

International VIEWPOINT

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**Special:
a new mass
women's
movement**

**Transition from
dictatorship in
Latin America's
biggest country**

**The continuing
militancy of the
British miners**



International Viewpoint

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BRAZIL	What prospects for the transition to bourgeois democratic rule by <i>Joao Machado</i>	3
BRITAIN	Second miners international solidarity meeting by <i>J. Drury</i>	9
	Dutch trade unionists boycott coal bound for Britain Interview from <i>Klassenstrijd</i>	10
	Confiscation of NUM funds in Luxembourg	11
IRELAND	Butcher's apron victory by <i>Fergus O'Hare</i>	12
SPECIAL DOSSIER ON WOMEN	International Women's Day, 1985	13
BRITAIN	The miners' wives and the fight for women's liberation by <i>Judith Baker</i>	14
BOLIVIA	Miners' wives lead the way by <i>Antonio Moreno</i>	16
MEXICO	The growth of a new mass women's movement Interview with <i>Soledad Moreno</i> and <i>Patricia Mercado</i>	17
CUBA	Women's liberation and the revolution by <i>Luisa Werth</i> and <i>Luis Vitale</i>	20
IRELAND	Building an anti-imperialist women's movement by <i>Beth Taggart</i>	22
USA	Reagan's world agenda for women by <i>Linda Woods</i>	25
INDIA	Women protest against dangerous drugs <i>Document</i>	27
EL SALVADOR	Women in the fight for national liberation from <i>Internationalen</i>	28

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What prospects for the transition to bourgeois democratic rule ?

On January 15, 1985, Tancredo Neves, candidate of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB), was elected president of the country. He is to be inaugurated on March 15. Thus, a candidate presented by the opposition and elected by a majority of the electoral college set up by the dictatorship is going to assume the country's highest office. In a way, this means that Brazil is coming out of a cycle of more than twenty years of military dictatorship. But this "coming out" is merely a transition from military dictatorship to a system of bourgeois democracy, and one that will be much more tightly controlled than the previous "democratic" governments in the history of the country.

In order to beat the candidate of the military's ruling party, the Democratic and Social Party (PDS), Tancredo Neves created a system of political alliances that constituted one of the broadest blocs of different sectors of the ruling classes ever seen in the history of Brazil. In fact, in the end, Tancredo Neves managed to get the support for his candidacy of the leading personalities who came to prominence in the wake of the military coup of 1964. Indeed, he got more support from such figures than Paulo Maluf, the candidate of the military regime's party, the PDS.

Joao MACHADO

All the state governments elected by the PDS in the 1982 elections supported Tancredo Neves. The only governor that formally backed Paulo Maluf was the governor of the state of Paraiba, Wilson Braga. Even he gave indirect support to the PMDB candidate. Braga's wife and the politicians closest to him, in fact, supported Tancredo Neves. Immediately after the January 15 elections, Wilson Braga announced that he was joining the Party of the Liberal Front, a formation created by the PDS dissidents who supported Tancredo Neves. Wilson Braga confined himself to giving Paulo Maluf just enough support to comply with the agreements made earlier.

Aureliano Chaves, vice president in the incumbent government headed by General Figueredo and the main leader of the Party of the Liberal Front, as well as General Ernesto Geisler, former president, also supported Tancredo's candidacy, although Geisel did so more discreetly. Tancredo made an agreement with the incumbent minister of the army, General Walter Pires, granting the latter the right to name his successor in the incoming government.

Few ministers in the incumbent government supported the candidacy of Paulo Maluf. Most of them preferred to stay above the battle, which amounted to giving veiled support to Tancredo Neves. This applied also to the leader of the PDS in the Chamber of Deputies, Nelson Marchezan, who abstained in the vote in the electoral college. Finally, the incumbent president himself, Joao Figueiredo, adopted a similar attitude, letting it appear that he found Paulo

Maluf a rather unattractive candidate. Tancredo Neves' vice president, Jose Sarney, only a few months ago was the national chairperson of the PDS.

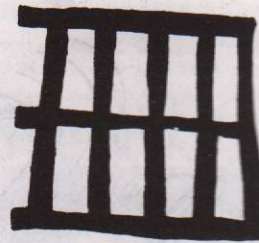
All this made it possible for Tancredo to get 480 votes as against only 180 for the PDS candidate in the electoral college controlled by the PDS and which was set up to give the maximum possible endorsement to the official candidates. This state of affairs requires an explanation, which is not difficult to find.

The decline of the Dictatorship

The decline of the military dictatorship did not start yesterday. Already in 1974, in the parliamentary elections, the legal opposition party, the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB) got the majority of the votes, but it did not get the majority in the National Congress because of the trickery of the electoral laws. In the following years, the movement for democratic liberties grew, in particular with the struggle for a total general amnesty.

In 1979, a relatively broad amnesty was won, although it was not total. Political prisoners became an exception in the country. Beginning in 1978, the workers' movement came onto the scene in force, organizing the great strikes that gave impetus to a vast process of reorganization within it.

After 1974, the last two general presidents, Ernesto Geisel and Joao Figueiredo, undertook a slow process of self-reform of the dictatorship, which was designed to modify the form of the regime while maintaining total control.



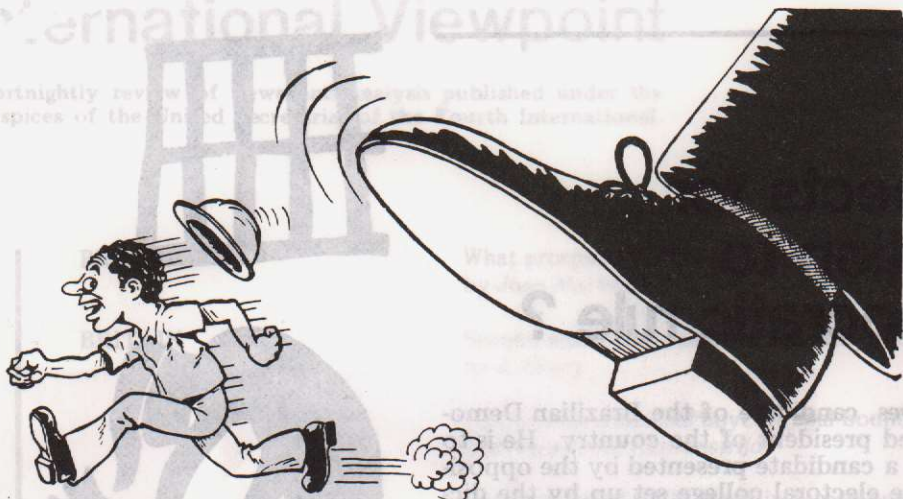
This was done at first in terms of a "detente" by the regime and later in the form of a "liberalization."

In 1982, despite the various modifications of the electoral law, which were supposed to give the advantage to the government party, the bourgeois liberal and populist opposition elected governors in most of the country's major states, e.g., in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais. The economic crisis, well underway since 1981, the first year when the GNP dropped, sharpened in 1982 and in particular in 1983, when the government started to conclude agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Subsequently, in 1984, the Brazilian economy experienced a slight upturn.

In the context of a greatly weakened dictatorship, the first months of 1984 were marked by the biggest mass mobilization in Brazil's history — the campaign for direct election of the president, that is, against the electoral college set up to endorse the government's candidates for the presidency. The campaign for direct elections was a means for the people to express their discontent with the general situation of the country, that is, with the military dictatorship and its economic policy of total subordination to the IMF.

The fact that the people's discontent was demonstrated in this way showed both the power of the mass movement and its limitations. Its strength was shown by the scope of the mobilizations. Nearly a million people demonstrated in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, and hundreds of thousands in other cities. Its

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limitations were shown by the fact that the demand for "direct elections" on which the mobilization was focused was a limited one, stressing the form of election much more than the question of a program or the sort of government the people wanted. Moreover, the leadership of this mobilization remained tied to the bourgeois liberal opposition, to the PMDB and in particular to the state governors in opposition to the federal government.

The Workers Party (PT) undoubtedly gained a great success and increased its strength throughout the campaign. Luis Inacio da Silva, "Lula," was nearly always the speaker most applauded in the mass rallies. The reason for this is that the masses identified with the most radical speeches. But, at no time did the PT try to challenge the bourgeois opposition for the leadership of the campaign. It did not even distinguish itself from the bourgeois opposition, which it could have done by running Lula as a candidate in the presidential elections on the basis of a clear program calling for social transformations.

Tancredo has already clearly let it be known that he would not make any sudden change in the policy of the preceding regime. There is no question, for example, of breaking with the IMF or declaring a moratorium on the foreign debt.

Of course, it is obvious that Tancredo's government will not be a military dictatorship and that it will not represent the continuation of the preceding regime. Brazil is entering into a form of bourgeois democracy that is greatly restricted by the emergency measures that remain in force. It has the feature of combining the maximum of elements that represent a break from the previous regime. But, in any case, the military dictatorship is destined to disappear because of the composition of the forces backing Tancredo and because his government will maintain a very different sort of relationship with the masses than that in force under the military regime.

Certain questions are now dominating discussions, and will mark the entire first phase of Tancredo's government. In general, they turn around problems of economic policy and the process that should open the way for eliminating the institu-

tions left by the dictatorship.

As I said above, Tancredo has already let it be known that there will not be any deepgoing change in economic policy. The country will have to stick to its agreements, in particular with the foreign banks and the IMF. The priority will be to try to regenerate economic expansion and limit unemployment, but as has already been said, it will not be possible to adjust wages to make up for the losses in buying power suffered over these last two years.

Tancredo has kept excellent relations with the dictatorship's economic team. And one of the names mentioned most often as a possibility for his minister of economics, Francisco Dorneles, Tancredo's nephew, is in fact a member of that team.

As regards the workers, Tancredo is concentrating his attention on the proposal of a "national pact" and a "truce." This pact so far offers nothing but efforts to increase employment. Tancredo hopes to gain the understanding of the workers, and he cites the Spanish Moncloa Pact as an example of what he wants to undertake.

The Constituent Assembly

On the political level, the big question remains that of the constituent assembly. Naturally, there are two extreme possibilities. One is a free, sovereign and democratic constituent assembly that would put an end to all the special powers laws and grant freedom for all the political parties. The other is a constituent assembly whose role would be limited essentially to according constitutional powers to a congress elected on the basis of the existing legislation and made up of representatives of the present parties.

Tancredo has come out clearly for the second alternative, with only a few modifications with respect to the electoral



laws and legislation on parties. These changes are intended to make it possible to form one or two new parties, not to open the way for the legalization of the PCB. On the latter question, Tancredo says that it should be discussed by the constituent assembly, and that, in any case, caution is required.

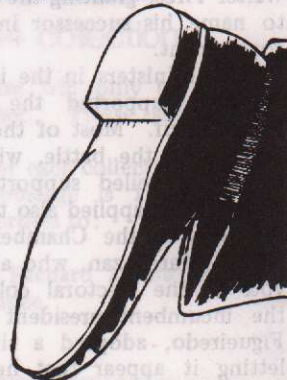
Nonetheless, legalization of the PCB and the other parties that are still illegal is inevitable. But if it is delayed, there will be a much more peaceful constituent assembly. This is Tancredo's reasoning.

However, to the contrary, for the workers' and people's movement, the alternative of a free and sovereign constituent assembly is the interesting one. It offers the means for widening the break with the military regime and eliminating what will remain of this regime after Tancredo Neves is installed as president in March.

Five political parties ran in the 1982 general elections: the PDS, the military's party; the PMDB, the heir of the old legal opposition; the MDB, which already included in its ranks many of the military regime's personalities; the PDT, the heir of the old populist current led by Leonel Brizola, which tried to present itself as a Social Democratic party; the Brazilian Labor Party (PTB), which also claims the heritage of the old populism but stands further to the right than the PDT, as shown by the formal agreement it made with the PDS to support Figueiredo's government; and finally, the PT.

The Party of the Liberal Front is in the process of formation. It is the party of the PDS dissidents who backed Tancredo, and it includes, notably, all the governors the PDS elected in 1982. On the other hand, the fate of the PDS is uncertain. At the moment a battle is raging for the control of the leadership between the supporters and opponents of Maluf. This confrontation could lead to a new weakening of this party.

Moreover, the situation is very uncomfortable for the representatives of the "popular" sectors of the PMDB, as a result of the consolidation of the conservative predominance in this party. Thus, a Progressive Front has been formed, uniting the most left sections of the PMDB, deputies leaving the PT — such as the former leader Airton Soares — and sections of the PDT which, like those represented by Roberto Saturnino, find themselves ill at ease with a leadership of their party that is dominated by the personality of Leonel Brizola.



This coordinating group would like to form something like a Socialist Party, but the figures involved are not sure that they have the forces for that. On the same ground, Brizola's PDT would also like to transform itself into an SP and, by means of such a name change, increase the number of its cadres.

To sum up: On the right, there is the PDS, whose evolution depends on the outcome of the battle that is being waged for the leadership. The Party of the Liberal Front would itself be sort of a party of liberal conservatives, but much more conservative than liberal. The PMDB, for its part, is consolidating as a more and more conservative party. But it still has a large popular base. There is also the PDT, which may transform itself into an SP. And maybe there will be a Socialist Party formed out of the Progressive Front.

The PCB, the PC do B and the MR-8 will probably not manage to get legalization immediately and will continue to participate in the PMDB. Finally, as the only anti-Tancredo party, there will be the PT.

The Brazilian political scene is thus very confused.

The results of the mass mobilizations

The year 1984 was one of great mass mobilizations, first of all in the campaign for direct elections but also for continuing and strengthening the struggles for higher wages and for rights for workers in general. It had the highest number of strikes since 1979. In a general way, all categories of workers who entered into struggle got wage adjustments higher than those provided for by the law on wages. This law set wage adjustments below the official price index (INPC) for all those who earned more than three times the minimum wage.

The year 1985 has already begun with major struggles. At the start of January, the agricultural day laborers, the "boias-frias," literally the "cold lunches," of the Guariba region in Sao Paulo went on strike. They clashed very violently with the police of the state governor, Montoro, who is a member of the PMDB.

On the other hand, according to the opinion polls, Tancredo's election was supported by a majority of the Brazilian population. For example, more than 70% of the population hoped that he would win in the electoral college, as against less than 10% who favored Maluf, and less than 20% who maintained to the end their support for boycotting the electoral college and the indirect election.

In the final analysis, the PT participated in the campaign for direct elections as the left wing of the democratic bloc, and not as the driving force of a working-class and popular alternative opposed to the projects of the bourgeoisie.

The orientation of the campaign for direct elections was to put pressure on the deputies and senators to approve a constitutional amendment introducing



Demonstration against the military dictatorship in 1977 (DR)

direct elections based on universal suffrage. For that, the constitution imposed by the military required a two-thirds majority of the elected representatives. On April 25, 1984, an absolute majority was obtained for this proposal but not a two-thirds majority. So, the movement came to a crossroads. What should be done now?

One possibility would have been to keep up the pressure by presenting new constitutional amendments. This was difficult, both because of the time limits and because of juridical problems. In fact, the law forbids consideration of the same amendment several times during a session of the legislature. Attempts were made to put forward new amendments in June and August 1984, but they aroused little enthusiasm and were rapidly abandoned.

Thus, two main alternatives appeared. The first was to continue the struggle, giving it a more determined character by advancing the demand for a constituent assembly, the perspective for a break with the regime, and by working for more radical forms of struggle, such as a general strike. This meant in fact fighting for a workers' and people's alternative.

The second option was to channel the struggle through the institutions of the dictatorship itself, which meant accepting the electoral college and trying to make it possible for an opposition candidate to win there. The objective was to "steal the enemy's weapons to win," as some said, and to keep any more radical candidate from running.

The first alternative was backed by sections of the PT, in particular by the revolutionary Marxists and other revolutionary currents. But the PT as a whole did not come out for this perspective. For months, the PT leadership remained confused, discussing only the pros and cons of supporting Tancredo Neves's

candidacy. When, finally, the PT chose to orient toward deepening the struggles, supporting the demand for a constituent assembly and so forth, many months had gone by, and there was no longer any possibility for successfully pursuing such an orientation.

On the other hand, sectors of the bourgeois liberal opposition were acting with determination to achieve a victory within the electoral college, channelling all the pressure created by the mobilization in the early months of 1984 behind that objective. For this purpose, they chose Tancredo Neves as a candidate. He was recognized as the oppositionist closest to the government and was accepted by the military as the champion of "negotiations" and of "entente" with the regime. The bourgeois liberals sought to gain support within the PDS.

