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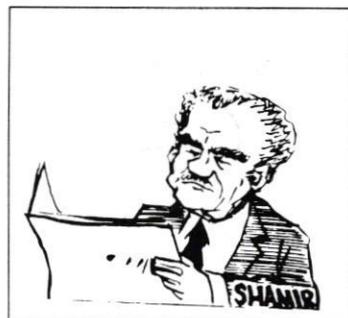
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URGENT SOLIDARITY NEEDED
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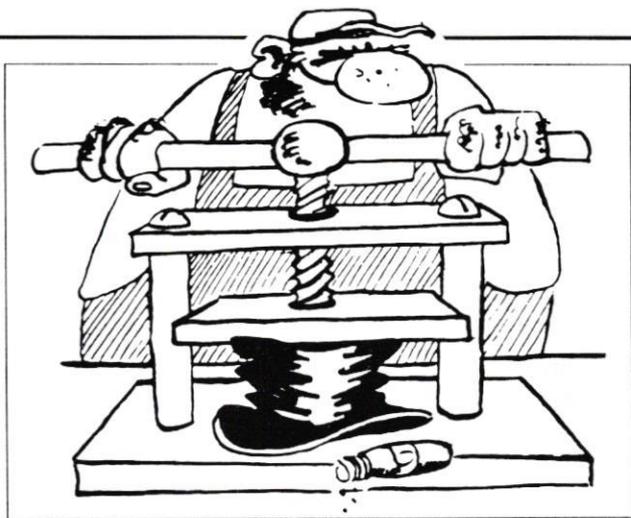
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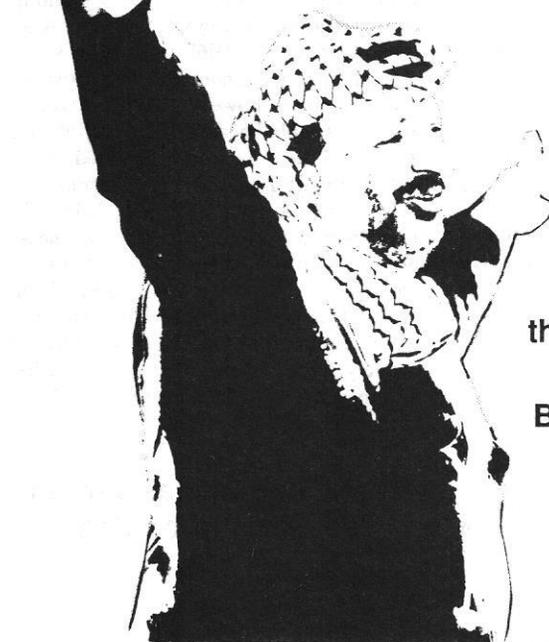
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Where is the PLO going? (Part II)



Questions of practical politics

NOVEMBER 15, 1988, will go down in history as the day when the state of Palestine was proclaimed in the territories occupied by Israel in 1967 — that is, on nearly 20% of Palestinian land.

But it was also the day when the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) — created in 1964 as its name suggests to liberate the 80% of Palestinian territory which the Zionist state has forcibly settled since 1948 — officially accepted United Nations Resolutions 181 (1947) and 242 (1967). In other words, when the PLO recognized the Israeli state and its “right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries” on four-fifths of Palestine.¹

SALAH JABER

A FEW HOURS after the end of the last session of the Palestine National Council (PNC) on November 15, George Habash called a press conference. Habash is the head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the main left faction in the PLO and the second largest Palestinian organization after Yasser Arafat's El Fatah. He explained to the press that his movement would stay in the PLO, in spite of its disagreement with the PNC's political resolution, in order “to preserve national unity”. Conscious of the weakness of this argument, Habash added that he was convinced that the new policy of the Palestinian right would lead nowhere, in any case. “Frankly, we no longer fear an American or Israeli settlement, because the ceiling of such an agreement cannot be accepted by any Palestinian, be they right or left”.

The pretext is threadbare. Fifteen years ago, the left of El Fatah used the same argument to justify its spinelessness towards a leadership who had *de facto* opted for a negotiated settlement with the Zionist state.² At that time, George Habash's PFLP argued against this pretext, withdrawing from the PLO's leading bodies in order to wage a political fight against the dominant bloc.

And here we are, so many years later, at the end of a sadly historic PNC that capitulated to American demands for the PLO's participation in a negotiated settlement process, with Habash using the same arguments that he fought previously, when the pretext was much more credible than it is today. But things should be judged on the evidence: what is the “ceiling” of a settlement from the standpoint of the US and

Israel?

First of all, from Washington's viewpoint. Ronald Reagan said in his speech/plan of September 1, 1982: “I ask the Palestinian people to accept the fact that their own political aspirations are inextricably linked to the recognition of Israel's right to a secure future....The best chance to arrive at a stable, lasting and just peace is to institute self-government for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza in conjunction with Jordan....The Arab/Israeli conflict must be resolved by negotiations leading to a deal: territories in exchange for peace.... UN Resolution 242 remains the cornerstone of the efforts made by America...”

Understanding between Moscow and Washington

At the end of 1988, the floor of the PLO's positions, which had never stopped being lowered, had already essentially met this ceiling for a settlement envisaged by Washington. Admittedly, some nuances remained: the Reagan plan foresaw Palestinian “self-government” linked to Jordan, while the last PNC political resolution spoke of a Palestinian state (the term “independent” no longer appeared, as if by accident) in confederation with Jordan. Lawyers would appreciate the distinction. However, Jordan's King Hussein himself

had already resolved the debate by officially detaching the West Bank from his kingdom on July 31, 1988.

Is there then a disagreement on the framework of the negotiations, beyond the agreement on the principle of holding them? This is no longer the case, according to Arafat. He recently explained to the semi-official journal of his movement that an understanding had been reached between Moscow and Washington that the International Conference would meet in “ongoing” session and subdivide into bilateral commissions. (*Al-Yom Assabeh*, January 2, 1989.) The PLO chief made it clearly understood that he no longer considered there to be a divergence with the United States on this subject.

What about the certainly fundamental question of Israeli withdrawal? In the framework of Resolution 242, the American government has always been for an ex-

1. In the first part of this article, published in the last issue of *IV*, the trajectory of the leadership of the El Fatah/PLO was described, which had led over the past twenty years from nationalist maximalism to political capitulation before the United States and their Zionist protégé.

2. At that time, Trotskyists on the ground retorted: “The timescale of a ‘peaceful settlement’ could be brief or long, but it would be absurd to build a political line on the hypothesis of the impossibility of this settlement. Those who adopt such a hypothesis find in it a cosy pretext for undertaking no action against the ‘peaceful settlement’ or those who are preparing it”. (*Al-Mounadel* 30, Beirut, March/April 1975.)

change — peace against the territories occupied in 1967 — without ever specifying that the Israeli retreat must be total. In fact, Washington deliberately left the matter vague so as to be able to arbitrate in any eventual negotiations between Arabs and Israelis, as it did at Camp David. The 1982 Reagan plan limited itself to affirming that when negotiations took place the United States would be able to assess “to what extent it would be possible to demand that territories be relinquished [by Israel]”, depending on what was proposed in exchange.

Fear of the Arab “demographic peril”

With Washington reserving the role of arbiter on this question of withdrawal, the ball was in Israel's camp. Enlightened Zionists, led by Labour Party head Shimon Peres, have always put themselves in the framework of Resolution 242 and its basic principles as defended by the US government. At the beginning of the 1970s, one of the big guns of Zionist Labour, Ygal Allon (who has since died), worked out a plan for a settlement with Jordan calling for an Israeli withdrawal from most of the West Bank. Some colonies and military bases were to be maintained at strategic points, notably along the Jordan river, which was considered as an inviolable security frontier for the Zionist state (the notion of “secure boundaries” contained in Resolution 242 lent itself to this sort of interpretation).

Since then, Labour's adherence to the principle of withdrawal (partial, of course) has been strengthened — not for “noble” reasons, but through fear of the Arab “demographic peril”. This fear, in turn, has been considerably boosted by the *intifada* (uprising), in which Peres has been able to see an illustration of his party's theses. On December 30, 1987, three weeks after the beginning of the uprising, he sounded the alarm. He publicly asserted that, in the year 2,000, “the entire population between the Mediterranean and the Jordan river (including the West Bank and Gaza) would be 45% Arab and 55% Jewish”, because the Arab birth-rate is “double ours”.

Two months later, Itzhak Rabin — the Labour Party's number two and, as minister of defence, the main person responsible for the repression of the uprising — made this confession: “During the last two months I have learnt... that it is impossible to govern a million and a half Palestinians by force”. (*Le Monde*, February 25, 1988.)

Indeed, outside of the heavy economic burden that this has meant for the Israeli state and the damage to its image in the world — two disastrous consequences for the Israeli “security” system — the *intifada* represents a direct and serious handicap for the Zionist army itself. It is mobilizing many thousands of soldiers to repress continually resurging mass demonstrations.

4 The result is not only the “diversion” of a

considerable part of Israel's military potential, but also — and above all — a moral gangrene spreading through the ranks of the Zionist army. Although going back much further than the occupation of Lebanon (which ended in a quasi-debacle), the occupation of the 1967 territories has, in its turn, become more and more burdensome to maintain since the *intifada*.

So it is not surprising to note that the most passionate champions of a withdrawal are today to be found at the top of the Israeli military hierarchy. In March 1988, a group of retired Israeli generals (as such, free to act politically) founded the Council for Peace and Security. They included: Yariv, ex-head of Mossad (Israeli intelligence); Sneh, previously the administrator of the West Bank; and Orr, one time commander-in-chief of the northern region and, therefore, of the Israeli troops occupying Lebanon. Very quickly, the Council brought together more than 30 major generals and over 100 brigadier generals, altogether nearly half of Israel's retired general officers. Orr said: “We are all agreed in our estimation that the occupation must be ended because its continuation represents a worse danger to our security than its end”. (*Le Monde*, June 2, 1988.) A statement that is as clear as it is succinct. Sneh added: “Most senior officers, from Shomron (chief of staff) on down, would prefer a partial withdrawal from a demilitarized West Bank to Shamir's ‘Greater Israel’”. (*Newsweek*, June 6, 1988.)

Demilitarization and partial withdrawal: two key elements of Israel's “ceiling” for a settlement. Ben Gal, another member of the generals' Council, said: “We want a demilitarized West Bank; we want to keep control of its air space, have some electronic warning stations, a military presence on the eastern slope of the hills overlooking the river Jordan, which, in any situation, will remain the military frontier”. (*Le Monde*, 19 October, 1988.) As far as Gaza is concerned, the problem is much simpler: the sector is completely trapped between Israel, the sea and the Egyptian Sinai desert, itself demilitarized because of the Camp David accords.

Different approach to Gaza and the West Bank

There is another major difference between the two territories. In Gaza, there are only around 2,000 Israeli colonists, compared to about 70,000 in the West Bank living in 124 colonies, and even the most “moderate” Zionists do not envisage dismantling all of them. These differences explain why Peres has several times come out in favour of a total evacuation of Gaza, while in the West Bank he only proposes a withdrawal from those parts “where Arabs are in a clear majority”. Ben Gal is more precise: “We could give up 100% of Gaza and 85% of the West Bank”.

Of course, there exists a large fraction of

the electorate and the politico-military establishment in Israel who reject even the idea of withdrawal. The Likud (right-wing bloc), led by Yitzhak Shamir, is clinging obstinately to the Camp David accords, which they interpret to involve granting administrative “autonomy” to the Arab inhabitants of the 1967 territories, while maintaining them under Israeli occupation. This position is, however, less and less tenable, not simply because of the *intifada* but also because it is totally isolated internationally. If Peres agreed to renew his governmental pact with the Likud in December, it was only as a stop-gap measure while he waited for the completion of the transfer of power from Reagan to Bush, after which the American administration would again be in a position to intervene actively. Then Shamir, who has already begun to water down his position, would be obliged to yield or hold new elections.

Tanks and planes versus stones and bottles

Likud's argument — that if Israel “abandoned Judea and Samaria” (the biblical names for the West Bank), the result would place the security of the Zionist state in grave danger — took no account of the conditions laid out by Labour for a withdrawal. This is why it is totally meaningless. The US researcher Jerome Segal, Arafat's friend and counsellor and a strong advocate of a Palestinian state, replied to this argument as follows in *Newsweek* (September 12, 1988): “It's a total joke. We're talking about a pint-sized, demilitarized zone that has no access to the outside world except through two hostile and suspicious states that completely surround it — Israel and Jordan”.

The Israeli ex-minister of foreign affairs (Labour), Abba Eban, was in complete agreement in refuting the Likud theses. In the *New York Times* on January 2 this year, he compared Israel's resources with those of the PLO. On the one side, “3,800 tanks, 682 planes with an impressive bombing capacity, thousands of pieces of artillery and missiles, and a formidable electronic capacity”; on the other, “zero tanks or planes, a few guns and no missiles”, with “an assortment of grenades, mortars, stones and bottles”. Eban rightly concluded: “An entity run by Arabs in a large part of the West Bank and Gaza, or a separate state, or, preferably, in a confederation with Jordan, would be the weakest military entity on earth”.

Are the limits of Israel's “ceiling” for a settlement — a partial withdrawal and a demilitarization of the evacuated zones — unacceptable for the leadership of the El Fatah/PLO, as Habash said? Concerning the withdrawal, it is true that even the political resolution of the last PNC talks about “all the Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967”. It is also true that when one gets ready to do a deal, one demands

the maximum. This is the case for all the Arab states, including Jordan and Egypt, for whom a total withdrawal is officially an inviolable principle.

Will there be new Palestinian concessions?

But to the question "Will there be new Palestinian concessions if the International Conference meets?" the El Fatah/PLO's number two, Abu Iyad, who is usually more forthright than Arafat, replied as follows after the last PNC in the semi-official journal of the PLO: "Any solution that does not include a state is unacceptable.... After this, things become less complicated. Any negotiations will discuss practical questions, such as the definition of frontiers, relations and so on. Here I must remind you that all Palestinian soil is occupied. So if our leadership manages to rescue a section of Palestinian territory and proclaim an Arab Palestinian identity there, that would be very good." (*Al-Yom Assabeh*, November 28, 1988.)

The question of demilitarization is even less complicated. Resolution 242, now accepted by the PLO, already foresees "the establishment of demilitarized zones". And, secondly, the PLO leadership was itself the first to break the official Arab boycott of Egypt and establish a close coordination with the Mubarak regime, without demanding that the latter repudiate the peace treaty concluded with Israel in 1979, which was founded on the principle of the demilitarization of Egyptian territory evacuated by the Zionist army. Given all this, the Arafat leadership will have no trouble when the time comes in agreeing to let Israel impose a strict limitation on the categories of arms permitted in the West Bank and Gaza.

This, of course, does not mean limiting Palestinian armaments to kitchen knives. Demilitarization does not mean banning all firearms, even in Egyptian Sinai. Quite on the contrary, the Zionist state wants a situation where the authority that takes over in the zones it evacuates can assume "the normal functions of the police" (Egyptian/Israeli treaty), so as to guarantee that "no acts or threats of aggression, hostility or violence originate or are committed on its territory, or by forces under its control or stationed on its territory" (*ibid*). The authority that will replace the Israeli army, if ever they evacuate zones in the West Bank and Gaza, will certainly be authorized to have a police force equipped with light arms, as in the Sinai.

So, to pretend that the Palestinian right, after the last PNC, could not accept the Israeli/US "ceiling" for a settlement — to believe that after making their bed, they are

not prepared to lie in it — is to wallow in illusions. But beyond the illusory character of this moral comfort that George Habash is trying to wrap himself in, the real question, the one that he is trying in some way to dodge, should be asked: What are unacceptable concessions? What would really constitute treason to the Palestinian national cause and capitulation to Zionism and imperialism?

The answer does not lie where the PFLP chief seems to situate it: either in the partial character of the withdrawal or in the demilitarization. Let us start with the latter. Is there anyone who is stupid or naive enough to believe that after a possible withdrawal of its troops from the West Bank and Gaza, the Zionist state would allow the inhabitants in these territories on its flanks to possess missiles, planes and tanks as they pleased? Geographical considerations and the relationship of forces being what they are, only a decisive military defeat of the Zionist state — which is not on the agenda in the near future — could ensure the Palestinians unfettered sovereignty, even if only on a small part of their territory. So who could blame them for settling for — provisionally, of course — an Israeli army withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967, while they do not have the means to replace it with a real Palestinian army? This would be to put off such a withdrawal indefinitely.

The same reasoning can be applied to the question of a partial retreat. As soon as the maximalist logic of "all or nothing" is challenged, as soon as

the necessity for tactical mediations and transitional objectives is affirmed, "all the West Bank or nothing" is no more valid than "all Palestine or nothing". It is evident that the masses of the *intifada*, whatever the scale and duration of their struggle, do not have the means to get more than a withdrawal of the Zionist army from the zones in which they are concentrated. To dislodge the Zionist colonies adjacent to, or outside of, these zones — and, with even more reason, the military bases — much more than an uprising is needed. What is needed is a war of movement, something that all the Arab armies put together are not in a position to win today, even supposing they had the intention to wage it.

