Both the major parties pumped a massive amount of money into the election. The PA victory in this traditional UNP stronghold will reinforce the decline of the right-wing party."

Elections in five other provinces were postponed by the government on supposed "security reasons". The deputy defence minister, who is part of the chauvinist block, said that elections will be held once the war against the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) is won. But the war is at a stalemate, and the Supreme Court recently ruled against the Government's postponement of those elections.

There is a working class majority in some of the other provinces, particularly

in the Western province. Once these elections are held, leaders of the New Left Front expect to gather momentum, and win a far more significant number of votes. According to Karunathna, "the forces of dissent gaining a 5% vote in this election marred with violence, ballot rigging and state terror clearly shows that

the Left wing forces in Sri Lanka are making their way to the forefront." ★

Notes

* Additional material by our staff-writers.

1. The New Left Front (NLF) includes the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) affiliated to the 4th International, the United Socialist Party (USP), affiliated to the CWI, the New Democratic Front (NDF) and the Diyasa Study Circle. The NLF scored 12,817 votes in these elections.

The People's Liberation Front (JVP)

Provincial councils were created in 1987 under an Accord between the Indian and Sri Lankan governments, supposedly to devolve power to the Tamil minority. Ironically the only part of the island where they are now not functioning is in the war torn Tamil majority north and east.

The formation of the councils was strongly opposed by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP — Peoples Liberation Front), a Sinhala radical petty bourgeois movement. It joined in a campaign of chauvinist violence orchestrated by the paramilitary Deshapremi Janatha Viyaparaya (DJV — Peoples Patriotic Movement). The aim was to stop the Councils, and force the withdrawal of Indian troops.

Sinhala chauvinism, state terror

The UNP government now faced destabilisation from two sides: the Tamil Tigers in the north, and the DJV in the south. But the deployment of Indian troops in the Tamil areas allowed the government to bring Sri Lankan troops back to the south, to crush the Sinhala protests. Apart from the NSSP, all the opposition parties supported the UNP proposals to "restore democracy."

In fact, the UNP government unleashed state terror, killing or "disappearing" 60,000 Sinhala youth and eliminating many senior JVP leaders.

In 1988-89 the DJV carried out fascist-style assassinations of leaders of the UNP, and a number of Left parties including the LSSP, CP and NSSP (then grouped in the United Socialist Alliance).

The inspiration for these acts came from the DJV's "Pol Pot" methods, and the ideology of racist intellectuals of the Jathika Chinthanaya (National Consciousness) current.

The attacks on the NSSP and other left parties reflected the accusations that these were "a pro-Indian fifth column," and their

opposition to anti-Tamil discrimination was "an affront to the [Sinhala] nation."

The JVP has now split into two opposing tendencies. Chauvinist forces have left the JVP and joined hands with the militarist forces within government to form the Anti-Terrorist Movement. This bloc mobilises for war against the Tamils, and all forms of devolution.

According to NSSP leader Karunathna "their aim is to come to power through militaristic methods. They hope to establish a Sinhala-Buddhist dictatorship... If anything close to fascism can arise in this country, it is from this tendency and none other." The movement has since attacked a peace demonstration in Colombo, with police looking on.

The JVP moves left

"The JVP, however, has moved away from racism. Together with the NSSP, they have fought against the chauvinists on university campuses....The JVP has opted for a left bloc, and dropped the idea of unity between the left and the chauvinist groups."

In previous elections the JVP used violence to stop people voting. This time, they were the victims of violence by the two main parties. There were only four allegations of JVP violence.

The JVP evolved from the youth wing of the Maoist Ceylon Communist Party [not to be confused with the pro-Moscow Communist Party — Ed.].

Despite claims to be Marxist-Leninist, they could not develop strong roots among the urban poor and working class, and remain a party based on the Sinhala-speaking rural poor.

"In that sense," argues Karunathna, they have similarities with the Russian Narodniks in the early part of this century, or peasant-based communist parties in other countries." [CKB/JD] ★



Indonesia Student solidarity

A range of organisations are sponsoring an International day of solidarity for Indonesian and East Timorese students scheduled for Saturday, May 22, one day after the Indonesian student movement forced the resignation of Suharto.

Given the vanguard role being played by the student movement in Indonesia and East Timor at the moment, it is extremely urgent to provide the maximum support for these two movements.

In Australia, there will be marches, rallies, public meeting and other events in most major cities. Activities will also be held in a number of European and N. American cities. Suggested themes include:

- Solidarity with Indonesian and East Timorese students!
- Free East Timor! Freedom in Indonesia!
- Release all imprisoned and disappeared students!
- Free Xanana, Budiman and Dita Sari!
- End all military ties with the Habibie-Wiranto regime!

Initiated by Resistance Socialist Youth Organisation, Australia. Supporters include: Antei-ro da Silva, Student Solidarity Council, Dili, East Timor; Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (FRETILIN), Australia; Students in Solidarity for Democracy in Indonesia (SMID), Indonesia; Students and Peoples Committee for Democracy (KOMRAD), Jakarta, Indonesia; Student Solidarity for Indonesia (SSI), the Netherlands; Malang Student Committee (KMM), Indonesia, and; People's Struggle Committee for Change (KPRP), Indonesia.

For more information contact ASIET, PO Box 458, Broadway NSW 2007, Australia. Tel: 61-(0)2-96901230. Fax: 61-(0)2-96901381. Email: asiet@peg.apc.org Webpage: <http://www.peg.apc.org/~asiet>

Trade unions "suspended"

The Pakistan government has "suspended" trade unions responsible for water and power distribution.

Farooq Tariq

In December the federal government inducted 30,000 to 35,000 junior commissioned officers and around 250 officers of the Pakistan army into the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA). Trade unions were "suspended" for two years. WAPDA employs more than 150,000 workers.

"The army will help the power company in all sorts of departments, from reading meters, delivering bills, to detecting cases of electricity theft and even manning public complaint centres", said the new WAPDA chairperson, Lt General Zulfikar Ali Khan. If he runs into difficulty, help will be at hand. Ali is the brother of the federal minister responsible for power and water.

The militarisation of this sector is another step in the curbing of trade union rights across Pakistan. The pretext of "safeguarding essential services" was recently used to remove the union rights of workers at Pakistan International Airlines. The country's 100,000 railway workers have met the same treatment.

The Essential Services Act was used to ban unions by military dictator Zia ul-Haq in the early 1980s. Now, the same act is being used by the "democratic" government of Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif.

The real motivation for the attack on the electricity and water workers is the government's determination to abide by the agenda of the IMF and World Bank. That means drastically downsizing and privatising power and water.

The latest measures have been justified in terms of WAPDA's heavy losses: the government claims that at least 26% of the electricity produced has been stolen by "influential people". But these influential people must come mainly from the ruling Muslim League and the opposition Pakistan People's Party. They belong to the feudal and capitalist class which the army exists to serve.

In reality, the soldiers have been brought in, not to curb the theft, but to get rid of workers as part of the downsizing; 45,000 jobs are under threat.

The main reason for WAPDA's electricity losses is the partial privatisation of the profitable thermal power stations during Benazir Bhutto's government

(1994-96). The present government claims that large-scale irregularities and corruption were involved in the privatisation of these units.

The main beneficiaries of the privatisation were the US and British buyers. The government guaranteed very high prices for the electricity, and the companies are now making big profits while consumers' electricity bills have tripled in the last few years.

The current government initially tried to negotiate with these so-called independent power projects to reduce electricity prices. But they did a U-turn, under pressure from the IMF and World Bank. Instead, it is targeting the workers and calling in the army to run WAPDA.

The army's role in running civilian administrations has been increasing over the last two years. Profitable contracts have been awarded to the army in education, census work and road construction.

We are now seeing the true face of the emergency rule instituted after India and Pakistan's nuclear tests in May 1998. For example, when the Sindh provincial government was dismissed and governor's rule imposed in October, army courts were established in the province, supposedly to curb terrorism.

The federal government is trying to impose sharia [Islamic] laws, which will give it dictatorial powers. The bill has been passed by the National Assembly, but not yet by the Senate, in which the government does not have a majority.

During the last two years, the Nawaz government has faced a severe economic crisis and has been forced to raise taxes, causing unprecedented price increases. The crisis has been exacerbated by the sanctions imposed by the imperialist

powers following Pakistan's nuclear tests.

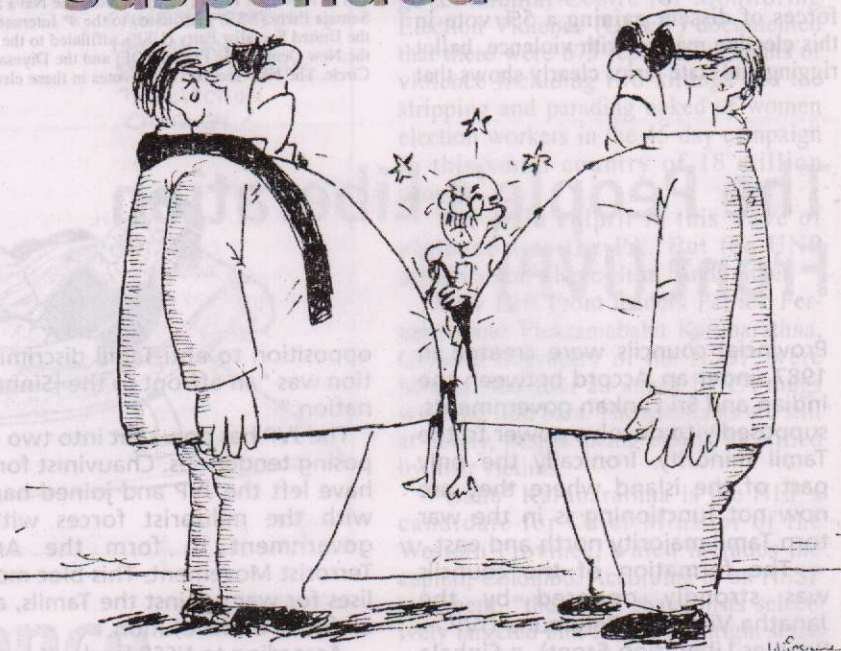
On two occasions, the government has defaulted on its loan repayments. The recent IMF and World Bank US\$5.5bn. bailout demanded the devaluation of the rupee, privatisation of financial and services institutions and the imposition of a general sales tax of up to 15%.

