International VIEWPOINT

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Did Rio save the world?

◆ South Africa: The test of strength ◆ Haiti: The prophet unarmed
◆ Belarus: The making of a trade unionist ◆ and more

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Correction

A PHRASE was omitted from Claude Gabriel's article, "50,000 votes that shook Europe", in issue no. 232 of *IV*, resulting in a significant distortion of meaning. The sentence: "Thus, the Danes were without doubt those who would 'benefit' the most from the monetary union" should have been concluded by the phrase "in terms of that union having the least social impact". Apologies to the author and to our readers. ★

International Viewpoint

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● **News closing date: June 26, 1992**

The test of strength

THE African National Congress (ANC), along with its allies the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), has launched an energetic campaign to pressure South African president F.W. de Klerk into accepting the formation of a multiracial provisional government and elections for a constituent assembly to be held before the end of the year.

MARC LINI — June 23, 1992

ACTIONS around these demands began on June 16, the anniversary of the 1976 Soweto uprising, with a transport boycott and a strike which was a big success in the Johannesburg townships and to a lesser extent in Durban. According to the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 89% of that town's wage earners did not report for work.

Nearly 70 demonstrations were planned throughout the country. The most important one took place in Soweto, where ANC president Nelson Mandela called for a continuation of the actions until progress in the negotiations is achieved.

Four-stage plan of action

The actions have been planned in four stages. The first of these began with the June 16 events and involved demonstrations and sectoral strikes (particularly in hospitals and city administrations). The second stage, which will take place in July, will consist of street demonstrations, work slow-downs and occupations of sites that symbolize the power of the South African state, like the television stations.

Shortly afterwards, the third stage will take place, in the form of a general strike at the beginning of August. The exact date and length of this strike will be fixed by COSATU in early July. COSATU had originally favored an unlimited strike for the end of July but the ANC requested that it be held in August so that it could be better prepared.

They also asked that it not be presented as an unlimited general strike so that it could be modified in the face of the government's reactions. For some leaders of the ANC and COSATU, the fourth phase of the plan of action, "Operation Exit Gate", will be the final struggle for a change of government.

This anti-governmental campaign will be a decisive test of the balance of forces, a first taste of future battles, and an indication of the mobilizing capacities of the ANC. It will constitute the most important confrontation with the regime since its legalization. Unlike the general strike of July 1991, which demanded the abolition of the Value Added Tax (VAT), the August strike will aim at influencing the very nature of future political institutions. It is precisely on this point that deep differences exist concerning the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA).

Talks break down

In spite of convergences on several aspects of the future constitution, the CODESA talks broke up last month around the demand of the ruling white National Party (NP) to include in the constitution the requirement of a 75% majority for the passing of key votes in the future parliament. The ANC delegation accepted, without a mandate from the rank and file, the requirement of 70% for certain important questions. This agreement led to a sharp confrontation. Fearing the derailing of the negotiation process, the South African government sent a telegram to 50,000 reservists asking them to be ready for a mobilization.

For their part, the COSATU leaders have been generally more determined than those of the ANC to fight until victory, even in the face of employer threats against the use of the strike weapon.

This new and serious escalation of tensions between the government and the ANC is the result of a sharply accelerated deterioration of the social situation. This has been expressed by the current union pressure and unfortunately, by clashes and social decomposition in the townships.

The last few weeks have seen many strikes, including a massive one by hospital personnel demanding wage increases. Every day the reform of the apartheid system opens up new Pandora's boxes. The misery of the townships, massive unemployment, the monstrous racial inequality in education and housing, have not been alleviated in the slightest since the opening of negotiations a year and a half ago. There have only been promises of the "redistribution" of wealth in the undefined future. The unresolved question of Bantustan land will certainly take on an explosive character in the near future.

It is this contradiction between the abstract character of the negotiations and the concrete aspirations of the Black masses that makes the situation tense and risky for both the government and the ANC.

Negotiations versus reality

The June 17 massacre of 42 people in the Boipatong ghetto and the police killings several days later highlights the gap between CODESA and everyday reality. The ANC leadership has therefore decided on a temporary and partial retreat from the official talks, fully aware that they have no alternative strategy.

The regime continues to play several cards at once. De Klerk himself often meets with Buthelezi, leader of the reactionary, Zulu-based Inkatha movement. One of Inkatha's leaders, Musa Myeni, has recently alerted his murderous troops that a civil war was imminent, since the country was "like a kraal with many bulls who all wanted to rule."

Given this situation, last year's "peace agreement" between the government, the ANC and Inkatha is meaningless. Armed police, Inkatha gangs and far right groups continue to unleash a reign of terror under the cover of the official negotiations. This is without doubt a taste of the so-called post-apartheid South Africa. ★

Israel: The elections Bush won

THE surprise victory of the Zionist Labor Party of Yitzhak Rabin in the June 23 Israeli elections was George Bush's first triumph in a long time. This victory was very important for Bush, as much for domestic political reasons as for foreign policy considerations.

SALEH JABER — June 25, 1992

THE domestic political problems of the US president in the run-up to the November presidential elections are well-known. Incapable of advancing convincing arguments and programs on the social or economic plane, the Bush administration has, since the Gulf War, rested on its laurels in international politics. However, these have been tarnished somewhat since the beginning of the year as the limitations of the American empire have become clear.

The Middle East is one of the areas where the limits of US power appear in sharpest relief. On the one hand, in the Gulf itself, Saddam Hussein is still boasting and the US have no alternative to push forward. On the other, the US is confronted with the Israeli-Arab conflict. Washington thought it could pull its chestnuts out of the Iraqi fire by convening the Israeli-Arab "Peace Conference" in Madrid on October 30, 1991. It gambled on moving towards a regional Pax Americana by confronting the intransigence of Yitzhak Shamir's Likud government with financial pressure.

It knew that the state of Israel desperately needed a ten billion dollar loan and that it had asked the US government to guarantee it. Without this money, the Zionist plan of absorbing a million Jewish immigrants from the ex-Soviet Union — more or less pushed in the direction of Israel since they could not go to the US — would be a dead letter. It was in order to obtain these funds, and for this reason alone, that the Shamir government agreed to go to Madrid. It was for precisely these same reasons that this conference got bogged down.[1]

Given the stakes involved, one could count upon the Bush administration using its financial leverage.[2] This is exactly what happened: not being dupes, the men in Washington refused to approve the loan guarantee until tangible concessions were made on the Israeli side. Shamir thought the goose was in the bag but instead he found himself empty-handed. The battle was joined, with mutually acrimonious charges leveled on both sides as each protagonist sought to influence the other's electoral campaign.

The Bush administration's efforts to achieve its goals led to an unprecedented deterioration of American-Israeli relations. The message of their Zionist Labor Party allies was that Likud intransigence was leading Israel down the road of bankruptcy and disaster. For its part, the Likud, with help from its friends in the US Democratic party, plied US public opinion with startling revelations about the Republican administration's Iraqi policy.

Washington wins

In this test of strength it was Washington who won. Of course, domestic political and socioeconomic factors played a role in Rabin's victory, and we will return to these in our next issue. But, they are all tied in one way or another to the American factor. It is likewise not surprising at all that on June 24 Rabin publicly called for the Bush administration to reverse its decision to deny the Israelis the guarantees for their ten billion dollar loan. In all likelihood, they will now get it.

In all this, the shortsightedness, nay dumbness, of the Palestinian right, especially Arafat, who rejoiced in Rabin's victory, are clear for all to see. Rabin will carry out policies little different from Shamir's (including on the "autonomy" conceded to the Palestinians), as he has already on more than one occasion demonstrated — though in a more flexible and subtle form in order to reap the fruit of Washington's favors and to regain the sympathy of the European governments. Once again, the common sense of the masses turns out to be more perceptive than that of some leaders who take their desires for reality. Many Palestinians who were interviewed by reporters on the streets of Jerusalem said that Rabin and Shamir were essentially the same for their people or even that the former was more dangerous than the latter because he was more crafty and enjoyed the support of the US. ★

1. See *IV* 216, November 11, 1991
2. See *IV* 206, May 13, 1991.

What comes after sanctions?

THE conflicts in the Balkans resulting from the break up of Yugoslavia continue to spread and get worse. Despite UN sanctions and talk of outside military intervention, the war in Bosnia continues and may culminate in a direct clash between Serbia and Croatia over their conflicting claims on the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina (BH). Democratic, peace and labour forces in the region remain under siege (see box on page 6).

The following article was written on June 11, 1992, for the Austrian revolutionary Marxist publication, *Die Linke*.

CHRISTIAN POMITZER

"IS there a possibility that Belgrade will be bombed?" "There certainly is, and by the Americans or NATO. However I don't believe it. It would be sheer bestiality and the Western military alliance would lose credibility. Our air force is totally ready for the struggle. All the missiles' systems have been withdrawn from the territories of the newly independent states and are now in place primed for action around Belgrade. Anyone who comes to Belgrade will find they are expected". "From where can the attack be expected?" "Either from the amphibious troops of the American Sixth Fleet or from the NATO intervention centre in Italy".

These exchanges were between Lieutenant General Bozidar Stevanovic, commander-in-chief of the Yugoslav

airforce and journalists of the pro-regime daily *Vecernje Novosti* a few days before the United Nations instituted comprehensive sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro.

The trigger for the decision to impose an embargo on the new version of Yugoslavia were the terrible pictures seen on TV screens at the end of May; in Sarajevo Serb irregulars fired on a bread queue, carrying out a bloody slaughter. In fact, in recent months Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (BH) have seen far worse massacres without the "international community" feeling obliged to take such drastic measures. Now, however, not only has the Bush administration come out strongly for sanctions against Serbia, but there is also talk about an air and sea blockade and military intervention. Meeting in Oslo, NATO members decided to make available an intervention force for "peace-keeping action".

Some of the reasons for the American change of heart are easily seen: after basking in the glory of his Gulf adventure for a few months, domestic economic realities saw George Bush losing support among the white middle class. Then came the disturbances in Los Angeles and other US cities and the sudden rise in the fortunes of the independent candidate for US president Ross Perot. Bush is hoping to compensate for his domestic weaknesses through foreign policy success. Then there is also the first signs of a challenge to the hitherto unquestioned "defence" role of NATO from European countries, especially France and Germany, who have been talking of setting up a "Eurocorps".

The Gulf scenario

Are we then approaching a rerun of the Gulf War in the Balkans? Certainly the catalogue of measures taken or proposed— first sanctions, then a blockade and then military intervention — are reminiscent of the Gulf scenario. And Slobodan Milosevic seems ready and able to step into Saddam Hussein's role as monster of the month. Even his proposal for a Yugoslav conference under UN auspices and his fantastic request for the USA and Russia to take control of all the fighting militia on the battlefield is reminiscent of the Iraqi dictator, who started producing all kinds of proposals in the last few moments before Desert Storm.

However, here the comparison breaks down. Milosevic takes pride in the fact that he has withdrawn from Bosnia soldiers of the former federal army originating from Serbia and Montenegro. And the reality is that the Serbian regime is not able to control the Bosnian-Serbian piece of the former federal army, the Bosnian Serb militia or the various Serb irregular forces. This is why repeated demands by Belgrade that the Serb militia halt their attacks in BH have fallen on deaf ears.

Continued Serbian involvement

However, even if he is no longer responsible for the further escalation of the war, it was still Milosevic who was responsible for the whole scenario, along with his Serbian allies in Croatia and BH. And, finally, air attacks on targets in Bosnia are increasingly starting from bases in Serbia since the army abandoned and destroyed Bihac, the most important airfield in Bosnia. Furthermore, the leaders of the various irregular forces can move freely around Belgrade and call press conferences whenever they wish.

That Radovan Karadzic's "Serbian republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina" and the various "Serbian Autonomous Regions" will be supplied by Serbia is beyond doubt. Thus, Milosevic has not yet lost his Kuwait — at least not totally.

Any eventual military measures by a Western coalition have to be evaluated both from a strategic and a political point of view. The first such measure, an air-and sea blockade, would be the work of the sixth fleet. Such a blockade would not only serve to ensure respect for the embargo, but would above all seek to prevent planes taking off from Serbian airfields or frigates from Bar and Kotor in Montenegro going to join the siege of Dubrovnik. If all this is not enough, then a limited direct military intervention could be expected. This would — on the pattern of the Gulf War — involve a flood of air attacks on airfields and barracks in Serbia and Montenegro.

It is also possible that the supply lines from Serbia to Bosnia would be bombed. However, such attacks could not stop the fighting in BH itself. Once outside involvement had reached such a level, however, the next step would follow inevitably: a landing by ground troops in Sarajevo to create a security zone there and save the legal government of BH. It is by no means certain that the plan of UN president Boutros-Ghali — to negotiate a ceasefire in Sarajevo or at least for its airport and send in UN troops to keep the peace — will succeed.

The battles implied by such an intervention would involve heavy losses and for this reason it is at least open to question whether the green light will be given. A full-scale "liberation" of BH is not to be expected. Speaking against this is the difficult terrain , the training of the units of the former federal army in partisan warfare as well as the many secret supply dumps.

And who will defeat and disarm the dozens of militia scurrying about BH? Active here are: units of the army of the

Repression in Croatia

THE Croatian government has initiated proceedings against a number of oppositionists, including Zagreb based journalists and Milorad Pupovats, leader of the Serb Democratic Forum, which claims to represent the "two thirds of Croatian Serbs who live in towns".

These legal attacks come against a background of an announcement by the investigating prosecutor that thousands of people may soon be charged for war crimes including "verbal crimes" and new legislation under which all ethnic Croats are automatically considered citizens of the new state; non-Croats not born in Croatia face a difficult process for obtaining citizenship regardless of how long they have lived in Croatia.

Pupovats explained his views in an interview in the Belgrade independent weekly *Vreme* (October 21, 1991)

"Henceforth [Croatia's Serbs] must abandon Yugoslav sovereignty to take part in the working out of Croatian sovereignty. For this to occur, these Serbs must be helped by Serbia and by the Croat majority which must sufficiently integrate them so that they no longer feel the need to consider themselves 'Yugoslavs'". ★

Yugoslav Federal Republic, the Bosnian Serb part of the former federal army, the territorial defence forces of the "Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina", Chetnik bands, mercenaries such as "Arkan" and "Tiger" from Belgrade; on the side of the Bosnian leadership the Bosnian territorial defence and the Croat defence council in West Herzegovina; from the Croat Republic, unofficial units of the Croat National Guard and the military arm of Dobroslav Paraga's Party of Law.

Bosnia-Herzegovina thus looks more and more marked out as the Lebanon of the Balkans, with Serbia and Croatia in the roles of Israel and Syria.

What political motives lie behind the sanctions and the threat of and partial implementation of military measures? The embargo's official aim is of course to put an end to the struggle in BH, but the real aim is the fall of the Milosevic regime, since the Serbian opposition by itself is too weak to remove it. This is the immediate aim of the USA, as of Britain and Germany.

The only advocates of direct military intervention in BH itself are the Islamic states who are putting themselves forwards as the defenders of BH's threatened Muslim population. For this a force would have to be set up under article 42 of the UN Charter. Decisive for the final decision on military intervention will be whether the sanctions sway the regime in Serbia.