It is therefore perfectly correct and legitimate that the Unified Leadership of the *Intifada*, in many of its communiqués since the early ones, has put up front what it calls "immediate" demands such as "army withdrawal from the towns, the camps and the villages". This same objective figures in Communiqué 26 of the Unified Leadership (see the last issue of *IV*), alongside the transitional objective of a complete withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967, in the following formulation: "army withdrawal from Palestinian agglomerations".

Not capitulation but revolutionary realism

Trying to obtain this objective through the struggle, in the knowledge that the evacuated zones will inevitably remain under close Israeli military surveillance, is not a capitulation but revolutionary realism. Realism, because this objective can be achieved through the *intifada*. The best proof that it is attainable is the mere fact that a decisive faction in the Zionist military hierarchy — under the pressure of the uprising and without being offered anything in return — has concluded that it is necessary, for security reasons, to withdraw the Israeli army from the Arab-populated zones — that is, from Gaza and most of the West Bank.

Of course, the incomplete liberation (limited sovereignty) of a small portion of Palestinian territory would be a very partial gain. In a manner of speaking, it would mean the inhabitants in these areas passing from a prison regime to house arrest. Such a gain would nevertheless be appreciable for those who are suffering the occupation. A revolutionary Palestinian leadership would be entirely justified in settling for this immediate objective, attainable through struggle, while continuing to fight under the banner of the transitional demand for a total and unconditional withdrawal of the Zionist army from the territories occupied in 1967. Such a leadership



would aim to transform Gaza and the inhabited regions of the West Bank in the short term into "liberated zones", administered by the "people's committees" born out of the *intifada*, which are giving the uprising its direct organizational expression.

But a partial gain — or anything resembling a compromise — is only legitimate from a revolutionary point of view if it is not in contradiction with the continuation of the struggle for the final objective. That it is, as Lenin said, a "compromise which in no way diminishes the revolutionary devotion and readiness for further struggle on the part of those who have agreed to such a compromise". (*"Left-wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder.*)

As a matter of fact, it is not enough to quote Lenin on the need for compromises, as do the Stalinists in Nayef Hawatmeh's DFLP. Account must also be taken of his warning against those who "imagine that it is sufficient to admit the permissibility of compromises *in general* in order to obliterate the dividing line between opportunism, against which we wage and must wage an irreconcilable struggle, and revolutionary Marxism, or Communism... It is important to single out from the practical questions of politics... those which reveal the principal type of impermissible, treacherous compromises, compromises embodying the opportunism that is fatal to the revolutionary class, and to exert all efforts to explain them and combat them". (*Ibid.*)

Fundamental objective of self-determination

In the case of "practical politics" that we are discussing here, the impermissible compromise, the "treacherous compromise", is not, as previously explained, in the inevitably partial and limited gain available today to the Palestinians. The "treacherous compromise", the capitulation, consists in renouncing the "readiness for further struggle" in exchange for this gain — and, moreover, without any reason, at a time when the Palestinian struggle is at its peak. The "readiness for further struggle" to achieve the fundamental objective: for real self-determination for the whole of the Palestinian people through the destruction of the Zionist state, which is intrinsically founded on the oppression of this people. For the destruction of this state, which the preamble to the last PNC's political resolution itself still described as a "fascist, racist, colonial state, founded on the usurpation of Palestinian soil and the extermination of the Palestinian people!"

However, the text proclaiming the Palestinian state that was adopted unanimously by the same PNC, is based on UN Resolution 181 — that is, on the recognition of the legitimacy of the Zionist state — and "rejects the threat of force, violence or terrorism, or their use against its own territorial integrity... or that of any other state". The

political resolution, adopted by a majority of PNC votes against a small minority that included the PFLP, only dotted the "i's", given that the proclamation was equally based on "the international legitimacy embodied in UN resolutions since 1947".

These included not just Resolution 181, but also Resolution 242, explicitly accepted by the political resolution. It should be remembered that this means that the PLO is committed to cease "all claims or states of belligerency", to recognize the state of Israel and its "right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries, free from threats or acts of force", with "the establishment of demilitarized zones" in exchange for an Israeli withdrawal "from [1967] occupied territories" (without even specifying the extent of the withdrawal).

A state under Israeli tutelage

In short, the PLO leadership has begun to implement the action plan advocated eight months previously by its US adviser Jerome Segal, mentioned earlier, in *The Washington Post (International Herald Tribune, May 27, 1988)*. The first steps in this plan are: 1) that the PLO proclaims the Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza — this has been done³; 2) that it turns itself into a provisional government — a measure that is postponed for the moment; 3) that it promulgates "law number one" proclaiming that "the Palestinian state declares itself at peace with the state of Israel" and "will not have an army"; as well as "law number two... banning all terrorist acts and instituting sanctions in the event of violations". The essence of these two "laws" is already contained in Resolution 242.

What makes the state that the PLO leadership is preparing to set up into a bantustan is not its size, nor even the fact that it will be under surveillance. It is the fact that it will be a state under tutelage, a state whose government will have as its main task the repression of any hint of Palestinians continuing the armed struggle against a state that has expelled the overwhelming majority of them from their lands at gunpoint.

The principal means for which the PLO has opted is entirely and exclusively adapted to this end. Indeed, nothing else can emerge from direct negotiations with Israel in the framework of an International Conference under the auspices of the big powers, which can only have Resolution 242 — worked out by these same powers — as its basis. It follows that, as far as the PLO leadership goes, the "treacherous compromise" is not an unlikely future hypothesis — as George Habash stated in self-justification after the last PNC meeting — but clearly a choice already made explicitly by the same PNC, and which had been implicit since the 1983 PNC (see the last issue of *IV*).

Is this to say that we should abstain from

demanding the recognition of the Palestinian state by those governments that have not already done so? Not at all, because the importance of this is its impact on the masses involved in the *intifada*. The majority of them only wanted to see the aspect of a "declaration of independence" in the PNC's proclamation. This is what they celebrated and what galvanized them.

Their demand for an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza is just and has to be supported. Right now, one expression of that support is fighting for the recognition of this state by governments, immediately and without conditions of any kind, such as the "security" of Israel and so on. Because the more the masses of the *intifada* have the feeling that their hour of liberation is approaching, especially because of the growing international pressure on Israel and the US, the more they will be determined to continue their struggle without let-up.

However, as opposed to Moscow, which supported the proclamation of the state without recognizing it formally (for legalistic reasons), we fight for the formal recognition of the Palestinian state, though without approving the text of the proclamation adopted by the PNC. On the contrary, support for the struggle of the Palestinian people must remain, more than ever, centred around demands for a total and unconditional Zionist withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967, and the right for Palestinian self-determination without any form of diktat. This orientation was reaffirmed in the statement on the *intifada* adopted by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International in March last year (see *IV* 138).

Support for the Palestinian masses in struggle

By maintaining clear political autonomy on this, with no equivocations, it is entirely possible and legitimate to participate in all activities giving objective support to the Palestinian masses in struggle, whether alongside the PLO and its unconditional supporters or even with Zionists and pro-Zionists opposed to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, especially in the imperialist countries and the Israeli state. At the same time, we must refuse to subscribe to any positions containing contradictory elements to those defined above, such as the "rights" of Israel, peace with Israel or the International Conference.

Likewise, today it is more harmful than ever to endorse the sacred formula "the PLO, sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people". Indeed, this formula is not just recording the result of an opinion poll (in the absence of any direct democratic mechanisms for representing the whole

3. This shows that even someone like Jerome Segal could envisage this proclamation well before the Jordanian king took the initiative on July 31.

of the Palestinian people). In the minds of those who invented it and as commonly interpreted, it is clearly a *carte-blanche* given to the PLO, and therefore to its leadership, to decide the Palestinian people's future in their name. At a time when the PLO has unambiguously embarked on the road of capitulation, the pernicious character of this formula can be measured.

Most Palestinians live outside of 1967 territories

The US administration began having direct talks with the PLO last December, while a growing section of the Zionist *establishment* — including the current Labour minister Ezer Weizman, a quarter of the deputies of the same party and its general secretary, who just resigned for this reason — are calling for a direct dialogue between the Israeli government and the PLO. Was all this to celebrate the first anniversary of the *intifada*? Or was it because, between mid-November and mid-December, the Arafat leadership took some decisive steps in submitting to US and Israeli conditions?

It should not be forgotten that the majority of Palestinians live outside of all Palestinian lands, the West Bank and Gaza included. The right of the Palestinian people to self-determination includes also its right to freely and democratically choose its representatives, with nobody having the right to decree from the outside who is its "sole legitimate representative". Admittedly, the PLO enjoys the support of the majority of Palestinians — for the time being, because representation in a democracy is not an eternal right. The majority of the people can be wrong. Revolutionaries have the right, and the responsibility, to tell them and to combat their illusions.

To support unconditionally the struggle of an oppressed people against its oppressors means to support this struggle independently of the nature of its leadership (even if it is feudal or religious!). That does not mean unconditional support for such leaderships, especially when they belong to the possessing classes. In this respect, the attitude of revolutionaries must be based on the distinction between measures that should be supported and those that should be denounced.

For example, the unconditional support for the struggle of the Indian people against British imperialism had to be combined with a critical attitude vis-à-vis Gandhi and the Congress Party, in spite of their enormous popularity and the fact that they had led some struggles such as the campaigns of civil disobedience — very similar to those of the *intifada* in Palestine today. Many examples like this could be borrowed from other countries (China, Ethiopia, Tunisia, Iran, the Philippines and so on). But the history of Palestine itself is sufficiently eloquent. Up until the 1948 defeat, the only leadership followed by the large majority of Palestinians was that of

the Jerusalem *mufti*, Haj Amin Al-Husseini. He was the spokesperson of the great Palestinian *intifada* from 1936-39, and the person responsible for defusing it when he went looking for a compromise with the British mandatory authority at the expense of the Zionists.

In all confrontations between Zionism, the imperialist governments or Arab reaction on the one hand, and the PLO on the other, the PLO should be supported without a shadow of a doubt. On the ground, alliances should be made with the PLO against the common enemy. Thus, our comrades in Lebanon participated in the fight against the Lebanese reaction and the Israeli army for seven years, under the military leadership of the PLO. But it is necessary to know how to act with such an ally. As Trotsky said in relation to the left faction of the Chinese Kuomintang (which was much more radical than today's PLO): "Not by prostrating oneself before it at every one of its vacillations... supporting each step forward and relentlessly unmasking every vacillation, every step backwards". (*The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Stalin*, 1927.)

Palestinian right-wing won prestige in 1960s

This latter task falls to the Palestinian revolutionaries and those in the Arab countries, whose most reactionary governments are the PLO leadership's main allies, supporting fervently every step backwards. Of course, the same does not hold true for the public activity of those active inside the Jewish masses in the Israeli state or the imperialist countries that support it.

That said, there remains an apparent con-

tradiction between our analysis of the PLO leadership and the fact it has enjoyed, up until now, widespread mass support. The contradiction does not come from the characterization of this leadership as bourgeois — a quantifiable and incontestable fact that the whole of the Palestinian left is agreed upon, including the Stalinist faction of the PLO. Because, after all, a bourgeois leadership can perfectly well embody the national aspirations of its people against a foreign yoke. The contradiction bears rather on our description of the PLO's trajectory in the last few years, if not since 1973, as a capitulatory course. George Habash, who shares the same analysis, quoted three reasons, in chronological order, to explain this apparent contradiction in a long interview/assessment given to the PFLP's paper, *Al-Hadaf*, in December 1987.

First of all, he said, was the fact that the Palestinian right had taken the initiative of armed struggle in 1965, which had given it a great deal of prestige and allowed it to win, in the beginning, a leading position. Following that was the fact that "the Palestinian bourgeoisie, because of its class nature and its tendencies to compromise and accommodate, is closely linked to the reactionary and bourgeois Arab regimes. These have given it a large amount of political and material support, which contributed to its dominance...".

Finally, still according to Habash, is the fact that "the national enemy replied to the political deviation that characterized the positions and practice of the Palestinian right by even more firmness and intransigence, such that the right-wing has appeared to follow acceptable tactics in the eyes of the masses".

These three explanations are true, if insufficient. The last one, which is absolutely

Two Palestinian views of the PLO

West Bank — young militants of the *intifada* were met by Alain Gresh, special correspondent for *Le Monde diplomatique* (May 1988):

"Today, very little escapes their sarcasm, not even the PLO leadership that they loudly and vigorously proclaim is their 'sole representative'. At the same time in private they deplore its incompetence and the corruption of some of its cadres — 'the five-star PLO', they say, bursting out laughing, — its lack of success.... For Bassam in just a few months the Palestinians within have won more than the PLO in twenty years.... But their attitude to the PLO is unambiguous: 'It's the PLO that decides; they must negotiate; we refuse to set up an alternative leadership'."

Jordan — Bakaa, one of the biggest Palestinian refugee camps, visited by Véronique Maurus, special correspondent for *Le Monde* (February 17, 1988):

"The uprising... is felt as the expression of an authentic and fierce Palestinian self-determination, after years of manipulation by Israel, the Arab states, and even the PLO, which is clearly accused of impotence and collusion with the 'politicians'.... A dream is repeated endlessly: that a new leadership emerges from the revolution. Who? The replies are more discreet. 'There will be a revolution, here and everywhere where they oppress us', insists an old man. 'All compromises must be rejected. If the revolution is sponsored by the Arab governments or the PLO, it will come to nothing...'." ★

basic, could in the long term become outdated. But it throws light on two things that are often overshadowed regarding the attitude of the Palestinian masses to the PLO. The first is that this attitude varies, in degree if not in nature, not only in accordance with social status, but also to a large extent with origin and territorial situation: Palestinians who hold Israeli citizenship, who remained in the territory taken over by the Zionists in 1948; Palestinians originating from the West Bank and Gaza, and living there; refugees from 1948 living in various places (the 1967 territories, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria) and so on. It is natural that the limit of tactics perceived as "acceptable" should be different for each category. Similarly, the attitude of their immediate oppressor vis-à-vis the PLO is decisive for them.

Thus, the inhabitants of the 1967 territories, where the Israeli occupiers have traditionally considered Arafat as the devil himself, naturally tend to have a lot more sympathy for him than the Palestinian refugees in Jordan, who are at least as numerous. The latter have difficulty swallowing the fact that this same Arafat has never missed a chance to tenderly embrace his "brother" King Hussein, who has as much Palestinian blood on his hands as the Zionist leaders, and who subjects Palestinians in his kingdom to such a repressive regime that it makes the Israeli occupation look humanitarian and democratic by comparison.

So if the PLO can appear, in the eyes of the masses, as an acceptable representative of their struggle against the Zionist occupation of the 1967 territories, it is not seen as the representative of the just as necessary struggle against the Jordanian oppressor (see box p.7).

The second aspect that is often overlooked regarding the attitude of Palestinians to the PLO, which is linked to the first, is that even among the masses who identify with the PLO there exists widespread mistrust of its leadership. Nevertheless, these masses support the PLO because they see in it the only available, and vaguely credible, force that can focus their struggles against the "national enemy". Noting this leads us to the fourth, and perhaps most important, reason for the persistent dominance of the Palestinian right: that is, the deficiencies of the left and, primarily, those of the traditional left of the PLO.

Knowing the analysis of the PLO leadership made by George Habash, leader of the main fraction of this left, one can only ask oneself how, in the same breath, he can proclaim his attachment to the PLO, describing it himself as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people"

and refusing any idea of building an alternative framework for the leadership of the Palestinian struggle. The reply that he gives to this inevitable question is not new, it is even more than 60 years old! For the sake of the cause, it is necessary to decorate the "bourgeoisie" with the title "national"!

In the interview previously quoted, he said that in "the first of the stages of national liberation...the national bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, workers and peasants" are united. Thus, "the PLO, in addition to being the framework that embodies the independent Palestinian personality, is this front including all these classes...although it is currently led by the bourgeoisie".

Here are the well-known ingredients of the Stalinist theory forged around the debate on China in 1926-27. Everything is

leadership can pass from the hands of one class to another (DFLP and PFLP theses), advancing as an argument the social composition of its base and its influence over the masses, means "consolidating the strength and power of the [bourgeois] 'top'" and "helping to transform more and more of the masses into 'cattle'..."

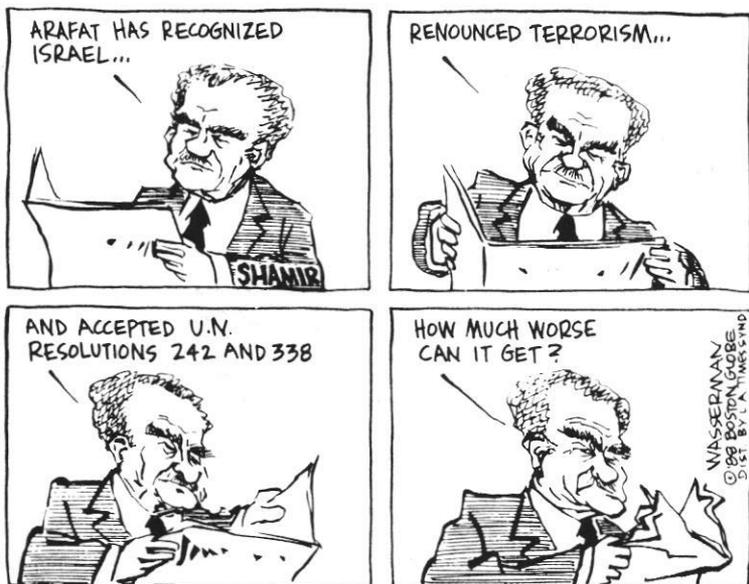
This is even truer in the case of the PLO than for the Kuomintang. Indeed, the statutes adopted in 1924 by the latter (inspired by the Comintern's envoy!) designated, in principle, the national congress — with its members elected from local congresses — as the supreme leading body, which in turn elected the Executive Committee. On the other hand, the Arab states that founded the PLO in 1964 took great care to create in their image, that is, as a bureaucratic institution essentially based on appointment and cooption, and not on the basis of direct representation via elected delegates.