Workers in a range of institutions have resisted these measures by striking and demonstrating. Workers at Habib Bank recently defied threats from the industrial courts and the government to hold a successful three-week strike demanding the implementation of a pay package the government had been refusing for four years.

Rail workers have launched a national campaign against the privatisation of railways, involving mass protest meetings, hunger strike camps and threats of an all-out strike. Despite the government's efforts, it has not yet succeeded in fully privatising any of the country's major institutions.

The unions covering WAPDA workers have condemned the government's actions and threatened to go on strike. They have also decided to appeal to the Supreme Court. The big question is whether the Pakistan Workers' Confederation will initiate strike action to defeat the government's attacks. ★

Protests about WAPDA should be sent to: Mian Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister of Pakistan, Islamabad, Pakistan; fax 92 51 920 7464; phone 92 51 922 2333, with a copy to: Weekly Mazdoor Jeddohud, 40 Abbot Road, Lahore, Pakistan; fax 92 42 630 1685. Farooq Tariq is the editor of *Weekly Mazdoor Jeddohud (Workers' Struggle)*, the newspaper of the Pakistan Labour Party. The group recently split from the CWI, a network led by Britain's Socialist Party. This article is reprinted from *Green Left Weekly*, 27 January 1999



China

Human rights situation worsens

by Jun Xing

On 5 October 1998 the Chinese government, signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which he signed over a year ago, has still not been endorsed by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress.

Many of the rights listed in these Covenants are also in the Chinese Constitution. But people exercising these rights have been persecuted and imprisoned on charges of subversion or counter-revolutionary activities.

At the World Human Rights International Symposium (Beijing, 21-22 October 1998), Chinese officials said that China had not revised its views on human rights. At the closing ceremony, Zhao Qi, Director of the News Bureau of the State Council, said that the Chinese government integrates the general principle of human rights with the concrete situation in China, and the right to life and to development are prioritised. Qian Qishen, Minister of Foreign Affairs, asserted at the opening ceremony that whereas European countries stress individual rights, Asian countries stress the rights of the community and the responsibility towards family and society.

The rhetoric of such statements is obvious: prioritising the right to life and to development is used as a pretext for the suppression of the citizens' political and social rights, and the "collective" is just a word used to replace the rights of the individual.

The President of the Chinese Human Rights Research Association, an official organisation, said that Chinese realities are different from those of other countries, and the Chinese government has to consider how it will implement the Covenants and how they can link with Chinese law (Cheng Pao, Oct 8).

In reality, the government continues to stipulate laws that prohibit the rights of citizens. Lately, Zhu Rongji, Premier, signed the "Interim Ordinance on the Registration and Management of Civil, Non-Enterprise Units", which applies to societies engaged in non-profit making

social activities using non-state owned funds. The Interim Ordinance stipulates that these societies "must not violate the country's unity, security and solidarity of the nationalities, and must not damage the country's interests and society's public interests".

Li Peng, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, also said that the government would not tolerate any civil organisations that oppose socialist market economy, object to social stability, advocate multi-party system, and negate the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (Apple Daily, Dec 2). Jiang Zemin, Party General Secretary, in his Dec 18 speech, also asserted that "all criminal activities that disrupt the social order and the market order, and damage social stability must be severely suppressed... they must be eliminated in the bud".

Indeed, the government has conducted a series of repression of civil society:

- The Preparatory Committee of the Chinese Democratic Party was ordered to disband, and its leaders in over ten provincial capitals were detained. Its three leaders, Xu Wenli, Qin Yongmin and Wang Youcai, were respectively sentenced to 13, 12 and 11 years of imprisonment on the charge of conspiring to subvert the state regime.

- On 30 October 1998, "Corruption Watch", claiming a membership of over a hundred in 11 provincial capitals, was ordered to stop all its activities. Its applications in September and October to the Beijing Civil Affairs Bureau for registration were rejected.

- The mild "Chinese Development Association", composed mostly of intellectuals, registered in Hong Kong, with a membership of over four thousand in the mainland, and claiming subscription to Marxism and support for the Chinese Communist Party, held its first Congress on Oct 4-5 in Beijing, attended by almost a hundred representatives from all over the country. On Oct 26, its property was seized and confiscated, and it was ordered to disband. One of its leaders, Peng Ming, had his passport confiscated.

- Also on Oct 26, 40 representatives of the "Chinese Family Church",

claiming a membership of 80 million Christians, were all arrested. Over a hundred members were subsequently arrested in Nanyang city.

Persecution of dissidents actually intensified after China signed the two International Covenants. Between Oct 25 and 27, over 40 dissidents were arrested.

On Oct 28, Yu Tielong, a member of the Chinese Democratic Party, stood for election as village chief in Shanding Village, Zhejiang Province, and obtained the largest number of votes. The election was declared null and void by the authorities. In mid November, another member of the party, Gao Hongming, stood for election as deputy to the Beijing People's Congress, but was deterred by the authorities, and was prevented from distributing leaflets to the electorate.

On Nov 24, a group of workers from an ammunition factory in Beijing signed a joint letter nominating dissident He Qing to run for election as deputy to the People's Congress. The management cancelled his nomination on the ground that He Qing had participated in the Democracy Wall Movement of 1979 and June Fourth of 1989.

Wang Wanxing, a dissident in Beijing who displayed a banner on June 4, 1992 at the Tiananmen Square demanding rehabilitation of June Fourth has been detained in a mental hospital for 6 years. Shanghai dissident Wang Miaogeng was also locked into a mental hospital in 1993, and has not been heard of since.

The above information —revealed in newspapers in Hong Kong — may only be the tip of the iceberg of repression. The stringent wave of repression recently launched reveals the authorities' fear of a reorganisation of the movement for democracy in a time of accelerating social contradictions, rising worker protests, and increasing peasant riots. The social and political atmosphere is changing, anticipating the 10th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square demonstration on 4 June 1989.

Source: October Review Vol.25 Issue 5/6 1998.
Contact: October Review, G.P.O.Box 10144, Hong Kong.
e-mail: or@earthling.net

The king is dead! Long live the king...

Waleed Kenaan

Not one but four US presidents rushed to King Hussein's funeral in Jordan. A strong message of support for the "smooth" succession from the late king to his son Abdala.

Succession to the eldest male son is a "constitutional" procedure reminiscent of the Middle Ages. But the assembled world leaders, and the western media, had no objections. There was no mention of the ballot box which these same leaders demand in Cuba, Nicaragua or any country which does not comply to the minute with their hegemonic policy. But Jordan is not one of those countries.

The four million inhabitants of Jordan have neither the right to elect their "president" nor the right to choose their government. They have a limited influence in selecting the country's "Parliament". But this institution mainly serves as a decoration to make the king's regime shine in the eyes of the west, in order that the regime may be eligible for continued military, economic, and political support.

Paradoxically, a limited "political opening" is considered essential to accompany the World Bank and the IMF Structural Adjustment Programme. Giving the poor the illusion of participation, to encourage them to bear the burden of reform. We are witnessing the transformation of a country ruled by Martial Law during most of its history to a system of "martialized" laws. At the centre of this "political opening" is, of course, ratification of the "Peace Agreement" with the Zionist State.

What legacy does King Abdala inherit? The old king left the country with over 25% unemployment. The number of households in absolute poverty quadrupled between 1987 and 1992. These households represent at least one quarter of the population. And 7% of families (300,000 persons) live in abject poverty.¹

A World Bank study of the health sector points to the "possible reemergence of previously eradicated epidemic diseases," as a result of the widening gap between the rich and the poor.²

In 1994, the country's Health Minister³ revealed that corruption in the governmental health sector had allowed the import and sale of drugs and food that were carcinogenic or otherwise unsuitable for human use! The corruption within the health sector reemerged in November 1998, when 500 school children were hospitalised after a vaccination programme.

The public health situation has also worsened due to the lack of drinking water. Each household in Jordan gets just 22 gallons a day compared to 65 gallons in Saudi Arabia and 78 gallons in Israel!⁴ This led to an even greater catastrophe in July 1998, when it was discovered that contaminated water was being delivered to some neighbourhoods in the capital.