So, the great campaign for "direct" elections produced a curious result. It helped to weaken the military dictatorship, to speed its erosion, and to make it inconceivable that the new president could represent a direct continuity of the military regime. (In any case, an option of this sort would have been very dangerous for the bourgeoisie because it would have led to a situation of extreme instability.) But instead of opening the way for direct elections immediately, this immense mobilization resulted finally in an acceptance and legitimization of the electoral college.

A key element in the strategy of the bourgeois opposition was dividing the PDS, without which it would have been impossible to win in the electoral college. From the start of the wrangle over the choice of the candidate in the PDS convention, it was clear that this party was not going to come through the test intact.

In fact, the PDS could only maintain its unity as long as this was imposed by

the exceptional means in the hands of the president, in particular by the need of uniting around the chief. But for the presidential succession, matters were different as revealed, moreover, in a recent interview given by Figueiredo, in which he said: "I couldn't do any better because I didn't have AI-5." (1)

So, the PDS split into a multitude of groups fighting for their own interests. What is more, the PDS convention became an arena for political battles in which methods such as promising portfolios in the future government and even bribes played a decisive role. The result of all this was to open the way to the nomination for the candidate least able to unite the party behind him and carry through a transition, that is, Paul Maluf. Maluf was seen by everyone as corrupt and capable of resorting to the lowest methods. With Paulo Maluf as its candidate, the PDS, which was already divided, literally blew apart.

Most of the more lucid representatives of the bourgeoisie, down to the military chiefs themselves, concluded that in such a context Tancredo Neves was much preferable to Paulo Maluf. This is the fundamental reason for the big lead Tancredo Neves gained in the electoral college, as well as for the formidable lineup of the ruling classes around him.

However, Tancredo's candidacy was given impetus not only by the support of various bourgeois sectors. It also got not insignificant backing from the popular masses. Despite the fact that Tancredo promised virtually nothing to the working people, despite his deals with practically all the personalities of the right, he was able to uphold a minimum "program" that had an unquestionable appeal for the people. It was summed up in the formula, "I am not the military dictatorship; I am not Maluf."

Thus, while practically no one thought that Tancredo could offer a big hope for change, the general feeling was that nonetheless with his accession to the presidency something was going to change for the better in the situation.

The prospects for a "Social Pact"

In this context, all the reformist currents in the workers' and people's movement gave their support to Tancredo. This included the greatly weakened and divided Brazilian Communist Party (PCB); the pro-Albanians of the Communist Party of Brazil (PC do B); the October 8 Revolutionary Movement (MR-8), which once spoke in much more radical tones; and the popular sectors of the PMDB and of Lionel Brizola's Democratic Party of Labour (PDT).

The only ones who did not join the chorus of support for Tancredo were the members of the PT — although a large section of the party's deputies lined up behind his campaign — and some personalities in the PMDB, such as the Pernambuco deputy Jarbas Vasconcelos.



Thus, it was possible to mobilize a broad section of the popular masses around Tancredo, even if his rallies were a little pale by comparison with the mass meetings for direct elections.

What can be expected from Tancredo's government? It is clear that he is coming to the presidency without having made a break with the military regime. The numerous servants of this regime to be found in his entourage illustrate this fact. His government will be able to utilize many emergency powers left over from the dictatorship, should the need arise. There is the national security law, the law on the press, the law on the right to strike and so forth.

There is now a wait-and-see feeling among the population, created by the impression that with Tancredo something is going to change. But, on the other hand, the trend is not for social struggles to decline in intensity, quite the contrary. It is even possible that the struggles will sharpen, marking an acceleration of the trend that has been seen in recent months.

In this situation, it will be extremely difficult for the Tancredo government to maintain for long the favorable climate it now enjoys. Already the state governments led by members of the "opposition" parties have been carrying out antipopular policies, keeping the freeze on the wages of public employees, repressing strikes and so forth. They have already suffered defeats, as is the case notably of the governor of Sao Paulo state, Montoro, who has had to confront social mobilisations of a very large scale.

However, before now these state governors could minimize their responsibility by claiming that they were dependent on the federal government, and that it would only be possible to do something if it changed. Obviously, with a representative of the PMDB in the presidency, it is more difficult to use this kind of argument. Of course, they will find other explanations to justify their policy, such as, for example, the threat of a rightist coup, the existence of a conservative majority in the Congress,

etc. But such arguments reveal a great weakness.

Tancredo's tactic, as can already be seen, will be to demand respites, explaining that it is not possible to restore in a few months what the dictatorship has spent twenty years pillaging, and that it will be necessary to create the conditions for improving the situation of the economy, and that belts will have to be kept a bit tight. In this regard, the question of a "social pact" or "political truce" is vital for the new government, because this is the only way it can keep the workers' and people's movement under control with a minimum of risk.

However, the potential is there for opposing such a policy. For example, the 70% of the population that approved the election of Tancredo Neves are not necessarily favorable to a "social pact" policy. Even the PCB is not openly defending this perspective. Its representatives have said that a "pact" like the Moncloa one could offer some benefits but for the moment the conditions have not been assembled for making such an agreement.

In order to make a real social pact, it would first be necessary for all the parties to be legalised, for trade-union liberty to be guaranteed. But for the moment, the minister of labor still holds the prerogative, established already in the time of the Getulio Vargas dictatorship (which was in power from 1930 to 1945 and from 1951 to 1954), to intervene in the functioning of the unions by naming trustees, and there are still unions that are being directly subjected to such measures.

It is only when these conditions of legality for the parties and freedom for the unions are met, the PCB representatives say, that the workers could negotiate a pact on a "basis of equality". It is clear that the PCB does not reject the possibility of such a pact, but that it is not going to jump in blindly into advocating one.

1. Institutional Act No 5 (AI-5) was the main repressive decree of the dictatorship at its height. It granted emergency powers to the president. There were major mobilisations demanding its abrogation. This decree was suspended in 1979.

It is in this context that the orientations defended and put into practice by the PT and the United Workers Confederation (CUT) will be a decisive element in the coming months. (2) They have real chances for success, despite the isolation in which they were confined at the time of the indirect vote in the electoral college to elect the president of the country.

Unlike other countries that have carried out controlled transitions from military dictatorships to bourgeois democratic regimes, such as the Spanish state in the past or Argentina just recently, in Brazil there is a class-struggle current in the workers' movement that has a mass influence, whose strength is even a bit greater than that of the reformist currents and the "pelego" (yellow) sections that operate in the workers' movement alongside the reformists. On this basis, the class struggle may follow a very different course in Brazil than it has elsewhere in generally similar situations.

The PT and the CUT have in a general way pursued a correct policy of working-class political independence in this transition process. But this policy has undergone many variations, and this explains in part the large measure of control that the conservative bourgeois sectors have held up to the present over the process of transition from the military dictatorship to a limited form of bourgeois democracy.

The hesitations of the Workers Party

For a long time the PT, limited by its trade-unionist origins, had virtually no political orientation suited to the immediate situation. This began to change at the time of the campaign for direct elections. The PT took the initiative in calling the first public demonstration on November 15, 1983. Subsequently, in the big demonstrations in the early months of 1984, the participation of the PT was always essential. The PT appeared as the most consistent defender of direct elections and the workers' interests.

However, as I noted before, the PT was not able — it did not even try — to build an alternative leadership that could counter the bourgeois liberal domination of this mass movement. Instead of serving as the driving force of a workers' and people's alternative, the PT was content to play the role of a "left wing" of the democratic bloc.

However, the real problem posed by the position of the PT came to light after the Congress approved the constitutional amendment for direct elections on April 25, 1984 but with less than the two-thirds majority necessary to enact it. In the two following months, the PT remained confused and paralyzed, discussing support for a "single candidate of the oppositions", who would clearly be Tancredo, as everyone recognized already at the time. The PT harbored the illusion that it would be possible both to main-

tain its support for direct elections and to negotiate with Tancredo to get a program acceptable to the workers. Lula and the main leaders of the PT supported the position of "a single candidate", and a meeting of the party's National Bureau on this question ended in an impasse.

When it became clear that Tancredo was the candidate for president in the framework of the indirect elections in the electoral college, the PT leadership made another attempt to negotiate with him. In a recent interview, Lula said: "Shortly after Tancredo agreed to stand in the electoral college, I had a meeting with many opposition personalities deputies in the progressive wing of the Brazilian parliament. I wanted to discuss with them the possibility of getting some concessions from Tancredo for the working class in exchange for our votes, which were about 80 to 100, since besides the PT members, we could count on some members of the PMDB and the PDT, as well as on the PCB and the PC do B." (3)

According to Lula, if it proved impossible to form such a multiparty left bloc, it was because the Liberal Front was much more agile and intelligent. It assembled the number of votes that Tancredo needed to win the electoral college and went to negotiate with him well before the opposition formations. From there the Liberal Front went on to set the policy of the future government. It is well to note that while Lula was trying to negotiate with Tancredo Neves, the PT's official position was still for a boycott of the electoral college.

So, it was only when the Democratic Alliance (AD) was formed, based on the PMDB and the Liberal Front, and including an impressive number of representatives of the dictatorship, that the PT finally put forward its position clearly and tried to set up an alternative. But precious time had been lost.

It was only at a meeting of the National Bureau in October 1984 that the PT finally adopted a correct position, which was reaffirmed in a national conference in January 1985. In addition to confirming the correctness of the position of boycotting the electoral college because it was an illegitimate institution of the

dictatorship and denouncing the desertion of the parties of the old bourgeois opposition at the time of the campaign for direct elections, the National Bureau very clearly characterized Tancredo's candidacy as bourgeois and pro-imperialist, based on the biggest bloc of the ruling classes ever formed in the entire history of the country. In the face of this, it affirmed the need for the workers to safeguard their class independence and to conduct an independent policy.

Crossroads for the PT

The PT thus opposes the policy laid down for the future Tancredo government, which means in particular rejecting a "social pact" and a "truce". Likewise, it means reaffirming the basic demands of the workers, such as the demand for a break with the IMF and a suspension of payments on the foreign debt, a readjustment of wages every three months, the end of the repressive legislation, agrarian reform under workers control, and so on. The PT has even come to support the slogan of a free, sovereign and democratic constituent assembly, rejected for long years by the PT leadership, which had an economic view of the situation.

One important element, however, has been missing in the orientations approved by the PT — the clear objective of building a workers' and people's alternative to the government of the Democratic Alliance, of uniting all the forces of the workers' and people's movement against the projects of the bourgeoisie. To the contrary, the resolutions adopted by the PT talk about forming a democratic front uniting people's and democratic forces. As an example of this, they cite the committees to fight for direct elections. There is, of course, a confusion here. It was correct to build struggle committees for the direct elections campaign on a purely democratic basis, bringing together parties such as the PMDB and the PDT. But it is quite another matter when it comes to the need to build a workers' alternative in opposition to the Tancredo government, an alternative that must serve exclusively the workers' struggle for power.

Thus, there is a certain ambiguity in the position adopted by the PT, a certain lack of clarity. This is a reflection of the still very pragmatic character of the PT leadership, which in general has adopted class-struggle positions but without systematizing this orientation. This explains why the PT finally took a largely correct position on the question of the "indirect" elections but only after a lot of hesitations on the part of its leadership, which was virtually forced to adopt this solution by the turn to the right represented by the Tancredo candidacy.

2. On the CUT and the trade-union movement in Brazil, see *International Viewpoint*, No 50, April 9, 1984.

3. The interview was published in the January 16, 1985, issue of the Brazilian magazine *Isto*.

Convenções regionais em 16 estados

PT

Um partido diferente correndo em faixa própria

The fact that the resolutions adopted at the PT's national convention speak in several places about maintaining the political independence of the workers does not mean, however, that this point has been completely assimilated.

Another problem that the PT has to confront now is what position to take toward the eight federal deputies of the party who, violating the decision to boycott the "indirect" elections taken at the PT's national conference, voted for Tancredo Neves in the electoral college. At the time, these deputies defended their vote by arguing that it was necessary to stop Maluf, whom they considered a fascist. But they maintained their position, even when everyone already knew that Tancredo would get the majority.

The PT is not governed by democratic centralism. To the contrary, it is a party with extremely fluid internal relationships. Nonetheless, it has proved difficult to accept this vote by three deputies in the electoral college because they represented the PT. It was they moreover, who at the end of 1984 forced a new discussion of this question, letting it be perceived that whatever decision the party took, they were going to vote for Tancredo on January 15, 1985.

Failing to take any step against these deputies would amount to accepting once and for all that the PT cannot any longer make decisions as a party, and that every one of its members can do whatever they please at any time.

Among the ranks of the PT, there has been a vast movement demanding the disaffiliation from the party of members of parliament who sat in the electoral college. The argument put forward against this position was that the PT would appear to be a "closed" party, and there was a lot of talk about "Stalinism".

Social struggles ahead

At the national conference in January 1985, it was decided to disaffiliate deputies who sat in the electoral college. This position was adopted over the opposition of the National Executive and of Lula himself. However, immediately afterward an appeal was lodged against this decision, and the result of the appeal is not yet very clear.

Going back on the disaffiliation decision would magnify the weaknesses of the PT still more, and sticking to it could lead to the party losing the support of important sections of its membership, especially among intellectuals and other members of parliament. In any case, the three deputies who sat in the electoral college are already on their way out of the PT.

As for the CUT, it has in general adopted the positions of the PT. It is presently searching for a strategy to give impetus to struggles that clearly run

counter to the policy of the "social pact," struggles focusing around a few central objectives, such as wage readjustment, unemployment insurance and agrarian reform.

Nonetheless, the CUT is still a quite fragile structure, which has been gaining strength only slowly. As a result, the decisive axis will be the wage campaigns of the most important unions, mainly the metal workers' unions in Sao Bernardo and Diadema, where a fight for higher wages is to start in March.

Politically speaking, the revolutionary Marxists, as well as the revolutionary currents working to build the PT, find themselves in a relatively favorable position. In recent months, the PT's political positions have in fact moved closer to those of the revolutionary Marxists. This has happened on a number of points, notably on the question of what position to take toward the Democratic Alliance and on defending class independence against the bourgeoisie's maneuvers in the process of transition to a more democratic system.

There has also been agreement on the analysis that in the first stage of the future Tancredo government democratic struggles against the emergency laws and for dismantling the dictatorship's repressive apparatus will play an important role. Likewise, there is a similarity of views on the central question of supporting the demand for a free, democratic and sovereign constituent assembly. This means that the revolutionary Marxists intend to deepen their analyses of the evolution of these struggles and that they say clearly that their objective is to form

a workers' and people's bloc opposed to the Tancredo government, as well as to build a workers' and people's alternative. The problem is to give more coherence to the present line of the PT and the CUT.

The coming months will be decisive. For the moment, Tancredo still has a certain credibility. But with the deals that he has made with every sector of big capital and the imperialists, he is going to have to follow a policy that will rapidly lead him to his downfall. If the PT and the CUT demonstrate some coherence in the present situation, if they manage to give impetus to major struggles, they will find themselves in an excellent position to focus the discontent with Tancredo that will emerge. This is a dangerous road. The revolutionary Marxists are aware of that. But the possibilities are real.

On the other hand, if Tancredo manages to attract major sections of the people's movement to his proposal of a "social pact," there may be a decline in mobilization and even a demoralization of the workers' and people's movement.

Despite the fact that the bourgeoisie has managed so far to keep the transition to a limited form of bourgeois democracy well under control, nothing is yet decided. There continue to be important possibilities for the growth of a class-struggle current. And it cannot be excluded that the perspective put forward by the Brazilian revolutionary Marxists — the formation of a workers' and people's alternative to the Tancredo government — can gain success. ■

AGORA TEMOS A CUT



Now we have a united union (DR)

Second miners international solidarity meeting

On March 3, a special delegate conference of the National Union of Mineworkers voted to return to work without a settlement after nearly one year on strike. As we go to press it is clear that some sections are in favour of continuing the strike.

Whatever the results of this, in the course of their strike the miners have clearly demonstrated that they will not surrender to the Tories and that they are ready and willing to resume the battle.

This fighting spirit was very much in evidence at the second Socialist Action International Miners solidarity meeting, held before the decision was taken, on February 16. Held in Penrhiwceiber, South Wales, the meeting was attended by over 400 people, the majority of whom were miners and miners' wives. It was also supported by international guests from the USA, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark and Japan.