It is by means of this anti-democratic mechanism that the PNC has mainly renewed itself since its members were first appointed at the first session, in 1964, under the control of the Arab states. It is by this same mechanism that El Fatah, following a decision of the Arab sponsors, took control of the PLO in 1969, as is explicitly admitted by Abu Iyad in his autobiography: "All the Arab countries...warmly welcomed the taking over of the PLO by the Resistance. The main

reason for this was that El Fatah, which enjoyed the confidence of most these countries, secured, as is proper, a predominant influence in both the PNC and its Executive Committee [EC]". (*Palestinian without a homeland*, Fayolle, Paris, 1978.)

Since then, El Fatah's dominance inside the PLO has been strictly speaking unmovable — because the organization's functioning rests on the vicious circle PNC-EC-PNC, the two bodies mutually assure the simple (and sometimes enlarged) reproduction of El Fatah's dominance. Thus, El Fatah had no great difficulty in mustering the two-thirds quorum for the PNC at the Amman session in 1984, in spite of the boycott by all the other Palestinian politico-military groups with the exception of two tiny pro-Iraqi organizations.

At this same session, in response to the growing dissension in the Palestinian movement since 1983, the leadership of the El Fatah/PLO decided to modify the composition of the PNC. According to a journal sponsored by the PLO⁴, "the number of representatives of socio-professional associations favourable to Mr. Arafat has more



there: stages, the bloc of four classes and its organizational expression, here the PLO, in China the Kuomintang (which at the time personified the independent Chinese "personality" even more than the PLO does of Palestinians today). The critique of these conceptions is also more than 60 years old, and it is just as pertinent and judicious.

"Considering the Kuomintang not as a bourgeois party, but as a neutral arena in which you fight to carry the masses with you, putting to the fore, as an asset, the 90% left base in order to cover up the question of who is the master of the house, meant consolidating the strength and power of the 'top'; it helped to transform more and more of the masses into 'cattle'....The bourgeois 'top' only tolerates (or tolerated) '90%' leftists (and leftists of that kind, moreover) insofar as they do not attack the army, the bureaucracy, the press or capital. Thanks to its strength, the upper bourgeois sphere maintains its power not only over the 90% of so-called 'left' members of the party, but over the popular masses in their totality." (*The Third International after Lenin*, Leon Trotsky.)

In the same way, to consider the PLO not as a bourgeois organization, but as a "neutral arena", a "front of four classes" whose

4. *Revue d'études palestiniennes* 25, Autumn 1987, p.207.

than doubled (to 26% of the total), just as those of the diaspora have grown by nearly a third (to 44.5% of seats)". Added to this are 10% of the seats reserved for representatives of the army (the PLA), who are directly appointed by the "commander-in-chief" — Yasser Arafat — in person, as well as 7.5% reserved for El Fatah's delegates. The other organizations have to be content with sharing 11.5% of the seats.

Bureaucratic manipulation of the PNC

A good illustration of both the bourgeois character of the PNC and the manipulations of its composition is given by comparing the representatives of the PFLP, the main Palestinian organization after El Fatah, with other "representatives". The ratio is 2-5 with those of the Palestinian diaspora from the Arab oil-producing countries (the Gulf emirates and Saudi Arabia); 3-5 with those of the diaspora in North and South America; nearly 1-5 with the group of "independent personalities", who represent only themselves, and often their wallets; and 3-2 with the Arab Liberation Front, a grouplet controlled by Iraq, the big ally of Arafat. Moreover, the last PNC session, where only 15% of the voters came out against accepting Resolution 242, is the undeniable proof of the fact that this body in no way reflects the real divisions in Palestinian public opinion.

These statutory methods of maintaining the dominance of the bourgeois leadership of the PLO are combined, of course, with the classic means mentioned by Trotsky, and notably by bureaucracy and finances. The PLO's bureaucratic apparatus is abundant: thousands of functionaries, whose highest layer lives in a luxurious style that is an insult to the living conditions of the vast majority of Palestinians; an apparatus that has some branches, such as the "political" or diplomatic department (with 85 offices in the world), that would make many third world states green with envy. In addition, either regularly or occasionally, the PLO subsidizes tens of thousands of people who represent an important pool of social support. As for finances, the PLO's treasury is, of course, considerable: an immense capital in liquid assets and real estate, and a working budget mainly sustained by the Arab oil-producers that can be counted in hundreds of millions of dollars a year.

From this it can be understood why the PLO left, in spite of its leaders' protestations, only has a token role — that of a left cover for the eminently rightist policy of the bourgeois leadership of El Fatah. This is shown by the pathetic spectacle offered by this left for the last two years: barely a few days after the two last PNC meetings (1987 and 1988) in which it participated under the slogan of "national unity", it was forced to publish communiques denouncing Arafat and company's positions as contrary to the PNC's decisions (in fact, to its

A sample of Palestinian fundamentalist talk

"We will establish our fighting Islamic state on every inch of liberated territory. But nobody can force us either to recognize the so-called entity on the rest of our sacred land, or to recognize its frontiers. We ask nobody to recognize ours, which will remain open until all the usurped land has been cleansed.... Those who are hoping to set up a state through peace negotiations are dreaming and pulling the wool over the eyes of their people in having them believe that this state will solve the problems of the Palestinian people...."

"This state, or mini-state, will have its hands and feet tied, its eyes blindfolded and its will paralyzed by the constraints and guarantees that it will have to assume before the International Conference.... The Palestinian people dying today, who have risen up in this blessed fighting revolution, have not done this so that PLO officers can raise themselves to the rank of ambassadors or to set up an illusory state with its will and its sovereignty paralyzed...."

Sheikh Khalil Al-Quqa, Moslem preacher expelled from Gaza by the occupying forces in April 1988. This declaration was made in the name of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, in the Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Qabas in October 1988. ★

particular interpretation of those decisions). This shows to what extent the national consensus on which the left claims to base its participation in the PLO's structures is illusory.

As Habash candidly acknowledged in the interview already mentioned: "We won the battle in theory, on paper. But the dominant faction in the PLO leadership, owing to its bourgeois nature, in its subsequent political practice did not respect this. In fact, it is this political behaviour that explains the opposition of this right-wing faction to carrying out organizational democratic reforms in the bodies and institutions of the PLO, because they would limit its political maneuvering room for knocking at the doors of capitulation, in the reactionary Arab capitals".

A platform for political agitation

Does all this add up to the conclusion that the Palestinian left should have abstained from joining the PLO on principle? Not necessarily. But it is its very conception of membership of the PLO that should have been radically different. The Palestinian left should have been able to stay in the PLO on a tactical basis, as it did during the early years of its participation, with its banner held high and without sparing the rightist leadership. It should have been able to use the PNC as a platform for political agitation, while denouncing loudly and forcefully its anti-democratic makeup and demanding that its central leadership bodies be elected by the Palestinian masses, including in the form of delegates from the people's committees in the refugee camps.

In any case, under no circumstances should the left have agreed to endorse the PLO's Executive Committee — at least not after 1974, the year in which the PFLP, then much more radical than today, correctly suspended its participation in the EC (it asked to be reintegrated four years later). Moreover, even from the point of view

of the PFLP's own political limitations, logically they should have again withdrawn from the EC after the last PNC, which accepted Resolution 242. In 1974, the PFLP withdrew for much less than that!

Nationalist opposition allied to Syria

Such are the shortcomings of the PLO's left. What about the dissident opposition then? The main organizations in this category — El Fatah-Provisional Command (a 1983 split from El Fatah), led by Abu Musa, and Ahmad Jibril's PFLP-General Command (a split from the PFLP in 1968) — represent a predominantly nationalist opposition allied to the Syrian government's Palestinian instrument, the Saika, in the framework of the Palestinian National Salvation Front (PNSF). After the last PNC, these organizations published denunciatory communiques together with other groups, including the Palestinian Revolutionary Communist Party, a left dissident group of the PCP. Today, they are calling for the setting up of a new PLO. According to Abu Musa, this should include the Islamic fundamentalist current, which is also violently opposed to the PLO's last turn for its own reasons.

However, the PNSF has very little credibility in the eyes of the Palestinian masses. It appears for what it really is: a grouping under the tutelage of Damascus that was totally discredited when it claimed responsibility for the bombing of Palestinian camps in Lebanon as part of its struggle against Arafat's El Fatah. In addition, the advances being made today by Abu Musa to the fundamentalist current have all the hallmarks of pathetic political shortsightedness and a pitiful bankruptcy.

In fact, this fundamentalist current is profiting in the Palestinian milieu from the same combination that impelled its considerable growth in other countries in the region: an explosive situation, weakness of the traditional bourgeoisie and the short-

comings of the left. In the Palestinian milieu, as elsewhere, the bourgeoisie has played the role of sorcerer's apprentice. Initially, the El Fatah leadership deliberately encouraged the growth of a fundamentalist Palestinian current, in particular after 1979, and up until 1987 for some of its components. Today, this current has profited from the *intifada* to build itself, to the point where over the last few months the Zionist authorities have become seriously worried. Previously, for a long time they had taken a *laissez-faire* attitude, hoping in this way to better "divide and rule".

The fundamentalist current is in a very good position to attract those disappointed by the PLO, who have been growing in number since the last PNC. Today, the fundamentalists are projecting a very radical tone that is likely to convince large sections of the masses and young people (see box p.9). Even Habash confirms this. In December 1987, he made what seemed to be a confession of his own weakness: "I think that the religious current could take over the leadership if the PLO stopped the armed struggle and went down the road of capitulation and deviation".

A curse for the Palestinian mass movement

It goes without saying that the growth of this current represents a real curse for the Palestinian mass movement. Its fanatical religious talk reinforces Zionist cohesion in Jewish/Israeli society on the one hand, and on the other it repels the Palestinian Christian minority, whose role is far from negligible. Finally, it represents an enormous regression for a population that was, and still is, in the forefront of a progressive struggle on a regional scale.

However, the Palestinian revolutionary left, although not organized in a single and centralizing political framework, is happily clearly bigger in relative terms than in other Arab countries. Mainly, it involves the left of the PFLP — and it is no secret that debates have been going on within it for some time.

The branch of the PFLP active in the 1967 occupied territories seems, judging by its communiqués, to be much more radical than the external leadership. On the other hand, the People's Committees set up in the Palestinian camps in Syria — close to the Communist Action Party (CAP) — brought together several hundred, mostly young, people. They were, however, decimated by repression from 1986 on and are now in Syrian jails.

Certainly, the revolutionary left is not massive. But in the sprint being run on the scale of the Arab region between the revolutionary left and radical fundamentalism, Palestinian revolutionaries are better placed than their comrades in other countries. This is especially important since the Palestinian political scene is a focal point for all the other countries. ★

Cárdenas creates new Mexican party

THE CURRENT CRISIS in Mexico is deepening, above all because, after the fraudulent July elections, the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has lost all credibility (see IV 147). Its control over the masses is weakening. The party is confronted with an internal crisis between various sectors that have widely varying political projects. The only apparent unity they can muster is in their struggle against the mass current now lined up behind Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas.

SERGIO RODRIGUEZ

THE SECTOR of the Mexican bourgeoisie represented by President Salinas de Gortari — sworn in on December 1, 1989 — believes that the whole economic and political framework of the traditionally populist PRI must be changed, or "modernized". However, Salinas lacks the necessary support for realizing his project because the long-time peasant and trade-union structures linked to the PRI are opposed to it. This sharp contradiction burst into the open after the elections and Cárdenas' success.

But the modernization project is running up against economic obstacles as well. It is one thing to embark on such a project in a period of prosperity, and quite another to try and modernize in the midst of a fully-blown economic crisis. And Mexico is one of the Latin American countries hardest hit by the crisis — by the fall in oil prices and the prices of raw materials, and especially by the weight of the foreign debt.

The debt is now over \$100 billion, and the interest alone takes up 6% of the gross national product, and 45% of all export revenues. The Mexican government does not get any gold stars or favors from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), despite being one of its most diligent pupils.

The government is therefore in a delicate situation, all the more so because it has lost its legitimacy in the eyes of a large segment of the population. But it still has room to maneuver.

After the elections, the government was able to bring a significant section of the intelligentsia back into the fold. Although they had voted for Cárdenas, in the final analysis they threw their support behind Salinas de Gortari. This type of sell-out is somewhat of a tradition in Mexico where the state has a great deal of capacity for

coopting intellectuals, who play an important role in the country.

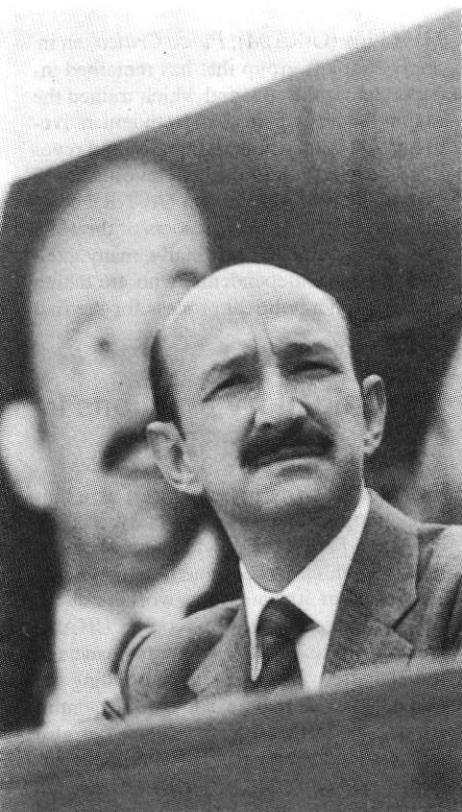
In the same manner, Salinas de Gortari exploited the visits of the presidents of Cuba and Nicaragua, Fidel Castro and Daniel Ortega, to the full when they attended his inauguration.

A few days before the ending of his term, Miguel de la Madrid paid an official visit to Cuba. This was the first such official trip by a Mexican president since the Cuban revolution, and it had only one aim — to ensure Castro's presence at the official inaugural ceremony in Mexico.

Castro and Ortega attend inauguration

Castro and Ortega agreed to appear. The Mexican bourgeoisie was very reticent about Castro's visit, but in the end they managed to make good use of it. Many people were very disappointed because it appeared that Castro implicitly supported Salinas. In fact, it was the first time that Castro has come to Mexico (apart from his trip to Cancun), and it involved much more than a symbolic presence at a ceremony.

After the inauguration, Castro also went to Tuxpan, the point from which the *Granma* set sail in December 1956 to begin the armed struggle in the Sierra Maestra. There he opened a small museum on the Cuban Revolution. He was accompanied by the Mexican minister of the interior who had detained both Fidel and Che Guevara at that time, but who treated them quite well. It so happens that this minister is now in charge of the police force, and as such bears the responsibility for all of the human rights violations in Mexico, in particular the disappearances (see article on page 28).



Salinas de Gortari (left) fiddled election results to beat Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (right) for the presidency (DR)

can population, which today is in opposition to its government?

Within the trade-union movement, the government still has some room to maneuver, despite the crisis within the PRI. The major union leaders are in fact incapable of breaking with the state, because all of their privileges are based on their links with the state apparatus. A few months ago, the biggest union federation, the Mexican Workers' Confederation (CTM) entered into violent confrontations with the small Regional Workers' and Peasants' Confederation (CROC). The latter has recently received state support. This type of confrontation between union structures may well intensify in the months to come because the state no longer wants the CTM to maintain its old hegemony over the workers' movement. The old union bureaucracy symbolized by Miguel Velasquez (leader of the CTM since 1930!) has become an obstacle to the state's modernization project.

At the same time, things are beginning to move in the union movement, but outside of the direct control of the apparatus. It is not the union leaderships that are deciding the when, where and how of struggle, but the workers, who are acting spontaneously "parallel" to the union structures.

Workers demonstrate against wage review

Thus, in December, hundreds of thousands of public sector workers (a sector which includes about 2.5 million workers) demonstrated their opposition to the wage review proposed by the government. Salinas had proposed an increase of 8% for the entire year, which is a ridiculous amount given inflation and the fall in real wages. This entire mobilization was organized outside of union structures, but also independent of any left political organization.

All of which leads us to believe that in the next two years we will see an increase in contradictions and crises, not only between the state apparatus and the union bureaucracy, but also within the union structures themselves. We can expect breaks in the middle levels of the bureaucracies — the layers most closely linked to, and still influenced by, Mexican workers.

The annual incomes of the Mexican working class rose regularly throughout the 50s and 60s, but then the situation changed abruptly. In some areas — oil, for example — the average wage in the 1970s was ten times the minimum wage, while today it is only double. This is a big change that is reflected in Mexican workers' new living



standards. It is therefore not too surprising that the oil workers' union played the biggest role in the confrontations within the union movement, and has developed a very aggressive line against the government.