Thus we can imagine the following scenario: as a result of the sanctions, Serbia runs short of fuel, there are long queues in front of the shops and factories have to close for lack of materials. For the first time in the crisis, Serbia has no international friends (with, perhaps, the exception of Greece).

And people are increasingly less open to the argument that there is a global conspiracy against the Serbian people. The united opposition gets stronger and the students demand Milosevic's resignation with increasing vigour. By now even the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences and the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church, until now supportive of Milosevic, have begun to express their reservations.

Even within the nomenklatura things begin to sour; the leadership in Montenegro starts looking for ways to separate from Serbia, a third of the newly elected deputies from the ruling Socialist (former Communist) Party decide to set up a Social Democratic Party, while the factory managers feel their privileges threatened by the taking into state control of their once "self-managing" enterprises. There is discontent in the army after Milosevic orders the mass sacking of long-serving generals and officers.

The Romanian model

An accumulation of factors such as this would lead not so much to an uprising led by the opposition as to a palace revolt against Milosevic which would establish a more moderate nomenklatura regime on Romanian lines.

It is of course quite another matter whether this would stop the war in BH. The Serb militia in BH have sufficient supplies to continue their war for several more months and inflict further death and misery on the civilian population. And this struggle will be all the more desperate the more uncertain support from Belgrade becomes. Even if the Serbian forces become weary, this does not mean an end to the turmoil. The strengthened Muslim and Croatian forces might then take bloody revenge on the Bosnian Serbs. Furthermore, the Croat government's barely hidden plans for intervention in BH have only been strengthened by the measures against Serbia. ★

From the IMF to the FA/18s

ON Sunday May 17, 1992, 38% of the Swiss electorate took part in elections where they were asked to vote on a series of questions including Swiss membership in the bodies of the Bretton Woods accords, also known as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank(WB). 56.4% of the voters declared themselves favorable to the participation of their country in these institutions.

CHARLES-ANDRE UDRY

IN THE immediate post-war period Swiss banking circles opted for remaining outside of these two institutions in order to protect the secrets of their banking system from international scrutiny as well as the autonomy of its monetary policy.

Since 1982 however, the government has publicly declared its desire to join the IMF and the World Bank. This was the time when the debt crisis broke out and the IMF once again began to play the role that the suppression of fixed interest rates had denied it at the beginning of the 1970s.

This role was none other than forcing the countries of the "periphery" to pay for the servicing of their debt. Switzerland was very active within the Club of Paris (which brought together the principal industrialized countries), and the Club of London (which brought together the private banks) in defending a very strict monetarist policy towards the Third World. However, unlike member-

ship in these two clubs, Swiss adherence to the IMF requires that the proposal be submitted to a popular vote if, in the three month period following the enactment of the law, 50,000 citizens ask for it. At the end of 1991, a large coalition was put together that gathered the 50,000 signatures necessary for the referendum.

The government then decided to submit the question of IMF and World Bank membership to a vote in the shortest possible period. This gave the referendum organizers three months to wage their campaign. This was not a fortuitous choice. Since 1989, the government has had to reorganize Swiss relations with a series of international institutions, above all the European community.

The leadership of political forces from the left to the right have campaigned for Swiss participtipon in the IMF and World Bank, arguing that "Switzerland must reject national chauvinistic reflexes and enter international institutions." In this way they hope to avoid a debate on the content, policies, functioning and so on, of the IMF, and in this way also the vote will prepare the way for that on membership in the European Economic Community (EEC), planned for 1996.

Nevertheless, a debate is opening up amongst the population concerning the IMF, the WB and their policies in the Third World.

National differences

Sharp differences have opened up between the German and French-speaking sections of the country. Firstly, the Swiss German media has publicized the discussion; this has not been the case in Francophone Switzerland.

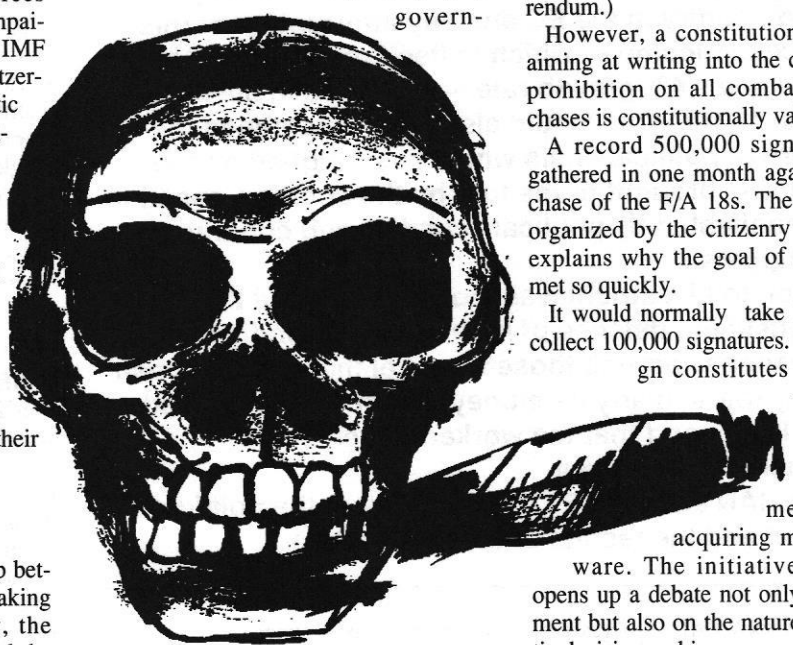
Furthermore, there was much more active opposition to the IMF within the German-speaking Social Democracy, which had decided on a national level to support the referendum. On the other hand, the Social Democratic parties from the French-speaking cantons, along with the big non-governmental organizations (NGOs), all came out in favour of IMF and WB participation.

Opposition to IMF membership from a national chauvinistic point of view was slight, as was recognized after the refrendum campaign by those who had invoked an alliance "against nature" to justify a critical "yes" vote.

The coalition against IMF participation distributed 900,000 flyers, which represents one for every household in the principal towns. Numerous meetings and debates were held, in the course of which representatives of social movements, feminist and Third World organizations and trade unions spoke. A network was thus established between the NGOs, left-wing organizations and Christian circles.

An important task lies ahead for the movement against membership. Swiss policies within the IMF and the WB and in relation to the countries of the East and the South must be closely monitored and contrasted with the promises made by the government during the referendum campaign. IMF membership will only be useful for the Swiss government if it can obtain a seat on the executive committee.

These seats are difficult to come by, especially as East European governments apply for membership. If the Swiss government succeeds in obtaining a seat on the executive, the creation of an independent watch-dog body could become a focal point of consciousness and reflection on Switzerland's imperialist policies in particular and the IMF and WB in general.



For the last six years the Swiss authorities have been studying a combat plane that they would like to buy in order to provide Switzerland with "air cover". These studies began before the fall of the Berlin Wall. At the time of the fall of the wall, 37% of Swiss people polled favored an initiative in favour of abolishing the army.

The debate around purchasing combat airplanes took a new turn when the recession hit Switzerland in 1991. Unemployment level hit a level unseen since the Second World War. Military expenses of 3.5 billion Swiss francs seemed totally out of proportion at a time when budgetary restrictions and social crisis were occurring. In spite of hostile public opinion the State Council (the chamber that represents the cantons in the bicameral system) announced the purchase of 34 F/A-18 planes.

Demand for moratorium

Faced with this provocation the Organization For a Switzerland Without an Army (GSSA) launched a campaign on April 29, 1992, demanding a moratorium on all purchases of combat planes until the year 2000.

This initiative will allow citizens to intervene in a debate on the acquisition of military hardware — an area that has been explicitly excluded from public scrutiny through referenda (military spending cannot be submitted to a referendum.)

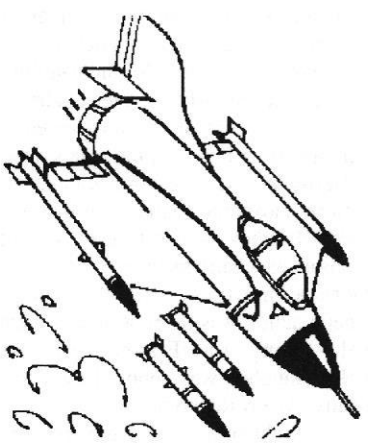
However, a constitutional initiative aiming at writing into the constitution a prohibition on all combat plane purchases is constitutionally valid.

A record 500,000 signatures were gathered in one month against the purchase of the F/A 18s. The petition was organized by the citizenry itself, which explains why the goal of 500,000 was met so quickly.

It would normally take 18 months to collect 100,000 signatures. This campaign constitutes a clash between direct democracy and the parliamentary mechanism of acquiring military hardware. The initiative, therefore, opens up a debate not only on disarmament but also on the nature of democratic decision making.

The national council (the lower house which is elected according to the number of inhabitants in each canton) will discuss the purchase of the F/A-18s under the surveillance of these 500,000 signatures.

It will be a debate to follow. ★



Trouble ahead for Irish government

A SIGH of relief was heaved by all respectable folk when the Irish referendum on June 18 approved the Maastricht Treaty on European monetary and political union by 68.7% of those voting. For leaders of Ireland's European Community partners the result was a relief after the Danish referendum had interrupted the hoped-for smooth process of European integration and provoked broad questioning of the Maastricht Treaty.

For the Irish government the "yes" vote was vital. Ireland benefits greatly from subsidies: it is the most heavily subsidized country in the EC and any interruption of this vital source of income — which in itself provides one half-point of Ireland's 4% growth rate — would have been disastrous. A "no" vote would also have heightened the atmosphere of political crisis which has weighed on the government — brought to the fore by the abortion question but also manifested by political scandals and continuing labour struggles.

Opposition to Maastricht was mobilized around the abortion question, defence of Irish neutrality and generally found a response among those who feel that the European Community (particularly its money) has mainly benefited the upper layers and that the workers, unemployed and small farmers have lost out.
JOHN MEEHAN and ANNE CONWAY look at the political background and the results of the referendum.

A FIANNA FAIL/Progressive Democrat coalition government has ruled the 26-county part of Ireland since June 1989. It ran into serious trouble over a series of business scandals, closely connected with a privatization programme in the last part of 1991.

Government appointed directors of former state companies in the telecommunications and sugar production companies were caught lining their own pockets. The action taken was very mild: multi-millionaire Michael Smurfit, former chairperson of the Telecom Board, was forced to resign; a partner in one of his scams, Dermot Desmond — also a close associate of the then Taoiseach (prime minister) Charles Haughey — had to leave one of his jobs as the chairperson of the state-run airports authority Aer Rianta. Finally, cosmetic action was taken at government level — long time Fianna Fail boss Charles Haughey was deposed by a former ally, Albert Reynolds.

This bought time for the government, and improved poll ratings.

But the problems have not gone away for ever. A special difficulty is caused by the owner of Anglo-Irish Beef Processors, Larry Goodman. Goodman built a huge agribusiness empire that collapsed with debts of £500 billion. His main creditors were major continental European banks, which had lent him money on the strength of assurances from the big Irish banks. It seems Goodman may have used some of the continental European money to reduce his exposure to the Irish banks. Goodman was so big that the government could not afford to allow a collapse — so special legislation was rushed through the Dail (parliament) to allow Anglo-Irish Beef processors to go into "examinership".

It is evident that Goodman made a lot of his money through defrauding the EEC under the Beef Intervention Scheme. He had a big "export trade" with Iraq before the outbreak of war there, but much of this business may have been fiction in order to milk the EEC for intervention money.

The state was obliged to set up a Tribunal of Enquiry into the affair and a crucial stage is about to be reached. Involved is direct conflict of evidence between the current Taoiseach Albert Reynolds and the leader of his coalition partners, Des O'Malley of the Progressive Democrats. Another awkward issue is huge political payments to the main bourgeois political parties.

Despite the mountain of evidence that privatization equals corruption, the government is intent on pushing the process further. Following a highly damaging strike in the Electricity Supply Board (ESB), the Minister for Energy, Bobby Molloy of the PDs, announced the company was to be split up, with the clear intention of weakening the trade unions in the industry.

The Post Office has gone through a six-week long strike over the introduction of casual labour. The big banks provoked a strike on very similar issues, using the fear of open competition facilitated by the Single European Act to worsen the conditions of the workers. The banks were able to stay open for emergency service during most of the strike, partly by recruiting from the vast pool of the unemployed.

Decline in emigration

Official unemployment now stands at over 280,000, creeping up to 25% of the workforce and is already at the highest level since the foundation of the state in the 1920s. In fact it would be at least double this number but for the wave of emigration in the 1980s.

The big difficulty for the Irish ruling class now is that for the past two-and-a-half years emigration has come to a halt, especially to Britain. It is common now to meet people in their late 20s or early 30s who have come back to Ireland because life became impossible abroad. Some call themselves the BTAs (Been to Americas).

This has important socio-economic effects, not least in the area of abortion. In February ten thousand people demonstrated in Dublin protesting against the internment of the 14-year old girl, victim of rape, whose parents eventually took her to England for an abortion. A big proportion of the demonstrators were young people in their twenties, people who five years earlier would have been abroad. In other words, real limits are being put in the way of the state's usual strategy of "exporting" social problems.

On the political level, this has produced a steady erosion of confidence in the main bourgeois parties. The showing of the "no" forces in the Maastricht referendum — which was considerably better than predicted before the Danish result — are an example.

The gathering together of Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, Progressive Democrat and Labour leaders was designed to shore up the credibility of a Maastricht Treaty that was losing popular support. This could well turn out to be a dry run for a multi-party government formula in the near future. Albert Reynolds claims he can achieve single party Fianna Fail government and end his "temporary little arrangement" with the PDs. The certainty of future political instability suggests otherwise.

Although the polls showed a steady increase in the "no" vote, the final 7-3 vote for Maastricht in the referendum became increasingly likely in the final days of the campaign as votes moved away from the "no" lobby because of the media emphasis given to the "Pro-Life" campaign. Other forces opposing Maastricht were largely ignored.

But the 30 per cent vote against the Treaty was quite impressive given the weight of the "yes" lobby. This included the four main political parties, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), big business, the big farmers' organization and the Council for the Status of Women.

State backs yes vote

Taxpayers' money was used to fund the "yes" campaign. Government efforts to swing the vote in its favour — especially after the Danish referendum gave the idea that voting "no" was not such an outrageous thing to do — included setting up a freefone line to get information on the Maastricht Treaty (from the government's point of view of course), sending out one million pamphlets (in a country whose population is 3.6 million) arguing the case for a "yes" vote, and commandeering national television and radio for a pro-Maastricht broadcast by the prime minister two days before the poll, with no right of reply for the "no" campaign.

A government spokesperson was widely quoted in the media at the start of the campaign: "We will have to strike terror into the hearts of the Irish electorate". And the conduct of the campaign — one of bribes and threats — confirmed this strategy. Prime minister Albert Reynolds promised that women's right to travel abroad for abortions would only be guaranteed if the Treaty were ratified — a weighty threat.