J. DRURY

The meeting took place in a rather different context from the first one, held in Bold, Lancashire in October 1984. Unlike in October, this meeting was held in the context of the Coal Board's vicious attempts to humiliate the miners in what will probably turn out to be the final phase of the dispute. But the meeting was also held in the heart of the South Wales mining area where the vast majority of miners have been solid since day one of the strike.

As one speaker from Leicestershire pointed out, South Wales is a 'scab-free zone'. If the government and the Coal Board are able to implement pit closures in this area, the whole community would be devastated with the loss of 100,000 mining and related jobs. This has spurred the determination and resolve that the communities in this area have shown.

This determination was shared by everyone at the meeting in unanimous support for the NUM leadership's attempts to get an 'honourable settlement' to the dispute. Kent miners' wives leader, Kay Sutcliffe, pointed out that in this context the miners did not need Norman Willis or the TUC to negotiate on their behalf. She added that miners were not intimidated by the Coal Board's offensive or the media's exaggeration of the 'back to work' figures. (For full text of speech see page 14).

Dai Davies from the South Wales executive committee of the union scotched one myth that the Coal Board keep trying to re-raise, and that is the possibility of South Wales or any other region of the NUM trying to make a unilateral return to work without a national call to do so. He explained the conditions under which he thought the miners could return to work with 'their heads held high': 'One of the options put forward on the media last week was the option that the South Wales miners want to unilaterally return to work. Totally untrue. This would mean that we would isolate ourselves from the rest of our comrades in the

coalfields, and there is no way we will go up that road. Also, we were told that if we were to return to work we could walk to the pitgates with our heads held high. Total untruth. What about the 600 lads who've been dismissed during this strike? As far as the South Wales area are concerned, we totally reject that option.

'Option two is that the Coal Board has said we must sign a piece of paper saying we will cooperate with pit closures. No way will we do this.

'Option three, which the South Wales area has adopted, is that we stand firm.

'People here were saying earlier that what this government wants is Scargill's head on a plate. But they don't really want Arthur Scargill, what they want is the organisation. They want the roots. As far as we're concerned, no surrender. The only time we'll return to work is with an honourable settlement, that is acceptable to all rank-and-file members.'

These determined sentiments were endorsed by speaker after speaker, with a recognition that whatever the outcome, there were other battles ahead that had to be mapped out right away.

Alongside of the need to fight the right wing across the labour movement, many speakers stressed the positive alternatives that the miners' strike has pointed towards and which can be built on after the strike, whatever the outcome.

Frank Elvey from the Labour Campaign for Gay Rights for example, got a rousing reception. By a very courageous speech about the need for the whole labour movement to fight for gay rights and about the harassment he has faced at times within that movement, Elvey demonstrated how the miners' strike has encouraged all oppressed groups in society to come forward with their demands.

Pat Hickey, from the *Socialist Action* Editorial Board explained the paper's policy in relation to this: '*Socialist Action* wants to fight with the miners in this struggle, but we also want to fight with the miners beyond this struggle. We want to fight with the women's support com-



mittees and with the tens of thousands across the country who have supported the miners.

'We have the task of building a new leadership in the labour movement, a leadership which is equal to that which the miners have produced in the NUM.

'We don't need the likes of Kinnock and Willis. Building an alternative leadership is a big task and *Socialist Action* wants to be with you in achieving that. We want you to join with us in fighting for this.'

Finally, the international speakers all explained how rank-and-file workers across the world were also looking to the miners in Britain for a way forward.

Representatives from Germany and Sweden explained how they would be receiving miners' wives in tours organised around International Women's Day on March 8.

The most enthusiastic response of the day was reserved for Fergus O'Hare, of People's Democracy in Ireland who drew out the similarities between the struggle of the Irish communities and that of miners and their families in Britain.

Beginning his speech in Irish, O'Hare pointed out that in Belfast this would have been illegal, since the British government has even denied the Irish people the right to speak their own language in the part of Ireland it rules directly.

He continued: 'I would like to say how honoured I am to speak to people who are struggling here against a vicious and repressive regime which we in Ireland

have been fighting against for the last 16 years.

'Like us in Ireland, you are fighting for the survival of your communities ... It is very important that we learn from one another. There are a lot of lessons that we can learn from you about organising in the labour movement. There are a lot of lessons the miners can learn from the struggle in Ireland.

'We started off in Ireland with peaceful demonstrations and we were met with repression. Only last week in Belfast, two young lads were shot dead by the army for joy-riding. summary execution for taking a car is what you get in Belfast with the army there.

'Margaret Thatcher is always lecturing people about democracy ... she doesn't know what democracy is. In Ireland she has deliberately gone against the wishes of 80% of the Irish people that we should

have our own country, united and undivided; So when Margaret Thatcher tells us that the miners should have a ballot she's not really talking about democracy — she's talking about getting her own way.

'Democracy is a facade for her in order to get her own way. We elected Bobby Sands MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Fifty thousand people came out and voted for him. What did Maggie Thatcher do? She ignored it. She ignored the expressed wishes of the people.'

O'Hare went on to explain other similarities in the struggle of the two communities: the role of the women, for example. Northern Ireland has the largest male population in prison in Europe, and this fact amongst other things has forced the women to organise. The women led the hunger-strike campaign, and by fighting the national-

ist struggle they are now in a stronger position to take forward their own demands, just as the miners' wives will be able to do.

He explained that in the nationalist community they too have their scabs, like the cowardly supergrasses currently sending hundreds to jail through their lying testimonies in the courts. But the most important thing to come out of the Irish struggle and the struggle of the mining communities was an understanding of the need and possibility to organise all sections to fight the British state.

The message coming out from the whole meeting was of the strength that lies in unity of the oppressed and of the way in which the miners' strike and the grim determination of the miners and their families can point the way forward in the fight against oppression and exploitation. ■

Dutch trade unionists boycott coal bound for Britain

*The following article is from the February 13 issue of *Klasenstrijd*, the paper of the Dutch section of the Fourth International.*

At last, the first action has gotten off the ground at the Overslag Bedrijf Amsterdam [Amsterdam Transshipment Company]. On Friday, February 8, for the entire day no coal was loaded into ship "Elisabeth" bound for England. But why in hell has it taken so long to get such actions under way? And how is it possible that coal and oil are still going to England from the Netherlands?

The leadership of the FNV [the major union confederation] and the affiliated unions have always had something new to hide behind. Up to the beginning of December, the Vervoersbond [Transport Workers Union] said that there was no "official call for a boycott"

What are the facts?

On March 21, 1984, the NUM launched an international appeal. It asked the miners unions to watch to make sure that none of the coal they produced was shipped to Great Britain. The two international transport workers federations got a request to ask their members to boycott coal and oil shipments to England.

Two and a half months later, the NUM sent a letter to the FNV. It was dated May 1. Among other things, it said: 'We would be very happy to have your help to try to stop the transshipment of coal from the Netherlands to the United Kingdom ...' [Retranslated from the Dutch.]

Two days later, Vernon Jones, overseas representative of the NUM, during a meeting with Kees Marges of the Vervoersbond pressed him to take action.

Marges gave the following response in an interview with the critical trade-unionist paper *Solidariteit* (January 1985): "Contacts abroad are not going so easily because the NUM is no longer a member of the International Miners Federation."

On May 22, the International Miners Federation called on the transport unions to black coal transport to Great Britain. So, what is the problem if the NUM is not a member of the International Federation?

Marges offered another argument: "We didn't hear anything more from the NUM." On October 12, Peter Heathfield, secretary of the NUM wrote directly to Wim Kok, [head of the FNV]. In his letter, he expressed his concern that nothing had yet been done about the shipment of coal and oil out of Dutch harbors. Marges said (in the same interview with *Solidariteit*),

"The letter was a joke — a wild west story" Marges resumed contact with the national leadership of the NUM, "but they could not clear it up for me..."

So, how did it happen that Heathfield himself in a letter of December 6 confirmed his letter to Kok?

Not before December 8 does any headway seem to have been made. Kees Marges, in the name of the Vervoersbond; and Rob Bunt, for the FNV, engaged in discussions in London. Under the leadership of Norman Willis, general secretary of the TUC, representatives of the confederations and transport unions from West Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands talked with a representative of the International Transport Federation and representatives of a series of British trade unions. Out of this meeting came a call to do everything possible to prevent the shipment of *extra* quantities of coal and oil, over and above the usual shipments.

From these facts it seems clear that more was asked than simply "seeking out and registering coal and oil shipments to England," as the leadership of the Vervoersbond has always claimed.

Naturally, such a boycott will not come about spontaneously. It is not so easy with the transshipment companies. The fear of unemployment is great on the docks. Reorganizations in the past have eliminated a lot of jobs. And the Vervoersbond could not do anything about that.

So it is logical that people on the docks say, "and now we are supposed to boycott coal? Naturally, we don't like doing that work" "But how long should we strike? A day? The next day the ship will be loaded" "We think that there will only be a strike if our own needs are taken up."

There are problems that you cannot avoid if you want to call a boycott. But it was very cheap when Wim Kok said at the time of the occupation of the FNV office: "People have to be able to determine themselves what policy the leadership is to follow." A call for a boycott could only be effective if it were coupled with a perspective for the future of the transshipment business. Take Terneuzen. Its business in practice turns around the shipment of coal. What sort of future does it have if the miners lose?

The fact that it is nonsense that the workers do not want a boycott is clear from the fantastic action of the workers at the Overslag Bedrijf Amsterdam. But that must not be the end of it. All shipment of coal to England must be stopped.

Another problem often raised is that in the event of a boycott, the Vervoersbond would have the judges on its back. That would not happen if the boycott were called officially by the International Transport Federation. The conditions for that exist. The ITF supports the call for boycotting extra coal shipments. According to a letter from the federation leadership of the FNV to the secretaries and district leaders (dated December 13, 1984), the ITF is calling on all affiliated organisations to do everything possible to achieve that aim.

No one is unaware that there are a lot of problems involved in boycotting extra coal and oil shipments. But a solution can be found for those problems once the union leadership is prepared to take the responsibility for such a boycott and thus to mobilize the creativity of the membership.

The newspaper of the FNV, *de Vakbondskrant*, writes: "Action readiness has been harmed especially by the activities of various action committees operating outside the union movement, some of whose members have put such heavy pressure on workers at the transshipment companies that a lot

of irritation has been created." This comment was directed against the occupation of the FNV office.

Naturally, we agree that this was a stupid action that did not bring the boycott any closer. But this action was not directed against the workers in the transshipment companies but against the leadership of the FNV. This leadership is in fact not taking adequate steps to give real leadership to a boycott. And during the occupation, Wim Kok could not convince those involved in the action that they were going to change. Instead, he knew nothing better to do than to call the police to throw them out. ■

Confiscation of NUM funds in Luxembourg

The British government will stop at nothing to break the British miners' strike. On September 28, 1984 a British court declared the miners' strike unlawful in the Derbyshire region and unofficial in the Yorkshire region and on October 10, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) were ordered to pay a fine of £200,000 for defying this judgement.

In the face of the quite correct refusal of the union to pay this fine, the British court decided that the NUM's assets, the main part of which had been transferred to foreign banks, should be sequestered. The bulk of the funds (£4.9 million) were deposited in Luxembourg in the Nobis Finanz International bank. The rest (£3 million) were deposited in banks in Switzerland and Dublin.

Price Waterhouse and Co, the company charged with the sequestration of these funds were unsuccessful in their original attempt because a Luxembourgish court of law decided that only £200,000 could be frozen and that the NUM should have the right to dispose of the rest.

In Luxembourg, however, a lively protest campaign was developed following the announcement by the Tory government of its intention to confiscate the funds. On December 17, 1984 a picket of the British embassy in Luxembourg was organised by the youth section of the railway workers union together with Luxembourgish Womens Liberation Movement (MLF).

The Confederation of Free Trade Unions (CGT) issued a statement saying that only the NUM had the right to dispose of funds which had come from the dues paid to it by the members.

The PSR (Revolutionary Socialist Party, Luxembourgish section of the Fourth International) took up the campaign by launching an appeal directed at the government (a coalition of the Socialist Party and the right-wing christian social democracy) and the minister of justice, also the chairperson of the Socialist Party. The appeal aimed to prevent any complicity with Margaret Thatcher's government and reaffirm that only the NUM had the right to remove their own funds. This appeal was officially launched on January 12 in all the left wing daily papers and was endorsed by about thirty famous personalities including Socialist and Communist Party and Greens' deputies; the chairpersons and leaders of the three main union confederations (the Free Trade Union, the Christian trade unions and the railway workers union); the PSR; the MLF etc.

Following this appeal, according to the British daily, the *Times* of January 10, 1985, the bank concerned was forced to delay its intended surrender of the union's funds to the British sequesteror, Michael Arnolds.

Replying to a parliamentary question from a communist deputy the minister for the treasury and foreign affairs, Jacques F. Poos (a socialist) stated that the Luxembourgish government had asked the bank concerned not to surrender the union's funds to the British receiver because British law could not be exercised on Luxembourg territory and that it would have to be a decision by the Luxembourg courts which would determine what should happen to the funds — whether they should go to the NUM or to the British receivers.

It was, therefore, in the face of widespread opposition and against the recommendation of the government and the law courts in Luxembourg that Nobis Finanz International nevertheless decided to hand the entire sum of £4.9 million to the British receivers (apart from the small sum of £200,000 already frozen by the Luxembourg courts).

This scandalous action brought an immediate wave of protest in Luxembourg: the three trade-union federations protested 'emphatically against this measure which constitutes a challenge to basic trade-union rights', and which, 'has to be put in the framework of the aggressive policies of the British Tory government and is part and parcel of repeated attempts by right-wing forces throughout Europe to openly attack trade-union rights.

'Everything must be done to ensure that the NUM's funds are restored'

The trade unions called on 'all political and democratic organisations to act together to ensure the right of the miners of the NUM to get their funds back.' At the same time, 300 well-known personalities and activists of the labour movement protested against the fact that British law was being imposed on Luxembourg territory thus violating basic trade union rights. The signatories of an appeal to this affect demanded that 'everything be done to ensure that the funds be restored immediately to the NUM who urgently need them in these difficult times.'

In response to this appeal, the government, through their spokesperson, J. F. Poos denied any responsibility in the affair and they confirmed that the funds had indeed been paid against the wishes of the government and the courts to a parent bank of the bank in question, in West Germany. In order to get round the Luxembourg courts, the funds had been paid into the Industrial Credit Bank in Dusseldorf. The bank was so unsure of their ground in carrying this out that, in collaboration with the sequestrators, an insurance policy with Lloyds bank in London was taken out.

It is urgent that labour movement organisations across Europe protest strongly against this attack on trade-union rights. Against this conspiracy by European capital who are united in their attempt to bring the European trade union movement to its knees, we have to counterpose the solidarity of the international working class and its organisations.

In the meantime, many questions still remain unanswered in the whole affair: Did the parent bank in West Germany act illegally? Where did the bank in Dusseldorf or the sequestrators get the money to pay for the insurance policy with Lloyds? And finally, the treasury minister in Luxembourg has said that the sum deposited by the NUM in the bank concerned is available to them; what right does the bank then have to prevent access by the NUM to those funds?

Everything must be done to ensure that the funds are restored to the NUM to whom they rightfully belong. ■

Butcher's apron victory

At a recent meeting Belfast city council voted in favour of a resolution aimed at preventing Sinn Fein and 'like-minded organisations' from standing in the local government elections this May, or in any future elections to the Stormont assembly or Westminster. They hope to achieve this by making all would-be candidates for election in the North of Ireland sign a declaration opposing violence and swearing allegiance to the British monarch.

Fergus O'HARE

This move is the latest in a series of attacks on the democratic rights of Sinn Fein and People's Democracy (PD) elected representatives in the North of Ireland, and comes in the wake of a significant victory by PD councillor John McNulty against attempts by Belfast council to 'unelect' him.

The PD victory in what became known as the 'Butcher's Apron' row has demonstrated both the possibility and necessity of opposing the increasing attacks on democratic rights.

The row broke out last December with attempts by unionists to close down a leisure centre in a nationalist area on the spurious grounds that local people had erected an Irish tricolour over it. During the debate unionists heaped abuse on the tricolour.