In 1994, the World Bank reported that the ratio of debt to GDP in Jordan (107% of the GDP) "exceeded the standards established for creditworthiness (75% of the GDP) throughout the past decade."⁵ According to the Bank, there would be no way out for the Jordanian economy during the 1990s unless the country could achieve a level of growth of over 6% in each year. Jordan would not be able to achieve such growth without attracting "a level of capital inflows from abroad which would support a level of private investment [equivalent to] 20% of GDP."⁶

Of course, Jordan's Structural Adjustment Programme has failed, just like all those in other parts of the world. In August 1998 the Jordanian government attacked the World Bank in the local press for the failure of the 1988-98 Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). The World Bank and IMF in turn attacked the government for submitting false numbers for the rate of growth in GDP and other economic figures. For four years the government had been claiming a growth rate of 6-7%. In fact, these years were characterised by either what the IMF likes to call "negative growth," or growth rates below 1.5%!

This was a curious charade. The IMF had accepted the government figures at the time, and applauded Jordan for its efforts. When challenged over its falsehood, the Jordanian government admitted the falsification. What is the point of this programme, since both who design it and those who implement it agree on the falsification of its advertised goals? What are the real goals of SAPs?

It is increasingly clear that the real success for both sides is the integration of the local economy with the world global market. Despite all the rhetoric, SAP programmes are not about paying the National Debt.⁷ These IMF and World Bank plans actually maintain the debt trap, in order to force the restructuring of the whole economy for the benefit of global capitalism. The basic principles of the Bretton Woods system, established 50 years ago, are trade liberalisation and controlling capital flows.⁸

In 10 years of Structural Adjustment,

Jordan did a lot to attract foreign capital. The highest band of income tax was reduced from 50% to 35%. All kinds of tax breaks for companies were introduced. Government subsidies on oil, food, fodder and other vital subsidies were reduced or abolished. But the exchange rate of the Jordanian Dinar was kept fixed. Import tariffs were reduced or abolished. The revenue shortfall was made up by a new sales tax, hitting consumers and the poor in particular.

Despite the desperate situation, the country continued to take loans to fulfil its commitments to the world capital and specific sections of the local bourgeoisie in facilitating their investments and complying with their needs.

The bad news is not over. Water is scarce in Jordan, and many voices at government level are talking about diverting water from the "wasteful" agricultural sector to "income-generating" sectors like industry and tourism. This will presumably be done by liberalising the prices of water, and letting the market decide who can afford this most basic of resources.

The World Bank has also recommended changes in the Land Laws. They want to replace the taxes on land transfer to people outside the close family by taxes on vacant land.⁹ The effect of this will be to concentrate land in the hands of few investors. It is a key step in the "upgrading" of the refugee camps where many of the country's Palestinians live.¹⁰

A client state

Despite the failure of the first 10 year SAP, the government is negotiating a sequel. To understand what kind of government would do this to its own people, we must look back to the origins of the Jordanian monarchy.

As the Ottoman empire declined, Jordan came under British control. This influence continued even after "independence" in 1946. Modern Jordan was a key part of the British and French plan to divide and rule the middle east. Jordan was to serve as a buffer zone along most of the border between the Zionist State and the Arab world.

Because of its importance as a buffer state, the regime has been assisted and supervised by the USA and the oil-rich Arab regimes of the Persian gulf.

The country's main source of income during the past 72 years was foreign grants and loans. Up until the late 80s, this amounted to more than 50-70% of the national budget. There were ups and downs in this trend, but only for a brief period. The king always managed to find new donors interested in his geopolitical merchandise.¹¹

The new king will have the same tribal support that he inherited from his grandfather. The tribes are used to structure his army, which is the bedrock of the monarchy. Army officers and top civil servants are invariably selected

from the allied tribes. As its power has expanded across the entire country, the masculine tribal mentality had come to have a massive weight in society, from the tribal and army songs you hear in the street to the deplorable situation of Jordanian women.

The monarchy's tribal power base is no historical accident. Jordanian kings have managed the country in alliance and with the substantial help of the British, US, and Israeli governments. At different periods, the old king also harnessed support from richer countries in the region, mainly Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq.

In 1956, the king had to bow to the will of the people, who poured into the streets against the British backed "Baghdad Pact" and against British rule of the country and army. By the mid-60s the King had regained control. He used British and US military and economic support to crush the people's movements. He dissolved the Parliament and declared martial law. There were dozens of casualties and thousands of arrests.

This repression continued until the 1967 war, when Jordan lost the West Bank to the Zionist state. The army, the backbone of the regime, was crushed and scattered, and the Palestinian resistance began to reemerge. The king had to again bow to circumstance, reconstruct his forces and regain support from his American and Israeli allies. Then he began to prepare for the 1970 civil war and massacres in Amman. He crushed the Palestinian national resistance and drove them out of the country. He reintroduced martial law, with full economic, military and political support from America.

In 1973, fearing another surge in nationalist feelings, he flew to meet the Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir and revealed to her a possible Egyptian and Syrian attack on Israel. Under Jordanian law, this was treasonous and criminal.

Martial law was maintained until 1989, when the king bowed to the threat of unrest. He was terrified that the *intifada* in the West Bank would spread into Jordan, where over 60% of the population is of Palestinian origin.

But what most alarmed the king were riots in the non-Palestinian population, which represents his main source of support. People were rioting against the effects of the structural adjustment plan. Soldiers were among the rioters.

Hussein managed to crush the uprising quickly, and then stabilise the situation with a limited political opening. But he didn't change the parameters of the structural adjustment programme, which he insisted was the only way out of the economic crisis.

After the second gulf war, in the mood of defeat which was sapping the morale of the people, the regime redoubled its implementation of the SAP. The king began with the help of a "tamed" Parliament: he co-opted the Islamic movement, Jordan's largest

"opposition." (Hardly surprising, the Islamic movement was the only legal party in Jordan between 1943 and 1989).

From this safe position, the king put forward an undemocratic and pro-tribal election law, preventing the opposition parties from pursuing any sort of effective alliances against the coming "Peace Treaty" with Israel.

Then came a "new" press and information law, condemned by human rights groups in Jordan and all over the world. Under this legislation, 13 newspaper have been closed, and there has been a continuous trickle of arrests and condemnations of journalists.

The combination of these two laws serves to silence and dismantle all opposition voices by all means available. Nothing has been left to chance. It interferes directly and indirectly, both to advance the regime's loyal clients, and to limit the already-fragmented opposition.

The country's elections are seriously manipulated. Last time round, only 39% of the 1.85m. voters participated. This is less than 23% of the population!

Oppositionists and independent voices are falsely accused, tried under harsh legislation, and sentenced to long periods of imprisonment. Many others are still waiting for their day in court.

Jordan's "forgiving king" often steps in to pardon those he has unjustly accused and sentenced. Good for his image. Good for stability.

In November 1998, Amnesty international reported that "several detainees have died in jail over last two years following beating by different security services... sometimes [there] has been no proper investigation" of charges brought against oppositionists. But this kind of news doesn't interest the monarchy's supporters in the western media.

One of the most troubling results of these laws has been the attack on labour and professional unions, and regular interference in union elections. The regime has also introduced a new labour law that eliminates the right to strike, and leave unions vulnerable to being dismantled at any time.

This is part of a process aimed at maintaining the popular masses in a state of defeatism, lowering their morale and weakening their ability to resist the savage consequences of the SAP implementation. This makes it possible to accelerate the pace of "privatisation." In Jordan today, privatisation is a wholesale sell-off of government enterprises at ridiculously low prices for the sake of "attracting" international capital.

At the same time, the government is reducing or abolishing subsidies on food and fodder. The price of water for agriculture has risen by over 600% during the past 7 years!

This is the contradictory legacy that King Abdala must now assume.

Abdala has a 20-year military career and has served as the head of the elite

forces in the army. The former regent, his uncle Hassan was unable to oppose King Hussein's decision to appoint Abdala as his successor. The United States administration and Israel have already shown their support for Abdala and are trying to gather aid from the region (mainly from the Gulf States) to smooth the transition of power and maintain stability.

There is a lot of talk about "democracy" and "political opening," but this is just a smokescreen. As a sign of welcome to the new king, the main organised party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF) has lifted its boycott of the country's "fixed" elections. There is no real opening for an expression of the popular interest.

The policies which Abdala will continue are against the will and the interest of ordinary people in Jordan and across the Arab World. The new monarch will pursue close relations with Israel, and collaborate with the American plan to topple Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq.

Abdala will continue his father's strategy of active intervention in the changing structure of the Islamic groups and other opposition groups on the left, demoralising and dividing activists.

The new king will continue Jordan's submission to IMF and World Bank diktats. Any foreign aid which does arrive¹² will be sucked into the corrupted structure of the regime.

If this century has proven anything, it proves that no government is to be trusted to ensure the rights, needs and future of the people. Nowhere is this clearer than in the regimes in the Arab world. But what to do with political movements without memory? What to do with those who rushed to the king's funeral, praising his work for peace (with Israel and against the Palestinians) and for the country (for the rich and against the poor). The Jordanian regime can be relied on to pursue the disgrace of the Oslo and Wadi Araba agreements. This is no time for illusions about peace and progress in Jordan and the region. ★

Notes

1. The absolute poverty line for a family of 6.8 persons is JD 97 (US\$136) per month per family not paying rent and JD119 (US\$167) per month for a family paying rent. Abject poverty is \leq JD67 per month!

2. Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan: Health sector study, World Bank 1997

3. Minister of Health Abd Alraheem Malhas.

4. www.MSNBC.com 6/11/98, average household in Jordan is nine people

5. World Bank, in "Peace and Jordanian Economy" October 1994.

6. *Ibid.* pg.5

7. "The only part of the so-called national wealth that actually enters into the collective possession of a modern nation is — the national debt." Marx, Capital Volume One page 919, Vintage Books

8. Whose world Order: Conflicting Visions lecture by Noam Chomsky Sept. 22 1998 at the university of Calagary.

9. World Bank Study: "Peace and Jordanian Economy" October 1994.

10. The geopolitical role that Jordan (TransJordan) has played and "benefited" from during different periods of history

11. The per capita income ratio of Jordan to Israel is 1:12.

12. Though the economic crisis in the Persian Gulf threatens to cut Jordan's aid income. Saudi Arabia's national debt is currently 120% of GDP, and oil prices are expected to remain very low.



Mindanao conflict escalates

The Philippine government has escalated the war against the Moro minority and revolutionary groups on the Southern island of Mindanao.

According to **Chris Gaerlan** of the Alab-Katipunan peace movement, "the Mindanao problem is not military but poverty."

In 1996, the Armed Forces of the Philippines launched military offensives against the strongholds of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). This offensive was accompanied by the opening of peace negotiations with the group, which seeks self-rule for the indigenous, Muslim population of Mindanao. The army advanced into the peripheries of MILF main camps. (The MILF has 13 major and 33 smaller camps all over Mindanao).

In 1997 the army advanced even further towards the MILF: main camps. Military offensives happened in the MILF camps at Camp Abubakar, Raja Muda, and Camp Omar.

Clashes and skirmishes heightened, while the peace negotiations continued. A Secession of Hostilities agreement was signed, but, later in the year, an armed confrontation near camp Abubakar at Buldon and Barira municipalities resulted to the killing of teachers and students at a Madrasah (Islamic school).

Meanwhile, the government finally signed a peace agreement with the larger Moro National Liberation Front. Mindanao was promised a degree of autonomy, and MNLF leader Nur Misuari became the governor of the Autonomous Region of the Muslims on Mindanao (ARMM).

In 1998, the army intermittently attacked Camp Omar and Camp Rajah Muda. Heavy fire fights took place in these MILF territories which killed and wounded undetermined numbers of government soldiers and rebel comba-

tants. Elsewhere, five major detachments of government troops were overrun by the MILF which resulted to the closure of major national highways.

The heavy fire fights between the two warring armed groups continued to escalate even during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which started on December 19.

There was a massive deployment of military forces from the north of the Philippines (4 Army Divisions, Special Operations Groups, Special Forces and other military units, from bases in Luzon and Visayas). They reinforced the government positions around the 13 main MILF camps. This growing encirclement marked a new, higher phase of the military offensive.

By early 1999 the main MILF camps were encircled. Camps Abubakar, Omar and Raja Muda were again shelled with mortars and massive bombings. There was a massive confiscation of MILF arms from their satellite camps and peripheral regions. The skirmishes continue as we go to press.

Since 1996, hundreds of military and MILF forces have been injured and killed. So have many innocent civilians caught in the massive military offensive. The MILF has been on the defensive, but has managed to destroy or capture significant number of APC's and other heavy weapons from government troops.

Thousands of homes and hectares of farmland have been devastated and razed to the ground due to military offensives.

The military has also launched an

offensive in the areas controlled by the RPA-ABB, the guerrilla wing of the Revolutionary Workers Party (RWP-P).

According to the Tri-people organisation against disaster (TRIPOD), over 20,000 families have been displaced. The displaced population is coping as best they can. Most brought no food with them, and are now selling their cattle at a very low price, and eating their poultry. Some have found refuge with relatives, who are already in a very tight economic situation. There is no source of livelihood for the refugees in the evacuation centre.

The internal refugees have no tents. Some have built rough shelters, but these do not protect them from the sun or the rain. Even the evacuation centres are not safe, with the constant sound of bombings and clashes. The various government and private agencies are virtually ignoring the evacuees.

Deployment of military forces

Eighty percent of the country's 350,000 soldiers are now concentrated in the Philippines. There are also 20,000 members of the Philippine National Police (PNP) on the island.

Since the "integration into civil life" of the MNLF, 7,000 former guerrillas have been integrated into the armed forces, ready to fight their former comrades in the MILF and the revolutionary guerrilla groups.

The island also has about 47,000 armed members of paramilitary groups, trained in counter-insurgency, and organised in the Citizen Armed Forces and Geographical Unit (CAFGU). This doesn't include the bands of armed vigilantes, which are increasingly present in Mindanao.

There are also a number of ideologically motivated vigilantes, including the Christian Nationalist Front, Tadtad, Adamic, Pulahan, Ituman, Sagrado Corazon de Jesus and Christian Liberation Army. Some of these groups were organised for counterinsurgency during the Marcos years.

In Zamboanga Peninsula another armed group has emerged: the Subanen Liberation Army (SLA) seems to be trained for counter insurgency with an anti-Moro orientation.

There are four networks of death squads, organised by the military intelligence group, the police, the army and local politicians. According to one army source, the military intelligence network is the most dangerous, because of its capacity for secret operations.

Needless to say, the Armed Forces of the Philippines have an overwhelming superiority of firepower over the rebels. They have 4 OB-10 bombers, 4 MG 520 attack aircraft, 4 Huey helicopter gunships, 4 F5 Fighter jets, and a large number of armoured personnel carriers, 105mm and 81mm howitzers. Their use is internal armed conflict, not for

international conflict based on the international laws of war. These heavy weapons have been used to crush a number of units of the MILF, NPA and RPA-ABB. The revolutionary groups have mainly RPG, 81mm mortars and M30 and M60 firearms.

The roots of militarisation

In 1997 the Armed Forces of the Philippines began a modernisation programme. This was supposed to include a shift of priorities from internal to external defence. The modernisation budget is 333 billion pesos, almost 45% of the total government budget for 1999.

The army justifies this spending by pointing to the external threat from China, and internal threats from the MILF, Maoist NPA and the revolutionary ABB in Mindanao. Resources will inevitably be shifted from external defence to internal operations.

The Visiting Forces Agreement

Since the Philippines government is effectually bankrupt, Washington will be sponsoring the modernisation. In exchange, the Philippines will sign a Visiting Forces Agreement, enabling the US to base troops in the country.

American bases were closed after the downfall of the Marcos dictatorship. It has been hard to reverse this decision. The media has done its best to exploit the issue of China's intrusion into Philippines waters [by building on the uninhabited Spratly islands]. But this was not enough to convince Philippine senators to vote the VFA. Hence the escalation of the Mindanao conflict, and claims that the VFA would enable the government to pacify the island.

The USA claims that the VFA will safeguard and secure the Asia Pacific region, and help the Philippines deal with internal and external threats. The VFA would also help safeguard US interests in Mindanao. It would also be a staging post for intervention in Indonesia, the Philippines and across the region.

A base on Mindanao would help advance US and Philippine government interests in the Spratly islands, thought to sit on a large oil deposit. The USA can only access the Spratly oil in alliance with the Philippines government.

This is the background to the recent investment of billions of pesos on the General Santos airport and other installations on Mindanao. The contractors chosen are known for their previous work on US military facilities.

President Erap has also begun preparing a constitutional review which may include allowing foreign access to national resources, and limiting constitutional protection of civil and human rights.

Popular and church opposition will make this a long and difficult process. Erap hopes his recent victories in Mindanao will give him the time he needs. ★

India

Who cares about health and safety?

Workers at one Gujarat factory have taken matters into their own hands, after labour inspectors have failed to enforce minimum health and safety regulations in the chemical sector. **Thakorbbhai Shah** and **Ramkilesh Saroj** report from Baroda.

Hema Chemicals in Vadodara makes potassium and sodium bichromate, chromium sulphate, and other chromium based chemicals. Chromium is a metal used widely in alloy and metal plating, its various salts have wide application in industry. Chromium chemicals are used in wood preservatives, coloured glass, glaze, tanneries, textile dyes, pigments for lithography, and other uses.

The manufacturing process for Sodium and Potassium Bichromate consist of crushing chromate ore into small pieces. The ore is then mixed with soda ash or lime and roasted at 1100 to 1200 degrees celcius. The metal is then cooled, and bichromate is extracted.

The health damage at the Hema plant is terrifying. A doctor working for the Factory Inspector's office identified 43 workers suffering from nasal septum perforation and 23 suffer from dermatitis. Two workers have had their toes amputated following secondary infection of ulcers, and gangrene.

The hazards of chromium are well known. Hexavalent chromium mainly attacks the upper respiratory tract, including nose, pharynx, and lungs. It may damage kidneys, teeth, and cause stomach pain and dermatitis. It is also known to cause lung cancer, deep and slow healing ulcers, on the skin and in the nose. Eardrums perforate.

Chromic acid mist causes toxic jaundice, liver damage, and lung fibrosis. Even the small amounts of chromium in many oils have been linked to health problems among automobile, and diesel locomotive repair workers.

Hema clearly violates Indian and Gujarat legislation. The technology employed by the management is highly unsafe. And the management is known for its callousness regarding safety. In one of the units owned by by same company, Ushma Chemical in Nandesari, four workers died in an explosion in December 1996.

After a good deal of effort by the Union, the Factories Inspectorate have filed a number of complaints against this Company for violation of various provisions of the 1948 Factory Act. But the health authorities have failed to give proper diagnosis and guidance, thus preventing the workers from making a compensation claim. There has still been no comprehensive medical examination of the work force.