Until the anti-abortion protocol in the Treaty came to light — with the case of the 14-year old girl denied the right to travel to England for an abortion — it had seemed that there would be no significant opposition to Maastricht.

But the uncovering of the protocol to the Treaty which confirmed Ireland's constitutional anti-abortion position, and then the ruling by the Supreme Court which interpreted the constitution to allow abortion in certain circumstances, provoked opposition to the Treaty from both pro- and anti-abortion forces.

Recent opinion polls have shown more than 80 per cent against the fundamentalist policies of anti-abortion groups such as SPUC (Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child). On this issue alone mass opposition could have been mobilized against the Treaty. But the "Repeal the Eighth Amendment Campaign" (campaigning for the repeal of the anti-abortion clause inserted into the constitution in 1983) prevaricated when it came to challenging the consensus of established women's groups in favour of the European Community.

Benefits for women

These groups see the influence of the European Community as beneficial to women in the Irish Republic because of the positions that the EC has taken in favour of equal pay, equal opportunity, childcare and so on, which have had a certain effect on women's position. For a certain — essentially middle-class — section of the population, the European Community is seen as representing "modernity" and "openness" as opposed to the closed and very Catholic "traditional" Ireland.

So SPUC was able to set the agenda for the anti-Maastricht campaign. The Repeal campaign had decided to call for a "no" vote. But it stayed on the sidelines, despite the fact that the protocol would copper-fasten the anti-abortion clause into European law. The real threat posed by this amendment — despite the government's promises and the "Solemn Declaration" by the EC member governments that the protocol guaranteeing no challenge to the Irish constitutional ban on abortion through EC law was not contradictory to the right to information and to travel — was illustrated again recently when shipments of the British daily newspaper *The Guardian* were impounded because the paper contained advertisements for an abortion clinic in Britain.

Despite the trade unions' call for a "yes" vote, opposition to Maastricht was strongest in the working-class communities, which experience unemployment and deprivation. The Irish National Organization for the Unemployed was among those calling for a "no" vote, as was the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), environmentalist groups and Sinn Fein.

USI was instrumental in setting up "Youth Against Maastricht", the most promising feature of the "no" campaign. They campaigned on a progressive platform for workers' rights, women's rights and defence of Irish neutrality.

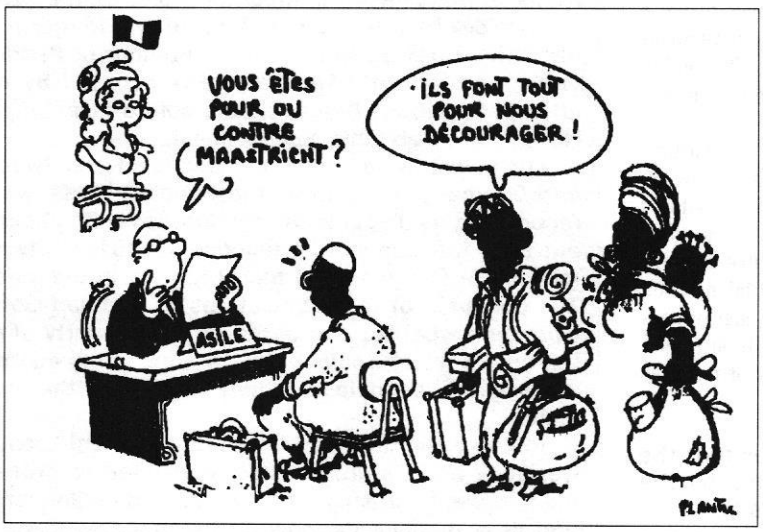
Opportunist blunder

But the main anti-Maastricht campaign, the National Platform, refused to distance themselves from SPUC in the hope of some spurious tactical advantage. The opposite proved the case. In post-referendum interviews, many said they had voted in favour of the Treaty because they did not want their vote interpreted as being pro-SPUC.

When the realities of Maastricht begin to bite — cuts, job losses, and the restructuring of the Irish economy as a more subordinate part of Europe — antipathy is set to deepen further.

The government will face a further difficult problem when it finally holds its long-promised referendum on the right to information on abortion and women's right to travel to Britain for abortions, promised for this autumn.

Then we can expect to see the full weight of the anti-abortion lobby and the Catholic hierarchy mobilized, putting the government, which must still rely on its support amongst the traditional Catholic voters of Ireland, in a difficult position. ★



"Are you for or against Maastricht?" "They'll try anything to discourage us" — [The next referendum on Maastricht will be in France]

A Marxist in the Czech parliament

VRATISLAV VOTAVA, a supporter of IV's Czech sister publication, *Inprekor*, was elected to the Czech parliament in the elections on June 5-6, 1992, on the Communist Party initiated Left Bloc slate. His decision to stand on this slate was the subject of considerable controversy on the Czech anti-bureaucratic left. The following interview with Vrata is from the May 1992 issue of *Inprekor*.

WHY on the Left Bloc slate?

The Left Bloc (LB) is an electoral coalition of the Czech and Moravian Communist Party (KSCM) and the Democratic Left (DL) which has also been supported by a number of other left groups and personalities, including Egon Bondy (a well-known opposition Marxist poet) and Ivan Svitak (a philosopher, similarly well-known since the 1960s). Its programmatic aims are, of all those presenting themselves in these elections, the nearest to the Left Alternative (LA) Theses of November 1989 and to the LA's programme for democratic and self-managing socialism.

Pluralism, and equality of the participants and their different points of view are fully respected by the Left Bloc, without reference to how many members a group has. This holds out the hope that after the elections there will still be a union of left forces open to research into, and promotion of, democratic and socially just alternatives to the current process of restoring capitalism in our society.

■ Is there not a danger that the Left Bloc will be abused by the KSCM for their own ends?

The KSCM is already a very different party to the pre-November Stalinist-bureaucratic Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC). It is no longer the political backbone of a bureaucratic dictatorship, most careerists have left it along with those directly responsible for the crimes of the past regime. In its ranks a still unfinished process of differentiation and change is going on.

Given the weakness and fragmentation of the so-called independent (meaning non-Communist) left, it offers the only real organizational basis for a left politics which can resist the extremely aggressive rightwing offensive, which presents increasingly open anti-democratic features.

I think that collaboration in the framework of the LB will strengthen those current in the KSCM itself which reject both a dogmatic defence of the past (so-called "really existing socialism") and social democratic-style pragmatic integration into the emerging capitalist system, and who are seeking a new way forward on the basis of self-management. The origin of the Left Bloc has something in common with the formation of the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC) in Italy, which members of the radical left organization Democrazia Proletaria have joined.

■ What is your electoral programme?

I consider as very important comprehensive support for forms of property based on self-management, including the formation of enterprises owned by their employees and cooperatives of the Mondragon type. I think that such forms should have been used during the so-called second privatization wave to defend bankrupt state and private firms and to develop cooperative enterprises.

In the Czech parliament I would like to contribute to the bringing together of the activity of the parliamentary left and the extra-parliamentary opposition, to the promotion of the demands of the citizens' initiatives, as a direct expression of the plurality of social interests in the spheres of so-called high politics.

I will also work for the defence of the social rights of young people — above all the right to free education, to work, to affordable accommodation as well as support for their non-commercial and non-conformist cultural activities. ★

The Velvet Divorce

SATURDAY June 20 saw the signing of an accord between the leaders of the strongest parties in the Czech Lands and Slovakia, Vaclav Klaus and Vladimir Meciar respectively, calling for the resolution of the crisis of the Czechoslovak federation by the end of September. This may mean the break-up of the federation into two separate countries; Klaus' party, the ODS, "preferring two separate states to a confederation".

This agreement between the Czech conservative right and the Slovak nationalist centre-left (Meciar's HZDS) — and the apparently friendly tone of their discussions — surprised many. In fact, it is mainly the result of the ODS' absolute determination not to allow their free market drive to be slowed or thwarted by a Slovak government eager to protect industry from such policies. Others, including president Havel, are attempting to mount resistance to the break-up, and Klaus' attitude has been much criticized on the Czech left.

As elsewhere in the countries of "no longer really existing socialism" the break-up would open a number of Pandora's boxes. In Slovakia, friction with Hungary, exacerbated by moves such as an attempt to impose Slovak as the sole official language on Slovakia's Hungarian inhabitants, seems inevitable.

Less clear is how relations will develop between the Czech Lands and Germany. Until now, the Czechoslovak government has only recognized as illegal (and therefore reversible) expropriations carried out after the Communist takeover in 1948. Between 1945 and 1948, millions of Germans lost their property in the so-called Sudetenland. The demands of the associations of Sudeten German exiles have at least the verbal support of the governing party of neighbouring Bavaria, the Christian Social Union. An upcoming agreement between Germany and Czechoslovakia may fall foul of the break up of the latter state.

In any case, the need for an independent broad movement linking Germany and Central Europe, dedicated to promoting friendship of the peoples by breaking the old pattern of German economic domination of mutually antagonistic Slav peoples, becomes clearer by the day — C. M. ★

CUBA

International congress held in Germany

A CONGRESS of solidarity with Cuba, held on Saturday May 23 at the Stadthalle in Bonn-Bad Godesborg, assembled more than 2,000 people: the size of the attendance and the quality of the interventions made it a real success.

Twelve speakers, from Latin America, the United States and Europe, denounced the embargo imposed on Cuba for the past 30 years, and its increasingly dire consequences since the fall of the regimes in Eastern Europe.

This particularly concerns Germany, given the importance of the previous trade between Cuba and the former German Democratic Republic (GDR).

The latter furnished substantial food aid to Cuba, notably in the form of powdered milk: to this day, the authorities of the unified Germany refuse to honour past agreements, even in the form of purely humanitarian aid. And the European Community has adopted the same attitude.

This policy was strongly denounced by Rosario Navas, Cuban ambassador to the European Community, and by Dorothy Piermont, a member of the European parliament.

Ulrich Bojé, a solidarity activist in the former GDR, also intervened on this question.

Daniel Algeria, for the Sandinista Front, Frei Betto, Brazilian liberation theologian, Hugo Diaz, for the Commission of Human Rights in Costa Rica, Teresa Gutierrez, in the name of the United States Peace for Cuba Committee, Janey Buchan (a member of the European parliament from Scotland), and Herman Veerbek (a Dutch MEP), spoke on the situation in Cuba created by the blockade, and denounced the hypocrisy with which the question of "human rights" was used to justify the strangulation of the Cuban revolution.

Irma Barrera, a deputy in the Cuban National Assembly, described the gains of the past 30 years in the fields of education, health and womens' liberation.

Finally, Roberto Robaina, general secretary of the Young Communists and a member of the leadership of the Cuban Communist Party, stressed the will of the Cuban people to preserve their independence.

He also spoke of the Cuban people's desire to continue along the road already traced while making the changes necessary for the preservation of the revolution — the struggle against the "internal blockade", the "bureaucratic blockade" — and spoke of their confidence in their capacity to resist.

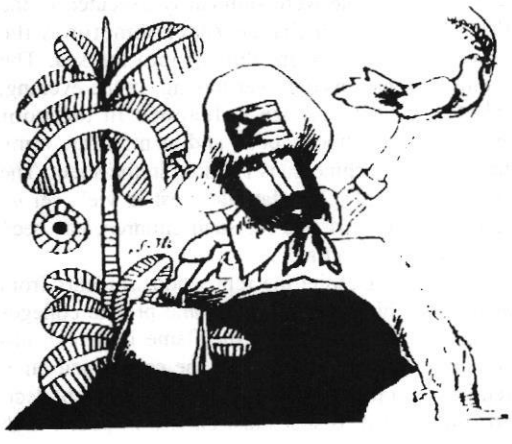
The importance accorded to this initiative by the Cuban leadership was underlined by Fidel Castro's lengthy message to the congress.

Heinz Dietrich, a lecturer at the University of Mexico, concluded the congress by talking of the solidarity tasks ahead. ★

FRANCE

The crime of solidarity

FORTY people were arrested in the course of a raid in Brittany in May 1992, for having given shelter to Basque militants who were supposedly members of the revolutionary nationalist organization ETA.



Some have been charged or are still being held in the Parisian region.

This is not the first case in which the French police have acted in this manner to crack down on solidarity with the Basque struggle — the priest in the village of Espalet, in the French Basque country, accused of having sheltered a Basque refugee without papers, has recently been released from prison, thanks to pressure from the inhabitants of Espalet and the religious authorities.

But this time the French state has decided to set an example: the Bretons charged are accused of "association with wrongdoers" and of assisting people without proper papers "in liaison with a terrorist enterprise": they could thus receive heavy penalties.

In the course of April and May, some leaders of ETA had already been arrested in the French Basque country as a result of closely coordinated operations between the French and Spanish police.

Police intimidation has however not succeeded in blocking all demonstrations of support for the Basque refugees.

In Brittany, committees of support have been formed in several towns with the participation of numerous individuals and different political forces — Breton nationalist organizations, the Greens, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (French section of the Fourth International), and others — while a variety of personalities have pledged their support to the imprisoned Bretons. A demonstration of 2,500 people took place at Quimper on May 23 .

Finally, the trial of 20 Basques, residents of the Spanish or French states, will open in Paris on June 19, 1992 — the French police are trying to lump together the cases of these militants, who were arrested in the course of different operations between 1989 and 1991, under the same heading, called "Operation Delta". ★

EGYPT

Farag Foda assassinated

FARAG FODA was an internationally known Egyptian writer, famous in particular for his struggle for democracy and secularism. On June 8, 1992, he was assassinated in Cairo — by fundamentalists, according to all the evidence. Many demonstrations condemning this crime have taken place in Egypt and abroad. The text below has received numerous signatures from personalities in the Arab world.

"On June 8, 1992, assassins killed one of the most courageous Egyptian writers. The terrorists fired on the freedom of expression for which Farga Foda fought.

"We denounce this aberration which amounts to replying to reasoned argument by physical violence, undertaken by a tiny group which represents neither Egypt nor religion and which attempts, in the name of religion, to terrorize free thought, culture and art, following the numerous crimes which it has committed recently against the non-Muslim minorities and its threats against supporters of secularism." ★

The prophet unarmed

RECENT weeks have been eventful in Haiti. Mobilizations have been stepped up, especially in the high schools and universities, while repression has reached new heights. The ruling putschists, who came to power via a coup against elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in September 1991, have nominated Marc Bazin as premier. Meanwhile, the United States is engaged in intensive behind-the-scenes manouevring to arrive at a solution which would put Haiti firmly under its thumb.

ARTHUR MAHON

A WOMAN from Raboteau, a shantytown of the city of Gonaïves, told a French journalist earlier this year: "Two weeks ago tyres were set on fire here in the middle of the night, I don't know who by. From time to time you find leaflets in the street. The population has shown that it has not fallen asleep. At any moment something could break out". For the time being people are resisting silently, but at the same time there is tension and frustration. The army is well aware that at any moment it could face sudden explosions.

The embargo decreed by the Organization of American States (OAS) has little substance.The trucks which bring all kinds of goods to Haiti (especially weapons for the army) gather on the frontier posts of the Dominican Republic. The army has been assured of a lavish supply of fuel from this source for a long time. However the prices for the poorest have risen catastrophically. The prices of basic necessities, which are not covered by the embargo, have risen by at least 20%, and often much more. Since the coup the economy has collapsed.