In his response, McNulty made an allusion to the Scottish highland clearances of the eighteenth century, stating that some of his constituents would re-

gard the union jack as a 'butcher's apron'. A flurry of hysteria erupted from the unionist benches. McNulty was suspended indefinitely from the council chamber, thereby effectively disenfranchising the people who elected him.

The action of Belfast council is seen all the more clearly when you consider that in the past unionist councillors have shouted death threats at PD and Sinn Fein councillors, called for the incineration of the Catholic population and physically assaulted PD councillor Fergus O'Hare in the council chamber — without any culprits being suspended.

McNulty has refused to accept the right of the council to suspend him indefinitely and determinedly turned up at every council meeting since, only to be forcibly ejected by the RUC [Royal Ulster Constabulary].

These actions have been accompanied by strong protests from all other Belfast anti-unionist councillors, the suspension of PD Councillor O'Hare, walk-outs

from the council meetings by both Sinn Fein and SDLP [Social Democratic and Labour Party] councillors, and noisy scenes in the public gallery as police have been called in to clear McNulty's protesting constituents.

The affair has attracted much publicity in Ireland, and PD have launched a campaign to highlight the case in the labour movement in Britain. The unionist establishment in Belfast has been forced to back down. When McNulty took his case to Belfast High Court, they found in his favour, declaring his indefinite expulsion illegal.

Smarting from their humiliating defeat, the unionists vindictively introduced severe restrictions on the right of the public to attend council meetings and set about trying to ensure that Sinn Fein and PD are prevented from standing in the forthcoming elections.

The 'butcher's apron' episode was the first attempt to fight back against the on-going attack on the rights of elected anti-imperialists in the Six Counties, particularly Sinn Fein. It marks an important departure.

With the electoral advances of Sinn Fein since the hunger strikes, both the British and Irish governments have adopted a policy of trying to marginalise them by refusing to allow them the rights normally accorded to elected representatives. For example, restrictions on the right of Sinn Fein travel to Britain, banning of Gerry Adams [president of Sinn Fein] from visiting prisons, the refusal of ministers in Belfast and Dublin to meet Sinn Fein councillors and the exclusion of Sinn Fein from the All Ireland Forum. (1)

Sinn Fein has made little attempt to mount a political defence against these attacks, taking instead a stance: 'Well, what else do you expect from these people?' Their non-recognition of the courts and the Dail (Irish parliament) also proves an obstacle to some of the steps likely to be involved in any defence campaign.

The SDLP leadership, far from defending Sinn Fein, actively collaborated in the attack; for example, through agreeing to exclude Sinn Fein from the All Ireland Forum.

It is within this context that the importance of the PD fight must be seen. They have called for a meeting of all anti-unionist elected representatives in the Six Counties to discuss the situation should the latest Belfast city council motion be acted on.

The whole question of decreasing democratic rights for anti-imperialist elected representatives in the North of Ireland is something which activists in Britain and elsewhere should be raising within both the trade union and labour movements. ■

Fourth International statement of solidarity

The Twelfth World Congress of the Fourth International declares its solidarity with comrade John McNulty of People's Democracy (Irish section of the Fourth International) undemocratically barred from exercising his rights and duties as a member of Belfast City Council.

Comrade McNulty has been barred from attending council meetings until he withdraws a statement describing the British flag (the Union Jack) as a 'butcher's apron'.

Comrade McNulty made this statement in response to pro-British Unionist councillors calling the Tricolour, the traditional national flag of Ireland, 'a rag'.

Unionist councillors of Belfast city council are refusing to implement the fire safety regulations in the Andersonstown leisure centre, newly opened for the population of this working class Catholic neighbourhood in West Belfast, unless the Tricolour that is presently flying above it is taken down.

Fellow PD councillor Fergus O'Hare and Sinn Fein councillors have joined comrade McNulty in his protest against this vindictive and undemocratic act.

We call on the labour movement and its elected representatives to demand that Belfast city council lifts its ban on comrade McNulty and implements the fire safety regulations in the Andersonstown leisure centre.

Forward to the day that the Tricolour flies in a 32 County Irish Workers Republic!

Britain and its butcher's apron out of Ireland now!

1. The All Ireland Forum was a conference of moderate nationalist forces established to elaborate a minimum nationalist programme and a solution to the conflict in the North. Margaret Thatcher rejected out of hand even the most mild demands which they came up with.



Dossier

International Women's Day, 1985

March 8, 1985 will be the seventy-second International Women's Day. It comes at a time when there is a resurgence of the women's movement worldwide and, at the same time, a renewed offensive by the ruling class attacking women's basic rights.

International Women's Day has its origins in the struggles of women in the socialist movement. On February 28, 1907 women socialists in the USA organised the first 'Women's Day' to demand political rights for working women.

In 1910 Clara Zetkin, the German socialist leader, proposed to the second international conference of Socialist Working Women that an annual celebration of women's day should be held. The first one was on March 19, 1911, on the anniversary of an uprising of the Prussian proletariat in 1848.

In 1913 the date for International Women's Day was changed to March 8. This was the anniversary of an important strike by women textile workers in New York in the 1880s.

The date took on new significance in 1917. It was the day that the February revolution (under the old Russian calendar) broke out, led by the working women of Petrograd.

As the number of countries celebrating International Women's Day grew, so did the demands put forward. In 1911, an article in the American journal *New York Call* pointed out that 'although Women's Day was established for the special purpose of demonstrating the socialists' support of the political enfranchisement of women, other demands are also put forward and other political and social questions.



'It was the struggle against the increased cost of living, the demand for motherhood and assistance for women's and children's labour legislation as well as the cry, "Down with militarism", that constituted the Women's Day programme in different years.'

The need for women to fight on all fronts is no less true today. In particular, women are in the forefront today, as before the First World War, in the fight against imperialism and war.

Within the peace movement, women have often shown through their actions the best way forward for the movement as a whole. Women's peace camps at Greenham Common in Britain, at Comiso in Italy, in the USA and Australia, have proved to be a constant thorn in the side of imperialism.

In recent years, the same has been true in the struggle against austerity. In the following articles about the miners' wives in Britain or the women's movement in Mexico, it is clear that in many cases where reformist leaders of the workers' movement have cowered in the face of the capitalist offensive, women have come forward to fight.

Women in the mining communities have been organised and the example of the British miners' wives in the last year has inspired women around the world. Leading up to International Women's Day, miners' wives will be touring France, Spain, Germany and Sweden to join in the celebrations in those countries.



In recent years women in Third World countries, including in Latin America and the Indian sub-continent, have begun to organise on a more permanent basis to defend basic rights. Such actions often spill over into the fight against women's specific oppression.

Whilst the influence of feminism and of the women's movement on a world-wide scale is growing and recomposing all the time, at the same time the ruling class — despite the United Nation's so-called decade of women that culminates this year — is stepping up attacks on women.

Such attacks are not only occurring through the activities of 'right wing extremists' but also with official backing from reactionary governments.

Statements by Ronald Reagan declaring his intention to attack women's abortion rights in the United States, and worldwide, give alarming credibility and backing to the so-called forces of the 'moral majority'. This points up the need for a response by the women's and workers movement on an international level to combat this offensive.

As in the early 1900s, so today, the socialist perspective has been the only one to offer women a real way forward. The debates thrown up by the struggles of women in Cuba and Central America and the gains of those revolutions are testimony to this, and those debates will continue within the framework of the fight to build socialism.

Alongside of the strengthening and recomposition of the movement in different countries, it is vital that an internationalist perspective for the women's movement be developed. The celebration of International Women's Day is an important event in the fight to build a truly international women's movement based on solidarity between women and with the labour movement both to defend our basic rights and to struggle towards our liberation.

The miners' wives and the fight for women's liberation

'A woman's place is on the picket line', is the battle cry of the thousands of miners' wives in Britain who have so courageously fought the Thatcher government in the last eleven months in order to defend the mining communities. Whatever the outcome of the dispute, it is clear that it is these women, organised in their own groups in every striking pit village in the country who have held the strike together. The Tory government had been counting on getting the women to play a 'typical' strike-breaking role. The women of the mining communities have shattered the Tory image of the wife escorting her husband across the picket lines, and in the course of their struggle they have challenged many other traditional images of women.

Judith BAKER

Because of the tight knit communities in which the miners and their families live, the women have in fact played an active role in supporting previous strikes. Even during the 1926 general strike, the women were organised in support. And in the 1972 and 1974 miners' strikes the women were organised, but as many point out now this was only to work in the kitchens or to help with the food

parcels. In this strike everything is very different. As Tricia Sutcliffe, a Kent miner's wife points out, 'In the 1972 and 1974 strikes we were doing the things women normally do — working in the kitchens, making food parcels. We did go on one picket in 1972, but that was a one-off thing. In 1972 we had joint demonstrations but organised by the NUM, not separate women's demos with husbands coming along, and women speaking on platforms was unheard of.

'Instead of being in the kitchen, the women are out on the picket lines....'

Kay Sutcliffe speaks

The following are major extracts from a speech made by Kay Sutcliffe, leader of the Kent miners' wives at a meeting organised by Socialist Action supporters in Penrhiwceiber, South Wales, on February 16.

...this government is launching an attack not only on the working class as a whole but on the mining communities. And you have to live in a mining community to understand why. I have a particular personal link with Penrhiwceiber because my father was born here and along with many other miners from Wales but also from Scotland, Yorkshire and the Midlands during the 1930s these men were forced out of these coalfields to find work elsewhere. And our coalfield in Kent was formed from amongst these men who travelled many, many miles on foot in order to make a new future for themselves and their families. That is why we're fighting now to keep our communities together. Our forefathers have fought for this. These communities are our right — we deserve to keep them and we will fight every step of the way to ensure that we do.

There is no point in saying that there are jobs elsewhere because we know that there aren't any jobs elsewhere. When they have put all the miners on the dole what will be the consequences? My father was a miner and he suffered a very serious accident at Snowdown (Kent) colliery. This meant that he was unable to work after his accident even though his mind was very active and willing. He wanted to go to work but it was physically impossible. I and my family watched him suffer

during his last four years in utter torment because he wanted to go to work. This is the kind of thing we don't want to see — our young men suffering years and years of torment because they want to work, they want to keep this country alive. They do not want to sit on the dole queues for the rest of their lives. They are not idle men despite what they would have us believe.

We have seen many attacks against the miners and the mining communities. Many tactics have been used by the coal board and the government; cuts in social security payments, the press and the media have been used against us and Arthur Scargill in particular. He is not the NUM personally, he is just a leader and I would like to add that he is one of the best leaders that any union has ever had. If the rest of the trade-union movement had leaders like Arthur Scargill, we wouldn't be in this position now.

We've seen a back-to-work movement that hasn't been very successful despite the figures that the Coal Board puts out on the television. We all know in our hearts that those men aren't going back to work. They can play about with the figures as much as they like.

We can all see for ourselves. What are those men doing? They are getting paid to sit on the pit top; they're getting paid to make cups of tea; paid to paint the pit top. They are not actually being paid to work. It's a waste of time and money. The real men are out on the picket lines. They're not scabbing on their own workmates.

'Today when a miner speaks at a meeting it doesn't have the same impact as having a woman. People were at first taken aback. They expected us to talk only about women's involvement in a very passive way and not give political speeches. And when they heard us, the reactions was, "What the hell is going on?"' (1)

There are many factors which explain why the women are playing a much more key role in the strike today. Firstly, ten years of the women's movement definitely had an impact on these women and on the way they organised. Most miners' wives groups whilst they do organise food and clothes distribution (a vital task in the dispute) also have a life of their own. They have their own bank account and in some cases organise women only pickets. Many of the women declare themselves influenced by feminism and some would call themselves feminists.

Groups of miners' wives have been down to the Greenham Common peace camp during the strike and the Greenham women have actively supported the strike.

But apart from the impact of feminist ideas and the strength of women's exam-

1. All quotations from Kay and Tricia Sutcliffe are taken from an interview conducted in November 1984 by Jane Kelly. Unpublished.

ple in struggle, women's actual lives have also changed a lot in the last ten years and these changes have had a big impact on women in the mining communities. The main change is that more and more women are going out to work (and this despite Thatcher's drive to get them back into the home).

Mary Davies of the Penrhiwceiber women's support group in South Wales described the impact that this has had to *Socialist Action*, a British revolutionary Marxist paper. 'Yes. More women work today in the mining communities than ever before. They got used to being independent. A lot have got part-time jobs mainly in factories or as school cleaners, working in the bakery or in the hospitals. We supported our husbands last time, just as much as now, but we didn't have as much freedom. I think women feel stronger minded today. Like the women at Greenham Common, who have shown that women can do things that men can do and even that men perhaps can't do — like survive all that hardship...'

Another thing that changed the women's attitudes and their involvement in the strike was the experience of police brutality early in the dispute. Many mining villages in Britain are now virtually permanently occupied by police. One could easily imagine that one was in Belfast or Derry rather than Yorkshire or



Kay Sutcliffe (DR)

Kent. Like the women of Northern Ireland, the women of the mining communities live with this every day, and it has hardened their attitudes.

On the picket lines, the women have learnt at first hand about police violence, and it is a lesson that most of them will not forget. To them, it has revealed the political role of the 'boys in blue.' Kay Sutcliffe of the Kent group described one morning's events:

'The police were just punching everybody. Six to eight people got arrested that day before the scabs came anywhere near the gate. Twenty-six people

got arrested in all. We watched the police actually drag a bloke away who hadn't done anything. We can't go to our children and say, "If you're in trouble, go to the police. You can trust them." They [the children] call the police "pigs". Ten months ago I would have told them not to.'

As well as themselves being directly influenced by feminism and the women's movement, the miners' wives have also inspired other women. This is important because of the Thatcher government's attacks on women's rights, which had played a big role in dispersing and demoralising sections of the women's movement. Behind them the miners' wives have rallied women from the Labour Party, women from Greenham Common and from women's groups all over the country. Women against Pit Closure groups, established in all the major towns, comprise women from many sections of the broad women's liberation movement. The miners' wives are in the leadership of a vital recomposition of the women's movement which could prove very important in the coming years.

The women's action has also had a massive impact in the Labour movement and in particular on the miners' union itself. On August 11, 1984, the first national demonstration in support of the strike was organised by the miners' wives in London. Arthur Scargill, the

We've had the police thrown against us right from the beginning of this strike. Men in Kent have had their civil liberties taken away. They weren't allowed to go from Kent and up to the Yorkshire coalfield. Many of the men in Kent have links with men in Leicester because that is where they did their first lot of picketing.

We have seen that because of petty restrictions on bail conditions that have restricted movement on picketing line, the roles in many communities have been reversed. (1) Instead of the women being looked at as working in the kitchens, the women in many cases are now out on the picket lines and the men are in the kitchen, helping to feed the families.

When we consider the police activity against us, the way they fiddle about with film clips to show that it's the miners that are causing the violence, we all know that it's the police that are causing all the trouble.

We have got two Kent miners in jail for offences on the picket lines: Terry French has been jailed for five years for an assault on a police officer; Chris Tately has got three years in a remand home for an assault on a police officer. Those sentences were imposed on these lads on the very same day that a policeman that had assaulted his wife and put her into hospital was just fined one hundred pounds for an assault. When you consider these charges and see that these lads have been sentenced in the middle of an industrial dispute, they are in fact political prisoners and we ought to all take action to ensure that these people are all taken out of jail and let back into society where they belong.

The police activity has been stepped up since the 1974 strike; they have been trained for what they are doing. They've been trained hard. And we all know who they've been trained on and we've all stood back and watched it: the black people in this country, the gays and lesbians in this country, the Greenham Common women and the people in Northern Ireland.

How long have we sat back and watched what has been done to these communities? How long have we sat back and never taken up any action for them? None of us have done very much. But these people were out on the picket lines, out collecting for us, from day one. They have never turned their

backs on us and we should be ashamed that we ever turned our backs on them.

The tactic of the Tory government has always been divide and rule, worker against worker. They know that they will have a hard fight against the working class and they can't beat us if we stick together.

It's now that the TUC and the Labour Party should be thinking about what action they should take. We don't need Norman Willis to negotiate a settlement for the miners. We've got a good executive that can do that for us. What we need for Norman Willis and Neil Kinnock and others to do is to back us in the actions we've taken. The rank and file have done a lot in terms of picket lines and collections and we are very thankful for that. But these leaders are there to represent the working class and it's about time they did their jobs. And if they were getting paid as working class men are, then perhaps they'd fight a bit harder.