Months ago the daily newspaper, **Indian Express**, condemned "the utterly inhuman responses of an employer and the Gujarat government machinery to the continuous exposure of workers to hazardous chemicals. To the proprietor of Hema Chemicals, conditions in his unventilated factory outside Vadodara are no worse than what is produced by vehicular pollution on Indian roads. Judging by its performance, the Factory Inspectorate agrees. Emission levels within the factory have not been measured even though the Inspectorate's own medical officer certified an incriminatingly high incidence of case of the factory's 250 workers. The workers themselves report gangrene and lung and kidney ailments.

The normal response in such a situation would be to shut down the factory until the working environment was brought into conformity with legal standards. But who is going to do that? Government agencies are not made accountable to anyone. Proprietors will remain indifferent as long as regulations are not enforced and unions are ineffective.

So, as long as there are more poor, illiterate people outside the factory gate looking for job, those inside will be treated as expendable, as a subhuman species for whom no one need take responsibility" (15 July 1998).

The strike only started after management cut wages, despite a court injunction. But the struggle will determine the wider question of whether Gujarat state will enforce legislation on health and safety at work. ★

Protest letters can be sent to the Chief Minister of Gujarat [Fax: +91-2712-22101], The Chairman of the National Human Rights Commissions [+91-11-3340016 or 3366537] and the Hema Chemical Industries [Fax: +91-265-380129]. Please send a copy to the trade union. Donations are also requested to sustain the strike and for urgent medical treatment. Contributions should be sent to the "Vadodara Kamdar Union," 101, Shree Krishna Apartment No. 2, Opp. Kothi Police Parade Ground, Raopura, Vadodara 390 001, Gujarat, India. Phone/Fax: +91-265-412499/412224. E-mail: <ICS@LWBDQ.LWBBS.NET>

The rational holocaust

Most commentators have treated Hitler's fanatic anti-Semitism as beyond rational explanation. The Jewish revolutionary **Ernest Mandel** disagreed

In its extreme form racism is congenitally linked to institutionalised colonialism and imperialism. Indeed, the one cannot function without the ideological protection of the other.

It is impossible for thinking human beings — and colonialists, imperialists and defenders of their specific "order" are thinking human beings — to deny millions of men, women and children elementary human rights without attempting to rationalise and justify these indignities and oppressions by a specific ideological sophism — "racial", "ethnic" or "intellectual/moral" inferiority — an attempt to "de-humanise" them ideologically.

But once large groups of human beings are considered as intrinsically inferior — as *Untermenschen* (sub-human) — then it only takes one more ideological-political step to deny them, not only the right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness, but the right to life itself.

In the peculiar — and increasingly destructive — suicidal combination of "perfect" local rationality and extreme global irrationality which characterises international capitalism, this step is frequently taken.

From racism...

Anti-Semitism was widespread among most nationalist-conservative circles in France and Russia as well as in Germany, before and during World War I. It reached a paroxysm at the end of the war, during the revolutionary period. In December 1918, the German Kaiser wrote in his *Diaries* "let no German rest until these parasites [the Jews] have been wiped out from German soil and exterminated." Hitler had only to pick up and systematise widely-expressed sentiments.

But the seeds of the Holocaust are not to be found in traditional semi-feudal and petty-bourgeois anti-Semitism. Of course, anti-Semitism among sectors of the Polish, Ukrainian, Baltic, Hungarian, and Russian petty bourgeoisie offered fertile ground for tolerating and aiding the Holocaust. But this type of anti-Semitism led to pogroms, which were to

the Nazi murderers what knives are to the atom bomb.

...to genocide

The seeds of the gas chambers resided in the mass enslavement and killing of Blacks via the slave trade, in the wholesale extermination of the Central and South American Indians by the *conquistadors*. The term genocide is fully justified: millions of men, women and children were killed just because they belonged to a supposedly "inferior", "subhuman" or "wicked" group.

It is true that these crimes of colonialism/imperialism occurred outside Europe. But it was precisely German imperialism's "manifest destiny" to colonise Eastern Europe.

The Nazis and the most extreme proponents of the imperialist doctrine of racial superiority by no means intended the enslavement and extermination only of the Jews; gypsies and sections of the Slav people figure on the same list.

The first group of *Untermenschen* to be slaughtered in the gas chambers during the war were not Jews but ethnic Germans certified "mentally insane". Over 200,000 were exterminated in 1940-41 in *Aktion T4*.

This kind of thinking was not confined to Germany. The atrocities committed in Manchuria by Japan's Unit 731 are only one rung below Auschwitz, and can only be explained by a mentality and motivation basically similar to Hitler's *Herrenvolk* (master race) idea.

And what about the callous killing of 250,000 Japanese civilians by dropping the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki? While not exactly comparable to the Holocaust in the scope of its inhumanity, this act certainly reflected a contempt for human beings of a "special kind" which is not at all that far removed from extreme racism.

Rather like the American general who reasoned that saturation bombing of German cities was justified, despite its effect on innocent children because "those innocent German children are the potential soldiers of World War III, just as the innocent German children who had been fed [by the allies] after 1918 later served in Hitler's army and did remarkably well".

From idea to action

When we say that the *germ* of the Holocaust is to be found in colonialism's and imperialism's extreme racism, we do not mean that the germ inevitably and automatically produces the disease in its

worst form.

For that, racist madness has to be combined with the deadly partial rationality of the modern industrial system.

Its efficiency must be supported by a servile civil service, by a consistent disregard of individual critical judgment as basically "subversive" (*Befehl ist Befehl — an order is an order!*). It requires thousand of passive executive agents (in fact: passive accomplices of crime).

It requires the conquest of power by desperado politicians like the Nazis, with the consent of the bourgeoisie. It requires cynical *realpolitik*, leading to blackmail and systematic state terrorism (Goering, Hitler and co. threatening to eradicate, successively, Prague, Rotterdam, London, Coventry ("*wir werden ihre Städte ausradieren*"); something which became credible only if such threats were occasionally implemented).



Trotskyist newspaper aimed at occupying German troops.

The gradual implementation of this state terrorism unleashes an implacable logic of its own.

It also requires a fetid substratum of unconscious guilt and shame, which must be rationalised in spite (or better: in function) of monstrous crimes.

The Holocaust only comes at the end of this long causal chain. But it can and must be explained through it. Indeed, those who understood the chain were able to foresee it.

Explaining and understanding a crime does not imply any apology for it: the Holocaust — the deliberate and systematic killing of six million men, women and children simply because of their ethnic origin — stands as a unique crime in mankind's sad criminal history.

But what explaining and understanding *does* imply is that similar causes can have similar effects; analogous crimes could be repeated against other peoples if capitalism survives long enough to unleash the totality of its barbaric potential once again.

The slave economy

But wasn't this wanton killing of potential labourers, including highly-skilled ones increasingly scarce in German war industry, totally irrational?

In general systems of super-exploitation and slavery are largely irrational. But they have existed in many places for long periods of time. Whilst not constituting the basis of capitalism (free wage labour), they are often integrated into the capitalist mode of production.

They have a partial rationality: the costs of such labour can be reduced to almost nothing, a miserable pittance which rapidly reduces the labourer's weight and health till he dies from

starvation and deprivation. There is no longer any question of the need for medium-term reproduction of individual labour power.

It is true that the average productivity of such labour is abysmally low. But as long as the supply of slaves is abundant, an operation of this order has a rationality of sorts.

Ancient Roman senators and contemporary SS gangsters — not to mention 18th and early 19th century Southern plantation owners in the USA — made "exact" calculations to discover where the precise limit of that "rationality" lay.

While the SS gangsters were certainly the most criminal of all, they

were by no means the least calculating.

Like the Roman slave-owners of certain periods, they forced their slaves to work themselves to death. Those who could work were not killed outright. That was the precise function of the notorious "selections" on arrival in the extermination camps.

More generally, the rationale of the extermination programme was drastically to reduce the population of Poland and the Ukraine — the German colonisation space — and to allow only those to survive who would become obedient slaves. The Jews were considered unfit for that role — something of a racist compliment. ★

Against pessimism

"The overall picture of the ideology prevalent during World War II is sombre indeed. Internationalist or even simply humanist consciousness were at a historical low-point — so much so that many thought that an irreversible slide towards barbarism had already set in. Orwell's 1984 was the prototype of such premonition.

Such profound pessimism was premature. In the last analysis, the radical decline in globally rational behaviour which indubitably marked WWII was a reflection of the great defeats suffered by the international working class prior to, and during, the first years of the war. But after Stalingrad and Mussolini's downfall, a new and tumultuous rise of international working-class militancy occurred.

The disappearance of the fascist dictatorships in Europe, and the victory of the Yugoslav and Chinese revolutions, were the clearest expressions of this modification in the global balance of class forces.

So were the upsurge of the French and Italian labour movement in 1944-48; the landslide victory of the British Labour Party in 1945; the insurgency of national liberation movements throughout Asia which seriously weakened imperialism in the 1945-5 period.

Such upheavals ultimately made possible a limited and contradictory revival of working-class consciousness and genuine internationalism too, even if they had to start from a very low level.

Certain social forces and individuals saved humanity's and the international proletariat's honour during the Second World War.

The Amsterdam workers launched a magnificent strike in February 1941 against the first anti-Semitic measures of the Nazi occupation.

The Yugoslav Communists built a proletarian brigade — much to the fury of Stalin — which succeeded in recruiting several thousand Italian, Austrian, Hungarian and German soldiers and volunteers into its ranks.