The repression suffered by the peasants in the countryside is worse than ever. After the coup, hundreds of thousands of people fled from the repression raging in the towns to take refuge in the countryside. But the situation there has become intolerable. The system of army-appointed civilian section chiefs has been restored in the interests of maintaining order. These chiefs have set about rebuilding and arming their networks of agents. In the South-East department, where there are only 300 soldiers, 17 truck loads of Brazilian and Israeli arms arrived this January.

The repression in the countryside has two objectives: to break the fighting spirit of the peasants and to squeeze money out of them. Peasants are arrested and beaten until they part with their money. Some have to sell all their belongings, and, at the risk of their lives, try to get the USA by boat. Many more take to the forests and mountains. They come back to their homes from time to time to get what they need, but they can no longer cultivate their land.

Forms of resistance

Resistance has had to take the form of graffiti, leaflets and lightning demonstrations. Some twenty small bulletins (some produced in tens of thousand of copies) are distributed in the country. The best known are *Kawoutchou* (Tyre), *Mawon*, *Kokoriko* and *Pikon Wouj* (Spicy Red). Some of them call for the formation of committees of resistance.

At the start of April, demonstrations took place in the capital Port-au-Prince and elsewhere. On April 29, thousands of inhabitants of the capital demanded the return of Aristide. On May 2, two hundred priests and nuns held a procession in the streets of Port-au-Prince. They were demanding the release of a Venezuelan nun found in possession of a calendar carrying Aristide's photo. Their demonstration was also a way of expressing their feelings about the new papal Nuncio, who had the day before presented his credentials to the putschist president, making the Vatican the first state to give him official recognition.

The first mobilizations this year were of students. Despite beatings, arrests and teargas they courageously organized demonstrations on school premises and defied the army when they arrived. The National Federation of Students of Haiti (FENEH) celebrated university week under the theme "University, crossroads of resistance?"

On May 18, a lightning action was greeted with enthusiasm by the people and gave the mobilizations a new impetus. On that day, a small plane, which had come from another country, scattered leaflets over several neighbourhoods in Port-au-Prince and other cities. On one side was a portrait of Aristide with the national flag and on the other an appeal to "a sustained mobilization", "total and absolute resistance" and to "make the pot boil even more strongly with orderly, disciplined and united mobilizations".

It also called on people to listen to Radio-16 décembre, a short wave station broadcasting to Haiti from the United States. This station aims to some extent to replace Radio Enriquillo, a progressive Catholic station transmitting from the Dominican Republican, whose Creole language broadcasts have recently been forbidden by that country's president (despite this it continues to provide information in Creole in the form of songs.)

Unable to stop the May 18 action, the army responded with repression. This was all the more furious owing to a number of attacks on army personnel, which had gone as high as the army no. 3. It is known that in one case a soldier's gun and his uniform were stolen, suggesting an action by a resistance group; at the same time in another case three soldiers were killed by their own comrades-in-arms.

Army terror

For several weeks the army has been trying to terrorize the people, using the same methods as during the coup. Shots can be heard throughout the country. According to the bulletin *Résistance et Démocratie*, quoting a publication devoted to the defence of human rights, between May 22 and 25 some hundred people were summarily executed in the Port-au-Prince zone; sometimes the bodies were thrown into the sea. The prisons are overflowing. In the evening, children are kidnapped in the poor neighbourhoods and at night the army machine guns children in the street. The centre "La famille c'est la vie", set up by Aristide for such children, has been set on fire.

Despite the repression, students from high schools and some private colleges have taken up the flame from the university students of the capital and other cities. On May 24, the government decided to shut most classes in public high

schools and bring forward the date of the examinations. However, the pupils went to their schools, which were often surrounded by the army. New clashes took place and at least one pupil was killed in the capital. On June 1, two girl students were wounded by shots after troops had besieged their school where a banner with a portrait of Aristide had replaced the national flag. Two days later pupils tore up their examination papers and threw rocks at the soldiers surrounding their school.

Rarely has the United States achieved a higher level of hypocrisy than in its recent dealings with Haiti. While engaging in behind the scenes manoeuvres to undermine Aristide, they periodically make gestures to give the impression that they are working for the restoration of democracy — instantaneous recall of the ambassador, occasional mild condemnations by Bush, withdrawal of visas for some notorious Haitians.

Rejecting refugees

These gestures are aimed at international and Haitian public opinion. The hypocrisy of the Bush administration has been highlighted by the issue of the boat people. Since the start of the crisis, 38,000 refugees have been intercepted by American coastguards. Among them, 23,000 have been sent back to Haiti where the army records their identity and fingerprints. Only 10,000 have been allowed to stay in the US to apply for asylum. The rest are waiting for a decision, stuck in the naval base at Guantanamo.

Finally, to put an end to this problem, Bush decided on May 24 to immediately send back all refugees picked up at sea and shut the camp at Guantanamo. At the end of May, one man, who claimed he was a deserter from the Haitian police, threw himself into the sea, preferring to drown rather than return to Haiti.

On a smaller scale, the French government has with equal cynicism striven to prevent Haitian asylum seekers from reaching its borders. Since most come through Switzerland, France has got the Swiss government to refuse entry to Haitians who do not have a letter of invitation. Air France, aboard whose planes most Haitians arrive in Switzerland, has interpreted these measures in the narrowest sense. Thus, on February 11, the airline — completely illegally — refused to allow 90 out of 103 Haitians to board a plane, although all had valid tickets.

The putschist government and the army fiercely opposed the ratification of the agreement made by Aristide and

representatives of Haiti's parliament in Washington on February 23. It was made impossible for Haiti's parliament to ratify; deputies opposed to the agreement, and others paid for the job, left the chamber rendering the session inquorate. Then soldiers threatened those who remained. Soon afterwards the supreme court of appeal rejected the agreement as unconstitutional.

Putsch supporters divided

At first, such events divided those who had rallied to the side of the putschists. A sector of the bourgeoisie affected by the OAS embargo wanted the agreement ratified. This was true too of some parliamentarians who had welcomed the coup, but have now had enough of living under the shadow of the army and the Duvalierists. Thus, the Washington agreement has posed problems for the putschists.

However, in the end the government, the army and the representatives of parliament managed to reach agreement on a text which, with a few amendments, was ratified by those deputies and senators who did not boycott the vote. It should be pointed out that this success for the putschists was made possible thanks to the attitude of the majority of parliamentarians from the PANPRA, a member party of the Socialist International, which is financed by the French Socialist Party.

The agreement thus reached envisages the nomination of a new prime minister to replace Jean-Jacques Honorat, the installation of a government of "consensus and public safety" which must resume negotiations and the resignation of the putschist president Nérette.

This latter will not be replaced "until an overall and definitive solution to the crisis has been found". On June 2, Marc Bazin was appointed prime minister, and his nomination was ratified by parliament — much to the discomfiture of PANPRA who were expecting the new premier to come from their ranks.

This nomination, which, according to Bazin, buries the Washington agreement, has aroused protests from the OAS, which has just resolved to step up the embargo, Washington and Paris. Even one of the ideologues of the coup, Jean-Claude Roy, joined in the chorus of indignation. According to him: "we can expect the worst, with continuous instability and increasing violence". Few Haitians still think that a negotiated settlement is possible. It is becoming clear that the organization of underground resistance and popular mobilizations are the only way to put an end to the dictatorship and impose Aristide's return.

New tone from Aristide

The situation has led to a change in tone from Aristide. After the coup he stressed the embargo, which he hoped would bring down the dictatorship (in fact its main achievement has been to allow a number of traffickers to get very rich) and other international pressures. At the same time he tried to maintain the spirits of his supporters in Haiti in messages broadcast on Radio Enriquillo. However he did not call for organized resistance. A speech on February 7, the anniversary of his accession to the presidency, marked a first change. Referring to the slave struggle against the French plantation owners, he issued a stirring appeal to "raise ever higher the flag of resistance".

After the signing of the Washington agreement, whose contents were a disappointment for many Haitians, Aristide continued to firmly insist that there would be no question of General Cédras profiting from the proposed amnesty. At

the same time he sought to reassure the Haitian bourgeoisie and imperialism. In particular, he explained that he was the only person who could prevent the Haitian people from taking reprisals and reforge Haitian unity. He also stated that once restored to power he would have to move forward slowly "like a car in a traffic jam".

When it became clear that the Washington agreement was a dead letter, he changed his tone. On May 18, he called for resistance to "move into a higher gear". A message in the form of a poem runs:

"The light of history illuminates our memory/ The light of history warms our memory/ We must march heads held high/ Head held high in the direction of demonstrations/ In the university; demonstration/ In the school; demonstration/ In the church; demonstration/ In the street, on the mountain, in the city/ In the four corners of the country/ Call, shout, protest/ Leap, call, shout/ Repeat everywhere endlessly/ Liberty or death/ Democracy or death/ Liberty or death/ Democracy or death!"

Aristide has thus abandoned the cautious language of the first months of his exile. However, the building of a resistance movement needs a programme that draws the lessons of the past few years, particularly as concerns the need to place no confidence in the bourgeoisie and to pay attention to the details of armed confrontation.

Without doubt it is not Aristide's place to tackle such problems. He has attempted to exploit to the limit the possibilities on the diplomatic level and to split the enemy camp.

To do that a certain caution is understandable; however, this does not mean that he is justified in speaking in a way that hinders the development of the Haitian people's own awareness of what needs to be done or slows down the building of a movement of resistance that is capable of confronting the dictatorship.

Unfortunately, his months-long insistence on the "non-violent" character of the resistance and appeals for "the unity of the privileged minority and the non-privileged majority" has contributed to sowing confusion on essential questions.

Aristide's crucial strength is his rapport with the Haitian people, which is now stronger than ever. In the collective consciousness, he has become a moral and religious figure who embodies centuries of hopes and struggles, which, since the victory over colonialism and slavery, have known nothing but betrayal.

When in the presidential palace he used his rapport to stimulate popular organization and self-defence. Subsequent events have shown that this was the only realistic road. Certainly it is not an easy one, and Aristide has sometimes tried to work in this sense.

However, on the whole, he has preferred to give priority to manoeuvres in the hope of lulling his enemies and winning time.

In fact it has only been his own supporters who have been lulled. It seems that he believes — wrongly — that his links with the people mean that their combativity will not be affected by his manoeuvres and the hostages to fortune given to the enemy.

US steps up diplomatic offensive

Has Bazin's appointment closed the period of diplomacy and negotiations? It seems, on the contrary, that for the US, it is only now that things are really getting going. On June 4, Bush met the heads of state of the English-speaking Caribbean.

One of them explained the need for a regional solution involving the US. The following day the Dominican press hinted at the efforts of that country's president, Balaguer, to bring about a Bazin-Aristide meeting and promote "a political formula called the third option".

On June 6, the *New York Times* reported that the Bush administration was working on a negotiated solution whose main points would be: the return of Aristide, which must be accepted by "the opposition forces"; the sending of a multinational peace-keeping force under OAS or United Nations control; and the participation of the armed forces in the choosing of the prime minister.

In parallel, the US press has again been trying to discredit Aristide and campaigning for the lifting of the embargo. Thus all the elements are in place for pushing Aristide to accept the new prime minister and for international public opinion to accept the sending of a "peace-keeping force" to Haiti or even more direct US control, in the face of the wave of terror gripping the island.★

Economic reform — and war

THREE dilemmas dominate daily life in Armenia: the war in Karabakh; the economic changes in a country with an outworn industry and no natural resources; and the genocide of Armenians during the First World War and future relations with Turkey. In the capital, Yerevan, people wonder: can independent Armenia survive?

VICKEN CHETERIAN

"A WOMAN enters her kitchen," runs one of the jokes circulating in Yerevan, "and puts on the light to discover that there is electricity, puts on the oven and finds out that there is gas, puts on the tap to find there is running water. She runs to her husband and shouts: 'the Communists are back!'"

In Armenia — as in other regions of the former Soviet Union — people speak about the Brezhnev era as Paradise Lost. A time of abundance when shops were full, goods cheap and everyone had jobs. Armenia is a mountainous country of thirty thousand square kilometres with no access to the sea and very poor in natural resources. The Soviets built enormous chemical factories, which produced enormous pollution, but Armenia depended on raw material coming from Russia, and on the common market for the distribution of the end product.

In any case, the republic did not decide, since the investments came from Moscow and the income made by selling the products went there too. The blockade of Armenia by Azerbaijan since 1989 and the gradual collapse of the Soviet economy have had disastrous effects. This winter only 20% of industrial capacity was operating.

Half the republic's population live in the capital Yerevan. The Soviet Armenian lea-

ders tried to bring the city above the one million limit so they could get bigger investments under the plan. The city itself is in a poor state, as if struck by a disaster; the roads are pitted with holes while the housing is divided between badly built blocks and slum-like one family houses. Factory chimneys protrude out of residential neighbourhoods.

After dark the city is dead while the smart cafes that speak of better days stay closed. The 2,750 water springs built to commemorate the city's history stay dry. Crowdss stand for hours at bus stops; public transport is out of order while private cars are rare.

In May, when a gallon of gasoline cost 120 roubles in Moscow, its price in Yerevan was more than 700 roubles — more than most people's monthly salary. The country is closer to the Middle East than to Russia — or Europe. Family relations dominate social and economic life while women, if they work, do unskilled jobs. With the collapse of Soviet values and increasing economic pressure, traditionalism is trying to push women back into the kitchen.

After the earthquake

Leninakan is the country's second city; the statue of Lenin and his name have been removed and it is now called Gumri. The ruins left after the 1988 earthquake have only partly been reconstructed. Probably over one third of the population in the earthquake region still live in containers which are cold in winter and hot in summer.

Concrete apartment blocks, damaged by the earthquake, stand empty. People fear that in case of another shock these rapidly and poorly constructed blocks would once again become mass graves. Cranes hang idly over half made sites — building materials have been unable to get through the blockade. Moreover, in the past year the government has not invested in housing, while people cannot afford free market prices.

The privatization of land, the most radical in the former-USSR, was adopted by parliament in February 1991 and some 80% of the land has already been distributed. The step has been considered a success and the media has even claimed that "Armenia will soon be self-sufficient" in agricultural products (*Les Nouvelles de Moscou*, December 3, 1991). Indeed, in a mountainous region, small farms are usually more productive than big kolkhoz [collective] systems. Now, the major difficulty is the tractors and machinery used on the farms, which used to come from Russia. The second stage of privatization, involving shops, stores and cafes, has already started. Although hundreds of young men stand idly at street corners during daytime, there is no unemployment, meaning they receive a salary for a job they don't do; but by the end of the year massive unemployment can be expected.

The airplane from Moscow to Yerevan was overcrowded; some people had openly paid money to the captain to get on the plane and stood up during the whole journey. Most of them were on business, carrying all sorts of things, from imported chocolates to piles of eggs to sell on the streets of Yerevan. We walked out of Yerevan airport without being checked.