The workers have produced the wealth of this country for many years and it's about time they reaped the benefit.

We've had a lot of international interest shown in this struggle as well. They're looking to us to win this strike not just for the working class in Britain but for the working class throughout the world. We'd like to thank them all for the money and the food and even the action they've taken. From people in Germany, France, the Netherlands and the Soviet Union and even from countries as far away as Australia and Nicaragua.

We've got the next round of pay talks coming up with industrial action from teachers, railwaymen, council workers and particularly the rate capping on March 6. We've got to use that, use it together to fight together, to win for everyone, not just the mining communities.

If we all stick together, we'll win for everyone. We've got to see unity in the working class in order to get socialism....The miners deserve to win, the communities deserve to win. Let's make sure that they do. Victory to the miners.

1. Bail conditions and sentences themselves during the strike have been particularly severe, with many pickets being told that they must not go within one mile or a few miles of the place where they were arrested on pain of fines or rearrest.

miners' leader, and Tony Benn (the leader of the Labour Party's left wing) were there along with other men, marching at the back!

It is no coincidence that the NUM delegate at the 1984 Labour Party conference spoke in favour of changes in the Labour Party's constitution to allow positive discrimination for women inside the party. The NUM was the only major industrial union to support the women's demands. If the women's demands that five seats on the Labour Party's ruling body (the NEC) be reserved solely for women are met, it is likely that the NEC would go suddenly to the left. The demand thus threatens the current Labour Party leadership in a rather dramatic way. This is, of course, the same Labour Party leadership that is currently trying to sell the miners' strike down the river. The link between the miners' struggle and the struggle of women here is obvious. The miners' wives actions have highlighted this.

But if these women's example is really to take firm roots in the British and, indeed, in the international women's movement, it is important that the miner's wives groups do not simply disappear as quickly as they have come.

Kay Sutcliffe explained that in Kent some members of her group had been discussing this: 'This is something we were talking about the other night. Whether we will stay as a women's group, or whether we will affiliate to the Labour Party, because the Labour Party would like us to work with them. But I think that the women themselves would work better being independent, and maybe joining the Labour Party if they wanted as individuals....There are a lot of women joining the Labour Party already.'

But it seems that whatever happens these women will not be simply 'returning to the kitchen sink'. Betty Heathfield is a member of the national women's coordinating group that has been set up out of the strike and she explained that 'No union or strike will ever be the same again. Now we need to get the wives of dockers, railway workers and lorry drivers involved. We've got a national coordinating effort underway now because during the strike women have changed a lot... we have become political animals...'

Through their actions, the miners' wives galvanised the British women's movement and have become a vital component of its future. The role that they have mapped out for women within the struggle for jobs and against austerity is one that may be copied elsewhere.

In so doing, they have helped to raise the voice of feminism and feminist demands within the Labour movement, and will hopefully continue to do so. But perhaps the most important thing they have achieved is to show that today the labour and trade-union movement cannot fight the capitalist class alone — a strong and independent women's movement is not a side issue but a decisive one in the battles ahead. ■

Miners' wives lead the way

In October 1942, outside the small Bolivian town of Oruro, a miners' wife, Maria Barzola, and hundreds of her followers were shot by the army on a demonstration to protest the low level of miners' wages. The 60-year old Maria, who was leading the demonstration, became a heroine of her people and is a symbol of the fight of silver, tin and copper miners' wives throughout Bolivia which continues unabated to this day.

Miners' wives organisations have existed in Bolivia since 1946 and are now a permanent feature. Known as *Amas de casa* Committees and headed by a permanent national structure, they began to organise women mainly around the question of food and prices.

Antonio MORENO

In each mining community in Bolivia, there is a *pulperia* (grocery store) which is owned by whoever owns the mine whether that be a private company or the government itself. Such stores have a monopoly and there are frequent shortages of basic commodities and price rises caused by spiralling inflation. In such cases the 'amas de casa' committees usually organise to demand action from the local union, sometimes turning out onto the streets of the *campamento* (community or village) and marching to where the union meetings are held.

But the women do not just meet when there is something pressing like this to discuss. In many areas they will meet two or three times a week to discuss various day-to-day issues ranging from education, sickness and health, work with the local peasant women, etc. In many cases they are better organised than the men and nowadays many of the

women attend the union branch meetings as well. In strike situations these organisations play a key role in mobilising the community in support of workers' demands.

In her book, *Si me permiten hablar* (*Let me Speak*), miner's wife Domitila describes her 'amas de casa' committee established in 1961 by sixty women whose miner husbands were all in jail at the time for trade-union activity. They got together to demand their husbands' release and the women mounted a hunger strike which was eventually successful. In the end, several hundred women began to come to the meetings and up to 5,000 were mobilised on demonstrations.

Domitila explains the impact that this had on the women themselves: 'As women we had been raised from the cradle with the notion that women are only meant for the kitchen and to look after the children, that they are incapable of involving themselves in important

Hunger strike in La Paz (DR)



work. Above all, they should not be allowed to take an interest in politics.' With the establishment of the miners' wives committees all this began to change.

The national organisation of miners' wives has now been meeting regularly for the last four or five years and have links with the unions nationally also. Miners' wives representatives were present at the last congress of the COB (the Bolivian trade-union confederation) on August 6 (See *International Viewpoint*, No 63, November 12, 1984).

In fact, as the crisis in Bolivia mounts and the struggle of the workers' organisations intensifies, the role of the women in general and the miners' wives organisations in particular is becoming more and more crucial.

Inflation in the country is now rampant. In October 1982, for example, there were 44 pesos to one American dollar. Currently, there are 45,000 pesos to the dollar.

In recent weeks the COB has issued a call to all women in Bolivia to organise exactly as the miners' wives are organised in their communities and to take on the organisation and distribution of food. They are suggesting that local women's committees should take over the private and state-owned food storage depots and sell food at the legal prices opposed to the prices dictated by inflation or by profiteers and gangsters.

If women do begin to organise on this kind of scale (and it is not clear as we go to press what the developments have been), then they will be in the forefront of the confrontation with the private sector and with the government itself.

Because of the struggle of the miners' wives the need for women to organise is now recognised by the trade-union movement as a whole and the 'amas de casa' committees have become a model for all women to follow. Women have also been organised in the past around issues such as forced sterilisation introduced through the US aid programmes; and within the textile industry where many women work. Few women go out to work in Bolivia, but most women are forced to take on extra paid work in the house, such as washing, or are often seen selling in the street.

Women are starting to organise in the workplaces as well, however, and in particular women workers in the government sector have recently set up a national union. Article 104 of the constitution banned trade unions for all government employees and it was largely the women who defied the ban and got the union organised. They now lead and run the union and have been in the forefront of COB actions in the last year.

The heroic struggle of Bolivian women and of the miners' wives in particular have propelled women to the forefront of the labour movement where they are best placed to bring forward their own demands. The self-organisation of women on a national and local level has been and still is a vital component of this process.



Mexican women fight for their rights (DR)

MEXICO

The growth of a new mass women's movement

The following interview was given to Gerry Foley in Geneva on February 6 by Soledad Moreno and Patricia Mercado, two leaders of the Mexican Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT — Revolutionary Workers Party, Mexican section of the Fourth International).

Question. How has the women's movement developed in Mexico in recent years?

Soledad Moreno. A very interesting process has been developing at the rank-and-file level in the mass organisations, which shows that women are beginning little by little to organize around their interests as they see them. This means that women who years ago would not have met to discuss problems as women are beginning to do this.

This process has been exemplified by various assemblies that have been held on the national and regional levels of women who live in the shantytowns, peasant women, women of the left political organisations and the women in the committees to defend the political prisoners and the political "missing persons."

The discussions at these assemblies have taken up both the immediate daily concerns of the majority of Mexican women — problems created by the capitalist austerity drive, how to fight to get public services, how to fight to defend their jobs, how to fight for the land —

and a series of problems directly and clearly related to the specific oppression of women.

This marks a big change from past years when the problems of women's oppression were the property, so to speak, of small nuclei of women intellectuals or students. They did important theoretical and political work, but they remained isolated from the great majority of Mexican women.

Today, we are seeing a combination of the concerns held by the majority of women, that is, the general problems of their class, with the sort of problems that their entry into struggle poses for them as women, that is, confronting their oppression as women. For example, they may find that as they get involved in fighting for sidewalks, for schools for their children, against high prices, for jobs and for the land that they run up against their husbands opposing their participation in political activities.

Q. Could you give some examples of these regional or national assemblies of women?

Patricia Mercado. For about a year and a half, following an initiative by the PRT, most of the left organizations have been discussing the possibility of establishing a national women's organization, based on the women of the poor urban masses, working-class women and peasant women. Last March a National Women's Forum was called, which brought together *companeras* from the shantytowns, delegates from the Coordinadora-El Movimiento Urbano Popular [an organization of activists in poor neighborhoods], as well as peasant *companeras* belonging to the peasant organizations grouped in the Coordinadora Nacional-Plan de Ayala, which groups the entire peasant movement. There were also trade-union women there, both representatives of unions and working women. And, of course, there were women from the political parties and women's groups.

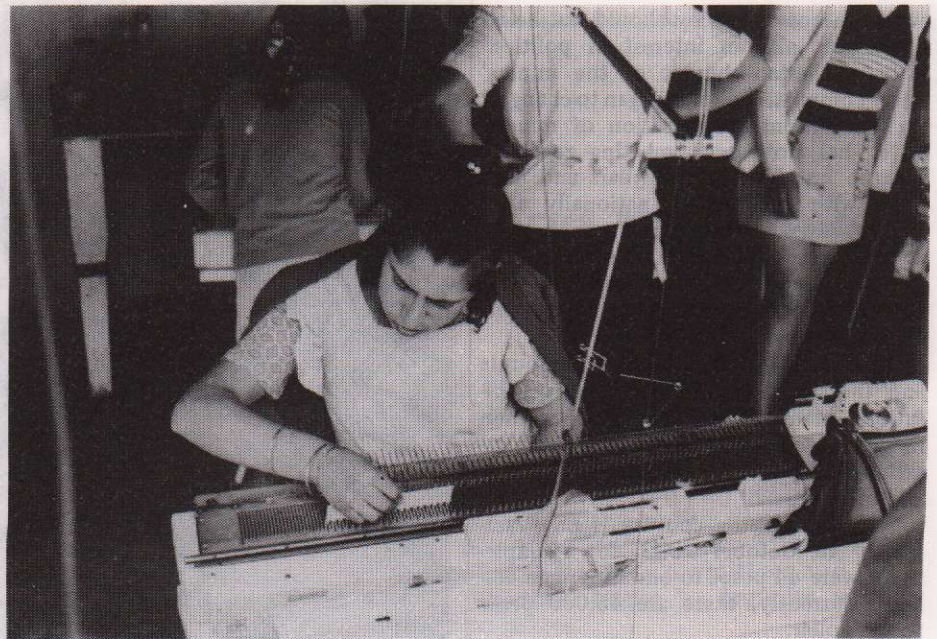
This forum discussed a wide range of concrete problems. For example, one very important discussion was on the problems of the women who work in the *maquiladoras* [factories that do only a limited task in a process divided up within multinational corporations in order to weaken the bargaining power of the workers]. The women from the *maquiladoras* who were there discussed a lot about the working conditions of a workforce of 200,000 on the [US-Mexican] border, who are mainly women. At the time there was a fight going on, and it is continuing, to win the right to unionize and to democratize the unions.

In November 1984, there was a national gathering of women from the shantytowns to discuss the problems of women in these concentrations around the cities. The main themes were the need to fight to get water piped in, to get electricity, and so on. One fundamental theme that touched them as women in the shantytowns and as housewives, as working women, was the fight against high prices, which involves forming consumer cooperatives, demanding that the state establish people's stores in the shantytowns and a whole series of such measures.

At the same time, the gathering discussed the need to promote within the shantytown-dwellers associations the participation and political education of women, as well as their involvement in the leaderships of these associations.

In December 1984, the first meeting of women workers in the *maquiladoras* along the frontier was held. About fifty women attended. They discussed how to begin to coordinate all the struggles that have been being waged in the *maquiladoras*. No trade-union group in the *maquiladoras* has been able to achieve what these women did, that is, set up coordination covering the whole frontier.

Besides this coordination of women in the *maquiladoras*, there is a coordination of working women in the services. In this sector, women have mobilized against a government decision not to set up day-care centers for the children of



A woman textile worker (DR)

women who work in the government secretariats but just to give them an allowance of three thousand pesos [about 15 US dollars] a month to pay for child care.

Another problem in the service sector is that the government is trying to get women to leave their jobs and go back to the home. So, the president's wife has organized a group of women, wives of the heads of government secretariats, which has set up a whole series of lectures in the service sector, lectures whose fundamental objective is to tell women to go back to their homes, that they have left their children uncared for, neglected their families.

The same problem has arisen in the banking sector [the banks are nationalized in Mexico], where 14,000 layoffs are coming up. The first in the list to be laid off will be women, women whose husbands work in the banks.

Moreover, last year workers in the public service sector were given an emergency wage increase, but it was not given to women with children in day care. They generally arrive at work a half hour late because they have to take their children to the day-care center. So, they were not given the raise on the grounds that they worked a half hour less. The women responded to this by mobilizing actions, work stoppages and so forth.

Today, this coordinating committee that I talked about has developed an initial form of coordination of women who are in the executive committees of unions in this sector in order to try to organize a more general response, to organize all the women in the service sector together and to not be isolated from each other.

One of the first things they have done is set up a monthly journal to familiarize all the women in this sector with the problems of women in other jobs. The objective is to show these women that similar things are happening to all of

them. Starting off from this journal and this coordination of trade unionists, they want to move toward a national assembly of women in all the services and to try to launch a more general counteroffensive. The first issue of the journal has just appeared. It is called *Nosotras* ["Us," in the feminine].

Q. What about peasant women?

PM. At the end of November 1984, the congress of the Coordinacion Nacional-Plan de Ayala was held. In the framework of the congress, a meeting of peasant women was held to discuss the possibility of holding a national assembly of peasant women. It was decided to undertake this project, and a national congress of peasant women is being prepared for the middle of this year.

Also, around the middle of this year, the second national assembly of shantytown women. One of the major tasks of this assembly will be to draw a balance sheet of all the work that has been done by shantytown women.

Moreover, all these meetings are being held in the context of a discussion among all the trade-union women belonging to these mass coordinating bodies and to the political parties of forming a national organization of women that could offer a general response to the whole offensive that the bourgeois government is launching against women in Mexico — working women, women in the shantytowns, women in the villages.

What is necessary to prepare for forming such a national coordination of women is to have nuclei of women in most of the regions of the country and in most sectors, the shantytowns, working masses, etc., who are prepared to build such an organization. That is necessary to assure that it will be real, have a real base. On the basis of this, the specific time for launching the organization could be decided.

Q. What role is the PRT playing in this process?

SM. We are trying to promote coordination of all these struggles on the national level. In fact, a lot of struggles have been waged but often because of being isolated they have failed to reinforce the movement. We think that it is necessary to build a movement, not just to wage isolated struggles.

On the other hand, we are coming into the campaign for the national legislative elections in July of this year. As the readers of *IV* may remember, there were national elections in 1982, in which our candidate, Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, was the first women presidential candidate in the history of Mexico. This year the elections are just for the Chamber of Deputies. We are running 300 candidates throughout the country.

We intend to use this election, as the previous ones, to promote mass struggles, including, of course, the struggle and organization of women. To this end, we are preparing to form women's committees around the election campaign. But these committees will not be just electoral, but will organize struggles for the women's immediate demands, as well as support for the candidates.

We saw a very important example of what such women's committees can do in the elections in the state of Tamaulipas in the 1983 elections. Women's committees were organized on the basis of the various *ejidos* [the old Indian common lands] to fight for respect for the people's vote [electoral fraud has been open and crude in such areas] and for the women's demands also.

For example, one of the demands the women raised was for a grain mill. That was a very important demand. If you don't have a mill, that means that you have to go to another village to mill the corn, or you have to spend two or three hours a day milling it in order to be able to make the tortillas [the Mexican staple]. The women had never raised such a demand before. But winning it made a very substantial change in their lives.

Moreover, these women's committees were among the best defenders of respect for the people's vote, they were determined and radical. [In this area, the men are often away from the villages].