This union has 100,000 members and has great economic strength. It is led by real union gangsters who have physically liquidated all of their opponents and competitors. Despite that, the union has a nationalist, Cardenist past, linked through the elder Cárdenas (Cuauhtémoc's father, who always maintained close ties to the unions) to the oil nationalizations of the '30s. In the July 1988 elections, the oil workers' union implicitly supported the young Cárdenas, providing him with financial aid and political support in specific areas.

It is in this context that what Salinas calls the "transition" took place. But it was a very different transition from that which has taken place in most other Latin American countries, where it was a matter of ending a military dictatorship by means of a more or less democratic and constitutional process. In Mexico, the transition is taking place with the same party, the PRI, in power, without any agreement about or change in its single-party structures.

No change in the single-party system

After the fraudulent elections in July, the PRI had to recognize that it had no more than 52% of the votes. But this party's organizational tradition and ideological references do not allow for any real transformation of the single-party system, which means there will be no transition in Mexico

So people had a very heated reaction to Castro and Ortega's presence. A demonstration and meetings were organized to express their disappointment. However, the reaction was more nuanced in the case of Ortega, because everyone is very aware of Nicaragua's economic difficulties and the lack of maneuvering room for the Sandinista leaders. Even if Ortega's presence was as much of a political error as that of Castro, it was the Cuban leader who drew most of the criticism.

In his speech, Castro referred to the imperialist threat to Cuba and Nicaragua and the dangers of military aggression. He added that a revolutionary upsurge in a big country such as Brazil, for instance, would make such an aggression much more difficult. However, in Mexico — the second largest country in Latin America — while the Mexican masses were taking the first steps toward a struggle against the government and imperialism, Castro preferred to support the government against the masses!

This position is very hard for the Mexican masses to understand or to believe, and it is clear that Castro's attitude will rebound on Cuba. For his part, Cárdenas spoke out very strongly against Castro, saying that the Mexican population supported the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions, but that this did not mean that they supported their leaders. The Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT, Mexican section of the Fourth International) also took part in the debate, explaining that it would continue to support Cuba and Nicaragua, but that the visits did not serve the interests of these revolutions.

Because, in the future, who will put pressure on the Mexican government so that it helps Cuba and Nicaragua, if not the Mexi-

on the PRI's initiative.

Cárdenas understood this. He represents a possible transition, but what he proposes is also very different than what is occurring elsewhere in Latin America. Cárdenas does not enjoy support from imperialism or from the national bourgeoisie, for in the eyes of the latter, he is synonymous with communism. The bourgeoisie feels that because of what he represents in the popular consciousness, it would be impossible to rely on him to bring about a transition.

Cárdenas swimming against the stream

That is one of the things that complicates the possibility of a summit accord between Cárdenas and Salinas. Besides, Cárdenas defends the old populist conception of the Mexican state as it was built by his father, on the question of the foreign debt, on wages, nationalizations and so on. Therefore he is totally opposed to Salinas' vision of a modernized state, one that will pursue the preceding government's policies on privatizations. In six years, out of 1,800 existing state enterprises, 1,400 were either privatized or simply shut down, if the bourgeoisie did not want to buy them. So the two projects are incompatible on this point.

Cárdenas' project channeled all of the democratic and nationalist aspirations of the Mexican poor, but he is going against the stream. In Peru, for example, Alan García, who had had a similar project, was unable to carry it out because he was going in the face of the world economic situation. This is no longer the '30s or '40s, when it was possible to develop production based on the substitution of manufactured goods for imports, the process that underlay the rise of nationalist currents.

Now the situation is reversed. The dependence on the IMF and foreign capital penetration leave little space for populism. Obviously, Cárdenas is not going to call for an insurrection or a general strike against the government. But, in spite of his weaknesses and hesitations, neither is he in a position to make any summit agreement, because the same movement that has supported him until now would then turn against him.

Unlike other mass movements in Latin America, the process of radicalization in Mexico is quite impressive. One example is that people are not afraid of the army. In other places, people were in a hurry to get rid of military dictatorships but were afraid that the military would remain, or that there would be a new coup d'état. So the bourgeoisie used this fear of the military in order

to channel the movement towards a controlled transition. In Mexico, on the other hand, the population has not gone through the same experiences and does not see the army as a threat. Therefore it is pushing Cárdenas to go further and faster.

Cárdenas is also conscious that he cannot win the day without the support of at least a section of the bourgeoisie, of the army and of the union bureaucracy. For that reason he has adopted a very cautious attitude, especially as concerns organizing the masses.

But he has chosen to fight this battle outside of the PRI and to build his own party, and this has created a very contradictory situation. In fact, in popular consciousness, this break with the PRI — given the relationship between the PRI and the state — is a step towards the development of class independence.

Cárdenas has said that the construction of his party, the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) was necessary in order to give expression to the success shown by the July elections. However, not all of the sectors and small parties that supported his electoral campaign are part of the new party. Some of them maintain links with Cárdenas but refuse to participate in organizing the PRD itself.

Left forces in Cárdenas' party

On the other hand, the Mexican Socialist Party (PSM) — which includes the former Communist Party — as well as the rest of the far-left, except the PRT, decided to join Cárdenas' party. So, among others, forces in the party include a Maoist organization called the Revolutionary Left Organization/

Mass Line (OIR/LM); *Punto Critico*, an independent left group that has remained independent until now and which trained the major leaders of the 1968 student movement; a section of the nationalist and revolutionary left called the Revolutionary National Civic Association (ACNR); comrades who left the PRT; leaders of the 1986 student movement; and, finally, many intellectuals and independents, who are taking part in such a political process for the first time.

Contradictory positions in the PRD

Cárdenas' party presents itself as a citizens' party and not as a class party. But this "citizens' party" is rife with contradictions, some of which were immediately evident. Shortly after its founding, workers at the biggest university in Mexico, the UNAM, went on strike. Most of the union leaders in this dispute were involved in building the PRD. At the same time, some of the administrators and the university authorities also belonged to the new party. The union members took part in the strike, while the administration was bitterly opposed and labeled it as "provocative" and opportunist. As a result, contradictory positions were held by members of the same party.

The PRD will continually face this type of situation. Another example is that while many peasants belong to the party, so do many big land-owners. Thus, the debate over land reform is likely to be explosive! Again, there will be two diametrically opposed positions.

For the PRT, the situation is rather complicated. After 1982, we believed that a critical period of recomposition and reorganization in the Mexican extreme left had opened up, with the Communist Party at the center. Today, the whole of the Mexican extreme left has unified...but behind Cárdenas. There is no doubt that he has total control over the direction of this process, although some joined him believing that they could maneuver and fight him for leadership of the operations.

This section of the left going over to Cárdenas has also raised problems of political orientation. Today, these groups are developing an entirely electoralist strategy and virtually discarding the radical vision of the Mexican left. Not so much because they have joined Cárdenas' party, but because they are adapting to his vision of the mass movement and popular mobilizations. They are saying, for example, that today it is not possible to challenge and confront the state and therefore we will have to go



through a period of three to six years before we can change anything.

From the PRT's point of view, we are in a new situation as far as the election period goes. We mounted a big political campaign against electoral fraud. For that purpose we made a tactical alliance with Cárdenas and other sectors that defended the Cardenist victory. So the party had a presence in the mass movement and was not marginalized, despite the fact that it did not join the PRD.

Today, we must develop an alliance in action with Cárdenas around two questions. First, we must continue the fight around the illegitimacy of the Salinas de Gortari government and demand that he step down. This is a point that Cárdenas raised in the context of a huge mobilization, and one which we defend. Second, we should act together around a series of democratic questions: wages, the foreign debt, full employment, democratic liberties and so on. They are immediate demands and make up the minimum basis of activity in the mass movement. That is the platform of a political accord with Cárdenas. We will see if it works in practice, but nothing is certain, even if Cárdenas has indicated his agreement.

However, we must combine the construction of such a political front with independent activity and our own profile. Today, the PRT is not only the sole revolutionary party in Mexico, but also the only socialist one.

Thus, there is no longer the possibility of building political fronts with other forces on the far-left in order to put pressure on the bourgeois nationalists. On the contrary, we must build a front with the nationalist current, and those militants of the far-left who have joined it will oppose this because, for them, the PRT is an obstacle.

These sectors are opposed to the continued existence of an independent party on the left because their base is hesitant and doubtful about the politics they have chosen. So the very existence of PRT represents an unrelenting pressure on them.

PRT lost its legal registration

Our situation is complicated all the more by the fact that we have to regain our legal registration. The PRT was officially credited with 0.38% of the vote in the July 6, 1988 elections and lost the legal registration we had gained in the 1985 elections when we were credited with 1.5%. We have launched a PRT supporters' campaign, and we need 65,000 supporters in order to have this registration restored. Not only does bourgeois law demand that we collect that many signatures, but the people who sign must also declare that they agree with the program and statutes of the party.

We think that it is nonetheless possible, as the PRT has a widespread influence. Besides, for us this campaign will be one not only of finding signatures, but of recruit-

ment. The challenge for the PRT is therefore to build a party of tens of thousands of supporters, in order to be an independent force distinct from the PRD, and also a real political force capable of putting pressure on Cardenism on the ground, in action.

The PRT has a presence in the reorganization of the independent mass movement. For example, in the capital, Mexico City, where Cárdenas received 48% of the votes and the PRI only 23%, an assembly parallel to the official one was set up with the participation of Cardenists and the PRT, and was accompanied by the organization of local committees in each district. At the inaugural meeting of this assembly, the major speeches were given by Cárdenas and Rosario Ibarra [the PRT's presidential candidate].

Political space opened for revolutionaries

The PRT is also involved in the peasant movement and the shanty-town struggle. It is active in the leadership of the Popular General Union of Workers and Peasants (UGOCEP).

There, the stakes are high — unification with all of the other peasant organizations outside of UGOCEP, some of which are Cardenist, would bring together over 2 million peasants. Such a process of unification would even be capable of putting strong pressure on the peasant organizations linked to the government.

The specific intervention and united politics of the PRT in certain regions of the country have strengthened peasant structures overall. In the region near the border between the states of Veracruz and Oaxaca, for instance, the PRT is in the leadership of a peasant organization numbering from 30,000 to 40,000 people. This work takes on a political dimension, as well.

At a public meeting organized by the PRT to present the members of the local party committee, 8,000 peasants turned up. All of a sudden it became clear that these peasants considered themselves members of this party committee! The PRT was forced to reorganize its structures and create many more committees in the region.

Another advantage for the PRT is that the electoral fraud and the lack of respect for their votes has generally discredited elections and the electoral system in the eyes of a large section of the population. This has led to higher and higher levels of abstentionism.

In the last elections for the governor, mayors and deputies in Tabasco state, the rate of abstention reached 80%! But this was not a sign of depoliticization, as shown by the fact that both before and after these elections, there was no let-up in the demonstrations. As Cárdenas' entire strategy is based on forming and using his party in order to participate in elections, this leaves a great deal of political space for the PRT. ★

A stunning victory for the Workers' Party

IN LAST NOVEMBER'S municipal elections, the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT) went from having three elected mayors to thirty-six. Among the gains was São Paulo, the largest city in South America, where a PT woman, Luiza Erundina, was elected. In the country as a whole, the PT went from having 170 municipal councillors to 2,000. How can this stunning victory be explained?

GUSTAVO VASQUEZ

MANY PEOPLE, in Brazil itself as well as in other countries, have tried to minimize the PT's victory with all sorts of explanations. For instance, leaders of the Brazilian bourgeois parties counted up the number of PT councillors and mayors in the country as a whole to show that the PT has less elected representatives than they do, as if everyone did not already know it. Others are trying to put the blame on the president, José Sarney, because it was he who repressed the Volta Redonda strikers, or who refused wage increases.

Lionel Brizola, the populist leader of the Workers' Democratic Party (PDT), attributed Luiza Erundina's triumph in São Paulo to support from his own party, no less. Well, if the PT was electorally supported by the PC, the PCdoB, and the PDT, each of these parties elected only one councillor, while the PT elected 18 (see box p.14).

If it is the case that the popular classes punished the government and its collabora-

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tors for their general policies and lack of respect for individual rights, as the PT leaders themselves say, it is equally clear that by their votes they have demonstrated that the PT is free of any taint. They have put the administration of the country's major cities in its hands.

PT led campaign for direct elections

The explanation lies in the policies advanced by the PT from the very beginning of this short-lived New Republic. When the right to elect the president directly was denied, and all the other parties together decided to hold this election within the confines of an electoral college made up of a few hundred of their members, the PT refused to participate. In fact, it was the PT that had pioneered the campaign for direct elections. The electoral college, then, went on in 1985 to elect respectively Tancredo Neves and José Sarney as president and vice-president.

More recently, last October the PT refused to vote for a constitution that, while it ratified some advances in the area of workers' democratic rights, was nonetheless fundamentally reactionary. In November, when the time came to sign the social pact, the United Workers' Confederation (CUT), in which PT activists work, refused to ratify such a reactionary accord. When the workers at Volta Redonda confronted the army that had been called out by Sarney, the local union, affiliated to the CUT, fought tooth and nail, never playing a conciliationist game.

Thus, this vote by the Brazilian people did not come out of the blue. It was not a blind choice, made without knowledge of the proposals and practice of this party. On the contrary, Brazilian workers have gone through an experience with the other parties, they have seen them in action, and they have also understood who has always defended them.

These are the "surface" reasons for the PT's results. But it is also the balance sheet of a party that has no fewer than 450,000 active members. The PT's members understood, as the PT federal deputy of São Pau-

lo Florestan Fernandes said, that "winning these elections meant not only a democratic revolution and social reforms today, but a springboard for socialism in the future. They [the PT members] were able to spread this message in poor areas and among the working class in the cities, and in that way they radicalized the elections and dealt a series of blows to the 'invincible' parties of the established order. In the end, clergy, priests, and 'progressive' bishops made their own contribution.

"They understood these changes and endorsed a vote for the only candidates who advanced a real perspective of authentic social change. This was decisive support for the victory of those who would unfurl their banner to defend democracy, popular participation and proletarian socialism in city halls." (*Folha do São Paulo*, December 5, 1988.)

Thus, no conciliation, social partnership, or pact. No confidence in the deeply reactionary bourgeois institutions. No huddles behind closed doors. Reliance on direct democracy, and above all, a struggle for the rights and demands of those who have nothing. No confusion about the class struggle. No notions about conjuring away classes, whether in rhetoric or policies. The towns will be run, above all, for the benefit of the poor.

As Luiza Erundina said, referring to the *faveleros*' (slum-dwellers) squatting on land in order to build homes, "The right to housing takes precedence over private property." Or, as Olivio Dutra, mayor of Porto Alegre and national president of the PT, said: "You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs. That is why you cannot govern a city for the benefit of the people without running up against quite clearly defined economic interests and groups. The real-estate speculators who hold tracts of land without using them, owners of mass transit, of construction and of large commercial centers will undoubtedly be the first affected."

Centers of fundamental economic importance

It is true that the PT won in the big capital cities where the population is most concentrated, but it also carried centers of a fundamental economic importance. These included São Bernardo, which has the highest industrial concentration of any city in the world, and is the trade-union bastion of the PT; Santo Andres, the dormitory city where many workers live; Santos, the major Brazilian port; Campinas, location of one of the biggest Brazilian refineries and bastion of the oil workers' union. The mayor who was just elected there is Jaco Bitar, a historic oil workers' union leader, a founding member and leader of both the PT and the CUT.

The PT also won in Diadema, where the incumbent mayor was re-elected. Diadema was one of the three cities where the PT



won last time, and the only one where the PT's policies were really applied. The population showed its awareness of this, as it did also in a negative sense in the other two cities, where the PT lost its mayors.

In Diadema, the PT followed a policy of serving the people. They lowered the price of public transport fares, and since the private company that held this concession refused to accept that, they took the service over, buying new buses. The city council created a people's transport council that included a representative from each neighborhood, a representative from the transport workers' union and one from the city. This council was responsible for everything concerning public transport.

Council tackles social problems

The city council set up municipal services in the *favelas*, and started immediately to build emergency housing in the most neglected neighborhoods. The materials used were made in municipal workshops, and this in itself created jobs. The council opened new schools and extended the free-meal program for children from the poorest families. It installed a waste-treatment plant, and at the beginning of the year, 50% of the people of Diadema expressed their support for the PT, an unrivalled score.

But there have also been rough spots. Thus, the former mayor of Diadema got into conflict with the PT ranks, but they were able to impose their own candidate for last November's elections, and the former mayor had to pull out. In this way the population showed that it was not voting for big names, but for democratic positions, policies, a certain conception of work, and for the party that stands for them, the PT. This is what explains the November success.

Finally, the PT's triumph in the municipal elections has a significance going beyond the 36 town councils it controls, both because of the features of these cities (size, industrial concentration, population concentration, and so on) and because of the character of the PT's proposals. These are by no means moderate, but are proposals that fundamentally challenge the existing system. ★

Brazilian parties

PMDB: Brazilian Democratic Movement Party — center-right, the ruling party.

PCB: Brazilian Communist Party — pro-Soviet.

PCdoB: Communist Party of Brazil — a split from the PCB, of Maoist origins.

PDT: Democratic Workers' Party — populist.

PDS: Social Democratic Party — right-wing.

PTB: Brazilian Labor Party — right-wing.