Hundreds of statues

The national pride of the Armenians is striking. The streets of the capital are decorated with hundreds of statues of Armenians considered important. The loss of the identity of belonging to a superpower is replaced by nationalism, always strong in the Caucasus. The two national heroes these days are General Antranik — a guerilla leader who fought against the Turkish army at the start of the century — and the French-Armenian singer Charles Aznavour, who made big collections for victims of the earthquake.

In Soviet times, even the repatriated Armenians were looked at suspiciously and never rose to high position. Now the president, Levon Ter-Petrossian, is Syrian-born. His parents repatriated in 1946, while the foreign minister, Raffi Hovanessian, is an American-Armenian. The nationalist choice is buoyed up by hopes of support from the diaspora, where half of the seven million Armenians live, in countries including Iran, Syria, Lebanon, France, the USA and Canada, or from the prosperous communities of Western Armenia in Turkey.

However, national pride is not enough to keep people at home. My hosts, the Goharian family, the elders in which were repatriated Greek-Armenians, wanted to emigrate to Los Angeles. And they were no exception. "There, the poorest of the poor lives better than the rich here," said Siranoush, who used to work in the city soviet and was looking for work in the private sector.

In Armenia, it is difficult to get a clear idea about what is happening in the world. The international TV news is two minutes of rapidly changing CNN pictures. "We have an agreement with CNN", said Samuel Kevorkian, the director of the local TV station, "they provide us with the international news images for free and we show only CNN".

Nationalist arguments

Even the Armenian Communist Party's defence of its links with Moscow is based on nationalist arguments. "Armenia is surrounded by hostile Muslim states", said Aram Sarkissian, who was a politburo member of the local CP and is now the head of the Democratic Party of Armenia. "History has proved that the West, Britain and later the US, supports Turkey in this region. Our only ally is the Russians and for that we need a strong pro-Russian political party in Armenia, to strengthen Russian interest in us".

This argument is an old one — Armenian Communists argued against nationalists that the Red Army saved the country in 1920 from the invading Turkish armies. A monument commemorating the entry of the Tsarist Russian army in 1828 stands not far from Yerevan.

When the movement started in the Armenian-populated Karabakh enclave in neighbouring Azerbaijan, demonstrators in both the Karabakh capital Stepanakert and Yerevan carried portraits of Gorbachev. "They not only believed in *perestroika* and *glasnost*", said Vahan Ishkhanian, a journalist, "but they thought that the Russians ruling in Moscow would intervene in favour of their cause". The position of the Soviet leadership, which tried to portray the Armenian popular movement of 1988 as "irresponsible and adventurous" while trying to maintain the status quo, created a strong anti-Russian mood. Thus the struggle for Karabakh soon evolved into a movement for independence from Moscow.

The pogroms in Sumgait (1988) and Baku (1990) revived memories of the genocide organized by the Turkish authorities in 1915, while the war has created a deep hatred of the Azeris. There is a widespread belief that Turkey is supplying

the Azeri militias with arms and equipment. The borders with Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan (an Azeri enclave between Armenia and Iran) are the scene of sporadic fighting, mainly by paramilitaries. There is no discernible opposition to the war, no belief in the possibility of a solution and in Armenia as under Moutalibov in Azerbaijan, the government is widely criticized for not doing enough for the war effort.

With the social changes in the ex-Soviet countries resulting from the process of economic reforms, most of the regimes that now exist will probably prove transitory. The Armenian National Movement (ANM) currently in power evolved from the Karabakh Committee formed as a result of popular mobilization in 1988. Now, the ANM is made up of intellectuals who were outside the old regime and former Communist cadres who have rallied to it. At the start, its main aims were for the unification of Karabakh with Armenia, and the closure of the nuclear power station and of the "Nayrid" chemical factory just outside Yerevan which is the cause of much pollution.

Shifting attitudes to Russia

When Ter-Petrossian came to power in August 1990 after direct elections, the mood in Armenia was strongly anti-Russian. At the same time he was faced with a threat from Gorbachev to disband the militia groups. Unlike Gamsakhurdia, the former president of Georgia, or the Azeri Popular Front currently in power in Azerbaijan, which are trying (or tried) to break their links with the Soviet Union's successor, the CIS, Levon Ter-Petrossian tried to take a positive attitude to the Soviet authorities and subsequently to Russia, aiming to avoid direct confrontation.

The new elite in Yerevan were also in favour of a diplomatic solution to the Karabakh question. For this they were ready for a compromise to keep Karabakh as an autonomous region within a federal Azerbaijan. ANM leaders know that pro-market reforms, which rest on the hope of foreign investment, require stability. But military developments have overtaken political scenarios. The ANM also had to abandon its ecological stand. Nayrid was closed for a year but then reopened. "The struggle for Nayrid was a political question for us", said Ter-Petrossian, meaning that before the factory belonged to the Soviets, but now to the Armenian republic.

Furthermore, the government is now studying the question of reopening the nuclear power station. "This station is of the Chernobyl type" said Hagop Sanasarian, the head of the Green Union of Armenia, "built in a seismic region. Plus, there is no experience where a nuclear centre of this type is closed and then reopened".

"They don't support the cause of Karabakh; they follow the economic and political steps of Moscow; they don't share power with other parties; they are behaving like the old regime". These words come from speeches by supporters of Parour Ayrikian, a nationalist militant who spent 17 years in jail under the old regime. Among other things, Ayrikian is demanding a more thorough break with Moscow, including the creation of a national army and currency. At an earlier stage, he had called for better relations with Turkey to replace economic dependence on Russia. Every Saturday around 5,000 of his supporters gather in Opera Square to listen to anti-governmental speeches.

Historic parties reemerge

The best organized opposition group is the historic Dashnak Party. In power during the first Armenian Republic after the Russian revolution, they were chased out by the Red Army to become the most prominent and the most anti-Soviet Armenian organization in the diaspora. In 1990, the party opposed immediate independence and stressed maintaining good relations with the Soviet Union and Russia, to offset the "historical danger from Turkey," as their candidate in the 1990 elections, Sos Sarkissian put it. For many Armenians, the Dashnaks were a symbol of the anti-Soviet struggle; this pro-Russian stance lost the party some of its popularity. In the past two years the party has stepped up activity in Armenia and has considerable influence in Karabakh both among the fighters and in the Karabakh Supreme Soviet.

The ex-Communist media is now controlled by the ANM, which continues the old tradition: often the front page of the paper is devoted to the president's latest speech. After the collapse of the old regime, many small publications arose. "I took part in publishing a *samizdat* journal dealing with cultural and political matters," said Vahan Ishkanian, "later it became a legal monthly publication, but we had to stop because of financial difficulties". Now he worked for the most popular daily, *Yergir* ("Country") and said that most of the local papers are trying to link up with diaspora parties as their last hope of surviving market conditions. Yergir belongs to the Dashnak Party, as do some other weekly and monthly publications. Similarly the Ramgavar (liberal) Party has an influential paper printed twice a week.

This near monopoly by the diaspora parties of the young media has political consequences. Consisting mainly of refugees who survived the First World War massacres, the diaspora considers Turkey as the Armenians' main enemy. The government, which is trying to establish diplomatic and economic relations with Turkey, has even hinted at a public renunciation of territorial demands on that country; such a position is viewed as treason by West Armenians.

Many in Yerevan fear that the increasing involvement of Turkey on the Azeri side would lead to direct war between the two countries. An economy in crisis, war in Karabakh and on Armenia's borders and a nationalism fuelled by the frustrations and injustices of history; could the end of this century turn as tragic for Armenians as its beginning? ★

The making of a trade unionist

IN MAY this year a group of union officials from the former Soviet Union attended the educational centre of the Canadian Autoworkers Union. Among them was Nikolai Belanovskii, the vice president of the Union of Auto and Agricultural Machine Workers of Belarus (formerly Byelorussia).
The interview with Nikolai, the first part of which we publish below, was given to David Mandel on May 23, 1992 in the course of the visit to Canada.

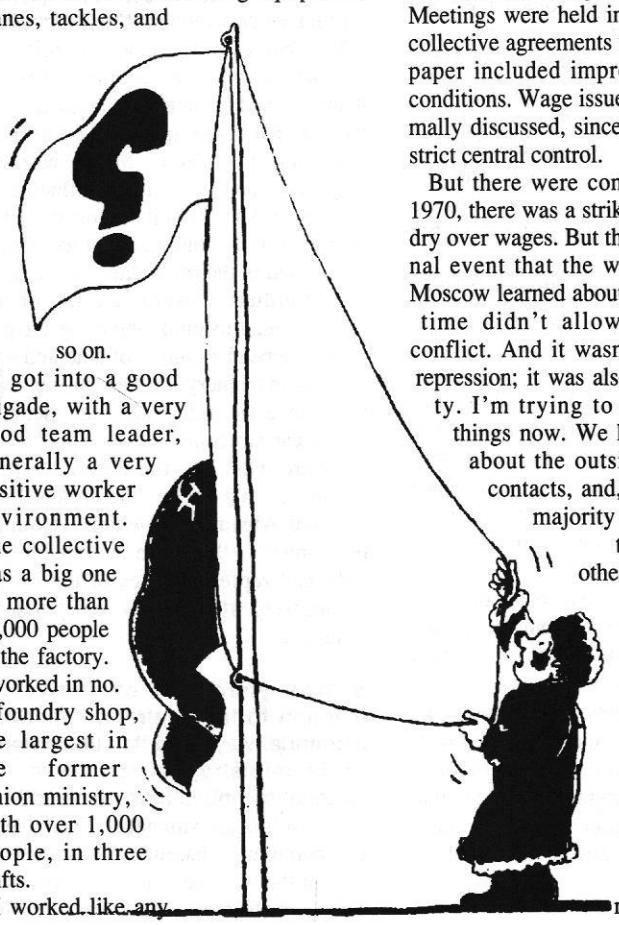
LET'S begin with your background.

I was born in 1954 in a peasant family. My parents, unfortunately, got divorced, and I grew up in a family of two sisters, my mother and my aunt, myself and my aunt's daughter. As the only man in the family, I was actively involved in the household economy very early on.

After finishing school, I started working in the kolkhoz (collective farm) and I also completed a course for truck drivers. Then I was called up. I consider that I received good training in the army: I completed a junior aviation specialist's course and worked as a mechanic servicing aircraft weaponry. When I returned home, there was really no work for me as a truck driver or mechanic; so I left for Minsk and got a job at Minsk Avtozavod which makes MAZs, middle class trucks, considered as the best of their type in the Soviet Union, that is, the former Union.

■ Did you have any problems moving to the capital city?[1]

In those days it involved certain complications, but if you were moving for work in a large enterprise, it wasn't very difficult, all the more so as I went to work in a foundry shop, where they were short of workers, and I was already familiar with a lot of the machinery. I was taken on as a mechanic for lifting equipment, cranes, tackles, and so on.



I got into a good brigade, with a very good team leader, generally a very positive worker environment. The collective was a big one — more than 30,000 people in the factory. I worked in no. 2 foundry shop, the largest in the former Union ministry, with over 1,000 people, in three shifts.

I worked like any other worker. I don't think I was in any way exceptional. Of course, I tried to do my job well. And since I had earlier been involved in sports, I also participated in competitions on the shop's team and was active in youth tourism, camping, hiking.

Then in 1980 — I was 25 — the chairman of our shop's union committee left. I was on vacation at the time: I had recently got married. When I returned home, my neighbours told me that people had come three times looking for me. I was alarmed: maybe something had happened. I went over to the shop, where some people from our Komsomol[2] organization told me that my name had come up in discussions about a new shop chairman. This was totally unexpected for me.

■ Why did they choose you?

The younger workers supported me; they knew me at work. It's hard to talk about oneself. But for some reason they said I could be trusted.

■ What was the former chairman like? Did he defend his workers?

For that period, it's very hard to figure out who defended the workers and who didn't. Conditions were totally different. Sure, there were many problems in the foundries, especially the harsh work conditions. But the system that existed then didn't really give any basis for you to think that things could be different. Meetings were held in a routine manner, collective agreements were signed that on paper included improvements in work conditions. Wage issues weren't even formally discussed, since wages were under strict central control.

But there were conflicts. As early as 1970, there was a strike in our steel foundry over wages. But that was an exceptional event that the whole republic and Moscow learned about. The system at the time didn't allow for much open conflict. And it wasn't just a matter of repression; it was also people's mentality. I'm trying to understand these things now. We had no information about the outside world, no real contacts, and, unfortunately, the majority of people felt that things couldn't be otherwise.

I was elected chairman of the shop committee. There were other candidates, but I got a majority. At first I found the job very difficult: more than a thousand people under one roof, three shifts, many problems, including personal ones — housing, childcare and the like. They also foisted the allocation of cars and other goods on us.[3]

■ Were you working full time for the union?

Yes, there were over a thousand people, after all. Exactly three months had gone by when I had my first serious conflict with management. We had a new shop head, a man with a long work record at the factory who tended to look at things through the eyes of a master (*khozyain*). A young worker had been drinking and was absent from work, and it wasn't the first time.

The shop head told him he was going to be fired. But we had, and still have, a system which requires the consent of the union committee for dismissals. Our committee met, and on my recommendation, we refused to give consent. We had heard the worker out and decided that, as he was young, he deserved a chance to correct his ways. In those days, getting fired under the clause on violation of work discipline meant you carried a black mark around with you for the rest of your life.

So the shop head came to talk to me. I explained our position. In the end he said: "If that's how it is, then I don't need you or your committee". He ordered me to reconvene my committee and get consent. That tells you something about the place of the unions in those days. I simply answered: "If you have the power to force the committee to take that decision, then convene it, only I won't be there". That's all I could do then.

But I have to give him credit: he apparently thought things over and returned after a couple of hours to excuse himself, though he still insisted I was wrong and that the worker would continue to violate discipline. I answered that if he did, we'd look at it again, but that a young person in particular deserves to be given a chance. And true enough, the worker didn't last long in the shop.

Another conflict arose during a discussion of work conditions. We were listening to a report by the head of the section. Our shop committee asked some very pointed questions about his work. His boss, the head of the shop, defended him in a very crude manner: "I'm the best judge of the section head's work!" There were a lot of workers there, and I had to

1. Migration to large cities was controlled through a residence permit (*propiska*) system.
2. Communist Youth League.
3. Factories were allotted a certain quantity of cars and other scarce goods that would be sold to workers and administrative personnel. The shop committee decided who would be given a chance to buy, as only a few items were allotted to each shop.

answer firmly: "In your own office at your own meetings, you can judge the work of your managers, but here we're looking at things from the workers' point of view, and we're considering how he works with the collective".

Had these conflicts not arisen, and had I not taken these positions, it's possible that I might have become the ordinary kind of committee chairman for those times.

■ You mean that the fact that you were forced to take these stands at the very start helped to determine your later behaviour?

Yes, but I wasn't really conscious of what I was doing. I'm sure I made my share of mistakes, but I intuitively took the path that I did. And in fact, I eventually developed pretty good relations with management. We never again had such pointed confrontations, and when it came to resolving problems that arose in the shop, the shop head ordered his foremen to prepare carefully for meetings with our union committee.

I spent six years as chairman of the shop committee. Our factory is divided according to types of production. The foundry department had eight shops in all, with 3,500 people. One day, the chairman of the foundry department's union committee was forced to resign by a vote of no confidence at a worker's conference.