We see these committees as part of the process leading to a national organization of women. They will not close up shop once the elections are over.

Q. What sort of impact has the organization of women in Nicaragua and El Salvador had on the women's movement in Mexico?

PM. Not much so far. There was an assembly of Latin-American women that took place in Cuba at the end of November where it was decided to form women's coordinating committees in all Latin-American countries to build a Continental Front for Peace. One of the main objectives of this was to fight against US intervention in Nicaragua and

El Salvador, to build a women's barrier to intervention. This organization has been formed in Mexico by women from the political parties, from autonomous women's groups, by intellectual women. But it has not had much of an impact on the broad movement. It is more of a left organization. Of course, we want to take this question of the fight against intervention to the women we are working with in the mass sectors.

Q. What do you expect to happen this March 8, for International Women's Day?

PM. On the basis of what happened last year, we can expect some important actions. Last year, a national day of action was called around three fundamental axes — against high prices, against repression and for a women's right to choose. The fact that the International Population Congress was held in Mexico helped. There was a mobilization of women, fundamentally shantytown women, in front of the Secretariat of Foreign Relations to press the demand that population policy not be based on the question of more or less people and that it should not disregard the opinions of women. This was an unprecedented mobilization on this sort of issue in Mexico.

It will certainly be proposed to carry forward that example this year by a demonstration in defense of reproductive rights, for more effective contraception and so forth. The fight against high prices and repression continue to be axes of the actions because these are fundamental to a united front of women.

Q. What impact did the onset of the economic crisis have on the women's movement in Mexico?

PM. Three or four years ago, the wo-

men's movement in Mexico had ceased to be a movement, there were just some isolated women's groups. Since the masses of women in our country did not respond to the demands of the autonomous women's groups, the movement reached a dead end. The women did not know what to do.

The onset of the crisis created another kind of women's movement, different kinds of mobilization, in other sectors. The shantytown women started to mobilize more than ever against high prices, they started mobilizing more than ever for public services for their homes, which concern them most directly because their husbands go out to work. And the first place the government wanted to cut its budget was in the area of public services.

In the countryside, the women began to demand that they actually be given the "women's portion" of the *ejido* so that they could work it and have more money in the house. And they started raising other demands in accordance with this, for seed to sow these plots, for water for the plots. They started forming cooperatives to dig wells and buy animals. They started to organize as women within the communities.

At the same time, in the unions, the women began finding themselves particularly hard hit by layoffs, and they started reacting against it.

So, we began getting a different sort of women's movement, a different sort of mobilization. And the autonomous women's groups that remain are trying to link themselves to this movement, so as to build a conscious movement, one not based merely on immediate demands, but a conscious one.

Q. What sort of links have developed between the women's organizations and the unions?

PM. None, really. What have developed are organizations of women. For example, we have women in factories who are concentrated in certain areas of work and may die there. They have no right to training to improve their skills. There have been mobilizations for the right to promotion and training. For example, when the women are together in the factory cafeteria, they may decide to mobilize to stop the production line. In some cases, the union involved has backed them up, in others it hasn't.

In the subway workers' union, for example, all the women have mobilized to win the right to be train drivers. There have been a series of struggles at this level. But this has not brought about a link between the women's organizations and the trade-union organizations. There have been just isolated struggles in the unions.

A movement of working women has begun to grow, exemplified by the assembly of women working in the maquiladoras and the coordination of women working in the service industries. But it isn't getting any help from the union leaderships. ■



Women's liberation and the revolution

Taking advantage of the invitation we received from the Cuban Communist Party last year to give several political seminars on Latin America and two talks in the Women's Federation, we were able during our three-week stay in Cuba to gain some familiarity with the evolution undergone by Cuban women in the period of transition to socialism.

The struggles of Cuban women have to be analyzed in two phases that are part of the same political process — national liberation and building socialism — which has made possible notable advances in women's liberation. That is, the participation of women in political and class struggles is inseparably linked to their specific demands as a sex.

In the last century, women led by Mariana Grajales and Ana Betancourt fought together with Manuel de Cespedes, Antonio Maceo and Jose Marti to break the chains of colonialism. They managed to break the Spanish yoke in 1902. But they soon fell into another kind of semi- or neo-colonial dependency, with the Yankee intervention, which led to the imposition of the Platt Amendment. (1)

This marked the beginning of a half century of struggle against imperialism and the native bourgeoisie led by Gerardo Machado, Fulgencio Batista and other Yankee stooges, a struggle that culminated with the attack on the Moncada barracks, in which women of the stature of Melba Hernandez and Haydee Santamaria participated.

Luisa WERTH and Luis VITALE

The victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 opened a new stage in the struggle for the liberation of Latin American women, involving for the first time in our history the active participation of women in building socialism in one of the countries of our continent, where the revolution began to speak Spanish.

In the early years of the revolution, women joined the militias to defend the nation from the threat of US invasion, helping to bring about the imperialist defeat at the Bay of Pigs. Such participation by women in the people's militias, along with their integration into community tasks, such as urban and rural work and education, helped to break down the old patriarchal mode of life. Women started to come out of the four walls of their homes. As Isabel Largauija put it:

"Women's labor power ceased being the property of their fathers, husbands or pimps. In channelling their efforts to the benefit of the community, women began to become conscious of their worth, and fundamentally, of their right to the product of their labor. In the consciousness of oppressed Cuban women, two conceptions began to emerge, which for them were inseparable, the sense of community and of personal identity.

"In 1961, the literacy campaign, which initiated a massive process of educational improvement, especially in the rural areas, brought tens of thousands of young women in the towns and cities out

of the seclusion of the home. They stayed in the mountains for months as voluntary teachers, working alongside their male comrades, free to make their own decisions for the first time.

"As a useful social activity and a way for supporting the gains of the revolutionary, voluntary work appealed to women, because they identified with these gains. This became a bridge by which women emerged from the stagnation of the home, began to lose their fear of the world outside the family, gained experience and confidence in themselves. It prepared them gradually to consolidate their new position by becoming incorporated into the paid labor force." (2)

Federation of Cuban women formed

Becoming established in jobs, the prostitutes who had proliferated into the tens of thousands to satisfy the appetites of Yankee tourists, went through a process of reeducating themselves and of recovery of their human dignity, devoting themselves self-reliantly to productive work and study. A similar process occurred among the 70,000 former domestic servants.

"The destruction of private ownership over women's labor power," Largauija and Dumoulin write, "was perhaps the starting point, the underpinning, that made it possible to integrate women later into production, scientific activity and political leadership.

"The rescue of women's labor power



and with that of their human identity was done in the name of the general interests of the community, and it was in the service of the community that women began to become conscious of their independence and their value as human beings. So, it is not surprising that Cuban women in the 1980s cannot understand their emancipation as women outside of the structural changes brought about in the revolutionary process. For them, private property and domestic slavery are synonyms and fit together into a shameful past. For them, women's liberation and social revolution have the same meaning."

The Federacion de Mujeres Cubanas [FMC — Federation of Cuban Women] was formed on August 23, 1960 with the aim of incorporating women into the economic, political and social life of the country. As a revolutionary task, it assumed responsibility for investigating the problems, concerns and difficulties of women in order to refer these to the competent government bodies. Thus, in all these years, the FMC has worked actively in the literacy campaign, in setting up Ana Betancourt Schools, in sexual educational schemes, in formulating the New Family Code and in resolving the difficulties that have arisen in order to achieve full equality for women.

The Family Code in force in Cuba leaves no room for doubt about the equal rights of all human beings in Cuban society. It is important to point out that this Code, as all other Cuban laws, was discussed in all the bodies in which the masses participate, in the block organization of the FMC, in the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs), in the unions, etc., before being promulgated. This point seems particularly important to us since one of the problems in our Latin American countries is that women of the poor and middle sectors often are unaware of favorable laws, and, of course, have not participated in, nor had any opportunity to express an opinion about, laws that directly concern them, such as divorce and the right to choose.

1. This provision amounted to limited sovereignty for Cuba, reserving paramount authority to the US. — IV.

2. Isabel Largauija and John Dumoulin: *La mujer en el desarrollo — estrategia y experiencias de la Revolucion Cubana*, a paper presented to the Fifteenth Simon Bolivar Latin American Sociologists Conference held in Managua, Nicaragua on October 10 - 14, 1983.

In the CDRs, the basic unit of People's Power, the people of a block participate. Their function is to handle community problems such as mass vaccination, education and vigilance. Participation is voluntary and the leaders are democratically elected. Housewives and elderly persons have done outstanding service in the CDRs. In these bodies are discussed both community and national problems....

The First Congress of the FMC held in 1962 gave impetus to the creation on a massive scale of collective laundries and restaurants in order to lighten women's work in the home. "The problem was to get the state to provide effective services, paid for by those concerned at a low rate but one sufficient to finance these services." (3)

The women have a great ally, Fidel, who is the state leader that has most concerned himself with women's liberation in all of history. From the first day after the triumph of the revolution, he has encouraged it and supported it, not only in words but in deeds, recognizing that since women are doubly exploited they have to be doubly revolutionary.

Women continue the fight for their specific demands

The resolutions of the First Congress of the Cuban CP held in 1975 also gave solid backing to women's struggle for emancipation. In the Theses "On the Full Exercise of Women's Equality," it was stressed that "the success of this historic battle involves totally rooting out, as communist morality demands, the vestiges of the old attitude toward women; the radical elimination of still existing prejudices and discrimination.... It was essential to carry on intense and continuing work against backwardness, underestimation of women and prejudices, to get women to discover themselves, to become conscious of their possibilities, so that they will express and defend their views, so that they will feel capable of undertaking difficult tasks, of leading, of creating.... This participation by women in society must be in absolute equality with men.

"While any vestige of inequality remains, it is necessary to continue working to achieve this objective of the revolution.... The principle that care of children is an exclusive responsibility of the mother must be rejected.... The competent bodies must promote conditions enabling workers to care for sick children both in the home and in hospitals....

"It is necessary that those who have not yet understood the just principles of equality on which our socialist society is based cast aside prejudices and backwardness and realize that men and women are equal in their situation and opportunities. Both men and women are capable of leading, of building. There is nothing unmanly about sharing in the household chores and in looking after the children.... The concepts of socialist morality are the same for all citizens. But in many cases a different starting point is

used in evaluating the same action by a man and by a woman, with conceptions of bourgeois morality prevailing.... There cannot be one morality for women and another for men." (4)

The percentage of women with jobs went from 17.8 in 1970 to 31.9 in 1979. At the Fifteenth Congress of the CTC (Confederacion de Trabajadores Cubanos - Cuban Workers Confederation) held in February 1984, companero Veiga pointed out in his report that women had reached 38.9% of the economically active population, that is, 1,044,000 women at work, in contrast with the 160,000 women who worked in 1959.

It is important to point out that the gains made by European and North American women in this respect cost them a century of struggle, whereas Cuban women achieved this in less than twenty years, thanks to the socialist revolution.

In his speech concluding the recent congress of the CTC, Fidel Castro pointed out that in some provinces, such as Havana, women now exceed 44% of the economically active population. Unlike women in the capitalist world, Cuban women work in highly skilled jobs. Some 53% of the technically skilled labor force is made up of women, according to the statistics published by the CTC in February 1984.

Some 60% of new professionals are women. In medicine, in the Carlos Finlay facility, two out of three students are women. Fidel even joked at the CTC congress:

"We have had to protect men and establish a quota - 52% women, 48% men. Because we wanted the proportions to be more or less equal in the medical profession. In a certain sense, we even wanted married couples of doctors so that when it was necessary to send doctors to some part of the world to carry out a mission we could send a couple." (5) In university fields such as economics and philosophy, women have taken up more than 55% and 81% of the posts, respectively.

Because of the facilities provided by the socialist revolution, the percentage of married women who have had the opportunity to work has risen from 16% in 1970 to 36.7% in 1979.

The participation of women in the trade-union movement has been increasing. In 1980, 42.7% of the elected union leaders and 32.6% of the members of union bureaus were women. In the basic units of People's Power, the CDRs, about 50% of those involved are women. However, the participation of women in the leading organs of People's Power, the municipal, provincial and national assemblies, remains small. Only 22% of the members of the National Assembly of People's Power are women.

Likewise the participation of women in the Cuban Communist Party remains weak. In 1975, 14.1% of the membership were women, and in 1980 it was 19.1%. This was pointed up by Fidel in the recent CTC congress, when he said:

"Why aren't there more women in the leaderships of the party, the state and the mass organizations? One of the reasons for this lesser degree of participation by women in the leadership of the party and People's Power is that the main responsibility for household tasks and childcare still falls on women. In the Second National Congress of the FMC held November 25-29, 1984, it was pointed out, 'we are encountering great difficulties in advancing companeras, especially at the level between the block and the municipal assembly and from the municipal to the regional level. Family problems, along with changing residence, have tended to make such promotions extremely difficult, and we are finding very little understanding on the part of husbands when transfer from a work center is needed.'" (6)

Cuban women have resolved most of their basic problems so that they can continue fighting for their specific demands. For five years now, the problems of housing, health and education have been largely solved. There are more than 100,000 places in kindergartens, and some 400,000 places in part-time boarding schools. More than 600,000 children and teenagers have scholarships. In almost all work centers, there are collective restaurants.

Some contradictions for women remain

Nonetheless, women have to continue bearing the burden that goes with the reproduction of labor power and of the greater part of domestic tasks. Larguia and Dumoulin write, "The elimination of the home as a private economic cell, as a labor center devoted to the direct reproduction of labor power, is a law of scientific communism. But the replacement en masse of the small domestic economy by a great socialized productive force not only requires a very high development of the productive forces but a thoroughgoing technological redesigning of the human habitat, which must be accompanied by the creation of a daily consciousness of the highest scientific level." (7)

The period of transition to socialism presents serious problems for overcoming underdevelopment and dependency, especially in our Latin American countries, at the economic, class and political levels. But these problems are much more difficult to overcome on the level of culture and the relations between

3. Ibid., p. 9.

4. Luis Vitale: *Historia y sociología de la Mujer Latinoamericana*, Ed. Fontamara, Barcelona, 1981, p. 61.

5. First Congress of the Cuban CP: *Tesis y Resoluciones sobre el plen ejercicio de la igualdad de la mujer*, Imprenta Federico Engels, Havana, 1976, pp. 4, 9, 22, 44 and 47.

6. Fidel Castro: Closing Speech at the Fifteenth Congress of the CTC, *Granma*, February 25, 1984.

7. Second National Congress of the Federation of Cuban Women: *Memoria*, Ed. Orbe, Instituto Cubano del Libro, Havana, 1975, p. 18.

spouses. The structural changes achieved in the first decades of a socialist revolution are not automatically reflected in individual and social consciousness. Racial prejudices and male chauvinism inherited from the capitalist system cannot be abolished by decree.

It is possible that Latin American revolutionary feminists visiting Cuba have been surprised somewhat by the contradictory appearance of this process that is aimed at the total liberation of human beings, since vestiges of notions of male superiority remain in the conduct of many *companeros* and also *companeras*.

Over these 25 years of revolution, we can say that there has been an important change in the collective consciousness about the equal role that women should have in the society. Nonetheless, in the family, we often still find cases of a mistaken sexual division of labor. There are also notable differences between the generation that came to maturity before the revolution and which is still alive and the present generation. The role that grandmothers play is striking.

Working women rely on their mothers. We asked a number of grandmothers about this, and they answered that it was natural for them to help their daughters and to take care of their grandchildren when they got out of school. At bottom, the grandmothers continue reproducing the forms of male domination, since by their work they substitute for what the husbands should do in an equal division of the household tasks. This function of reproducing the system of male domination is clearest when the grandmother in question is the mother of the spouse that appears as the head of the household. When we asked the same question to young women, they answered that this was a problem of transitional society, that they did not consider it just and that the problem would have to be solved.

Cuban women's high level of collective and social consciousness enables them to understand that these and other needs that have still not been entirely met will be satisfied as production and productivity rise. Cuban women know that their labor will produce wealth that will benefit the entire society.

The ideology of the patriarchal family, corresponding to a state and a society that no longer exist in Cuba, persist despite the efforts that are being made from all sides and by all the social organizations. Fundamentally, they are preserved by the transmission of values from mother to daughter and by the sexual division of labor in the home.