The Danish resistance saved nearly all the Danish Jews from the Holocaust by transporting them overnight to Sweden. Small groups of Japanese leftists aided the Chinese guerrillas in Manchuria.

An ex-militant of the Left Opposition, Lev Kopelev, succeeded in organising anti-fascist propaganda in the German language so efficiently that the German citadel of Grandenz surrendered without a fight to the Red Army. Having thus saved the lives of thousands of Soviet and German soldiers, he was promptly arrested and imprisoned by Stalin's NKVD for the hideous crime of "cosmopolitanism".

A tiny group of European Communists under the leadership of Leopold Trepper set up an information network in occupied France and Belgium which was worth several divisions for the Red Army, according to expert opinion. After the liberation of France, Trepper travelled to Poland where he was promptly arrested by the NKVD and kept in jail for several years.

Small groups of internationalist Communists, generally of Trotskyist conviction, combined anti-fascist resistance activity with a steadfast defence of working-class interests and a staunch internationalist

attitude towards the individual German soldier and worker. Many of them paid with their lives for their stance.

These were small exceptions. But they demonstrated that under the ashes heaped upon the workers' class consciousness by Noske, Hitler and Stalin, a spark remained. From that spark, new flames would arise.

What these proletarian internationalists embodied was the conviction that the war could end otherwise than by the restoration of ruling-class power or the emergence of new bourgeois states; that it could end otherwise than by the total victory of either of the two coalitions; that it could lead to the spread of victorious popular socialist revolutions.

Such conviction was neither utopian nor did it discount the strength of the armies of the potential victors. It expressed an understanding of the instinctive wishes and spontaneous trends of tens of millions of workers and poor peasants over three continents.

For it to be realised, sufficient organisational strength — including armed strength — and political capacity were required. But purpose and initiative could make all the difference.

It was not the relative strength of their opponents which made the Yugoslav Revolution victorious and led the Greek to defeat, which saw a victory of social revolution in China and its defeat in Indonesia. Differences in the resolve and determination of the Communist Parties in these four countries were the decisive factors.

What was possible in Yugoslavia and China would also have been possible in some other European and Asian countries. [EM] ★

Extracted from Ernest Mandel, *The Meaning of the Second World War*, London: Verso, 1986

Coming soon

Conference listing

Your money or your life!

Cancel the debts!

March 12-13, Brussels, Belgium
A major international gathering sponsored by COCAD (Committee for the Cancellation of the Third World Debt

On Friday 12 March, COCAD supporters and guests will discuss how to work together better, and how to make a bigger success of other events, such as the Tribunal on Brazil's Foreign Debt (late March 1999 in Rio de Janeiro), the global campaign for the cancellation of the Third World debt (culminating in a big demonstration in Cologne on June 19th 1999), the European Marches against unemployment (culminating in a big demonstration in Cologne on May 29th 1999), the activities of ATTAC (Action for a Tax on financial Transactions to Aid Citizens), ATTAC International's plan for a big international gathering 24-26 June in Paris, the caravan of Indian peasants and farmers in Europe in May-June 1999, actions and initiatives against military policy (40th anniversary of NATO), the world march of women in the year 2000, just to name a few.

Simultaneous interpretation will be provided (English, French, Spanish, Flemish).

The public event

Over 800 people are expected on Saturday 13th. Morning workshops include

- "The origin and evolution of the Third World debt crisis" with Denise Comanne (COCAD). Chair: Pierre Galand.
- "Globalisation and systemic crisis" with Eric Toussaint (COCAD).
- "The human cost of neo-liberalism in Europe" with Nicolas Benies (France) and Cédric Losange (Lutte-Solidarité-Travail -- Belgium).

Afternoon workshops will focus on the human cost of the debt

- "Latin America" with Adolfo Perez Esquivel (Nobel Peace Prize winner and head of Dialogo 2000 campaign in Argentina).
- "Africa" with Binta Sarr (Association pour la Promotion de la Femme Sénégalaise).

- "Asia" with Ajit Muricken (India) and Alan Roby (Indonesia).

- "East" with Andrei Kolganov (Russia).

These workshops seek to provide an accurate sketch of the daily lives of people across the world living under the effects of neo-liberal policies, adjustment plans and debt servicing. These accounts and analyses provide the foundation for our struggle: debt cancellation must immediately and unconditionally go toward meeting people's basic needs. The speakers are not looking for pity; they are all involved in struggles for change.

Two workshops will deal with "resistance and alternatives

- "Brazil" with Adelar Pizeta, a leader of the Landless Movement (MST), active (among other things) in the campaign for the cancellation of Brazil's debt.
- "Jubilee 2000" with Marlen Barrett (coordinator for Jubilee 2000 campaign), Susanne Luithen (German campaign coordinator), Adolfo Perez Esquivel (coordinator of Dialogo 2000 campaign in Argentina), Pierre Lefèvre (Cancellation of African debt, CIAM, Democratic Republic of Congo), representatives of South African, Peruvian and Filipino debt campaigns, and Belgian NGOs (Broederlijke Delen, Entraide et Fraternité, COCAD/CADTM), and others.

At 17.30 there will be a plenary session to examine a series of measures for a radical transformation of the system. Speakers will include ATTAC-France with Christophe Aguiton (ACI, secretary of ATTAC-France); Globalisation Watch with Susan George; global trade, the MAI and after with Carole Crabbé ("Clean Clothes" campaign); wealth tax (someone from the Appel des 600); against unemployment and job insecurity with Jipi De Ley (European Marches); against financial speculation with Sophie Charlier (Entraide et Fraternité); the year 2000 Marche mondiale des Femmes; COCAD. Chair: Gérard Karlshausen (CNCD).

This session will examine various activities aimed at taxing capital gains in order to redistribute wealth. Speakers will also address the link between their campaigns and the question of the debt (the day's main theme). The different approaches presented will help those gathered put sketch out an overall strategy for change.

Participants

Africa: Mali (Jeunesses pan-africanistes); République démocratique du Congo (CIAM); South Africa (AIDC); Sénégal (APROFES, CONGAD); Togo (CADTM-Togo);

Europe: Germany (Campagne Jubilee 2000); France (ATTAC, Observatoire de la Mondialisation); Switzerland (AMP); Spain (SODEPAZ Madrid, etc., Komites Internationalistak from the Basque country, EUiA from Catalonia); Holland (People's Global Action); Great Britain (Jubilee 2000 and others); Luxembourg

(ASTM), Russian Federation (Alternative Review).

Americas and Caribbean: Argentina (SERPAJ, Dialogo 2000); Brazil (Movimento dos Sem Terra - MST); Mexico (CIDHMOR; Desde los Cuatro Puntos magazine); Cuba (CEE); Peru (Jubilee 2000); Venezuela (National Association of Consumers)

Asia: India (INSAF, KRRS); Pakistan; Philippines (Alab-Katipunan); Sri Lanka (NSSP); Indonesia (PRD)

Many leaders of struggles for social change from other countries will be present for the entire day. Because of time and space restrictions, not all will be given a "soapbox" (as the saying goes). But they will be present and will speak in the debates; so that we may benefit from their wealth of experience.

The meeting will take place at Free University of Brussels, Aula (Hall) Q, Avenue de la Plaine n°2, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

All enquires about the conference should be addressed to COCAD, 29 rue Plantin, 1070 Brussels, Belgium
Fax: (32-2) 522.61.27 Email: cadtm@skynet.be Web: <http://users.skynet.be/cadtm>

Crossing Over: 1969-1999

Ethnic Studies and Radical Politics Beyond the Schooling Industrial Complex
Berkeley, California, USA, April 9-10, 1999

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the Third World Strike at the University of California, Berkeley. As a collective action initiated by students of color on January 22, 1969, the strike posed a sustained and far-reaching challenge to the conservative university administration and state government. The enduring effects of that campaign included the establishment of an Ethnic Studies program, the (temporary) construction of institutional links between campus and community, and the formation of an unprecedented solidarity among radical youth of color.

This historic anniversary provides an opportunity to commemorate the movement and to critically revisit the principles that informed it: self-determination, educational relevancy, cross-disciplinary collaboration and multiethnic political solidarity. The organisers consider Ethnic Studies to be a vital site of political resistance, even as it is housed within the corporate university.

A guiding principle of this gathering will be that challenging the exclusionary and discriminatory practices of educational institutions is necessary but ultimately insufficient as a radical alternative to the current situation. A narrow focus on increased "access" to these institutions simply will not produce sustainable, viable social change.

It is imperative to develop a fundamental critique of schools as sites of oppression—even as they function under ideal conditions.

Recent right-wing assaults on affirmative action and Ethnic Studies in the state of California have converged with broader, bipartisan efforts to further marginalize the working poor, to criminalize immigrants and youth of color, and to re-affirm incarceration as a convenient "solution" for poverty.

In the face of this crisis, CROSSING OVER encourages participants from across the country to gather and coordinate their efforts to create, expand, and support Ethnic Studies programs while strategizing new ways to make these programs relevant and useful to existing community struggles.

For More information contact: Dept. of Comparative Ethnic Studies, 506 Barrows Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA.
Fax: (+1 510) 642-6456 Email: crossover@uclink4.berkeley.edu
Website: www.ethnicstudies.com

EuroMediterranean homosexualities

Marseilles, France, 24-31 July

The 20th century is rich in lessons for lesbians and gay men in Europe and throughout the world. We have lived through brutal repression (fascism, Stalinism and other dictatorships), the rise of the women's movement, the spread of birth control and abortion rights, a (temporary?) decline in the power of religion, the AIDS epidemic, an explosion of global communication networks, lesbian and gay images on MTV and the Internet and much more.