■ The union operated democratically even then?

Well, at least among the foundry workers. Votes of no confidence also occurred in the case of secretaries of the foundry's party organization. You see, foundry work is hard, conditions are very difficult, there is more danger and more injuries. The workers figure there's nowhere to go from there. And that work makes them more open, more independent and demanding. It also brings people together.

■ Is it somewhat like the miners then?

It's comparable. And I'm not only judging by our workers. I've seen the same thing in the foundries of Tractor Factory and in other places. Their mentality and behaviour are different. In 1986, I was elected chairman of the foundry department committee.

■ Why was your predecessor ousted?

He was blamed for two sorts of thing. One was that his committee conducted a conciliationist policy in dealing with management on work conditions. The other was dishonesty in the allocation of cars. People knew that I had adopted rather firm, critical positions towards the administration and they felt I could handle the work.

I worked there for three years. It was difficult but good work. We succeeded in solving a lot of problems related to work conditions. For example, the auxiliary workers in the foundries — mechanics, electricians and so on — had been trying for a long time to get special pension benefits for harsh work conditions. We had two lists of special jobs in the Soviet Union. List number one included jobs with "especially harmful work conditions", in metallurgy, mining and so on. People in these jobs had the right to an early pension after 25 years. List number two gave the right to a pension five years earlier than ordinary workers. The jobs of these auxiliary workers used to be on that list until 1968. There was a tendency in those years to cut jobs from the list. It was done through the trick of changing their descriptions.

In 1989, the auxiliary workers finally organized a street protest meeting and decided to strike. I was present, and they elected me to head the strike committee. But I asked them, as chairman of the department committee, not to strike until I had tried other means. We negotiated with the administration but couldn't resolve the problem.

Then the government joined the talks — representatives of the State Committee on Labour and Social Security. By 1989, the situation had already been somewhat changed, and the government was paying some attention to these issues when we raised them. After two weeks of talks, we finally won. As a result, these workers eventually won special pension rights across the republic.

Towards the end of that year, abuses were discovered on the part of the administration and the factory trade union committee in the allocation of cars, housing, and so on, and I had to come out with a strong criticism and demand a full enquiry. Our foundry committee demanded a factory-wide delegates' conference to discuss the allegations. But of course the administration understood only too well it couldn't allow that.

So the director issued a decree ordering the reorganization of the foundry department: each of the ten shops became a separate department, so that in effect our department no longer existed. And since the department no longer existed, neither did its union committee. The foundry workers wanted to fight, but we saw that the situation in the plant as a whole didn't offer much hope for raising the rest of the workers.

■ Was the foundry department alone in the factory in its independence towards management?

There were two such committees; the foundry department and the pressing department. These are the two departments where conditions are the harshest, where the work is the most harmful and dangerous.

Soviet labour laws required that an elected union official be offered another job at the end of his tenure or in case his position was eliminated. They offered me a job as assistant director of an administrative bureau. But I understood perfectly that once I accepted an administrative position, I would no longer be covered by the legislation that protects workers from arbitrary dismissal and that I could be fired at once.

I had a long talk with the director. My main idea was that he was acting against his own interests in seeking subservient unions. After all, when a union committee functions as it's supposed to, most questions get resolved directly in the shop, and the authority of both the administration and the union committee are firmer. But of course I didn't expect him to retreat. Since I had already graduated from the institute in economics (I had been studying in the evenings), I took a job as an economist in the foundry shop.

■ Did you have an ATK (work-collective council)[4] at the factory?

Yes, but when the new enterprise law appeared in 1990, management dissolved it and created an enterprise council where half the people are appointed by management and half elected by the workers. Anyway, it hadn't had much influence.

It was in May 1990 that I lost my job as chairman of the union committee, though I remained in the praesidium of the factory committee. Towards the fall of that year, I began to think about the creation of an independent union of auto and agricultural machinery workers in our republic, since we didn't have any separate republican structures.

There was only the union's central committee in Moscow, the current International Algamation, which was under the ministry's thumb. In the republic, we only had representatives of the central committee, who had no real power or influence.

■ Was your idea exclusively a reaction to the central committee's dictatorial ways and its subservience to the ministry, or were there also nationalist motivations involved?

It wasn't at all nationalist. Even while I was committee chairman, I had come out against the way the union was organized. The republican structures decided

nothing; they merely wrote reports and signed orders from the ministry.

■ Did you give any thought to reforming the union's central committee in Moscow?

In practice, that couldn't be done from the republics. At the central level people were, in fact, appointed. Elections were completely formal.

■ You are saying that it was easier to change things at the republican level. Was this the sort of consideration that generally fuelled the drive for republican sovereignty that swept the Soviet Union?

Yes, it's an entirely objective process — people wouldn't have been moved to fight for sovereignty if Moscow had not exercised such dictatorial powers. All power was concentrated in Moscow. No enterprise director could decide anything of importance without Moscow's OK. All the major financing came from Moscow. That's not a normal situation.

■ Then the push for sovereignty was more a democratic than a nationalist movement?

Of course. But it eventually fed nationalist sentiment too. When relations with the centre are bad, there is a natural tendency to attribute all problems to the centre.

Our republic had a Federation of Trade Unions that unites all the branch unions. But it too was extremely conservative, and its officials were selected in the same way as Moscow's. One of the reasons we have so many problems with our unions is that the party apparatus consciously placed its functionaries, who in their majority had no lower level union experience, in the unions' higher structures.

They brought to their union jobs their own way of dealing with people and their ideological dogma. This had a serious effect on the quality of the union's work, and it meant that it was impossible for a worker from the bench with different views to move up into the higher positions.

It was only in 1990 that our union and the Union of Radio and Electronics Workers democratically elected central councils in the republic. Alexander Bukhvostov, who has been chairman of Gomel'mash[5], became our president. He had led the strike movement over the consequences of Chernobyl in 1990 and headed the march of Chernobyl victims to Red Square during the party conference to demand measures for defending the population against the consequences of the accident.

Statistics now show how child mortality and the cancer rate have risen. There was an attempt at the time to suppress these problems in the republic. The protests forced the authorities to deal with them. Now at least something is being done.

■ How were the elections of your republican union executive organized?

The idea of organizing a republican union arose in the factories. The organizing committee for the first conference was made up of delegates elected at conferences in the plants and of Byelorussian representatives of the Moscow central committee in our Federation of Trade Unions. The latter did purely technical work. Bukhostov was elected from among two competing candidates.

The conference was the first stage. It met in September 1990, elected a president and a commission to write a constitution. I was also asked to participate in it. The constitution states, for example, that employers can't be in the same union with hired workers. That point met a lot of resistance both from the union committee in our enterprises and from other unions. It might seem natural to you, but we have trouble even defining who an employer is.

■ Has the administrative personnel already left your union?

Not yet, but we are constantly raising that question. In writing the constitution, we had two basic aims. One was to make the union democratic, to get rid of the pyramidic structure. The plant organizations had to become the foundation of the union, and all the other structures should serve their interests. I knew from my own experience what it's like when things are the other way round.

Union functionaries would come to the plant and issue orders; they never asked how they could help us. In that rigid structure, we sent them all the dues we collected, and they decided how much and for what purposes we could spend.

The mistrust of higher structures has become deeply rooted. As people who had experience in the plants, we understood this and in writing the constitution, we took this into account. So, for example, only ten per cent of the dues, the smallest proportion of any union in the republic, go to the central council. We decided to take the minimum needed to maintain the apparatus and support our work. 90 per cent remains in the primary organizations.

That at least is how we felt things should be in the first stages. It makes work with the primary organization easier. When they have problems, I say: "Excuse me, but you have 90 per cent of the funds". We ask and demand that they don't spend the money but create strike funds.

■ How do the factory committees use their 90 per cent of the dues?

We still face big problems in the lower organizations. A lot of functions that rightfully belong to the state are still hung around our necks, a lot of cultural activities, libraries, sports, swimming pools and so on, that are maintained by our membership dues. For the transitional period, we are demanding that the state assume part of the costs.

At present, the government gives us six percent of the social insurance fund for maternity and sick leave, funerals and recreational activities. But we're trying to get the system of social insurance reformed. We don't want to administer these things ourselves but we want to be able to control how the government administers them and to determine policy.

So you see why many of our unions aren't what we feel they should be. They're kept so busy with social insurance, sports, childcare and the like, that they

4. Work-collective councils were provided for by the 1987 enterprise law and abolished by the 1990 enterprise law. These were to be democratically elected self-management councils, though in practice the vast majority were subservient to management.

5. A large agricultural machinery production association centred in the town of Gomel'.

can't pay the necessary attention to the price of labour, which is the primary issue.

■ How much resistance was there to this drive to renew the republican union? And did you have much support from below?

Of course there was resistance, mainly from the structures above the plant level. However, I can't say that there was much pressure from rank and file workers to reform the union.

■ Then, the changes are due mainly to the efforts of a group of activists from the factory committees?

To a very large degree. That's because you can't really expect independent actions of workers or of individual shop committees in an unreformed system.

After electing a president and a constitutional committee, we moved on to the second stage: formulating demands for a collective agreement and organizing a founding congress to adopt the demands. The congress adopted the demands in even stronger form, something quite unusual in our republic, as well as a plan of action. It was there also that I was elected vice president from among two candidates. The president and the vice president are the only two officers in the union on the republican level.

The work was very hard at first because I was alone. The president was from Gomel', and it took him half a year to arrange his affairs and move to Minsk. The biggest problems involved breaking the old mentality of the union committees in the enterprises. They were used to awaiting instructions from above. We put moral pressure on them, and we can do that because our authority among the workers, who can see the sort of things we are doing, is rising. The rank and file are beginning to pose a lot of questions to their committees. Many of those people haven't been able to change their ways and are being forced to leave. Others are trying to change.

Another complex problem was to clarify our relations with the Federation of Trade Unions. It was supposed to be a coordinating centre that dealt with issues that couldn't be resolved by the branch unions but instead had grown accustomed to ordering around the branch unions and running them.

When we and the radio-electronic workers adopted our new constitutions, the Federation tried to plug into that process and tell us what to do. But we were able to break the old relations and force them to recognize that it is the branch unions that create and finance the federation, which should deal only with those issues that the branch unions assign to it.

■ Were the developments in the radio-electronics union similar to those in your union?

In our work over the last year and a half we realized that we saw things in the same way, so we united to form the Association of Industrial Unions. Each branch has over 250,000 employees; we're the two biggest unions of the 23 in the republic. Representation in the Federation is one delegate per union, regardless of size. Since we were a very long way from being a decisive force in it, we decided to form our own association, though we are still in the Federation. The Federation is conservative and holds us back. Many of the leaders in the other branch unions are close to retirement: many were party functionaries in the past.

The Federation was to a large degree responsible for the April strikes.[6] The growing discontent among the workers was already evident at the Federation's plenary session in February. I spoke there and proposed concrete actions. At my union's plenary session, we decided to put the following demands to the government: stop the rise in prices — they were rising rather quickly, though the government denied that — and adopt social protection of the population. At that stage, however, we were only a few months old, and the government didn't pay much attention to us, preferring to deal with the Federation.

Discontent continued to grow. At a meeting of the praesidium of the Federation, I spoke very bluntly; if we don't put forth demands that have specific dates attached to their fulfillment and unless we are prepared to back them up with strikes, the unions might find themselves overboard. My proposal to set March 28 as the deadline for a favourable government response to demands on prices and social guarantees was adopted.

The next day I open the paper and start reading the Federation's declaration. It seemed OK until I realized that there was no deadline for the government's answer.

It was the old style. And that failure had a big influence on the further course of events. The government seemed ready to negotiate. But how? "Well, you see, we just can't pay for these things..." Had there been a strike deadline, we could have turned to the rank and file and mobilized them to exert pressure.

Meanwhile, without waiting for the government, our union began to negotiate with the plant directors to raise wages and pay compensation for the rising cost of meals in the canteens. The radio-electronic union did the same. But there were universal engineering plants located not far from ours in which the unions did nothing. On April 3, the day after the price rise, their workers pointed to the gains in our plant just across the street. At the Automatic Lines and Kirov (engineering) factories, the workers spontaneously poured out into the yard and held a mass meeting.

Representatives of the Workers' Union and of the Popular Front arrived.[7] An activist at one of the plants had informed them of the protests. They tried to convince the workers to stop work and offered to lead them. After a couple of hours, the meeting broke up. But a wave of agitation was already sweeping through the other factories, as the rumor of a strike reached them. Of course, had the trade union committees been up to their task, they would have systematized the demands, openly declared the support for the workers, and there probably wouldn't have been any strike committees and all the rest that followed.

But the next day, since the administrations had not adopted any measures to calm people's concerns, the workers of those two plants came to work and then went to the other plants to ask them to support the movement. It proceeded in a very chaotic manner, with groups here and there striking, but not whole plants. Not much happened that morning, until a conflict over wages, not directly related to the price rise, arose on the assembly line in our Avtozavod.

Aware of the agitation on the other factories, 4-5,000 workers stopped work and went to see the administration. Neither management nor union representatives came out to speak to them. So someone said: "Forget them. Let's go to Government House".

So they began to march in columns, in their overalls, to the central square. They included most of our foundry workers as well as several thousand workers from our Tractor Factory. When news reached the others that the Avtozavod workers were marching, they also began to form into columns and move, but, as I said, only groups of workers, not whole factories.

In some factories, the union committees began to wake up and went together with the columns, but very timidly. In the Tractor Factory, the union committee itself suggested the election of a strike committee. But then the two committees began to fight among themselves. The marchers had no clear goals except to raise their wages to compensate for the price rise. ★

6. Byelorussia saw a series of large-scale strikes in April 1991 that were set off by the price rise of April 2.

7. The Workers' Union was set up just a few days before the strike by workers with links to the Byelorussian Popular Front, a liberal nationalist movement.

Who are the privileged?

Round Table on Quebecois-First Nation relations

THE question of the independence of the French-speaking province of Quebec from the Canadian federation is complicated by the presence of tens of thousands of native peoples from various indigenous nations which have become increasingly vocal in demanding their rights and asserting their cultural heritage.

We publish below a round-table discussion between militants in the native people's struggle and the Quebec independence movement. The participants are: Marc Bonhomme, editor of the Quebec magazine *Option Paix* and a member of the Quebec Coalition for a Public Energy Debate; Ellen Gabriel, whose Mohawk name is Katsi'tsakwas, one of the spokespersons for the Kanesatake Long House; François Saillant, an activist in the housing movement and the movement in solidarity with the indigenous peoples; and Michel Mill, a revolutionary socialist and independence activist who has specialized in native questions since his youth. The discussion first appeared in the spring issue of *Option Paix*.

MARC Bonhomme: Ellen, in a recent interview that you gave to the bulletin *Solidarité*, you seemed to say that if the Oka crisis[1] advanced the Native people's cause in Canada, the situation at Kanesatake is worse than before.

Ellen Gabriel: Only the Band or Tribal Councils[2], which are the only bodies recognized by the government, benefitted from this struggle. They claim to have resolved the problem, when in fact all they have done was to put a band-aid over it. Nothing has changed for the people who demand the type of traditional government that existed well before their land was colonized.