We were able to see that many comrades have been unable to change the relations within the family or divide the domestic tasks. Nonetheless, as a result of the intense and sustained ideological campaign carried out by the FMC and because of the strength of the new generation educated in revolutionary principles of equality, parents have found it impossible to perpetuate the tradition of male superiority in which they were educated.

In many cases parents have come to understand, since at the same time as they have given way in their patriarchal claims, they can see the benefits of equality in their daughters.

Cuban women have the benefit of laws that permit divorce when necessary. Abortion is no longer the clandestine practice that takes so many lives in the other Latin American countries, especially among the poor. Health and sexual education programs conducted in the schools from the time they are seven years old enable women to have a full knowledge of their sexuality and fertility. Nonetheless, there are many cases, especially among teenagers, when contraceptive methods fail. Abortion is not recommended as a method of contraception. But it is available as a solution where pregnant women are not in a position to assume the responsibility of motherhood. In these cases, it is free and carried out under the best hospital conditions.

IRELAND

Building an anti-imperialist women's movement

International Women's Day will be commemorated in Ireland this year, as it has been since 1979, with a demonstration at Armagh Women's Prison in solidarity with women political prisoners. This is the only all-Ireland activity to celebrate the event.

In 1969 there were no women political prisoners. Bernadette Devlin, now McAliskey, at the time a Member of Parliament, was the first woman to be jailed in this phase of the struggle against the British presence, which opened with the 1968 civil rights movement. Since then, there have been many developments, inside and outside the prisons, always closely interconnected.

Beth TAGGART

Internment, when introduced in August 1971, initially was applied exclusively to men, but it was not long before the first women internees found themselves in Armagh jail. In subsequent years there was a small flood of prisoners who had passed through the infamous 'conveyor belt' system of arrest under emergency legislation; interrogation in the notorious torture centres, often resulting in 'confessions' to serious charges (at the start of the 1981 hunger strike approximately 80% of political prisoners had been convicted solely on the basis of such confessions); trial in juryless special courts and finally long prison sentences.

By the mid-1970s there were about 120 women in Armagh. Between 1972 and 1976 prisoners convicted for political offences were given special category status. As such they allowed freedom of

The contradictions that remain in Cuba with respect to women's questions were expressed clearly after the well-known Brazilian television drama *Malu* (8) was run on Cuban TV. It aroused a furor and a lot of commentary. Unlike in the other Latin American countries, the state, the party and the FMC socialized the debate, opening it up to the public with a forum on TV. Later, *Malu*, the lead, was invited to Cuba, after she had expressed her desire to meet Fidel Castro. The day after she arrived she got a big bunch of flowers, followed by a visit from Fidel.

This support for women's liberation by Fidel and the great work by the FMC, along with all the programs designed to raise the professional and educational level of women, has enabled women to raise their problems and get respect, if not agreement, from all men. ■

8. Larguia and Dumoulin, *Op Cit.*, p. 11.

association among themselves and were able to control many aspects of prison routine such as educational and recreational activities and housekeeping chores. Relations with prison authorities were conducted through an elected 'officer commanding'.

With the introduction of Britain's criminalisation policy in 1976, these rights were withdrawn and conditions deteriorated sharply. The prisoners embarked on a non-cooperation protest, refusing to do penal work and were in retaliation punished by restrictions on recreation, visits, educational facilities and lost a day's remission of sentence for each day's protest. Beyond this, the internal regime was made harsher — harassment increased, there were cases of beatings and medical care became nonexistent. The lack of medical care is a major problem which has still not been resolved. In recent years at least four prisoners have been released on the

grounds that their health was so bad that it precluded further imprisonment — but they were allowed to be on death's door before outside pressure forced action.

Early in 1980, prison authorities at Armagh provoked a major incident in which many of the women were badly beaten and which forced the women into adopting the defensive measure of refusing to leave their cells, thus forcing them, like the male prisoners in the H Blocks [so named for the shape of the prison buildings], to live continuously in cells covered with their own excrement, going without changes of clothing for three months at a time, with no washing facilities. This situation had an even more devastating effect on the health of the female prisoners than it did for their male comrades.

In October 1980, three prisoners in Armagh embarked on hunger strike in tandem with their male comrades in the H Blocks, demanding a return to all political prisoners of the conditions which still applied (and now apply) to all political prisoners convicted on charges dating prior to March 1976. This hunger strike was called off in December 1980. The women were in no condition to take it up again the following year when Bobby Sands and his comrades took it up again.

While certain minor improvements were introduced in the wake of the hunger strike, these were quickly rolled back, and the situation inside the prisons has become increasingly repressive and vindictive.

In Armagh since November 1982 a new policy, that of strip searching, has been implemented and is having a serious impact on the morale and psychological well-being of the women prisoners. Strip searching of anyone, prisoner or otherwise, is inherently degrading, but in Armagh its use is specifically designed and carried out to have the

greatest effect in undermining the determination of Republican women to resist the criminalisation policy.

The Armagh women are not hardened criminals; however much the British government tries to portray them as such. They are, for the most part, extremely young, Catholic women — housewives, cashiers, hairdressers, shop assistants, stitchers, occasionally a student or computer operator. In January this year the last woman with special category status was released. She left behind 17 comrades serving sentences ranging between five years and life, the average sentence of the current population is 13 years. Many of these women have been in prison since their teens, some will be middle aged when they are due to be released.

Life under British military occupation

Prior to the present phase of political struggle in the north of Ireland, there were no long-term women prisoners, political or otherwise. Since 1970 the numbers, while up and down, have risen dramatically. Armagh is now full of young women convicted for participation, or alleged participation, in military activities directed against the British colonial regime. This is a reflection of the role that women have played, not just in the armed struggle against British imperialism, but in all facets of anti-imperialist political activity in the past 15 years. The majority of the prisoners are in their early twenties and most of their lives have been dominated by the war situation.

In her book *The Armagh Women*, published in the weeks between the 1980 and 1981 hunger strikes, Nell McCafferty gives a glimpse into the person impact the war has had on some of their lives:

'Mary Doyle's mother had been killed in a Loyalist pub bomb explosion. Maire

Og Drumm's mother had been shot dead in hospital by Loyalists. Susan Loughran's brother had been shot dead in the New Lodge Road while bending over a dying man. Rosemary Simpson's husband was shot dead; her mother died of a heart attack after being struck by a British Army rifle-butt. Two sisters, serving sentence, were told that their brother had been shot dead by the British Army. Katrina Pettigrew learned that her sister had burned to death in a car carrying incendiary bombs. Brenda Murphy's father was shot and wounded by Loyalists and died later.'

Beyond these major personal tragedies, the war and the British presence generally have deeply affected everyone in the north of Ireland, but no one has suffered more than the women of the nationalist working class communities.

British-occupied Ireland is one of the most deprived areas in the EEC. Belfast is rivalled only by Naples for the title of most poverty-stricken and socially disadvantaged city in the Common Market. Male unemployment in the Six Counties is overall around 27% — in the nationalist ghettos it is closer to 60%, often repeating through several generations.

Women, in fact, constitute about 43% of the workforce, but this is a reflection of the distorted nature of the economy. One fifth of all workers in the north of Ireland are part-time, but of these part-time workers, 80% are women.

As the manufacturing sector disappears the trend is for part-time work to increase. Employment prospects for Catholics in the North of Ireland have never been good at the best of times. For those Catholic women who do get paid employment, it is usually at the bottom of the scale — domestics in hospitals, receptionists, etc. Whether or not they work outside the home, the overwhelming burden of daily survival for themselves and their families falls on their shoulders. It is a massive burden.

The cost of living is considerably higher than in Britain, but social security benefits are the same. Unlike Britain, social welfare payments can be deducted at source for arrears in rent, rates or other money owed to the state. (This is done under the Payments of Debts Act, brought in to counter the effect of a mass civil disobedience campaign protesting against the introduction of internment when people went on rent and rates strikes). In practice this means that many families are expected to live on a pittance, made even less by the need to pay inflated food and electricity charges.

Social services are minimal — cuts in the National Health Service have hit even harder here than in Britain, there is no abortion, virtually no nurseries, no statutory education for the mentally

Compounding all this is the reality of the military occupation by the British Army and the paramilitary Royal Ulster Constabulary (police) and the Ulster Defence Regiment (a locally-based, almost completely Protestant, regiment of

Strikers confronted by the owner of Keen Foods, Belfast during a strike over work conditions and pay (DR)



the British Army). For women in the nationalist ghettos this means at the minimum being confronted by gun-toting soldiers and police every time one goes out to do the daily shopping or take a child to school.

sectarian assassinations by loyalist paramilitaries — often the 'security forces' out of uniform — continue to happen. Everyone lives with constant surveillance.

In the past few years Britain's repressive arsenal has been expanded to include the use of mass show trials (the largest presently taking place has 46 defendants) to arrest and often convict dozens of people on the uncorroborated word of a single paid perjurer. Even if the case eventually falls, many of the accused have already served the equivalent of a four-year sentence by the time they come to trial. Many nationalists are not even given the benefit of these kangaroo courts.

There is a shoot-to-kill policy in operation which extends not only to suspected guerrilla fighters, but to peaceful demonstrators and to youth who commit the capital offense of stealing cars for the purpose of 'joyriding'. At the same time, police actively encourage crime and anti-social activity in the nationalist areas as a means of putting pressure on the community and because often 'hoods' provide a useful source of information in return for being given a free rein to operate.

Fifteen years of this kind of daily oppression and repression has produced a response from the nationalist community on a mass scale. Particularly since the hunger strikes, Irish nationalists have abandoned any hope of political reform within the context of the Northern Ireland statelet. Resistance has taken many forms and takes place on many levels.

In all cases women have been at the forefront of the struggle. For every woman in Armagh, indeed for every woman engaged in military resistance, there are hundreds politically active and thousands more who give support in one way or another collecting money for prisoners' dependents, participating in pickets, providing safe houses or involving themselves in community self-help projects; meanwhile taking care of their own families, which may well mean regular visits to one or more of their own children or their companion in jail.

Women for a number of years have had equal status as fighters in the armed resistance organisations. But far beyond this type of involvement, it has been women who have ensured the continued and deepening of the resistance in the communities.

In 1970, when the British Army imposed a curfew in West Belfast, confining people to their homes, it was the women who took to the streets, confronting the army and bringing bread and milk to their besieged neighbours. In the mid-1970s, when so many families had members in prison, it was women who organised to draw attention to the prisoners' situation. It was predom-

antly women relatives of prisoners who formed the Relatives Action Committees (RAC) in 1976, to demand the restoration of political status to prisoners. The RACs were the forerunners of the H Block/Armagh committees.

In the nationalist neighbourhoods they organised warning systems so that when the British Army entered an area, women would come out in the street banging metal lids from rubbish bins and blowing whistles; time after time they came out and marched and picketed and staffed offices, collecting evidence on repression; telling their stories and opening their homes and lives to countless visitors in the hope that they would be able to help. In many cases these women were raising their families on their own.

During the 1980 and 1981 hunger strikes, women played a major role at all levels in the campaign, which was organised throughout the 32 counties in a network of local and regional committees coordinated by a national committee. It was the campaign for political status which brought together the issues and individuals who were fighting for national liberation on the one hand and women's rights on the other.

The anti-imperialist struggle — a crucial issue for feminists

Anti-imperialist feminists, concerned that the Armagh prisoners were not receiving the support which should be forthcoming, especially from the women's movement in the south of Ireland, and also recognising the connection between the specific interests of Irish women and the struggle against imperialism, began to agitate specifically in support of the Armagh prisoners and organised the first of what is now a traditional picket at the prison on International Women's Day. Eleven women were arrested at this demo, two of them serving short terms in prison themselves as a result.

The women's movement, like Irish society in general, became polarised over the issue of Armagh, in particular, and the orientation that should be taken by Irish feminists to the anti-imperialist movement in general. The debate 'Is Armagh a feminist issue?' raged on, with women who supported the prisoners pointing out that it was the duty of anyone claiming to be a feminist to be opposed to the kind of treatment the prisoners were getting.

But more than that — the facts of life in imperialist-dominated Ireland are that Irish women cannot hope to realise their aspirations as women within the framework of a partitioned country. The other side of the argument was that women should unite around 'women's issues' ignoring the national question. This position of course begs many questions, not least of which is the problem of to whom feminists should direct their demands.

These discussions were not held in a vacuum. Women from the nationalist

ghettos, many of whom would not have identified themselves as feminists or relate to the women's movement, had, through their experiences, learned a new confidence in themselves individually and collectively. They had politicised, drawing many lessons from their own lives — not the least of which was a deeper understanding of their oppression as women. Women began to organise as women around their own demands and interests as well as continuing and extending their involvement in broader anti-imperialist and community questions.

While the mass movement which existed during the hunger strikes has been demobilised, its long-term impact continues to be felt. In the north of Ireland especially, a significant cultural revival is taking place, which is giving a deeper quality to the national liberation struggle beyond the defensive movement against repression. In Belfast and other centres, Irish language classes have blossomed.

A major development for women in West Belfast has been the opening of a Women's Centre in the heart of the ghetto. This centre is run by women from the community, most of them Republican activists. The centre has a creche, a fulltime counsellor, and is an organising centre for various campaigns, as well as being a hospitable drop-in centre.

In June last year an all-Ireland women's conference took place in Dublin. Over 600 women from all over Ireland came, including a good representation of rural women and women from the North. Although the concrete results are not always visible, it was in many ways a watershed. A large contingent from the north played a central role in the discussions.

The workshop on women and the national struggle was the largest and most controversial. The debate remained largely between Republican women and other northern women who argued that feminists should not identify with the anti-imperialist organisations. What was important at this conference was that for the first time the organised women's movement on an all-Ireland basis was in its majority anti-imperialist. While many women have differences with the anti-imperialist organisations, this very representative conference was overwhelmingly in favour of all the anti-imperialist resolutions, and understood the need to break the imperialist control of Ireland if they were to win their freedom as women.

What is necessary now is to develop that debate, and to broaden it to build a strong anti-imperialist women's current which encompasses women from the workers' and anti-imperialist movements as well as those active primarily on 'women's' issues. This will entail not only winning feminists to the anti-imperialist movement, but a discussion with Republicans about the role of an autonomous women's movement and its relation to the national liberation struggle.

Reagan's world agenda for women

United States president Ronald Reagan's anti-woman positions have become even clearer with his increased support for right-to-life forces and attempts to cut funding for international population programs which include abortion services. What emerges is, in fact, a world agenda contrary to the interests of women.

This kind of orchestrated offensive by the right is also evident in other countries, such as in Canada. According to *Socialist Voice*, (English-language paper of the Canadian section of the Fourth International) the recent victory by Dr Henry Morgentaler to establish a Toronto, Ontario abortion clinic "is the scene of a critical showdown on women's rights."

The anti-choice forces are preparing a week of demonstrations at the Toronto clinic. This goes hand in hand with recent moves by both the Ontario government and the federal government in their so-called legal battering of women's rights.

The battle for the right to choose will certainly be continuing in North America.

In the articles below, we take a look at the Reagan administration's maneuvers at the 1984 International Conference on Population, and update the situation of clinic bombings (See, *International Viewpoint*, No 65, December 10, 1984.) including an interview with an activist in the pro-choice Reproductive Rights National Network.

Linda WOODS

Abortion hit the headlines last summer during the 150 nation-strong International Conference on Population held in Mexico City. The Reagan administration's intention was to cut funding to international population programs practising or promoting abortion, and it also questioned the validity of family planning itself.

Clearly put, the US does "not consider abortion an acceptable element of family planning programs." But the US has long banned aid to developing countries for abortion services. According to the *Financial Times* of August 8, 1984, this new policy "seeks to cut off funds to private organizations involved, however peripherally, in providing abortion services. Countries with state-funded abortion facilities will continue to get population assistance provided the US money is held in segregated accounts."

Abortion remains legal in the United States, so the lesson is, if you can't beat them on your home ground, try to push the 'Moral Majority' opinion off on the rest of the world. With the US holding the purse strings on some 240 million dollars for population programs in 1984, that is, 44% of all industrialized country aid for family planning, this rule would end US population-control aid.

This world agenda for controlling women's lives and arrogantly imposing the "dictates of our [US] national conscience" [sic] on other governments was promoted by the American delegation head James Buckley, president of

cept Sweden read: "Governments are urged to take appropriate steps to help women avoid abortion, which in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning, and whenever possible provide for the humane treatment and counselling of women who have had recourse to abortion."