Does this mean that there is no going back from the freedoms we have won? In fact no victory is necessarily forever: the forces fostering homophobia are still at work. We are there in the social landscape but have not really found our place in it. Many lesbians and gay men are ignorant of our history. In Europe and still more in the rest of the world our lives are not seen and treated on an equal footing. We are still favourite scapegoats: when things get worse in Europe and the Mediterranean, tensions increase, and racist crimes and violence multiply, then hypocrites and bigots are quick to attack us as well, and the police and courts are close behind.

The Euromediterranean Summer University will gather together the European experiences of recent decades, and express our solidarity with the other peoples of the Mediterranean. As well as enjoying the Mediterranean summer, our presence will be a challenge to the homophobic National Front municipal governments in Vitrolles, Magnane, Orange and Toulon.

Workshops

Several parallel workshops will develop the Summer University's cycle of themes chosen by the programme committee, both on its own initiative and by outside proposal. Some workshops will continue every day throughout the Summer University, others may be more limited in time. The Euromediterranean dimension will be particularly visible. Workshops will be led by particular groups, media outlets, researchers and writers, and accompanied by a film series.

- gays/knowledge — lesbian, gay, bi, transgender and transsexual forms of expression — popular culture from the '20s to today — history — memories — transmission — archives — lesbian and gay studies
- identities — genders — sexualities — portrayals of sexuality — practices — pornography
- oppressions — repressions — discriminations — racism — sexism — lesbophobia — homophobia
- subversions — integration — political stakes — grassroots organising — media — strategies — political and social demands — militant actions — individual and collective commitment — impact of recent struggles (AIDS & domestic partnership)
- daily life — economic issues — economic insecurity — citizenship — social life — lifestyles — consumption — health — urban and rural life

Last minute speaker proposals should be sent to: Comité scientifique UEEH Intech chemin des Fontaines F-84110 Vaison la Romaine, France Fax: 33-4-75 27 14 04 Email: intech@wanadoo.fr

The forums

The forums will gathering all the participants to hear particular speakers. They will take the form of round tables on the above themes. All participants will be encouraged to speak (there will be travelling microphones and translation to and from several languages). Outside guests prominent in political and intellectual life will also play a role. The forums will all be recorded for publication.

The organisers

We are a coalition of women and men, lesbians and gays from various perspectives inspired by this project. Some of us took part in the past in the creation and five sessions of the Marseilles Gay and Lesbian Summer University (1979-1987), which brought together between 400 and 600 people for a week every two years.

We want to create "an open forum for discussion and gatherings where the various sensibilities of the gay and lesbian community can come together on a basis of mutual respect, pluralism of thought and behaviour, friendship among peoples, and a common commitment to anti-sexist and anti-racist demands... As a rule men and women will both be wel-

come... This will not be a place for decision-making." (Excerpt from article 4 of the bylaws)

Co-ordination is ensured by a members' council, with 50% women.

Registration

The fee for taking part in the Summer University is 850 FF. It is also possible to reserve a room and meals in the university restaurant for 900 FF. Reduced rates are available for students, unemployed and people with long-term illnesses. Register early — fees will go up after April 1999!

Registrations and requests for information can be sent to: Université d'Été des Homosexualités Intech Chemin des Fontaines 84110 Vaison la Romaine, France Tel: 33-4-90 28 70 10 Fax: 33-4-90 36 19 63 Organizational contacts (tel/fax): 33-4-75 27 14 04 (Jacques Fortin) Artistic programming: 33-4-91 47 29 52 (Verte Fontaine)

Other events

International Socialist Forum dayschool on 'Marx and Philosophy'

7 March, Conway Hall, London.
Contact: isf@isf.org.uk

'Global capitalism & effective opposition'

3-4 April, Glasgow, Britain
Sessions on capitalism and UK break up.
Contact: radfest@yahoo.com
Tel. 0131 557 6242.

G8 demonstration

18 June. World-wide activities
For information on British events contact
Reclaim the Streets on 0171 281 4621.

London Anarchist Bookfair

16 Octobre, London, Britain
Contact: m.peacock@unl.ac.uk
Tel. 0171 247 9249.

Electronic Viewpoint

Some of the articles for the next issue of International Viewpoint are already viewable at our web site. We are slowly adding a downloadable archive of articles published in previous issues

www.internationalen.se/sp/iup.html

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Obituaries

Uruguay Brenda Silvara ("Marita")

During the dark years of dictatorship (1973-85), "Marita" was part of the underground resistance, writes *Ernesto Herrera*. She spent 1975-78 in one of the Generals' concentration camps. Rearrested and savagely tortured, she found exile in Brazil in 1982-84.

With the democratic opening in 1985, she returned to Uruguay, and began organising the teachers' union. She was a determined member of the country's broad left front (Frente Amplio), and of its radical, feminist wing.

A primary school teacher by profession, Marita was also a leading member of of Uruguay's Socialist Workers Party (POS) and the Fourth International. When Ernest Mandel died, she wrote, in the Tupamaros magazine *Mate Amargo*, that he was "irreplaceable, like every revolutionary." The same could be said for her.

But she will also be missed for her human qualities. We have lost our "last resort" – the comrade who never let us down, who always found a solution, who was always ready with unconditional solidarity. in personal and emotional, as well as political moments.

She had the humility and disregard for material wealth that only those who have grown up and lived in extreme poverty can have, and a legendary courage that only those who devote their entire lives to breaking humanity's chains can share.

In her final stay in the hospital, terribly weakened, she continued to ask after her pupils, to share her personal

belongings with the other patients, to tell the doctors exactly what she thought of them, and sided with the nurses and other personnel. She remained, until the very last moment, a woman full of life, optimism, sincerity, and solidarity.

She finally passed away on January 3rd. At her request, we organised no solemn processions, no ritual lamenting. Just a simple round of thanks and applause for a life well lived. ★

¡Hasta la victoria!

Ernesto Herrera

Jerusalem Tragedy takes three AIC staff

Three collaborators of the Jerusalem-based Alternative Information Centre died in a tragic hiking accident on January 24.

That day, writes *Sergio of the AIC*, six AIC associates embarked on a hike to the Wadi Darageh area in the desert east of Jerusalem. The trip was organised by the AIC as part of staff activities. Initially the staff members called an official centre to confirm the weather conditions for the region and received approval that the region was safe.

By 15:30, flash floods struck the region taking us by surprise. Three of the group were able to escape, but the other three were swept away and were later found dead on Monday afternoon.

Our comrades who perished in this accident were:

Elias Jeraiseh, resident of Beit Sahour, born on February 9, 1961. Elias was married and is survived by 2 sons. He was our editor in chief for the Arabic publication *Ruiah Ukhra*. Because of his previous progressive activities he had been forced to live underground for four years, and served combined prison sentences of 7 years, including 27 months without trial under "administrative detention."

Inbal Perelson resident of Jerusalem was born on August 6, 1960, was editor in chief of *Mitsad Shenit* and had been an activist for many years.

Yochanan Lorwin, resident of Jerusalem born on April 12, 1953 was trained as a lawyer and worked in the AIC as assistant editor and translator for the English publication *News From Within*.

We grieve for the loss of our comrades that dedicated their life for the cause of peace, equality, human rights and the recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people. They were enthusiastic and giving activists who lived their lives in line with their progressive beliefs and principles.

Their death is a great loss for their families and loved ones, the Alternative Information Centre and the cause of the Palestinian people. ★



Transformation and regroupment

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

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

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

Price: £5/\$10. International Viewpoint, PO Box 27410, London SW9 9WQ, Britain.
<International.Viewpoint@compuserve.com>

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International Viewpoint is also distributed free by email. We also have lists in French, German and Spanish. Subscription is free.

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Booknotes

A Thai journey

Student leader, guerrilla, university professor and writer, Seksan Prasertkoun is one of the most striking personalities of the generation of Thai radicals who entered politics in the 1970s. He writes well too. An autobiographical selection of his works was recently translated into French. Pierre Rousset read it for us.

October 1973. Thailand is a massive base for the American forces engaged in Indochina. Hundreds of thousands of Thais march in protest, despite the military regime. They force open a democratic space. The dictatorship falls. As the fire of protest spreads across Asia, a generation of students and young radicals are formed, and international links are made.

Seksan Prasertkoun was part of the radical wing of the student movement. We met in Bangkok in 1974, and again when he came to France in 1975, to prepare his entry into the Thai Communist Party's guerrilla movement where he spent five years. As the threat of repression loomed, Seksan saw the Communist Party as the only force able to organise an underground struggle. Thousands of militants – students and members of the popular classes – fled from the military terror to join the guerrillas. In 1976 the country suffered another bloody *coup d'état*.

Seksan wrote the articles in this autobiographical collection during the 1980s, when he returned to civilian life. He completed his studies, became a lecturer and for two years was even the head of a social science faculty.

His writings reveal his personal, humanist outlook on the world, and his gentle spirit. He writes about his militant activities, but also about his childhood and family, the time he spent in a Buddhist monastery, and the eye-opening experience of university life.

This is above all a literary work, and reading it is a pleasure. It is an introduction to the society in which Seksan grew up, and to the East-Asian facet of that tremendous radical experience which formed a revolutionary generation, from Paris to Bangkok to Tokyo to Los Angeles.