The natives that have benefitted from this situation are the assimilated Canadian Indians.[3] The traditional Indians like the Mohawks and the west Canadian communities do not even exist in the eyes of the government. The government holds that it is helping the Indians because it pays various native nations for their lands. Those are good Indians according to the government because they do what the government asks them to do. But for us it is not progress, but a setback.

We are a nation, we have our cultural identity, our own language, laws, traditions and government. The natives who accept the formula of an autonomous government under the Indian Act are no different from ordinary Canadians; they are Christians who baptize their children and bury their dead like whites do. If they are not different from whites, why then is their a special place for them at the constitutional table?

MB: As far as relations between the First Nations and the Quebecois are concerned, can we also speak of a setback?

François Saillant: The ties between the Quebecois and the native nations have not deteriorated as much as has been said since Oka. Beforehand, the First Nations were considered part of folklore. As long as they did not demand their rights, they didn't bother anyone. But when they began to do so, things changed.

Michel Mill: The impression of a set-back is the result of Quebec political parties using this crisis provoked by the SQ[4]. These parties want to instill in the Quebecois the notion that Quebec is the sole reserve of the francophones. This was seen in the Grande Baleine affair[5]. This

1. The Oka crisis involved an armed conflict between the Mohawk people and the municipality of Oka over the building of a private golf course on land claimed for over 150 years by the Mohawks. For more on the Oka crisis and other incidents involving the repression of the Mohawks of Quebec see *International Viewpoint* No. 191, October 1, 1990.
2. The Band Councils as they are called in Canada, or Tribal Councils as they are called in the US, were established by the US and Canadian federal governments to administer funds allocated to the native peoples. Less than 20% of the inhabitants of the reserves participate in the elections to the councils. This reflects the opinion that they are alien bodies established as a means of reinforcing federal rule.
3. For example, Ovide Mercredi, President of the Assembly of First Nations, has denied that Quebec is a nation entitled to self-determination.
4. The SQ or Sureté de Quebec is the Quebecois police force.

strategy could create a favorable environment for the development of a far-right Ku Klux Klan-type of party.

On the other hand, this crisis has forced a series of minority currents within Quebecois society to face up to the problems of the relationship between the structure and functioning of a society of European origin (I don't think we can speak anymore of a white society) and the native nations.

MB: It seems that the authorities want to take advantage of any situation to poison the relations between European society and the native nations. We saw for example how the Parti Québecois (PQ) took advantage of the agreement between the Akwesasne community and Hydro-Quebec[6] around the payment of electricity accounts, to accuse the natives of having privileges.

MM: In order to resolve these difficulties we have to put forward a global vision. To do so, the goals must be decided and the means elaborated afterwards; not the other way around. There is too much of a tendency to accept the parameters of the debate as set by the government and the official opposition. These revolve around their notion of private capitalist ownership of the land and its products. Without an alternative, most of us accept these parameters as the basis of the discussion. But if we accept this logic of the needs and imperatives of the market, and not of human needs, people will be right in talking of privileges. We have to break with these notions.

FS: I work with people who have had their electricity cut off. It is natural that their first instinct is that of frustration. By looking at just one aspect of the problem it is easy to see how one would accuse the natives of demanding privileges, be it electricity bills, the non-payment of taxes, bingo games or the refusal to allow patrols on their lands. This is how the government can play its racist card. When will there be comprehensive negotiations on territorial rights, the exercise of sovereignty of the native nations, and the sharing of resources?

EG: I want to make it clear that I am a person who pays her taxes and I don't like the generalization that the media make in saying that all Mohawks don't pay their electricity bills. The resources used by Hydro-Quebec and other rich companies are on Indian land that has never been conceded. Our culture considers it dishonest to not pay for something that one wants to have in the house. But on the other hand, we are not privileged. We are constantly assaulted by a culture that does not seem to respect the environment.

For us, the land is a living organism that feeds us. Hydro-Quebec and the mining companies enrich themselves by ravaging it. It is they who are the privileged. You harvest what you sow. The Indians have been exploited enough. The small Mohawk communities have no economic future; the land is not adequate for agriculture and the level of pollution is enormous. Not paying for electricity is a challenge, an act of revenge. I don't condone such acts, but I understand them.

MB: The government does not want to deal with the real problem, on the other hand it would like to have social peace if it is not too expensive. It also recognizes that it is electorally profitable since this policy is supported by a large section of the Quebecois population. What is good for them is bad for us. How can this populism which could lead in a far-right direction be fought?

MM: Why not put forward the idea that nobody should pay their electricity bill? Hydro-Quebec has no more the right to cut off electricity at Akwesasne and Kahnawake than at Pointe-St-Charles or in east Montreal. It must be explained that if Hydro-Quebec seems nicer with some indigenous peoples it is only done in order to make it easier to tighten the knot around the Cree nation in Grande Baleine. Electricity is not a privilege but a right, like housing. Today one cannot live without electricity.

MB: Isn't it inevitable that such immediate demands will be situated in the framework of the constitutional debate?

FS: One might get the impression that the indigenous nations want things that we don't have and that they are against the things that we want, like, for example, Quebecois independence and that they are therefore ready to make an alliance with the forces that we have always fought.

The popular classes have an interest in improving relations with the indigenous populations. We have much to learn from the indigenous nations like, for example, on the question of respect for nature. The land mustn't be the private property of a few individuals. That would favor neither the Mohawks nor the Quebecois. It is no more correct to monopolize the land of the Kanesatake to build a golf course than it is to use the center of Montreal for a parking lot.

MM: We must be concrete and clear. Personally, I am pro-independence for Quebec. The independence of Quebec is not the independence of a vague entity that was drawn on a map in 1898, 1912 or 1928 by the Privy Council in London. When the indigenous peoples say that two-thirds of Quebec land belongs to them, we must answer yes. We must have honest and open discussions that are not based on the maps of the Privy Council, the Civil Code or the fact that Hydro-Quebec or others have stolen large parts of their territory. There must be mutual respect. That is the only way to clear the air.

Otherwise, we will continue to see the hypocrisy of the politicians and of many individuals in English Canada who want to come off as very pro-native only to create bad relations between the Quebecois and the first nations in order to crush the historic aspirations of francophone Quebec. This cannot be done if each side refuses to discuss with the other.

EG: All around us we see Quebecois talking of separation and Canada of unity.. Any Indian from the east or west will tell you about their native land. Non-Indians ignore them, especially those like [Quebecois bourgeois nationalist leader] Jacques Parizeau who claims to speak for ordinary Quebecois and for whom the native has no rights whatsoever. Are the Quebecois naive enough to accept such things?

The philosophy of our ancestors commands us to share things. This is a commandment that we have always observed. It is thought that we live in a civilized era. We on the other hand see it as a barbaric one because it involves the total destruction of human values as well as the earth.

Montreal will spend 450 million Canadian dollars next year to celebrate its 350th anniversary and they have just closed a shelter for poor people because of lack of funds. Where is the logic of this? The whole planet is functioning illogically. Our philosophy is not materialist. You said earlier that nobody can live without electricity. For us, electricity is a foreign concept. I know lots of people who would have no problem living without electricity.

When you talk of independence and of laws, you impose them on our independence and on our laws. We see the independence of Quebec as being only another set of new rules that will be forced on us. I heard (native American leader) Billy Two-Rivers say that an independent Quebec will be even harder for the natives.

People believe this because of the historic relations between the French and the Quebecois. The Hurons and the Montagnais are exceptions, but historically we are enemies and for certain reasons we remained so for centuries. I grew up at Kanesatake and Oka. There are old families there who have been there for over a hundred years and who are very racist. To them we are "dirty".

I grew up with this suspicious attitude

5. The Grande Baleine affair is the struggle against the construction of an environmentally-unsound dam on land claimed by native people.

6. Hydro-Quebec, an energy company owned by the province of Quebec, plans to flood tens of thousands of square miles of indigenous land in order to produce cheap electricity. This has been a source of considerable conflict between the First Nations and Quebec.

towards the French Canadians who think they are superior because they have more money and different values. For us, worth is not measured by the size of our property or our bank accounts. Success for us is to be happy within our family and in the community. The political and cultural conflicts that we have experienced must be resolved by discussions which, even if we don't finish them in our lifetime, must be begun now with young people who want to know what is a Quebecois, what is a Mohawk or a Cree. It seems as if we are scared of each other. We must work to modify these perceptions.

MM: There are a whole series of myths that must be destroyed. I come from a small community in Anishnabe country in the center of Ontario. The small town in which I lived was one third anglophone, one third French Canadian, and one third Anishnabe. The second language of the Anishnabe was French which made their situation even worse because speaking French in Ontario is bad enough for a French Canadian; imagine what it's like for an Anishnabe! In fact there was an alliance between the French Canadians and the native people against the others until primary school. Then, the natives were sent to school in the southern reserves.

The true history of relations between Europeans and indigenous peoples is not at all like it is presented in French or English history texts. These texts are responsible for the myths that provoked the Oka crisis; the myth of the alliance between Mohawks and the English which is historically inaccurate as is that of Indian torturers. We must demand that such texts be rewritten. The indigenous people know their own history better than we know ours.

We don't know it because it was written in a way to favour the privileged and perpetuate divisions. How many people know that there are at least 15,000 indigenous people in Montreal — more than in Vancouver where there are 13,000 according to the recent census? How many Quebecois even knew of the existence of the Kanesatake before the crisis? People in Montreal have visited the park and the shops at Oka, but that's all.

MB: The relations between the Quebecois and the indigenous people are similar to those between poor whites and Blacks in South Africa. The poorer a white is, the more he finds himself in conflict with Blacks over competition for jobs. Aren't we in a certain sense the Afrikaners of Canada?

In Quebec the English represent the "top dog", the indigenous peoples the "under dog", and the Quebecois the "middle dog". Not being fully lords of their own manor, the Quebecois feel threatened by the territorial demands of the first nations. As owner of his own manor, richer and more powerful, the English Canadian nation comes off as more "liberal", even more so as the leadership of the Assembly of First Nations accepts a priori Canadian unity.

To avoid this dangerous trap requires in the long term questioning private property as Michel and François have already pointed out, and rebuilding a society around the indigenous concept of the Motherland as Ellen has explained. But we need to think through a strategy for that.

MB: The struggle against Northern Energy has provided a meeting point for the concerns of both of us. The Quebecois and Cree people are against this project for environmental, economic or national reasons. The alternative of efficient energy use would meet our energy needs without violating Mother Earth and by creating many more jobs per dollar invested without massive indebtedness.

This perspective has been put forward by the organization Coalition for a Public Energy Debate, and it serves as the basis for an alliance. Most of the environmental groups like the Montreal blue collar union, CEQ and several citizens groups with Cree, Inuit and Algonquin groups have found themselves around the same table.

MM: Another good example is the struggle against private hunting and fishing clubs on the North Coast. Unions in Sept-Iles and Port Cartier and the Inuits have made an alliance to root out these clubs which belong for the most part to rich Americans and English Canadians with a smattering of Quebecois. I remember Michel Chartan, then one of leaders of the CSN, accompanying Indians all armed with rifles in a small aluminum boat to one of these clubs that were defended by armed security guards who fired upon them.

FS: Even though I am pro-independence, I'll admit that I share some of the fears of Billy Tworivers. The Quebecois nationalists have always been incapable of understanding the plight of the indigenous peoples. Remi Savard has for a long time tried to reconcile the two national questions in the interests of both against the same oppressive Canadian federation. But the nationalists just didn't get it.

The Quebecois has grown to be comfortable with the status of being oppressed. But the treatment meted out to the indigenous peoples conjures up the image of the Quebec oppressor. This is an image that the Quebecois nationalists have never been able to deal with.

It is said that the nationalist Parti Quebecois (PQ) has been the most open towards the indigenous nations. It is true that the declaration of 85 recognizes the existence of the indigenous nations except that it prohibits complete territorial integrity. The attitude of the pro-independence leaders is scary concerning their statements around Grande Baleine.

I am afraid not only for the indigenous nations but for the poor Quebecois classes if the Quebec authorities are under the control of Parizeau. We are heading in the direction of a society of bankers without concern for social problems. The pro-independence people who think otherwise are in a small minority and have not been able to make themselves heard.

MM: This is true and false at the same time. The Canadian state was founded from the beginning on the oppression of the people; this is its fundamental characteristic. The rejection of this state opens up the possibility, but not the certitude, of raising the biggest social questions, of breaking the false consensus that holds that Ottawa is the only enemy. It must be made clear that the enemy is also amongst us. It is this possibility and not the formal character of independence that is key.

MB: I don't agree with François. On the Northern Energy question the federal government tries to put on a good face,

unlike [Quebec premier] Bourassa who has taken clearly anti-Cree and anti-environmentalist positions, and Parizeau who tries to hide but always shows his true face when the going gets tough. However, [Canadian Prime Minister] Brian Mulroney recently showed his true face when he called on the European parliament during his recent trip to Paris to intervene in our affairs. Federalism is no different from Quebecois nationalism when it concerns the interests of the Quebecois people and the indigenous nations.

But Bay Street and the federal government are rich enough to come off well. Northern Energy is Bourassa's latest playing card after the Meech Lake affair[7]. Whereas for Mulroney, James Bay II [Hydro-Quebec] is one project among others in the framework of the free-exchange agreement with the United States. Worse yet, Ottawa uses the vulnerability of the Quebecois federalists to attack Mother Earth and the First Nations in front of Canadian and international public opinion. At the same time, the Anglo-Canadian bourgeoisie digs oil wells and uranium mines on indigenous lands in the West.

The key argument of the federal government is that the law is the same for all. That of Quebecois nationalism is that of the territorial integrity of Quebec. Together, these two positions negate the right of self-determination. The independence question opens up possibilities if we play our cards right. But how? This has taken several forms like, for example, the Regroupment of Solidarity with the indigenous peoples.

We are a minority but we represent the hope of a nation. The drive towards independence is irreversible. It can only be wiped out by an economic war if not by armed force. The Oka experience and the threats in the Anglo-Canadian press prove that this threat exists. This why an alliance between us and the First Nations is so essential. We confront the same enemy: big capital in Toronto and Montreal, the federalists and the national status-quo.

EG: We would not have believed that the armed intervention at Oka would prove us wrong. We, more than anyone else, understand what oppression is. We live through this oppression and our parents had it even worse. I've seen racism practised against French Canadians in western Canada where I lived. It's just as bad for indigenous people there than it is here. We don't distinguish between French and English. For us, you represent the same point of view. You want what the English Canadians have. Are we going to be sequestered onto reserves in an independent Quebec? Whose laws will apply?

FS: I agree that independence will open up possibilities and that is why I am for independence. But what bothers me is the type of independence or rather the political sovereignty that the current balance of forces involves. The unions are no longer an opposition force. They are part of the grand national consensus. The Parizeau-Bouchard current clearly dominates. Political sovereignty with people who want to maintain the social status-quo risks being worse in a situation of economic encirclement by English Canada.