British National Abortion Campaign member Leonora Lloyd wrote in *Socialist Action* [British revolutionary socialist publication] on September 9, 1984, that this resolution could be interpreted in two ways. Either "as encouragement for countries... to start promoting better methods of and access to contraception, plus improved facilities and more sympathetic treatment of women seeking abortion — or it could be seen as anti-abortion."

It is clear that anti-choice forces will read this resolution as a mandate for reversing the gains of legalised abortion, be it in Britain, the United States or elsewhere.

The current population of the globe is somewhere around 4.7 billion people, with the next billion to be added within 15 years — 90 percent of them in developing countries. The questions of how to feed, clothe and provide a living for the planet's population are indeed grave. But forcing imperialist ideologies and population-control policies on people — in this case most specifically women, be it by non-funding for abortion services, sterilisation programs or the promotion of unsafe contraceptives — is not in the interests of women or the working class as a whole. Hypocritically bemoaning the fate of the 'Third World's' rising population, while flaunting racist and sexist rhetoric about the declining [white] birth rate in Europe makes it very clear that the Reagan agenda for women worldwide should be vigorously opposed.

Women at work

In a cover story of *Business Week* (January 28, 1985) "Women at Work" we are told that women are "flooding" into the job market. Looking at women's ever vocal demands for equal pay, one forecast suggests that "if women today were to earn 74% (actually it is 64%) of what men were paid, the country's wage bill would be 100 billion dollars higher." Now that is a thought to send Reagan and profit-hungry capitalist America working even harder on the barefoot and pregnant ideal of womanhood!

Business Week also looked at the 'new' feminization of poverty, noting that "13 million women, of whom 4.2 million are nonwhite, are living in poverty." They list "more divorces, longer widowhood and retirement, increased teenage pregnancies, and the tendency of women to be in lower-paying jobs that lack childcare and health benefits" as causes of female poverty. Yet the 1985 US budget proposals will mean huge slashes in these areas and denial of needed services for women.

Abortion clinic bombings have made startling and scary headlines, and the offensive against American women's right to choose remains a main strategy for the right, but it is also just the tip of the iceberg as far as the global situation of women are concerned.

Clinic bombings - the rightwing on the offensive

In spite of a year of abortion clinic bombings, some coming within minutes of one another, hundreds of less serious incidents and a daily zealous harassment of women using clinic services, the United States government has done very little to stop this terrorism.

The FBI sent out a circular to clinics warning them to expect violent attacks around January 22, the twelfth anniversary date of the legalization of abortion, but did nothing to indicate it would prevent the possible attacks. Ronald Reagan spoke to a cheering crowd from the Washington, D.C. March for Life on January 22 with terms of praise and support. "I am proud to stand with you in the long march for the right to life. I am convinced that our response to the 12 anniversary" of the 1973 Supreme Court ruling "must be to rededicate ourselves to ending the terrible national tragedy of abortion."

He went on to say, "I am convinced that that spirit of understanding begins with a recognition of the reality of life before birth and a recognition of the reality of death by abortion. But that spirit of understanding also includes, as all of you know, a complete rejection of violence as a means of settling this issue."



This was the first time Reagan had condemned the clinic violence, but in rather hollow terms along side his glowing support for the right to life movement's goals.

"Reagan's rhetoric has been exacerbating and encouraging the right-wing forces," commented a National Organization for Women (NOW) member contacted in Washington D.C. In spite of the arrests of some nine people in connection with the bombings since December, can women really sit back and say thank you to this government?

Matt Goldsby, Kaye Wiggins, Kathy Simmons and James Simmons were arrested in early January in connection with a bombing in Pensacola, Florida

in summer 1984 and three Christmas Day attacks which did a combined 375,000 dollars in property damage to three different facilities. Wiggins, age 18, said the December 25 bombings were done as "a gift to Jesus on his birthday."

"The bombings are an act of desperation. Antiabortion tactics have failed politically, in the courts, everywhere," a NOW member told me.

"The [anti-choice] movement is feeling very strong and has been legitimized in the press," commented Marlene Fried (see interview below). Efforts by the right to gain support for a constitutional ban on all abortions through their Paramount Human Life Amendment have failed. The most recent vote, in 1983,

Interview with pro-choice activist

We publish below a telephone interview made on February 7, 1985, with Marlene Fried, member of the Boston, Massachusetts chapter of the Reproductive Rights National Network. The Reproductive Rights National Network Principles of Unity state they stand for reproductive freedom on a worldwide basis and are an "activist network seeking to organize and educate women and men in healthcare facilities, workplaces, unions, schools and communities" in support of their principles.

"Around the country the response to the bombings is that people are angry. The pro-choice sentiment is a lot stronger now. People are linking the bombings with the anti-choice movement, as a logical extension of a crazy movement. But they [the right] are on a clear offensive. They have gained ground with Reagan and other conservative forces, which is bad, obviously. That movement is feeling very strong because their position has been legitimized in the press. Recent polls show that our support has *not* softened up. Our support is, however, more intimidated.

There were more dramatic, immediate and direct changes after Reagan's first election. This term there are more subtle changes and consolidation of these changes. The right wing has captured the imagination of the media.

The Paramount Human Life Amendment was dropped about one and a half to two years ago, when it was clear that it had *no* chance. But I wouldn't be surprised to see it come up again. Reagan is committed to it and has been through-

did not pass in the Senate, but it could come up again given the more favorable climate and support from the Reagan administration.

Waiting for the chance to appoint more conservative judges to the Supreme Court, which Reagan could do in the event of any of the current judges dying, does not seem to attract the attention of the right's vociferous and active moral minority.

While some 70,000 joined the March for Life, pro-choice forces were not silenced around the country. Local activities have been immediately organized after every clinic bombing. And for January 22, NOW organized 30 chapters in 18 states in activities ranging from weekend long vigils inside the threatened clinics, escort services for facilities' users, ringing the state house in Annapolis, Maryland, and the sending of shoes to the White House "because Reagan wants to keep women pregnant and barefoot." ■

Human life amendments proposed at the state level, such as here in Massachusetts, have also been the focus of anti-choice strategy. The right erodes what it can to build a base at state level, and if the amendments pass, they can in fact end all medicaid [government contributions towards medical expenses, for example to low-income persons or the elderly] funding. There are only 13 states which still do provide medicaid funding.

The women's movement is fragmented and not very powerful. Women's groups are barely surviving, which is different from 1973. A lot of the effect of the right wing has been to make a lot of our support very quiet. In fact, the right has got fabulous press, which we don't get.

Local response has always been immediate to each bombing. But there is a lot more intimidation. For example, in Boston, a general health clinic which performed very few abortions, perhaps one-tenth of one percent of their services went to this, has stopped doing abortions. They have said publicly they are not stopping of their own free will but have been forced into this by the terrorism of the right wing.

We had some 600 people for a pro-choice gathering in Boston on January 22 and NOW organized vigils around the country, but that's not enough. I think it has to be more public and more visible.

The terrorism has forced a break and people who haven't been doing anything in a long time came along to the Boston event saying it was time to stand up. A lot of people call us every day asking 'what can I do?' So there is a response, but it is not yet mobilised on a very large scale." ■

Women protest against dangerous drugs

A campaign group has been formed in Bombay to protest against the Drug-controller of India approving NET-EN as a contraceptive. Two companies, Unichem and German Remedies, have been given licences to manufacture this drug. The following statement was issued by five women's groups to protest against this.

DOCUMENT

What are injectable contraceptives (IC)? ICs prevent pregnancy more or less in the same way as oral contraceptives. But they are administered by injection and are long-acting. The best-known ones are Depo-provera and NET-EN. Depo-provera needs only one injection every three months and NET-EN, one every two months.

Population control enthusiasts consider injectables the ideal form of contraception for women in the third world because of the ease with which they can be administered on a mass scale and the low failure rate. To those who look at women in the third world as nothing but faceless factors to be considered in any strategy of population control they cook up, the benefits seem overwhelming and the 'risks' in terms of women's health negligible. There has been a concerted campaign lately to 'sell' the idea of ICs through the media and elsewhere.

Women used as pawns in the imperialist game

Depo-provera has been the centre of a fight between health groups and women's groups on the one side and Pharmaceutical companies on the other since the 1960s, when the Upjohn Company of the USA sought approval for it. Upjohn has fought a hard and long battle in the US, unsuccessfully. They desperately wanted approval before their exclusive rights on the drug expired. The campaigns in the US and elsewhere brought Depo-provera a 'bad name'.

Approval for its manufacture has not been given by the Drug-controller of India. But neither has any explanation been given to the public or to interested groups about why it has not been approved. Meanwhile, NET-EN, another IC about which not much is known, has been approved in India and a licence to manufacture it has been granted to two companies — Unichem and German Remedies.

Both Depo-provera and NET-EN have been used in India for several years now for research purposes. This research has been carried out mainly on poor women

by voluntary agencies who conduct community health programmes, under the supervision of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). The reports of the studies have not been published till today and ICMR has refused to make it available to anyone. All interested parties are supposed to take their word for it that while Depo-provera is not so good, NET-EN is just fine.

Past experience with contraceptives and other drugs does not inspire in us any such trust or confidence. We believe that we have a right to know the details of the research studies, to make our own investigations and to come to our own conclusions. We do not consider the masses of women mere pawns in population control strategies to whom contraceptives are 'sold' on the basis of incentives without proper information.

What we do know about ICs is quite disturbing. Upjohn Company conducted two animal safety studies in the 1960s, a seven year one on beagle dogs and a ten year one on monkeys. Within three and a half years of the dog study, all dogs on high doses and half on low doses were dead due to inflammation of the uterine lining. (The two on low doses who survived had their uteruses removed.)

All control dogs survived except one which died of bite wounds and four which were sacrificed by the researchers. The dogs also developed cancer of the breasts, drug-induced diabetes and various other problems. At this point, Upjohn declared that beagle dogs were not the ideal animals to judge risks to human females.

Later, even the monkey studies in which cancer of the uterus occurred were said to be 'irrelevant to human experience'. The history of this controversy has been marked with disinformation and a desperate desire on the part of the company to maximise profits without making sure first that the drug is safe.

Breast cancer, two types of uterine cancer, serious menstrual disturbances and masculinisation of female foetuses are some of the serious effects of Depo-provera. Others are depression, decreased libido, nausea, dizziness, weight gain (without any increase in nutrition), etc.

A World Health Organization report on ICs in 1982 says that the majority of women on ICs have their menstrual cycle disrupted. In fact, a significant number of women stop having their periods only to have severe bleeding after injections are withdrawn while others bleed every day of the month while on the drug. But everyone concerned seems to feel that it is a minor side-effect. For Indian women, who hold the world record for anaemia, it is a very, very significant side-effect.

There is far less information available about NET-EN on human metabolism, on infants exposed to them through breast milk or about their carcinogenic properties. No one seems to know why the majority of women on these drugs suffer from menstrual chaos. Nor do they know why these women put on weight without more nutrition or why they are depressed.

Women's bodies — women's right to decide

Yet the advocates of ICs consider them an ideal form of contraception. Their favourite phrase is risk-benefit ratio. According to them, if the benefit outweighs risk, the drug should be used.

But the risks are taken only by women. The benefits are mainly for the pharmaceutical companies, the population control experts and the governments of third world countries.

There is a lot that is wrong with our family planning policies. It is always our families and their plans. A beginning must be made somewhere to correct them. Let's start with the newest strategy which is about to be imposed on the masses of Indian women. Let's struggle against the inundation of this country with ICs.

The demands of the campaign are:

- Ban all long-acting contraceptives and withdraw approval for NET-EN.
- Make public all studies in India on Depo-provera and NET-EN immediately.
- Stop experimenting on third world women with hazardous drugs and contraceptives.
- Institute a public enquiry on the controversial injectable and implanted contraceptives.

Join us in our struggle for a better deal for our women! ■

Campaign group against long-acting contraceptives

Forum Against Oppression of Women
Women's Centre, Bombay
Medico-friends' Circle
Stree Mukti Sanghatana
Sangharsh Vahini

Women in the fight for national liberation

Around Christmas time, a representative of the El Salvador women's organization AMES, which is a component part of the national-liberation struggle going on in the country, toured Sweden. During her visit, she gave an interview to Haakan Blomqvist, editor of *Internationalen*, the weekly paper of the Swedish section of the Fourth International. It was published in the January 31 issue of *Internationalen*. Our translation follows:

"I would like to encourage Swedish women to support our struggle, and to protest against the violation of human rights in my country, El Salvador."

Azucena Quinteros is thirty-five years old and the mother of four children. Actually, she is a seamstress, but some years ago her entire life changed. She joined the revolutionary movement in El Salvador. Today, she is in the leadership of AMES, the Salvadoran women's association, a mass organization of women who support the liberation struggle.

Just before Christmas, she visited Sweden to help to organize Swedish support work for women in El Salvador. The women's movement AMES has started a lot of projects for organizing women in the zones controlled by the liberation movement.

Azucena Quinteros said: "We are starting sewing enterprises, bakeries, day-care centers, handicraft groups and people's shops.

"For example, the women are making hats, baskets and handbags. This is partly to meet the needs in the controlled zones and partly for sale in the markets in the zones the regime controls. The money they get goes to buy things that are not available in the zones controlled by the liberation movement — clothing, shoes, medicine and various foodstuffs.

"And so they smuggle these goods to us. This is a risky job. The women who are caught at it are jailed. But it is necessary."

Azucena laughed and smiled a lot, even when she talked about the risks. They are only part of everyday life. But she became serious when she talked about how the various AMES projects are doing. She explained the practical problems and left the ideological formulas out.

"The people's shops are managed by the women's movement AMES and only AMES people work there. They sell staples such as maize-coffee, beans, cigarettes, matches and flour."

She explained that the local organs of people's power, the PPL, elected councils in the guerrilla-controlled zones, have

their own projects. They coordinate their activity with the AMES stores.

There are also a lot of private businesses in the liberated areas, but Azucena explained, they are "quite uninteresting."

"The enterprises run by the organs of people's power are the people's way of controlling prices. Prices in these stores set the standard for all, including private businesses."

'We don't tell women to come to us — we go out to them...'

Another area of work for AMES is childcare. The women have started day-care centers themselves in the liberated zones.

"The primary task of the day-care centers is to allow the mothers to take part in the revolutionary struggle and work, while the children are kept safe, looked after and fed," Azucena said. She added with a laugh:

"Our day-care centers are not so elegant. But they do not charge the women

Women defend the revolution (DR)



who leave their children there anything. And the children are well cared for and get proper food. It may be rice, beans and cheese, and when available meat and green vegetables."

She had pictures of an AMES day-care center in Nicaragua for Salvadoran refugee children.

The scenes seemed strikingly familiar. The children's drawings, games and morning assemblies are alike the world over. And there were the signs reminding parents: "Children must come between 8:30 and 9:00 in the morning!" "Please mark your child's clothing! We cannot take responsibility for unmarked clothing."

"At this AMES day-care center in Nicaragua, there are fifty children and 15 staff members. In El Salvador, we generally have one adult for every eight to ten children."

Alongside its various projects designed to draw women into common work, the AMES also runs courses and seminars for women on various subjects, ranging from methods of childbirth and contraception to cultural questions, economics, politics and the military situation.

"We address ourselves to women who are not yet politically conscious or involved in the revolutionary struggle," Azucena said.

"Our task is to point up the role that women have in this society and the one that they will have in the society we want to achieve.

"We don't tell women to come to us, we go out to them and explain that we want to work with them.

"In common discussions of what many women consider personal problems, many come to realize that women are doubly oppressed. And the final conclusion is to join together and fight."

Azucena explained that joining the women's movement and the revolutionary struggle brings a big change in the women themselves.

"The women often have prejudices themselves about what women's tasks in life are. That changes.

"Then they have to explain to their husbands what the problem is. There is a big difference in the attitude of the men to women in liberated areas, where the men are revolutionists. But even there, women themselves have to fight for the ideological changes," Azucena stressed.

"The first reaction from the men has always been to reject the change on the part of the women. Before it was only men who took part in the revolutionary struggle in El Salvador.

"Of course, there was also a women's struggle before, for example, twenty years ago. But they were only concerned with problems of food supply and such questions. Women never talked about national liberation and the new society in a longer-term perspective."

Azucena Quinteros herself is an illustration of her concluding remark:

"But everything has begun to change now." ■