Fighting for a socialist São Paulo

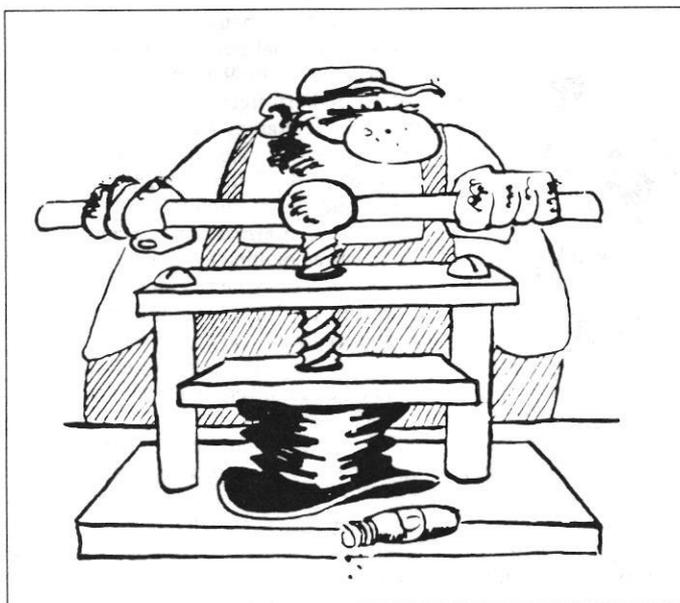
LUIZA ERUNDINA's victory is the most important element in the recent Brazilian elections. If the victories in other towns in the state of São Paulo and elsewhere were bigger, it was the fight in São Paulo itself that raged the hardest. (José Correa is a member of the PT's town executive in São Paulo.)

JOSÉ CORREA

NOT ONLY did the PT win in the capital city of this state, but also in thirteen other towns which, taken together, represent 15 million people, or half of the total population of the state and almost all of its most important urban centers. Together, these make up a gigantic urban complex with São Paulo at the center: the capital itself, with more than ten million inhabitants; Santo Andres, with 560,000 people; São Bernardo, another 560,000 people; and Diadema, with 320,000. Outside of the São Paulo metropolitan region, there is Campinas, with 900,000 inhabitants, Santos, with 460,000 people, and Piracicaba, with 250,000.

In governing the major cities in the most important state of the federation, the PT must today take up the huge challenge of consolidating a quantitatively and qualitatively larger and more politically and ideologically cohesive social base in order to become the majority party in Brazilian society and to win the support of the broad masses to its proposals.

It has managed to win a very important springboard for achieving such a goal. The PT is by far the dominant force among the 17 million inhabitants of the 39 municipalities that make up greater São Paulo, with its seven million wage earners who produce 20% of the Brazil's GNP, about \$61 billion. (In comparison, Cuba's GNP is \$15 billion,



and Nicaragua's, \$2.7 billion.) And in this region, huge social contradictions are growing: 35% of the population live in *favelas* (shanty-town slums), 50% have no sanitation, and homicide is today the major cause of death for adults.

Concretely achieving the PT's potential to become the majority party is a process that is dependent on two things. The first is the party's capacity to govern the towns satisfactorily, meeting the needs of the majority of the population, especially in São Paulo itself. The second is its ability to offer the masses a credible alternative for dealing with the crisis that is gripping Brazil.

Programme for municipal government

The following are some of the goals set down in a resolution on the municipal governments won by the PT, which was adopted on December 2, 1988 by the regional Directorate of São Paulo:

- the improvement of workers' living standards at the municipal level;
- continuing to expose the limitations of local administration, always stressing that the basic problems of the Brazilian people can never be resolved unless we put an end to capitalism and the workers take power;
- the creation of openings and channels to encourage the growing organization and direct participation at the municipal level of workers in all matters that concern them;
- support from the municipal administration to the workers' struggles against all governmental bodies of the state and the country, and against capitalism.

It is important to be pinpoint the significance of this victory even more closely. As the resolution cited above states: "The fact that the PT has won some towns does not mean that the workers have taken power in their cities, much less in their country. Power is something much broader than

that. It involves control of the essential means of production, of the state apparatus in its entirety and of the means of mass communication. All of these, as of today, remain in one way or another under the direct control of the bourgeoisie.

Confronting the economic muscle of local elites

"At the municipal level, power is largely outside of the control of the mayor's office. The economic muscle and strength of local elites, with their power of social cohesion, continue to exist, even if they were dealt a blow by the loss of their control over the municipal executive. At the level of the instruments for running local government, in practically every case we will face city councils where the majority of councillors will be in the service of the ruling class, and who will mount a furious resistance to the PT's municipal administration."

In São Paulo city, out of 53 councillors, 16 are PT, (plus two who are members of the PCB and the PCdoB, in the local "People's Parties" coalition with which the PT proposes to form a party coalition in order to govern the city.) The PSDB, with which the PT will have very difficult relations, has five council seats, and the PDT, one. This means that Luiza Erundina will have to run the city government with a council minority, and already an [opposition] bloc has been formed led by councillors Brasil Vita from the PTB, and Antonio Sampaio from the PDS.

So, there is a possibility that the PT will have to face up to a legislative blockade of its management, if the presidency of the São Paulo city council falls into the hands of a councillor from the right.

But that is only one of the difficulties that the PT will encounter. It will also face maneuverings of the capitalist sectors whose activity is linked to the public sector (bus companies, waste disposal, dumps, and so



on), as well as the pressures of the federal and state government, a media campaign and other threats.

There is an underlying logic in the whole administrative machinery of a municipality, and this is even more the case in São Paulo, with its 130,000 civil servants. These are apparatuses designed to support the accumulation of capital, auxiliaries in the management of social manpower from the bourgeoisie's point of view. They operate according to another kind of criteria than those necessary to meet the social needs of the popular classes.

So it is correct to say, as does the São Paulo Directorate's resolution, that "in this context, the social contradiction that we must face up to, and our major challenge, is to transform a political and administrative apparatus that was conceived with the aim of reproducing domination of the working class at the local level into a tool for struggle and for winning the workers' immediate and long-term demands. Taking up this challenge means forging a link between the immediate situation and strategic goals, and governing effectively without changing ourselves into administrators of capital.

"This means avoiding the dogmatism that would result, for example, if all we wanted to do was use the town hall in order to denounce capitalism. But also to avoid the pitfalls of reformism, which consist, at best, in improving the conditions for the reproduction of labour power at the local level. In sum, this means governing in the framework of capitalism, but at the same time making the PT municipal administration into an important element in building up the strength of the workers with a perspective of going beyond capitalism."

At the head of the São Paulo city government, the PT will need to accomplish its goals through a combination of solutions to various problems. The first and most urgent of these is that of the budget left behind by the preceding administration, (Jânio Quadros, PTB.) Only 10% of local taxes stay in the hands of the municipal government — the rest goes to the state and federal governments. For 1988, the budget was \$2,217 billion. This is close to the budget in Chile under Allende in 1972 (\$2.5 billion), but it is wholly inadequate to meet

the needs of this metropolis.

The municipal debt is around a billion dollars, and for 1989 a deficit of 25% is expected, and that figure will rise even higher if the budget Sarney has submitted to congress is passed, since it provides for payment of 25% of the foreign debt of the states and the municipalities. Moreover, there are also arrears on current-account payments amounting to \$210 million. Most of this is owed to the five big public works companies with which the mayor had signed contracts, and there is no way out of this obligation. In addition, there are arrears owed to the contractors who pick up the garbage.

What is more, the state government is to throw back onto the municipal government a part of the services and expenses in sectors today still blocked by the state, such as health and education. A large part of the budget is also committed to current expenses, mainly wages, and there is the danger that it will be further drained by the "arrangements" that Jânio Quadros has left behind. The PT, therefore, is going to find itself in a more than precarious budgetary situation with this debt time-bomb for the first year of its administration.

Administrative reform is essential

An administrative reform, involving the elimination of various secretariats and a redefinition of the role of others, modifying the functioning of the administration as a whole, and a real decentralization of the municipal "machine", is essential to achieve a genuine reordering of priorities. Such a reform, among others, will only be possible in the intermediate term, to the extent that the PT takes in hand the reins of administration, plans a new structure and breaks the existing pattern of inertia.

It will also be necessary in the medium term to prevent the basic needs of the popular sectors — such as transport, education, health and housing — from continuing to be a source of profits for the capitalist groups. Effectively nationalizing these services means ensuring that they function efficiently at an adequate level of productivity. This is the necessary precondition for undertaking a political and ideological struggle against neo-liberal ideas and those who say that state enterprises are inefficient.

The effectiveness of the PT's public administration will be intimately linked to the mechanisms of popular control and participation it is able to institute at the municipal level. This applies to the problems of democratizing the running of the state at the municipal level, both through the direct involvement of the population in administration and through institutional channels for mass participation. (This will mean either in specific sectors — councils for health care, parents of high-school students, transport users, or more generally community or

budget councils — and through the participation of state employees in setting objectives for state enterprises and public investment.)

The democratization of information, "administrative transparency," is an essential precondition. Cooption of leaderships and the development of paternalistic methods of work are a major risk for the PT today. But it is also in these areas that it has accumulated the most experience.

The most important question the PT has to answer is undoubtedly that of "people's councils." Organizing the masses of working people of the cities on a territorial basis independently of the state is a challenge of historic dimensions that the PT has to meet. Discussion is needed in the party about its independent character, definition of its role in the "area of civil society," as well as a careful description of the forms of people's organization suited to democratizing the running of the state.

Making such an organization into a real power, an organ for mobilization and struggle based on direct democracy, a "fourth branch of government," will depend therefore on several elements:

- the level of activity and experience of major sectors of the mass movement;
- the possibility of centralizing the various people's movements that are today limited to sectors in the regions;
- the compatibility of these movements with possible forms of participation directed toward democratization of administration, which tend to become the political reference point for masses in struggle;
- the capacity of the PT administration (without ceasing to expand its education, because it alone has the materials means for this), to preserve a real, and not merely formal, independence from the councils.

PT must not neglect party-building

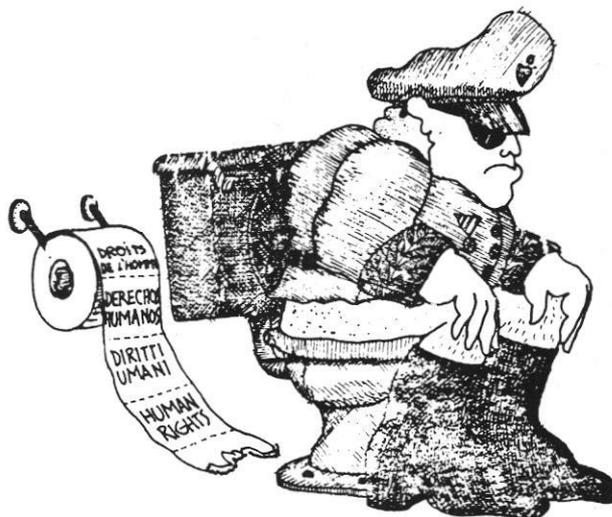
Another question is that of assuring an institutional cover capable of offering a formal legitimacy and of integrating all these elements in a more permanent way. The new municipal charter that the city council is to draft can play this role, if our proposals are already minimally implemented, and if the PT has sufficient strength to backup their adoption.

The PT has to take on all these tasks, without however neglecting the building of the party. The party cannot be allowed to decline or to merge with the PT municipal administrations. This also involves beefing up an activist intervention, which has fallen back a bit lately among the mass of members.

The process that is opening up is rather complex. The stakes are enormous, as are the dangers. But the possibilities opened up mean that it is worth taking these risks and throwing ourselves into the struggle for the victory of the PT administrations, especially in São Paulo. ★

Murder under the cover of "democracy"

A FOURTH Internationalist leader in Colombia, René González, gave the following interview to Gerry Foley in Europe at the end of 1988. Colombian Fourth Internationalists have recently joined A Luchar ("To Struggle"), a broad militant left organization (see IV 141).



HAS THERE been any letup in the dirty war, since the proposals for "dialogue"?

No, it has intensified over recent months. There have been dozens of massacres this year. The paramilitaries are going into towns and slaughtering the people who live there with impunity. On average, 40 to 50 people have been dying in these massacres.

Besides this, there are almost five political assassinations a day, according to the exposés of Amnesty International and the international human-rights organizations. There is systematic torture and selective murder of left-wing activists and leaders.

■ Are these massacres limited to the rural areas in which fighting has been going on?

Essentially, yes. The pretext used is that these are areas of guerrilla activity. The army is directly implicated in the actions of the paramilitaries. In the last massacre, in Segovia, in the department of Antioquia, the paramilitaries had to go through an area totally controlled by the army [see IV 153].

■ Has the growing importance of the drug traffic and local gangsterism had an effect on the dirty war?

In the most recent period, the income from the drug traffic has been decisive for the Colombian bourgeoisie. The recycling of dollars from this trade has enabled them to pay the foreign debt and maintain a more or less acceptable situation, in the context of the acute economic crisis in Latin America.

But this is leading to severe erosion of values and the judicial institutions of the state.

Moreover, the Mafiosi are buying great expanses of land. So, there is a collaboration between landlords and Mafiosi in driving peasants off these lands.

■ But why do they want to drive the peasants off the land, rather than keep them there and exploit them?

We do not yet have a real proletarianization on the land, in the sense of the buying and selling of labor power. For the moment, what these landlords are interested in is extending their land ownership. In this country, land is very important because of the income it provides and the power it brings in the political apparatus.

■ What value could these lands have without people?

The Mafia is accumulating lands and expelling the peasants from them with the idea of converting these lands into plantations. This extends to lands on which there is already an agricultural proletariat, as in the case of the banana-growing area, where there is also an alliance between Mafia capital and the banana plantation owners.

An example of the latter is the Urabá area in Antioquia, where five massacres have occurred recently. There the attacks have been directly against the workers, to prevent them from waging trade-union struggles, because they have a strong union, and to keep wages down.

■ Does the Mafia have its own armed forces?

Yes. It has its private armies. It is estimated that the Ochoa and Escobar clans in Antioquia have nearly 10,000 armed men. There are only 120,000 in the Colombian army.

■ What role has the Mafia played in the massacres?

There is no doubt that it is implicated. On the other hand, some civilian sectors of the regime have been trying to clear the government of responsibility by putting the blame on the Mafia. The Attorney

General has said that the Mafia is involved, and that these massacres have to do with the power that it is acquiring in terms of land. But despite the fact that the authorities are saying this, not a single perpetrator or mastermind of these massacres has been arrested. These groups have been operating with total immunity.

For example, after the Segovia massacre, the government used this outrage as an excuse to go deeper into debt, to buy more arms, more airplanes, more helicopters, more guns. It beefed up its reactionary system of laws still more. Now anybody can be arrested on suspicion, and there are no legal safeguards.

■ What about the urban areas? How extensive is repression there?

In the cities, the murders are more selective. There have not been any massacres. This reflects the peculiarity of the country. The left is strong in the countryside, but still very weak in the cities. In the countryside, there are big mobilizations and social bases that the left can influence. But it is not like that in the cities. We have a labor movement that since the 1940s has put a straitjacket on rank-and-file trade unionists. It is not based on industrial unions, and in fact the labor legislation in force firmly casts it in a craft-union, economist mold.

There is another aspect to this. The economic crisis has not yet hit rock bottom, with the result that the intermediate layers in the cities have not yet been polarized between the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary camps. They are holding to a neutral attitude, believing that their individual problems can be solved in the context of dependent capitalism.

The shantytowns are growing constantly because of the strong flow from the countryside to the cities. (In 1960, 70% of the population lived in rural areas; today the percentage has been reversed, with 70% living in cities.) These immigrants are very poor, and maintain many values of the rural communities.

This is true also of the new proletarian layers in the shanty-town belt around the cities. But nonetheless the country has been undergoing a gradual process of urbanization, and we cannot change the relationship of forces with the regime from the

countryside. It is obvious that we have to change it from the cities.

One of big discussions that the Colombian left is having now is about how to overcome the unevenness between the countryside and the cities. Because, as I said, in the cities, the workers' movement is still very much in the background, and has not waged any major political or solidarity struggles in recent years, nor any major industrial struggles that might provide a national outlet.

There is also a worrying development. Sectors of workers who consider themselves relatively well paid and have legal channels for negotiations are gradually separating themselves off from a population that is sinking deeper into poverty as a result of the effects of the foreign debt and the economic crisis. The problem is how to prevent a gap opening up between a movement of relatively well-paid workers — in comparison with the standard of living of the Colombian people — and the population as a whole.

■ **What has been the recent experience in concrete trade-union struggles?**

This discussion is sharpening, because recently a general strike was called to demand the right to life [i.e., not to be murdered] and better wages and social security. It did not produce the expected results. Only 10% of the workers struck. This outcome was especially grave, because since November 1986 a process of unification had been going on that embraced the 80% of the Colombian union movement. It included the trade-union forces led by the Communist Party, A Luchar, the independent (Maoist) unions and the old CSTC, which was the Communist Party's old confederation, as well as a fringe of the right-wing union movement.

Of course, this unification has not yet changed the structures of the union movement. The labor law and the regime represent a strong pressure for maintaining craft

unions. One of the Colombian bourgeoisie's main concerns for three decades has been to prevent the emergence of industrial unions. Even when unification processes develop, as has happened among workers in the electrical and banking industries, the regime will not accept united negotiations or a single list of demands. The relationship of forces with the regime has to be changed in order for industrial unions to operate in Colombia.