In the early 80s, the Thai Communist Party imploded. Just as the party was taking off, it was confronted to the Sino-Vietnamese conflict, the Cambodian tragedy, and the loss of its support bases. The old, pro-Chinese apparatus was unable to integrate the generation of militants like Seksan, who had entered poli-

tics in the 1970s. It was a "jungle party," with most of its members living in the guerrilla camps, neglecting to put down social roots.

This is an important story, about which we know relatively little – even after reading this book. Let's hope that one day Seksan will also write about the political history of the Thai revolutionary movement, the military experience of the guerrillas, and his differences of opinion with the Maoist leaders of the Party. ★

Seksan Prasertkoun, *Vivre debout (Standing tall)*, translated from Thai to French by Marcel Barang. Published by Kergour, 1998, 285p., 135 FFR.

Labour's first black MP

Marc Wadsworth reviews *Comrade Sak*, by Eddie Tucker

Sharpurji Saklatvala was Britain's first black Labour MP – and also a member of the Communist Party, when joint membership was permitted for a short period in the 1920s. Author Eddie Tucker was himself a key player in the formation of Labour Party Black Sections in the early 1980s.

Saklatvala's role as an MP is almost unrecognisable by today's miserable standards. He agitated among the working class of his London constituency of Battersea, and played an active role in the Indian independence movement. He was a champion of African and Asian unity.

Along with the other Communists, Saklatvala became a thorn in the side of the Labour Party leadership, and 1924 was the last time he was able to stand – and win – as a Labour candidate. In 1929 he lost his seat, standing as a Communist. But he remained active in Britain and internationally.

This book brings to life not only *Comrade Sak*, but the radical history of the left and the unions in the early 20th century. ★

[This review first appeared in *LLB* magazine]

Published in 1998 by Peepal Tree Press, £9.99

Show racism the red card!

At last, an initiative against racism in soccer which is rooted in the real world of the football supporter. Don't be discouraged by the foreword by Tony Blair to this, the second annual report produced by Youth against Racism in Europe, the Independent Newcastle United Supporters Association, and Race Equality Councils in England's depressed North-

East.

Backed by international footballers and the UNISON trade union, this is a working class response to the racism which is still endemic in the stadiums, despite the introduction of fully-seated stadiums and higher ticket prices.

The YRE, linked to Britain's Militant group in its early years, has produced a series of videos, school activities and club-based initiatives to combat racism in sport. The organisers of this report have even received death threats a sign that they are having an effect. [ET/LLB]

To order the report, send a large envelope with your own address, together with a 26p stamp (or an international reply coupon) to SRTRC, 1 Drury Lane, Newcastle, NE1 1EA, Britain.

Mandel in the Philippines

A Philippine (English-language) edition of Ernest Mandel's pamphlet "The Leninist Theory of Organisation: its relevance for today" has been produced by Life is Beautiful Press, PO Box 1460, Manila.

International Workers Aid

The November 1998 bulletin looks back at the first five years of this unique attempt to build concrete solidarity and material aid from the west European labour movement to multi-ethnic and labour groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The definitive history of this experience is still beyond our grasp, but these articles are a worthwhile contribution.

For more information about IWA's continuing projects to support trade unions and women's groups in Bosnia, contact the international office at Ragvaldsgratan 14, S-118 46 Stockholm, Sweden. Tel +46 8 714 8686, fax +46 8 462 9384, Email <arbetarkonvojen@online.idg.se>

Left opposition

The Left Opposition 1998: State Capitalism in the Soviet Union

A contribution to this perennial debate, informed by the oscillations of some sections of New Zealand's far left. Available on request from:

<trotsky1917@inet.net.nz>

Correction

In October we forgot to mention that our review of *Woody, Cisco and Me: Seamen Three in the Merchant Marine*, by Jim Longhi, first appeared in the Fall 1998 edition of *Socialist Action* (Canada) newspaper.

Subscription (four issues) costs C\$6 in Canada, US\$10 abroad. Available from 517 College St, Room 234, Toronto Ontario M6G 4A2, Canada. Tel. (416) 535-8779 E-mail: barryw@web.net

Net

Working

Inprekorr

Our German sister publication has moved. The website now includes the full index (to December 1998)

<http://webserver.comlink.org/inprekorr/>

Last but not least...

Check out our own website, archive and links, at www.internationalen.se/sp/ivp.htm



Canadian Dimension

The editorial of the February issue deals with "The Illusion of Choice in Quebec". Other articles include Doug Smith, "Fighting the Loophole": George Harris' Holy War, James Petras, "Globalization: A Socialist Perspective", Andrew Jackson, "The Global Financial Crisis": What does it mean to us? What should be done?, Jim Stanford, "We Need a War", Theresa Wolfwood, "On Globalization, Democracy, MAI, and the Alternatives": A Conversation with Maria Mies Gabriel Haythornthwaite, "The Clayquot Legacy: the Future of Environmental Activism", Lorne Browne, "NDP \$\$ for You and Me", John Warnock, "Sink or Swim: the Saskatchewan NDP and the Poor", Larry Haiven, "the Romanow Model: Saskatchewan Trade Unions Confront the NDP" and David Babiak, "Academic Labourers: the New Proletariat"

A one-year subscription costs C\$24.50 in Canada, C\$34.50 in the US and C\$39.50 in other countries. To subscribe call 1-800-737-7051 or visit www.canadiandimension.mb.ca/cd/index.htm

Critique #30-31

'Marx, Marxism and Crisis' is the title of this 25th anniversary issue. Contributors include Meszaros on 'Historical Determination', Petras on 'Class Struggle in Central America', Tickin on 'The Present Crisis', Marx's MEGA, plus interviews, reviews and obituaries

Still available is Critique #28-29, the ideas of Victor Serge, edited by Suzi Weissman, ed.

Each issue costs £10/US\$18. Send cheque to Critique, 29 Bute Gardens, University of Glasgow G12 8RS, Britain

Critique communiste #135

The LCR's heavyweight theoretical journal offers two dossiers this time: four articles on the significance of the 1848 events, and the second on the question of social appropriation, with articles by H. Wilno on "realisable socialism," C. Samary on "from the Communist Manifesto to the crisis in the USSR" and M. Rovère on "French-style capitalism." Also worth reading is the interview on the current crisis with François Chesnais and Michel Huson. The review section includes N. Bénétiès's notes on two recent books about the fascist Front Nationale.

Subscription for one year (four issues) costs 240 FF in France, 300FF abroad. Cheques should be made out to La Brèche, and sent to 2 rue Richard Lenoir, 93100, Montreuil-sous-Bois, France.

European Labour Forum#20

"Work less, work better" is the title of this special issue on the fight for full employment across the European Union. Contributors include Christophe Aguiton, Michael Barrat Brown, and Kostas Filnis. Edited by Ken Coates, the MEP expelled from Britain's Labour Party for his radical activities.

Published for Ken Coates and the GUE-NGL group in the European Parliament by Spokesman, Bertrand Russell House, Gamble St, Nottingham, NG7 4ET Great Britain

Inprecor #430-431

Our French sister publication departs from the usual format to bring you a comprehensive selection of documents from the first 60 years of the Fourth International, and articles by Antont Ciliga, Suzanne Leonhard, Michel Raptis ("Pablo"), Pierre Frank, François Moreau, Daniel Bensaïd and Livio Maitan.

This special double issue will not be published in English. The French version costs 60FF. Subscription to Inprecor costs 360FF for one year. Cheques should be made out to PECL, and sent to PECL, BP85, 75522, Paris cedex 11, France.

Inprecor #432

The February issue of our French sister publication includes a range of Brazilian comrades commenting the recent elections, and the growing municipal power of radical left currents within the Workers Party (PT). There is also an 11 page dossier on the Kurdish national question, produced by members of the Turkish section of the Fourth International. We hope to translate the Kurdish materials in a future issue of International Viewpoint.

Subscription to Inprecor costs 360FF for one year. Cheques should be made out to PECL, and sent to PECL, BP85, 75522, Paris cedex 11, France.

Links #11, Jan-April 1999

Five Communist parties and the road to socialism: articles by members of Colombia's FARC, Spain's United Left (IU), Indonesia's PRD, the South African Communist Party and India's CPI (ML). Plus Eva Cheng on China's capitalist restoration, Salah Abdel Shafi on Palestine's economy, and Pierre Rousset (editor of the French weekly Rouge) on France's fragile Fifth Republic

For samples of previous articles visit www.peg.apc.org/~stan/links/

Subscription details can be obtained by emailing LINKS at: links@peg.apc.org

Links is a project initiated by the Democratic Socialist Party of Australia.

Revolutionary Marxism Today #2 (Autumn-Winter 1998)

Contents include: Perspectives and Proposals for the Labor Party Constitutional Convention • Death on the Railroad: The High Cost of Faster Freight by Steve Williams • Female Genital Mutilation: Patriarchy, Profit and the State by Jan Boudart • Lessons of 1919 by Sacha Jordan • The Bulletin in Defense Of Marxism and the Labor Party by Ben Stone • Which Way Forward for American Trotskyism? by David Weiss • A Reply to Paul Le Blanc by David Weiss • The National Question in the Spanish State by Jim Padmore

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USA	US\$ 70 ☐	US\$ 35 ☐
Rest of world	US\$ 70 ☐	US\$ 35 ☐

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