But the CUT [United Confederation of Workers] did manage to unite 80% of Colombian trade-unions in a single confederation. So, we had a country suffering from impoverishment and from lamentable conditions from the standpoint of human rights, in which human life is worth nothing, and a confederation uniting 80% of the union movement, and so everyone thought that the strike was going to produce major results. But that is not what happened.

The government went onto a war footing, claiming that what was involved in the strike was the trade-union arm of the guerrillas. It clamped down with military control over the cities, and arrested and murdered union leaders in the days leading up to the action. In the electrical workers' union in Cartagena, for example, the army came and took away 200 to 300 workers. Moreover, it staged an ideological terror operation directed at the population, which of course had a big effect on the intermediate layers and the hesitating sections of the trade-union movement.

■ **What impact did this have on the thinking of those fighting in the countryside?**

Among the guerrillas, there is a sector that is considering whether it might not be a good idea to resume dialogue that would enable it to gain a certain space and a certain letup in the army offensive and in the dirty war in order to try to get more of a hearing within the mass movement. Other sections, on the other hand, are more in-

clined to wage a military offensive in an attempt to change the relationship of forces in the cities.

Such arguments have been going on despite the fact that the armed movement has had a rather stable united front of action in recent years — the so-called Coordinadora Simón Bolívar, which represents the entire armed movement in Colombia.

The regime is not insisting on dialogue, and does not have a big interest in it. It sees that nothing is happening in the cities, and so has nothing to worry about on that front. On the other hand, it sees the massacres and assassinations as a means by which it can continue to liquidate the left.

Proposals for dialogue were put forward in the early fall of 1988 by the government, but in totally unacceptable conditions, showing that the government had no real interest in this. What it proposed was a timetable for surrender, in return for amnesty. It said nothing about the paramilitary gangs nor about the alliance between the Mafia and the paramilitaries, nor about the violations of human rights. And this is when even spokespersons for the regime publicly admit that there are reasons for the existence of the guerrillas.

We think that at this time it is important to carry on open political activity, that is, to put forward proposals so that the country will know what sort of alternative A Luchar offers, in opposition to the line of the Communist Party and the policies of the bourgeois and reformist forces. The problem is that the country does not have a political culture. Its political life has been totally dominated by a very backward form of electoralism, buying and selling votes, patronage. It has lived under the shadow of a very powerful militarism and clericalism. So, we think that it is important to seek mechanisms for dialogue in the means of communication, despite all the obstacles.

The poverty of the people alone, or the sharpening of the economic crisis, will not by themselves produce a change, opening people's minds to another type of project.

■ **What sort of political response has there been to the killings and massacres?**

A much more stable left united front is being discussed now. But the problem is that every organization has different tactics. For example, the CP is staking a lot on electoral and parliamentary activity. It insists that this is the way, through slowly widening the possibilities for constitutional action. So far it has had 700 killed in the period from the start of Belisario Betancur's truce until now.

However, it has not taken an aggressive line in response or tried to push for mobilization, but followed a sterile course of trying to solve this problem by constitutional and parliamentary means. In the last elections, it made deals with the most corrupt fringes of the Liberal and Conservative parties, the traditional bourgeois parties. Its excuse was that this was the



way to get more posts in the provincial bodies and the national parliament, and that this would offer them more civilian and institutional cover against the dirty war.

Obviously, this policy is disastrous. It is not just that more and more social and left activists are being killed, but this strategy is not producing any result in the mass movement or changes in people's consciousness. A lot of people in the government respond to questions from organizations such as Amnesty International about attacks on the CP by saying, "In fact, these people made political alliances with us," that is with the government party in the last elections.

On the other hand, A Luchar comes from a very ultra-left tradition. Our joining the movement has served to give impetus to the discussion that has been going among their ranks about conducting more open political activity.

They have operated according to the conception that the political problems could be solved with very general and very ultra-left rhetoric. What we are trying to do is work out slogans that open the way for unity in action, and help the CP's ranks to see that their leadership is going about things the wrong way.

In strikes also, the CP's approach is to try to hide behind the trade-union bureaucracy, and it makes a lot of concessions to the bureaucrats. A Luchar operates differently.

■ Is A Luchar strong in the unions?

Yes. It has more and more of a presence in the unions. But before going into that, I should say that the other big left force in the unions, the PCml, the so-called Popular Front, oscillates between the positions of the CP and A Luchar.

In the past period, A Luchar has been growing in the union movement. It has five out of the 30 leaders of the CUT. If there were an election among the ranks, we could probably get about ten of the 30 members of the Executive. In the regional leaderships of the CUT, A Luchar has a lot of strength. It has majorities in the leadership councils. It is also involved in the agrarian unions and the cooperatives. It does work among the Indians. A Luchar reflects the Colombian left, in that it is mainly rural-based.

■ What is A Luchar's attitude to elections?

Up until now, it has maintained an abstentionist policy. Discussion has not opened up on elections, but it will next year when there will be elections. For the moment, the discussion is centering on whether or not it is legitimate to move into constitutional openings instead of what policy we should have in the electoral front or for these institutional openings. In a country where it is so difficult to carry on open political activity, there is a certain justification for this.

A LUCCHAR

For example, about 15 months ago, the CP presidential candidate, Jaime Pardo Leal, was murdered. He headed the best presidential campaign the CP has ever run. He represented not just a Communist record but also a trade-union background. He had a lot of prestige in the country, and followed a policy of class independence as a candidate. Then, the CP changed this policy once Pardo was dead for a policy of regional alliances with the two capitalist parties. This had a big impact on A Luchar.

■ What sort of internal political life does A Luchar have?

It is planning to hold a cadre school in January to discuss many things linked to the situation in Colombia, but also from the standpoint of the Marxist classics and previous revolutions (Central America, the Russian revolution, and so on). The discussion is to take up the question of tactics and strategy, the relationship between constitutional and non-constitutional action, between open and conspiratorial struggle. In other words, a series of classical discussions on Marxism, not in an academic way, but rather in relation to reality and the concrete needs in the country.

Our press has been regularized. It is a weekly paper. The idea has been raised also of devoting special pages to ideological and cultural questions. The left has to reflect a lot about the country, its history and the international context, which is quite difficult for us. What we are seeing in Latin America is a workers' movement that it not getting any results, and no results are foreseeable in the intermediate term.

The image you get from the media is that US public opinion is totally right wing. I say that not because I think it but that is what the capitalist- and imperialist-controlled media project. It seems that the election of Bush is practically a third term for Reagan, that what is coming is a much more offensive policy in Central America, that the Nicaraguans' economic problems will increase. In the Eastern bloc countries, the bureaucracy still seems to be strong, controlling the situation. Among Latin American left leaderships, including that of A Luchar, there are illusions about Gorbachev.

At the same time, Latin America is riddled with economic crisis; there are phenomena such as the PT in Brazil [see page 13], mass mobilizations in the Dominican Republic, a crisis in Peru. There seem to be possibilities for trying to achieve coordination among the mass and trade-union movements and also among revolutionaries.

■ Is there a distinct Stalinist influence in the organization?

No. The problem is rather the general authoritarian tradition in the country. These traditions also have an effect on the left. But the leadership of A Luchar does not have the concept of a monolithic party in the society they want to build. The organization's program in fact talks about political pluralism in the state that is to be built, and mass democracy. It doesn't talk about soviets, but that is another discussion, and we are not pushing it.

■ Are there prejudices about Trotskyism?

First of all, there is not much knowledge about it. In the situation I spoke of, the workers' movement in the advanced capitalist countries and the anti-bureaucratic opposition in the Eastern bloc countries do not seem to be a real force on which you could rely. They don't see these movements as being able to provide material support and other needs. From this point of view, we seem to them to be not very realistic, to be dreamers.

We have discussed the international aspect more in connection with proposals for Latin-American coordinating bodies, that the continents needs some kind of unity, that we cannot accept a situation where the imperialists have a single policy regarding the debt and the masses and revolutionary leaderships do not have a united policy.

■ What is the most pressing international need today?

There has to be more understanding of our situation. Both social democrats and Communists hide behind the fact that there is formal democracy in Colombia. When you knock on the doors of governments and governmental bodies, neutral European countries, even Eastern bloc countries, they see that we have a democracy and not a dictatorship, that this is not Chile. Bodies like Amnesty International make exposures, but there is no concrete mechanism for following them up. Such outrageous massacres as the one in Segovia are not reported in the European press.

However, the fact is that the situation in Colombia is worse than the one in Chile. At least in Chile there was a plebiscite. There are far less murders in Chile than in Colombia, there is far less persecution. But in Europe, people do not talk about Colombia. If international public opinion were aware of what is really happening here, I am sure that the internal situation would be a bit more favorable, and if international public opinion were mobilized against it, the situation would be much more favorable. ★

People's front or national front?

DEMOCRATIC activists throughout the Soviet Union have been involved in forming "People's Fronts," using the precedent of organizations that exist in several East European countries and are supposed to offer recognized channels for political activity by non-Party forces. Only in the Baltic republics, however, have these formations yet taken on a real mass character. They are therefore of special interest for democratic activists in other parts of the Soviet Union.

The following article summarizes reactions of the observers from the Moscow People's Front to the constituent congresses of the Baltic People's Fronts held last fall. Its author is one of the major leaders of the Moscow group.

BORIS KAGARLITSKI

EVERYONE was waiting for this event. The congress of the Estonian People's Front scheduled for October 1988 was to be a turning point in the development of the social movement, and not just in Estonia and the Baltic. For the first time in the post-Stalin epoch, an independent political organization in the Soviet Union had the possibility to declare its existence openly and officially, to hold a constituent congress and to appeal to the society through the state mass media.

The rise of the People's Front had begun in Estonia back in the spring of 1988, when a sharp struggle developed in this republic, as in other parts of the Soviet Union, around the election of delegates to the Nineteenth Conference of the CPSU. However, while in Russia it was not possible even to get the most unpopular delegates recalled, in Estonia a change in the party leadership was announced even before the beginning of the conference.

The local delegation got a send-off to Moscow from a rally of a hundred thousand *perestroika* supporters on the Singing Field¹ in Tallin, where the new leaders of the republic were called on to fight for radical changes in Moscow and for real independence for Estonia. The Initiative Group for the People's Front was at the center of all the events; all hopes were bound up with it. A journalist dubbed this enormous rally "the singing revolution." And in fact, everything was what you would expect from a revolution: mass enthusiasm, a

change in leadership, the formation of new mass organizations.

On the streets of Tallin and other cities, white, black and blue national flags — a crime against the state to display not long ago — were openly unfurled. The Moscow intelligentsia was discussing the "national liberation movement in Estonia"; the Western press was talking about the "Estonian phenomenon"; Soviet papers pointed to the republic as an example of "successful *perestroika*."

Greater independence from Moscow

In the meantime, the Estonian phenomena had another side, which at first was not apparent to outside observers. The rapid success of the People's Front was facilitated by evident sympathy from an important part of the local party and economic apparatus, which was trying to achieve greater independence from the central authorities in Moscow. In this way, the People's Front became an important factor in the inter-party power struggle.

The Front could put forward demands that the local *apparatchiki* fully supported but so far were not prepared to call for in their own name. Finally, it could mobilize mass support, unite thousands of people around these demands — in fact win a broader mass base for a part of the local leadership than it had ever had.

Of course, the administrative apparatus

in the republic was not homogeneous. Together with the contradiction between the central and republic authorities, there was the traditional conflict between "genuine" and "Siberian" Estonians. Not trusting the local cadres, in the 1940s Stalin preferred to mould the administrative apparatus from people who had no experience of living in the conditions of the "bourgeois" republic.

Estonian settlements in Siberia, which had existed from Czarist times, offered an ideal tool for solving this problem. On the one hand, "national cadres" (some of whom barely spoke Estonian) came forward, and on the other the local bureaucracy was freed from the heritage of "the old society."

It is not surprising that as "genuine" Estonians were brought into the life of the bureaucracy, competition increased between the two groups. The "new arrivals" relied on support from Moscow, which as before saw them as reliable executors of its will. The "indigenous" cadres, on the other hand, sought support among the intelligentsia, stressing their liberal and patriotic orientation.

The "singing revolution"

The "singing revolution" was made possible because the founders of the People's Front quickly got access to publications in the Estonian language and later to radio and TV. Support for the People's Front from high-placed members of the party leadership, including the secretary for ideology, I. Toome, was no secret to anyone.

The People's Front activists in Moscow and Leningrad from the outside realized the contradictions of the "Estonian miracle." Nonetheless, the events in the Baltic gave grounds for optimism. As if there were not strong national-bureaucratic tendencies, people talked about a mass, democratic movement becoming part of the general process of political transformations in the Soviet Union.

The draft program worked out by the Estonian People's Front experts contained a whole series of radical reform demands designed to widen civil liberties, form constitutional government and assure democratic elections to the Soviets.

"The aim of the People's Front," the draft says, "is to create an Estonia in which all citizens will feel free and secure." While defending the historic rights of Estonians as the indigenous nation on the territory of the republic, the authors of the draft stressed that "it is inadmissible to violate the democratic rights of citizens of other nationalities." (*Vestnik Narodnogo Fronta* ["Newsletter of the People's Front"] 4, 1988.)

The Front's economic program was clearly influenced by the ideas of Scandina-

1. The site of the annual festival of folk choirs. This event was one of the major institutions created by the Estonian "national awakening" of the last century.



Graffiti covered fence in Tallin
(Photo: Göran Jacobsson)

vian social democracy. On the one hand, it talked about "free development of cooperatives, individual and private property" and about "constitutional guarantees" for private enterprise. On the other hand, it talked about strengthening the social security, health and educational systems, about state guarantees of minimum living standards for all citizens and upholding the principles of social justice.

In the opinion of the draft program's authors, transition to the market economy should be accompanied by maintaining a major role for the state. In fact, in many respects the positions of the ruling bodies of the republic should be reinforced by the transfer to them of rights formerly belonging to Moscow. It was proposed that administrative levers should be left to the republic authorities for intervening in the economy as regards prices, wages and so on. Finally, the draft program of the People's Front talked about the need for decentralization, the smaller-scale organization of state sector enterprises. There was not a word about self-management of workers' collectives or the participation of workers in economic decisions.

A possible precursor to common success

Although the interests of the republic ministries and authorities were unquestionably one of the major factors considered in the formulation of this document, it could be said that the Front ideologues remain on the positions of democratic socialism and

defend the same conception of social development as the moderate wing of the Western left.

The Moscow People's Front, in which the influence of Marxist ideas is much stronger, naturally could not endorse every point of the Estonian program, but it was prepared to solidarize with it on a whole series of positions. Therefore, when a delegation of Moscovites got into the train, on their way to take part in the Estonian constituent congress, the mood was every buoyant. The expected success for the Estonians seemed a prologue to common success.

Three and a half thousand delegates at congress

For the people from Moscow, Leningrad, Yaroslavl, Minsk and others from "informal" organizations, representatives of many People's Front organizing committees from the "Slavic" republics, the grandeur and triumphant mood of the Estonian congress were a real shock. The perfect order in the enormous hall, with three and a half thousand delegates attentively listening to dozens of speakers, was a radical contrast to what we are used to seeing at home, although the activists from Kuibyshev and Yaroslavl already had an experience of large rallies, and the Moscow and Leningrad people had held more than one "gathering" or "conference."

The introductory speech by the leader of the Estonian Front, E. Savisaara, was carefully balanced. He quite clearly hinted at

the need for transition to a multi-party system, noting at the same time that "hastiness" on this question was "unacceptable." He appealed for dialogue with the Russian-speaking population of the republic. He criticized Stalinists, nationalists and even technocrats, advising the Front to "avoid the policy of ultimatums." (*Vestnik Narodnogo Fronta* 11, 1988.)

He spoke quite calmly and soberly, aiming for the least controversial formulations, so that the Russians, who are used to impassioned and sharp discussions and a rally spirit soon found his speech boring. However, quite quickly we started to understand that underneath the calm flow of the congress there were real passions. The speakers who following Savisaara, put forward one demand after another, of which only a few concerned social questions. Despite the appeal for dialogue with the Russian residents of the republic, the representatives of the Front took an extremely sharp position toward those who they contemptuously called "immigrants."

There was talk about the possibility of pushing the Russians off the territory of the republic. Some of the means proposed were not distinguished by their originality. It was proposed to establish republic citizenship, available only to those who could speak the Estonian language, who had lived in Estonian no less than 10 years and "were loyal to the republic"(!).

Closing of big industrial enterprises with a big majority of Russian workers was

discussed. At the same time, it was proposed that every Russian who left be given 10,000 rubles "traveling expenses." The republic could get this sum quite easily in every case because for every Russian worker brought to Estonia, 16,000 rubles is paid to the republic from the central budget.

No compromises for the sake of national equality were granted. There was to be only one official language, Estonian. The 40 per cent of the population who use the Russian language were to be denied the right to official recognition of their language. At the same time, it was stressed that "every Estonian's goal is an independent Estonia." (*Vestnik Narodnogo Fronta* 10, 1988), that "we want to be like Finland and Sweden."

Second-class citizens

However, as is well known, Finland does not deny its Swedish-speaking minority equal language rights, while the Estonian national movement clearly left its Russian neighbors in the republic only one choice, either get out or become second-class citizens.

It is quite clear that what was involved in this case was by no means the extremes that are inevitable in mass organizations. Official circles in the republic quite clearly let it be understood that they held a similar view. When the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of Estonia formed a commission on language problems, it included only three Russians out of 20 members. As could be expected, the conclusions of the official commission differed little from the proposals expressed in the People's Front Congress. As *Izvestia* admitted, the republic authorities were unable to overcome "the distrust of the Russian-speaking population." (*Izvestia*, October 18, 1988.)

In turn, the growth of Estonian nationalism provoked a corresponding response among Russians and also other national minorities. In Tartu, the "Internationalist Movement" was formed, headed by P. Kogan and the Siberian Estonian A. Saj. The leaders of the Inter-Movement announced that they were prepared to support the basic principles of the People's Front's economic and political program. But they spoke out categorically against any form of discrimination against the Russian-speaking population.

In the documents of the Inter-Movement, it was stressed that the Russian-speaking community is the overwhelming majority of the population in the north-eastern part of the republic, and any policy harmful to the interests of the Russians would paralyze the economic development of this region of the country. In many respects, the program of the Inter-Movement looked much more democratic than the People's

Front program. Put to the fore was the idea of equal civil and cultural rights and multinationalism.

It was said that the Inter-Movement, with its democratic slogans and readiness for dialogue with the People's Front, should become the "lesser evil" even for Estonians. If the Internationalist Movement failed, the vacuum would be filled by outright Russian nationalism. This was clearly expressed in the documents of the "Internationalist Front," which recognized the danger of "chauvinist and extremist organi-



zations" developing among the Russians. (*Vpered*, October 1, 1988.)

Nonetheless, it has to be recognized that for all the democratic expressions in its program, the IF leaders were seen by public opinion as conservatives. Their statements revealed a clear nostalgia for the "stability" of bygone times, when the rights of the non-indigenous population were securely guaranteed. Arnold Saj, who met with the Moscow People's Front delegation during its stay at the congress, impressed them as a completely honest but unquestionably conservative person.

Equality of nations and languages

A significant part of the Russian technical intelligentsia and workers did not unite around the Inter-Movement but around the "United Council of Workers' Collectives." The impetus for the formation of this organization came from a speech by the manager of the Tallin factory Dviagatel.² The demands in this case were the most elementary — equality of nations and equality of the two official languages, Estonian and Russian.

Under pressure from the republic leadership and after negotiations with moderate representatives of the People's Front, the Dviagatel management was ready to retreat from its initial formulations, but it did not get the support of the workers this time.

About 80 per cent of those employed in the factory spoke out for continuing the fight. Both the workforce and the management in many other plants started to come out in support of Dviagatel's "declaration."

The "United Council" that arose in this way recognized that "the interests of the indigenous population have priority," but at the same time it categorically declared that it would not accept any "violation of human rights" and demanded the "adoption of laws protecting national minorities from encroachments." (*Izvestia*, October 18, 1988.) Behind this impressive unanimity of the workforces and managements lay not only national but economic interests.

Between the devil and the deep blue sea

The factories in question are mainly under all-Union control, produce for the Russian market, and have links with dozens of suppliers and buyers in all the republics. According to the managers themselves, "Estonianization" of the business could turn into a business catastrophe."

The situation worsened, and what happened in the sessions of the congress did not calm passions. A representative of the People's Front organization from Kohtla-Järve [a predominantly Russian region of Estonia] said openly from the platform that she had "become afraid." Russian activists in the Front found themselves between the devil and the deep blue sea. Another victim of the nationalist euphoria was the left wing of the Front. Rem Bljum, a Marxist philosopher from Tartu, one of the founders of the first People's Front initiative group in the republic, was not even elected to the congress presiding committee.

"Did you notice that none of the delegates to the congress used the word 'comrade' in their speeches?" he asked the distraught Russian guests. "That is symptomatic." It was not only the traditionally fairly weak Marxist current in the Front that was weakened. Even social-democratic ideas lost influence. Many economic proposals put forward by delegates and mechanically included in the conception of "republic self-financing," of the "Estonian miracle," amounted to barricading the Estonian economy off from the all-Union market, reducing economic ties with the other republics to a minimum, looking forward to great achievements by Estonia on the foreign — that is, Western — market.

None of the ideologues of the Front doubted that such successes would be magnificent, although not one proposed even the most general sort of ideas about a future foreign-trade policy. In the words of an economist from the Moscow People's

2. A locomotive factory founded in 1893 and traditionally a major center of Estonian industry.

Front, V. Ponomarev, "This program is neither right nor left, it is simply incompetent."

This was a peculiar sort of congress, and this strangeness struck not only the Russian guests but also the foreign journalists. Almost no one criticized the leaders of the Front. There were practically no strategic or tactical debates. Only individual formulations in the program were discussed. Candidates for the leadership of the People's Front, without a secret ballot, were automatically included in the Council of Plenipotenciaries, although some of them got very few votes. The newly-elected Administration and Council of Plenipotenciaries came onto the stage with musical accompaniment and surrounded by beautiful girls in national costumes. Portraits of Savisaara and the "number two man in the People's Front," Marju Lauristan, appeared constantly in the pages of the *Vestnik Narodnogo Fronta*, which came out daily during the congress. All this was reminiscent of theater, although the director seemed to be quite naive.

Going back on the train, the mood of the Moscow guests was, unfortunately, not so happy as it had been on the way there. The differences between the Moscow and the Estonian people's fronts stood out, not only on the level of programmatic formulations (more "left" less "right"), but on the level of political thinking. Almost all the guests at the Estonian congress returning to the capital had very mixed feelings.

Mass meetings and a real confrontation of ideas

On the one hand, they saw mass meetings in Tallin, a real confrontation of ideas and programs and legal activity by several unofficial mass organizations. Along with the 60,000-member People's Front and the 12,000-strong Inter-Movement, "Greens" are also active, as well as a small national independence party. All this testified to a real democratization, which would have been unthinkable without the successes of the People's Front. But on the other hand, it was hard not to see new dangers, anti-democratic tendencies created by the agitation of national feelings, provincialism, and at times the incompetence of many People's Front leaders.

A similar picture took shape a few weeks later for the Moscow activists who attended the congress of the Latvian Front. After they returned home, they told a meeting of the Moscow People's Front: "It was the same as in Estonia, only much worse organized."

Although radical resolutions on social justice, civil rights and democratization, were adopted, Resolution 8 "on limiting immigration" characterized the Russian incomers as "great masses of unskilled and uneducated people" threatening the vital interests of the Latvian people. The resolution said that "only permanent residents of

the republic" should be allowed to study in Latvia's educational institutions and that all People's Front organizations should take an "intransigent position on this question."

Concern and then protests from Russians

Of course, such statements aroused first concern, and then protests among Russians, especially since there was a certain jarring note in the congress. One of the speakers called for erecting monuments throughout the country to the pre-war dictator Ulmanis, and another said that the German occupiers were not as bad as they had been made out.

On October 14, the organizing committee of the Latvian International Front was set up. It included representatives from 154 institutes and enterprises in Riga, Liepaja, Česis and Kraslava.

On October 16, in the program entitled *Labvakar* ["Good Evening"], a leaflet was read from an association called "Slavs," appealing to Russians to go into the streets on October 22 and "stand up" to the Latvians.

The appeal from the "Slavs" was not supported by the Inter-Front, which called on its supporters to "go about your daily business on October 22 and don't hold 'counter-demonstrations' and 'counter-rallies', don't play into the hands of provocateurs." (*Sovietskaya Latvia*, October 10, 1988.) Against the background of provocative agitation by the "Slavs", the Inter-Front looked like a moderate and constructive movement. But the confrontation between the Latvian and Russian communities was already developing in accordance with the usual laws of such situations.

In this context, the congress of the Lithuanian movement for *perestroika*, "Sajudis" (the local equivalent of the People's Front) was distinguished by realism and moderation in its national demands. Resolution 7 on inter-ethnic relations was formulated from the start in such a way as to reassure the non-indigenous population, stressing its equal position in the republic.

It should be noted that the Lithuanians have less reason to worry. In their country, they are the overwhelming majority. Moreover, the Russian, Jewish and Polish communities have never formed a whole, and therefore have no possibility of competing with the Lithuanians. Anti-Russian and anti-Polish leaflets posted in the Vilnius central square were torn up by People's Front activists and condemned as "provocative" during the congress.

Nonetheless, national enthusiasm reigned at the Sajudis congress as well. One after another, speakers gave pretty, poetic but rather abstract speeches about "our native Lithuania." Before the opening of the congress, the official Lithuanian leadership decided to restore the old national flag,

which was raised on the ancient Gediminas tower. Soon after this, the newly-elected party leader, A. Brazauskas, to the general rejoicing of Sajudis activists, announced that the old cathedral in Vilnius was being returned to the Catholic Church.

During the congress, a holiday atmosphere reigned in the city. People walked through the streets carrying the national flag and singing national songs. In the evening in Cathedral Square, national festivities began, and fireworks exploded over Gediminas tower. The congress was broadcast over radio and TV, and there were loudspeakers in the streets around which people constantly crowded, wanting to hear what was going on at the congress. No one showed the least ill-feeling toward Russians. What is more, during the congress Sajudis activists and Moscow representatives were able to form the closest comradesly relations.

Nonetheless, raising the national flag over the capital was easier than solving the real problems. The abstractness and strident tone of the Sajudis' program may have helped it rally the broadest layers of the population, but this is also its weakness.

In turn, the authorities immediately felt the vulnerability of the movement and did everything possible, calling for dialogue and cooperation, to assure that it would limit itself to symbolic gestures.

"We cannot rely on anyone but ourselves"

A representative from Kaunas, the worker activist K. Uokas, told us about this bitterly. The authorities answered Sajudis' slogans with slogans, with appeals for loyalty to the fatherland, vows of loyalty to our native Lithuania, with symbolic demands, symbolic gestures.

Although the Sajudis' leaders often talked about their movement's socialist option, they could not offer the delegates to the conference a strategy of their own for developing socialism in Lithuania, and in fact left the initiative to the new party leadership, which also could not offer anything concrete.

In any case, the Lithuanian movement was occupied primarily with its own problems. A member of the initiative group, Arvidas Juozaitis, told the people from Moscow openly that "Russian problems do not interest us." Thus, the dreams of many Moscow activists that the Baltic fronts would be locomotives that would "pull the entire movement forward" obviously did not come true.

"We cannot rely on anyone but ourselves," the philosopher Mikhail Malyutin snapped, summing up the results of the discussions in the Moscow left: "With all the weaknesses of the Moscow People's Front, we at least have one advantage — we can learn the lessons of other people's mistakes." ★



"It was as if the entire Estonian people had been lined up and every fourth person shot down"

A time of horrors

THE ESTONIAN-language press came under sharp attack in *Pravda* on December 3. (See IV 155, January 23, 1989.) The following article came under the heaviest fire. It is from the November issue of *Vikekaar*, a "literary and social-political journal" of the Estonian writers' union.

The full text of this article has a special interest for two reasons. First, it indicates what most upsets the official Soviet observers of the developments in Estonia, since there was other material in the same issue of the magazine that represented more fundamental political challenges to the official justifications of the Soviet regime but did not draw fire. Secondly, the article offers a background for some of the feelings that have been surfacing in Estonia, among other things certain illusions about the pre-war regime. The article, entitled "Time of Horrors" ("*Ouduste aeg*"), was published under the rubric "Living History."

MART LAAR

NOW, AS A hundred years ago, memory has become the watchword of the ongoing renaissance. Restoring this memory to the people not only raises their sense of their own worth, their honor, but it also enables them to explain the roots of their present behavior and striving. Unless we clarify our history, it is hard to answer the standard question from non-Estonians: "Why don't you go along with us. You wanted to join us, what's eating you now? We liberated you, we gave you the shirt off our backs."

As the people come to know their history, many phenomena and periods fall into their proper places (the war of independence, the great importance of the Estonian republic for the survival of our nation, and so on). Unless this is comprehended on the so-called emotional level, it is often impossible to recognize the concrete content and importance of the facts. And the craziest thing, it seems, is that we still do not understand the extent of our own people's suffering and the horrors to which they were exposed.

We have, once and for all, to realize that there can hardly be a single family in Estonia that did not have someone sent to Siberia, that did not have someone killed, victimized or forced into exile. Over a decade, the Estonian nation lost a quarter of its people, generally the most active and

educated. What happened over this ten years [1940-1950] is as if the entire Estonian people had been lined up and every fourth person shot down, including women, children and the elderly.

The records have been locked up, or already destroyed. So there is nothing left for us but to turn to the people's memory. And we have to do this quickly, before the last people still living who know about these events, and the butchers implicated in them, go quietly to their graves.

Whole villages destroyed by Red Army

On September 22, 1988, the Estonian Historical Society [*Eesti Muinsuskaitse Selts*] announced that it was going to collect this oral history. Its aim was to get the real facts of Estonia's history, to preserve this memory for future generations, to maintain and defend our historical memory. Today, as a hundred years ago, the people respond-

ed to our appeal with moving enthusiasm, although some publications have not yet found room in their columns to report this undertaking.

With the help of a network of collaborators covering the entire country, over the past year we have received about 8,000 pages of handwritten material and 90 hours of taped reminiscences.

In the summer, six expeditions were undertaken. I would like to take the occasion here to express my thanks for everything, even the short reports from collaborators. Those who have just provided an exact list of those arrested and deported from their own villages have made a welcome contribution to preserving our history. Along with the short accounts, we have also received memoirs of 400-500 pages.

It cannot be said that it has been easy to read all the contributions. We have all seen the film about the burning of Byelorussian villages (E. Klimov's naturalistic "Come and See"), but how many know that in Estonia, according to virtually certain infor-

mation, three practically identical villages were destroyed, along with their inhabitants. And not one of them was destroyed by the Germans, but rather by the Red Army, or the soldiers of its demolition battalions.

Listening to reminiscences of the Black Sea Demolition Battalion that went on a rampage after arriving on the shores of Lake Peipus, killing or torturing to death women and children and splashing acid over very young people, I personally could not understand what the touching monument erected on the site where members of this "death patrol" were shot down was supposed mean for the younger generation. Its victims' graves were leveled after the war by bulldozers.

Very few returned from Siberian prison camps

For a long time, it has been felt that it was hard to imagine any event more terrible than the deportations of 1949. But it seems to me that the wave of arrests throughout the country at the end of 1944 and the beginning of 1945 amounted to only a slightly smaller mass deportation. And of those who went to prison camps in Siberia, only a very few returned.

Reading the reports of this total injustice, this implacable destruction of all the concepts of decency that have existed (honor, conscience, diligence, humanity, pity), about the elevation to absolute power of blood-thirsty local Rasputins, it is still hard to comprehend what happened. The torture perpetrated in the Pagari Tånava cellars and elsewhere would, in general, be hard to imagine, if I had not seen many Soviet films about Nazi torture cellars in my youth.

At the same time, we all have to understand very clearly that Estonians escaped the worst fate. Looking at the total destruction of the Crimean Tatars, we can be thankful about our own lot. And to think that we were saved from the worst by the military conflict that erupted between Hitler's Germany and Stalinist Russia on June 22, 1941. The June 14 mass deportations were supposed to be the opening of a purge. In addition to categories marked for liquidation, at least 25 per cent of the population was to be expelled. The second wave of the deportations only hit Saaremaa, which had proportionately the highest losses in Estonia.

Thus, the start of the war generally brought relief in Estonia. What happened in 1940 and 1941 had to be really terrible for the people to forget their 700-year-long hostility to the Germans, and greet them with flowers in the summer of 1941. The general inspector in the period of the German occupation, Soodla, was awarded the *Vaburisti* [Freedom Cross] for bravery in the fight against the German militia. You have to agree with the opinion of H. Vaino that this war [World War II] could hardly

be called a Fatherland War [as the Soviet authorities term it] for Estonians.

Reading all the stories written by the people (there is abundant material in the museum about the massacres during the German occupation, and the "white terror, which was quite terrible in some respects" and so on), you cannot help being left with the impression that in the handling of history up until now the sequence of events has been completely turned upside down. The origin of the bloodshed in Estonia was the forcible occupation of the country and the forcible maintenance of a regime of terror, which people opposed out of an instinct for self-preservation.

In 1941, the forest brotherhood first of all defended themselves and later their homes by force against liquidation. On the same basis, the entire people feared the worst consequences when the Soviets returned, and so Estonian soldiers fought exemplarily on the Narva line, in the Blue Mountains and in other places. Under the cover of these soldiers' last desperate struggles, tens of thousands of people escaped by sea. They cannot be blamed for that, because if they had stayed, what awaited them was arrest, deportation, execution and intellectual terror.

Recently, the question has often been raised in the press of why no one opposed this bloodiest dictatorship in human history.

There were of course those who resisted it, but until today they have been characterized as anti-Soviet elements, bandits, narrow nationalists, terrorists, Western agents and so on. But can they be blamed for not seeing anything in Soviet power but Stalinist violence and an empire of injustice?

Keeping alive the spirit of independence

Now it seems, in fact, the only ones who fought against the terror were high-school youth trained by illegal national organizations, men and women who hid in the forest for a decade and prisoners and deportees who kept alive the spirit of the period of independence in Siberia. Naturally, some of the forest people were robbers, murderers and sadists (although it was easy to blame all the crimes on the forest people), and many people who started out with "clean hands" over time turned into real human beasts. They were also hunted like beasts of the forest.

No conditions can justify inhuman acts of violence, but at the same time I cannot consider people who beat pregnant women, who nailed children to trees, who robbed and killed harmless workers to be human beings. Naturally, you could find humanity among them too, but you have to recognize that that is not exactly the way they stand out in the memory of the masses.

What distinguishes the Soviet activists killed by the forest people (many of whom, in the opinion of the local people, deserved

to be shot) from the prison guards, who were given the job of escorting a mother who, along with a few friends, was taking dead child's cobbled-together veneer coffin to the camp cemetery. It was very light, but the women were so exhausted that the smallest stones were unbearably heavy for them. They fell in the filth, they crawled, pushing the coffin slowly toward the cemetery. But the soldiers laughed and beat them with their rifle butts.

Moreover, most criminals of this type are still alive and somewhere they must be living peacefully on pensions and enjoying the greatest possible comforts.

I am by no means an advocate of new blood vengeance, but the names of such persons should be published so that at least the people can know who is who. Otherwise, any ostreperous veteran will be seen as a mass murderer.

Plan to publish subsequent memoirs

It is hard to judge them, because for the most part they have simply been forgotten for years! Not much is remembered about the sadistic mass murder committed in Kuressaari and the chief of security at the time in Saaremaa, V. Riis, remains in retirement in Pärnu.

Reading the above, some could maintain that on the basis of a person's opinion and throwing out a few ugly facts, I am making a generalization about the murders. Unfortunately, I could tell such readers quite long stories, with specific names and often even the days of the month. That was done with the initial collection of data. In fact, I still do not have an overview of what happened in Estonia. I do not know the number of deportees killed in 1949, to say nothing of those who were arrested and perished during the German occupation or of those who perished and were slaughtered in the late 1940s.

For this reason, the Estonian Historical Society is appealing to the broadest possible public to send us information about all repression under the first or second occupation [that is, both the Soviet and the German].

We need the names of people, of places, ages; the times when people were arrested, perished or deported; data about the subsequent fate of people (death in prison camps, return to Estonia). Likewise, we are collecting data about people who were killed in the first or second half of the war.

We are truly grateful for every piece of information. Only through the broadest possible collaboration from the people can we get the true facts about the history of our country and our people.

Our address is the following:

Tallin 200090, postkas 3241, Eesti Muinsuskaitse Selts. Ajalooline pärimus [Oral History]. Subsequently, we are planning to publish memoirs that may have a broader interest. ★

Defend Hugo Blanco!

AS WE go to press, we have just heard from the Peruvian Peasant Confederation (CCP) about the disappearance of Hugo Blanco and Luis Tuesta de la Torre, kidnapped by the police on February 9 at Huacali.

Hugo Blanco was a former deputy in the Constituent Assembly, who was imprisoned for many years by the Peruvian military dictatorship. A long-standing leader of the peasant movement, Hugo is now the organizational secretary of the CCP and a member of the central committee of the Partido Unificado Mariateguista (PUM).

Luis Tuesta de la Torre is the general secretary of the Huacali federation of the CCP and also a member of the PUM. They were both arrested by the national police on February 9. The police deny that they are holding them and there has been no news since.

Since January 25, the peasants of Pucalpa (Huacali) have been on strike, demanding better prices for their agricultural products as well as bank loans at affordable rates. The police have carried out violent repression against this movement. Eight peasants were killed during the first confrontation with the forces of law and order, and 20 during the second.

On February 9, 200 peasants were gathered in the headquarters of the CCP in Pucalpa for a communal meal, a common practice in these poverty-stricken zones. The police attacked, machine-guns in hand,

arresting Hugo Blanco and Luis Tuesta. Hugo Blanco was shaved on the spot and his head covered, before being taken away by the police. In the Pucalpa barracks there are 200 peasants imprisoned. The police are not giving any information on the fate of Blanco and Tuesta.

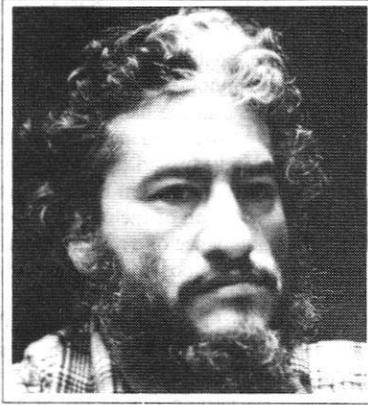
The lives of these two peasant leaders are in danger, and their fate depends on a rapid national and international reaction. This is a veritable kidnapping, with no legal basis. The fate of the disappeared in Peru, as in many other Latin American countries, is too often death. Hugo Blanco and Luis Tuesta have to be saved from this fate.

It is very urgent to contact prominent human rights figures, MPs and so on

to contact Peruvian embassies, consulates, and the Peruvian government to demand information on the whereabouts of Hugo Blanco and Luis Tuesta. For example, in France the LCR and the national human rights organization Ligue des Droits de l'Homme have demanded and obtained a meeting with the embassy. In Sweden a vigil will be organized outside the embassy. British, West German and Dutch MPs will be asking the Peruvian government to make a statement on the whereabouts of Hugo Blanco and Luis Tuesta.

Telegrams of protest can also be sent to Alan García, Presidente de la República, Palacio de Gobierno, Plaza de Armas, Lima, Peru. ★

STOP PRESS: *The Peruvian Ministry of the Interior has made a statement that Hugo Blanco was arrested, and is being held in Pucalpa prison (Huacali region). Extremely serious charges of inciting armed rebellion and carrying arms have been made against him, making solidarity initiatives even more urgent.*



**AROUND
THE
WORLD**



BRITAIN

Viraj Mendis deported

A MASSIVE police squad smashed their way into the church where Sri Lankan-born Viraj Mendis had been living in sanctuary for over two years to avoid deportation, claiming political refugee status (see IV 112). Following the raid (the first ever of its kind) on January 18, Viraj was finally deported to Sri Lanka after a long campaign to defend his right to stay. In the February issue of *Socialist Outlook*, Finn Jensen looked at the implications of this latest move:

The government has sent a clear message to all those opposing immigration and nationality laws. Both the deportation and

the way it was carried out are intended to scare the Black community and the churches, temples and mosques considering giving sanctuary to those facing deportation. The government wants to teach all anti-racists a lesson. That is why the police smashed their way into the church, more than a week after Viraj had formally applied to go to Denmark, and when he was still awaiting a reply from the Danish authorities....

It is becoming clear that immigration officials planned to follow this action with a swoop on other "illegal" immigrants, and had decided that it was necessary to get rid of Viraj first. They have been building up information for sometime about people's whereabouts and have a special squad of police officers whose sole responsibility is

this work.

The government will pay a political price for their actions — support for Viraj's right to stay in Britain is still strong. Many people are outraged at the way the police broke into the sanctuary, and cannot accept that the Home Office could not send him to a third country.

For months, civil war conditions in Sri Lanka have been evident from news broadcasts. The right-wing JVP have killed hundreds, if not thousands of people who they believe have made concessions to Tamil separatism. Viraj could well be on their death list because of his well-known support for Tamil self-determination....

The Sri Lankan government itself is unlikely to move against Viraj Mendis because of the publicity around his case, and while they are trying to clean up their image and pretend that violence is on the ebb. However, the position of the Home Office that he and others are not in danger is a bare-faced — and conscious — lie.

In a last-minute attempt to stop the deportation, Labour MPs tried to raise the debate in parliament. A leader of the transport workers' union went to Gatwick airport to try to get his members not to prepare the plane on which Viraj was to leave. All of this was too little, too late, but it gives a

glimpse of what the labour movement could do if it mobilized against deportations.

About 50 people are deported from Britain every week. Industrial action at the airports and high profile campaigns against the immigration and nationality laws could prevent many of these. It is necessary, especially if the crackdown occurs, to mobilize all of those who have been involved in Viraj's campaign and all of those angry at his deportation against all of these cases. ★

CHINA

**Trotsky's role
"outstanding"**

AN ARTICLE by Li Dian, in *Nanchong Shiyuan Xuebao* ("Nanchong College Review") 2, 1988, points out that Trotsky's role in the October revolution was outstanding, that it was in no way "sabotage", and moreover that it was not just one of "carrying out every action under relevant leadership". The article, summarized below, was taken from *Xinhua Wenzhai*, Beijing, 1988:11, p.194.

Apart from Lenin, his contribution was greater than that of any other Bolshevik leader. This is a historical fact. In 1917, at a crucial point in the Russian revolution, Trotsky closely linked his own fate to that of the Bolsheviks and Lenin, and displayed the fearless spirit of a proletarian revolution. On July 10, Trotsky publicly wrote to the Kerensky government unmasking the reactionary face of the bourgeois provisional government, and was arrested as a result. After the smashing of the Kornilov rebellion, the Party recommended that Trotsky, having demonstrated his outstanding activi-

ty, should be chairman of the Petrograd Soviet.

In this period Trotsky worked hard to prepare and develop the revolution, especially with his gift for oratory, and won masses of loyal and reliable followers for the Party. At Central Committee meetings he resolutely backed Lenin's proposals, and voted for the resolution on an armed uprising in the near future. He was elected onto the leading Politburo. Later he chaired and led the work of the Revolutionary Military Committee.

During the October insurrection, he was in the front line at the Smolny Palace. In the first Soviet government under Lenin, Trotsky was foreign minister. During the struggle to defend the newly-born Red Government he put down the counter-revolutionary rebellion in Petrograd and smashed the White offensive organized by Kerensky. Trotsky also played an extremely important role during the three-year revolutionary civil war in Soviet Russia. ★

BOOKS

Trotsky's Notebooks

PHILIP POMPER has recently published *Trotsky's Notebooks 1933-1935* (Columbia University Press, New York), which were discovered in the Trotsky Archives (Houghton Library) at Harvard University. This is the first time that they have been published in any form.

The texts, about 40 pages, are essentially notes on Hegel's dialectic, some notes on Lenin and on evolutionism. They have been published alongside the original Russian text, with a lengthy introduction that contains an interesting analysis of the differences between Bukharin and Trotsky's interpretation of the dialectic.

All in all, the book is 175 pages long. This new contribution is indispensable

reading for all those who are interested in Marxist philosophy. ★

VIETNAM

Rehabilitate Vietnamese Trotskyists!

A TIME when rehabilitations are underway in the USSR is a good opportunity to remember that the dead hand of Stalinism reached out all over the world — including France, Czechoslovakia, Spain, Greece, China and Vietnam — to assassinate the regime's opponents, and in particular Trotskyists. Below we are publishing an international appeal for the rehabilitation of Ta Tu Thau and other Vietnamese Trotskyists massacred in their country in 1945.

"The undersigned, having actively participated in the solidarity movement with the Vietnamese people's struggle for their independence, demand that justice be finally given to Vietnamese Trotskyist leaders Ta Thu Thau, Tran Van Thach, Nguyen Van So, Phan Van Hum, Phan Van Chanh, Huynh Van Phuong..."

"These men, survivors of the French colonialist penal colonies, had a wide audience among the working class of Saigon during the 1930s. They played an important role in the trade unions and the Indo-Chinese Congress at that time. On various occasions, they were elected to the Saigon municipal council. They were all arrested by the Vietminh and disappeared in 1945."

"The accused of the three Moscow Trials, Stalin's victims, have been rehabilitated, and Trotsky's file is now open in the Soviet Union. In Hanoi, voices are being raised to demand that the members of the Nhan Van Giai Pham movement, calumniated in an indescribable fashion in 1956, be given back their dignity. Alongside these changes, it is high time to fill in the blank pages of the Vietnamese communist movements history — or rather to replace those that were ripped out: we demand the articles and works of the disappeared Trotskyist militants be republished. Vietnam cannot go forward without knowing its own history, but this history cannot be written if certain truths remain hidden."

The numerous signatories to this appeal from all over the world include Noam Chomsky (USA); Pierre Broué, Pierre Naville, Dang Van Long (editor of *Chroniques Vietnamiennes*), Zbigniew Kowalewski, Alain Krivine, Pierre Lambert (France); Tariq Ali, Robin Blackburn, Ken Coates, Tamara Deutscher, Cliff Slaughter (Britain); Ernest Mandel and Livio Maitan (Fourth International).

Further signatures can be sent to:

Preparatory Committee, PO Box 735, London SW9 7QS or to *Chroniques Vietnamiennes*, BP 746-75532, Paris Cedex 11, France. ★



**"Just like I promised,
we'll soon have free
circulation of Turkish
workers in the EEC"**

José Ramón García is still missing

A LEADER of the Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRT, Mexican section of the Fourth International), José Ramón García was a candidate in the municipal elections in Cuautla in March 1988. After the official announcement of falsified results for the legislative and presidential elections in July of the same year, he became one of the leaders of the Committees to Defend the Vote, which were formed to campaign against the electoral fraud.

As secretary of this democratic united-front organization, he led several mobilizations against fraud and usurpation of power locally and in Mexico City. His disappearance, therefore, was a blow to the entire democratic movement and a clear affront to the will of the people.

Political nature of this disappearance

In practice, the government immediately recognized the political nature of this disappearance by appointing a special investigator. But most of the investigating so far seems to have been directed toward other objectives. Various rumors have been spread that José Ramón is linked to the Basque organization ETA or to Nicaragua, or even that he himself chose to disappear.

The PRT categorically rejects such allegations. What is more, these absurd stories have served as the basis for police surveillance, interrogation and threats against PRT members, Ramón's comrades in Cuautla, and his friends and family. But no attention has been paid to his public political enemies. In reality, the principal suspects in this case are members of the police forces themselves.

It is intolerable to claim that an investiga-

AS MANY telegrams as possible should be sent immediately to:

- Carlos Salinas de Gortari, Presidente Constitucional, Estados Unidos Mexicanos, Palacio Nacional Mexico D.F., Mexico.
- Fernando Gutierrez Barrios, Secretario de Gobernación, Bucareli 99, Mexico D.F., Mexico.
- Antonio Riva Palacio López, Gobernador Constitucional Estado de Morelos, Palacio de Gobierno, Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico.

TWO MONTHS have now passed since José Ramón García disappeared as he was leaving his home in Cuautla in the state of Morelos (see IV 155, January 23, 1989). In all this time, neither the state nor the federal authorities have been able to offer a satisfactory explanation.

tion is impartial when it consists solely of threats and pressures against those close to Ramón. They are trying to put the blame on the victims.

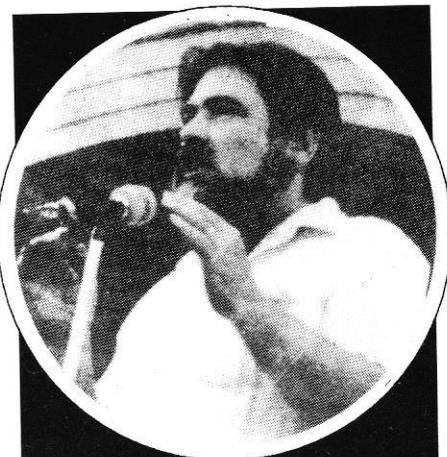
This is a political attack, and it is up to the government to make the political decision to put things right — that is, to free José Ramón immediately. This is no ordinary criminal case, as the police would have people believe. It should be recalled that a few months ago, shortly before the July 6 elections, another attack took place against the PRT in Cuernavaca, the circumstances of which have never been clarified.

At that time, the house of the PRT's representative on the state Elections Commission was attacked and damaged by an armed group. Moreover, the PRT headquarters in Cuernavaca was attacked recently and campaign material for José Ramón was destroyed.

A crime against humanity

José Ramón's case has discredited the statements of the government, which claims to want political dialogue with the opposition and "national reconciliation." José Ramón's disappearance is precisely an attack against a current in the opposition to the regime that is distinguished by its consistent refusal to grant any legitimacy to the new government.

Therefore, this case is also an attack on freedom of association and organization, in contradiction to the official statements about the need for a new political reform. The new president, Salinas de Gortari, himself recognizes the existence of general dissatisfaction with the federal electoral code and therefore suspicion about the July



José Ramón García

JOSE RAMON first became politically active in Paris in 1973, joining the Internationalist Communist Organization (OCI) [now the PCI], the French section of the International Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International (CORQI).

As a political science student at the Sorbonne, he founded the Latin-American Students' Federation. He continued this activity until 1976, when he left for the Spanish state, along with his companion, Ana Santander.

In the Spanish state, he joined the General Workers' Union (UGT), and had responsibilities in the press and propaganda apparatus of the confederation. He worked at the same time in the Internationalist Socialist Workers' Party (the local section of CORQI), and was in the leadership of this organization in the Basque country.

In 1981, he returned to Mexico. In 1987, he joined the PRT and devoted himself building the party in Cuautla. ★

6 election results. But someone who actively challenged these results in the state of Morelos has now been the victim of a kidnapping.

According to the United Nations, kidnappings are a crime against humanity. For the PRT, the immediate reappearance of José Ramón García and all those who have "disappeared" for political reasons is a basic precondition for being able to talk about a new political climate in the country.

The mobilizations demanding the return of José Ramón must continue. Already in Latin America, Europe, the United States and Canada, since December many human rights organizations; political, social and trade-union organizations, as well as representatives of democratic public opinion, have called on the Mexican government to produce our comrade alive. ★