The important question is the balance of forces that will come about. Serious questions must be put to the unions who should help us build a different type of society.

MM: There are major gaps in this facade of unity. At the last congress of the Central Montreal Council of the CSN, in the workshop on relations with the indigenous peoples, people learned to their great surprise that one of the full-timers of the shop was a native. The atmosphere at the beginning of the workshop was very tense; there were not only sympathizers with the indigenous people's cause. Nothing was resolved but the questions were correctly and honestly posed.

Michelle Vigeant, a francophone Mohawk from Kanesatake, made an excellent historical presentation. At General Motors at Ste. Theresa, where Mohawks from Kanesatake work and are widely respected, there were many debates in the shop. The same thing occurred in the CLSC union in St. Paul where the workers wound up taking a favorable position on Gahnienke.

The policies of tail-ending Bouchard and Parizeau are not always accepted by all the unions. At the last FTQ congress the rank-and-file strongly challenged the support given to Grande Baleine by the top leadership. The mere existence of the Solidarité Regroupement is a huge step forward. While the indigenous struggles did not begin yesterday, the solidarity among Quebecois francophones is quite new. The League of Rights and Liberties is, to their tremendous credit, a trail-blazer. We must continue to overcome the remaining obstacles.

FS: Besides the unions, we must also involve the popular classes. It is they who are the biggest victims of Parizeau and company. We have to find a way to infiltrate the social assistance bureaus which are exposed to the first stereotypes, to the worst racism.

EG: We want support with no strings attached. We in our society are trying to resolve the worst problems that the Minister of Affairs has not only not helped resolve but has made worse. We are very suspicious about the support of some people and some groups. During the crisis some religious groups threatened to withdraw their support because they did not like certain things. They must be made to understand and respect who we are.

The Quebecois and ourselves are following parallel roads which are quite similar. We have to know what you want. Why do you want independence? I can understand it because the federal government is extremely corrupt. Breaking up this state is a very good idea. But at what price? Will there be more oppression of the indigenous peoples? This is a question that torments many people. Like the Grande Baleine project, many indigenous people see the building of economic independence of Quebec as destroying the indigenous people's way of life; the Canadian government is quick to seize on this sentiment in order stoke the resentment of the indigenous peoples towards the Quebecois.

The media has an important role to play. Misinformation is rampant. We are scared of the rise of a police state. In fact, the Mohawks already live under one. But the other indigenous peoples are afraid of one as well. Far from improving, the situation is getting worse. Development projects are being pursued everywhere. One will begin again in Pin's in Oka in March. Do people think that we are going to take this laying down? The Oka Quebecois are afraid of us. If violence occurs it won't only be the indigenous peoples who will rise up. The rest of Canada asks what you are doing to the indigenous people. They too are misinformed. People must be conscience of that. Kanesatake may be a small indigenous community but what happens there will effect the whole country.

MM: We must give unconditional support to the defense of the indigenous people's rights. Unconditional does not mean blind. I think we have to be much more imaginative in our support for self-determination than before. I don't like the formulation that calls for a Quebec of twelve; that is, an egalitarian association of eleven indigenous nations plus the European inhabitants of Quebec, because except for the Attikameks and the Abénakis, the other First Nations are not confined to the territory of Quebec's borders. We have to stop thinking according to the rigid framework of private property, of lines drawn on a map. We must consider solutions that are not necessarily based on the model of the European Nation State with borders.

We have not yet taken up this problem. We have not discussed among ourselves or with the indigenous peoples. True, this vision of things has a certain utopian ring, but I don't see any other way. ★

7. See *International Viewpoint* No. 191, October 1, 1991.

Rio or revolution?

TWO BASIC options exist for anyone today who, out of frustration or nostalgia for their radical left past, wants to hear or read the word "revolution". One is to pick up an illustrated magazine and look at the adverts for goods. Here they may read about the revolutionary new washing powder, revolutionary new motoring concept, the revolution in trainers or even the permanent revolution underway in the field of desktop computers. The other refuge of the actuality of the revolution is in the mass of research and multitudes of reports about the world ecological situation, recently before our eyes at the UNCED "Earth Summit" conference in Rio.

THIES GLIESS*

SOME examples of the latter: Under the title "The Global Revolution", the Club of Rome writes: "The theme of the recent Club of Rome conference was 'the big change'. We are convinced that we are in a period of the establishment of a new world social order, which differs in fundamentals from our present-day society to the same degree as the world after the industrial revolution differed from the preceding long agrarian period... We are convinced that the extent of these changes will lead to a great revolution on a world scale".

The authors of the legendary 1972 Club of Rome report, Donella and Dennis Meadows, have written in their latest book *The New Limits to Growth*: "The present period is one of a comprehensive change: the third revolution. The next revolution will be one for a sustainable society... The Sustainability Revolution will develop as an organic and evolutionary process. It depends on the visions, insights, perceptions, attempts and actions of billions of human beings".

Lester B. Brown, the director of the Worldwatch Institute, prophesies in his report on 1992: "The construction of an ecologically sustainable future requires the alteration of the world economy, big modifications in human reproductive behaviour and dramatic changes in values and lifestyles. All this really adds up to a revolution, driven by the need to repair and maintain the world's ecological system...."

Conservatives change tune

It should be pointed out that such statements come from previously conservative ecologists and scientists. Such views are pouring out of the big publishing houses in millions of copies. Obsessive picking at the spot of the seemingly eternally postponed anti-capitalist reckoning and apocalyptic predictions about revolution in the face of the environmental crisis they are themselves responsible for — this is the reality of the consciousness of the bourgeois class, of the employers and the governments in 1992.

Twenty years have passed since the first United Nations environment conference in Stockholm in 1972. It was organized because of a powerful awareness among the bourgeoisie itself that there were limits to growth. The Club of Rome report was a bombshell for the policies capital had previously followed. Unrelated to the traditional bugbears of socialism, communism or merely "trade union power", the rulers saw themselves in grave danger if the pillage of nature and the ruthless interference with biological systems continued.

The practical results of this change in mood were some short term measures to meet the most crying problems and much prevarication. On the other side, however, environmental movements grew almost ceaselessly. Big ecological organizations, independent both of the governments and the bureaucracies of the mass labour movement, arose. Major disasters such as Seveso, Bhopal, Harrisburg and Chernobyl regularly gave renewed impulse to an ecologically based opposition to the dominant policies while spectacular actions against nuclear power stations, or the construction of new airports or dams throughout the world, gave this new movement experience, and sometimes the taste of success.

A changed awareness

This movement has succeeded in fundamentally changing awareness about environmental issues. Independently of the cyclical turns in the economy and even relatively independent of the ebbs and flows of the ecological mass movements itself, a deep mistrust of the bourgeois order has taken root in people's minds. Furthermore, in the ranks of the opposition movements who contributed to the fall of the bureaucratic regimes in Eastern Europe, the theme of environmental destruction played a central role.

The cries of triumph from the bourgeois ideologists over the "fall of socialism" provided them with about two years breathing space. Now, however, it is all the more obvious that the market economic system is not in a position to provide an environment friendly social order and that in Eastern Europe itself reshaping non-capitalist relations to make them fit for the market requires the most ruthless possible attitude to the environment. This, from the point of view of the ecological movements, is the balance sheet of the past twenty years.

Remedial measures taken

But how do things look from the point of view of the rulers, big business and the governments? In the rich countries a number of remedial measures have been taken. No state can get along today without environmental authorities and an environmental policy. Waste products and their disposal are producing big problems throughout the world. But no progress can be made in dealing with the basic issues of environmental destruction in the context of an economy based on commodity production and the profit motive.

The pressing need to externalize superfluous costs for the production of the existing concrete range of goods leads inevitably to the irrational whole of the capitalist market economy in which even products and services aimed at environmental protection — remedial measures, cleaning up, filter technologies, substitute materials and much else — are subject to the same rule: one product wins, and whether it becomes a necessity for all is decided by chance. And when, as today in the USA, Japan, Western Europe and most of the so-called "newly developed" economies, there is a cyclical crisis of capitalism, then market competition sharpens the edge of the principle "profit first".

Towards the end of the 1970s, in the

* This article first appeared in the June/July 1992 issue of *Inprekorr*, a German revolutionary Marxist periodical. This translation has been shortened somewhat for reasons of space.

face of a rise in ecological protests, electoral successes by Green parties, and statements by many independent scientists, the ruling classes of the capitalist centres called on their agents among the entrepreneurs, governments, parties and ideologies to work together to achieve the following aims:

1. To present the environmental crisis as an overall, human crisis, not connected with the specific economic structure of capitalism, with the private ownership of the means of production, with the exploitation of wage labour or the unequal distribution of wealth.

2. The re-establishment of ideological hegemony for the argument that private property could and would deal with the ecological crisis, that the notion of "progress" was the exclusive property of the market economy — the aim being to overcome the "destructive pessimism" of the Club of Rome and other studies.

3. The development of a strategy for dealing with the most gross ecological disasters which uses market instruments and ensures that as far as possible it is the masses who pay.

4. Finally, the introduction of a policy which would counteract the tendency of criticisms of environmental destruction to challenge the system and instead tie the movement to the existing power structures.

In the runup to the Rio Earth Summit it became clear that these aims have not been achieved. Whatever criticisms one may have of the Rio conference, one thing is clear; no one puts forward arguments that do not place the connection between ecological destruction and economic structures at the centre of attention. Questions of the world economic order, such as poverty and hunger, are on the agenda as central to the problem of environmental destruction.

A daily struggle for survival

For more than a half of humanity, the ecological crisis is not a long-term struggle for the survival of the species or to save the coming generations, but a daily struggle for personal survival. 500 million people are hungry while every year 40 million die of hunger and related diseases; 1.3 billion have no reliable source of clean drinking water and every year 23 million die from a lack of drinkable water; 2.3 billion live without proper sanitation, each year 40 million die from diseases that could easily be cured; 1.7 billion live without a regular supply of electricity; 1.5 billion suffer from a serious lack of wood fuel, which is practically their only source of fuel. 825 million people are illiterate and a good third of those able to work are unemployed or under-employed.

Every year this system means a loss of $500bn for the under-developed countries owing to unequal economic relations and shrinking access to the world market. In the period between the UN environment conference in Stockholm and that in Rio, the gulf between the poor and rich countries has doubled. The average income of the richest 20% of humanity is 150 times higher than that of the poorest 20%.

For the world's poor, the environmental crisis is a living example of the operations of the law of combined and unequal development. All the problems of the developed countries — over-development of space and of urbanization, collapsing public transport, air, water and land pollution, waste mountains and the threat of chemical products and residues — appear in the poor countries in magnified form. Each year some 20 million tonnes of toxic waste is legally or illegally dumped by the rich countries in the poor countries. Toxic and radioactive waste is already an international commodity equivalent to arms and drugs.

Furthermore, a glance even at the developed countries shows the unavoidable connection between environmental destruction and capitalism.Whatever the specific environmental issue, things pan out in the following way: the affected, led by environmental groups, demand immediate action. "Industry" is against and in between is the responsible minister, with his heart on the first side, but his head on the second.

In a radio show in Germany dedicated to current affairs, the well-known critic of transport policy Winfried Wolf outlined his alternative, to which the manager of Volkswagen had just one answer: "You want a completely different economic system".

The Eastern experience

The degree to which the market economy is incapable of constructing an ecologically tenable economy can be see in Eastern Europe and particularly in East Germany, where the necessary finance potentially existed. Here, given the growing awareness of recent years, there was a chance to begin again. But capitalism has only been able to do what is in its nature; plunder, exploit and concrete over — and whatever is left over is considered wilderness, which can be left to capitalist outlaws; con artists, drug dealers and speculators; social and ecological considerations have played no role.

The conjunctural difficulties of the market economy are destroying whatever remained of the veil over the roots of the environmental crisis. When US president Bush explained that in Rio he would not sign anything that would hinder the advance of the American economy, and when the German and European governments said that they could not go out ahead on the ecological front for reasons of competitiveness, they were saying in effect: an ecological future and capitalism are contradictory.

The tenor of all studies on the situation of the world is more pessimistic than twenty years ago. Furthermore, the governments have been revealed as impotent. Despite enormous efforts by environment ministries, a multitude of institutes and quangos and all the bourgeois political parties, nowhere have the political and ideological agents of capital been able to gain the

"ecological competence" they desire.

The Rio show itself takes place under constant bombardment "from its own side". The bourgeois media, without exception, have striven to besmirch the conference in order to guard their own flanks: if failure has already been predicted then the disappointment will be less.

The ruling class wants to see their progressive nature and their entrepreneurial capacity to deal with any problem confirmed. However the only thing they come up with are pitiful ideological talk shops where pensioned off "elder statesmen" such as Schmidt, Thatcher or Giscard can wile away their declining years prattling on about a new "ethic of responsibility" or "the principle of responsibility".

It is not possible to see how the worldwide awareness that the existing economic order is destroying the environment can be recuperated into restored faith in the capitalist system. The maintenance of the capitalist system requires a high degree of assent to its basic values. Where this is not available, ideological manipulation and fear must be used.

The same principle applies as for war. The fact that capitalist competition can in principle lead to armed conflict must be accepted by the masses. The Gulf War was a small opportunity to test this out.

A permanent war

The fact, however, that capitalism conducts a permanent war on the environment is increasingly less swallowed by the masses. And until now, the ideologues have failed to repair the damage.

This is despite the fact that on no other theme have the managers of the big firms spoken so directly. Almost every firm has a policy of trying to present an ecological image and several have created posts for environmental directors. There is hardly a product which does not present itself as "light", "bio" or "eco" and many firms are into "Eco-sponsoring" in a big way, including contributions to ecological associations and "debt for nature swaps" by which Third World debt titles are exchanged for measures of environmental protection in areas within those countries. The latest offspring here is the German pharmaceuticals industry's payment for the German edition of the *Worldwatch Circular*.

The next Nobel Prize for Economics or, at the very latest, the one after that, will go to an economist who writes on the role of market mechanisms in the management of environmental safeguards. However, until now the capitalists' dream of finding a way to deal with the environmental crisis using their own means has not been realized. Much has been written and proposed, but two snags remain unavoidable. First of all, all the plans imply, in one form or another, a massive increase in the prices of energy and raw materials.

Secondly, there is the requirement to match up purely quantitative criteria, based in the last analysis on working time used, with qualitative, political considerations as to which things have what effect on the environment. The division of economics and politics is, however, an essential characteristic of market economics.

At the moment the dominant line of development of economic policy reflects business' wish for increasing deregulation, with the maximum possible abolition of political regulations restricting market activity and the exploitation of the workforce and nature.

New regulations will only be reluctantly accepted if there is no other choice. The idea that it is possible to arrive at a form of price fixing that reflects "real ecological values" is completely illusory; the market is inherently "unpolitical" and cannot take into account qualitative criteria.

It hardly needs to be emphasized that a massive rise in the cost of resources will not be swallowed and it is just as hard to see how a historical-moral component can be added on to constant capital (payments for machines and raw materials) with the consent of the capitalists.

Unlike the working class, nature cannot improve its value through class struggles and trade unions, in order to compensate for past, present and future depredations. Just as rarely as capitalists voluntarily give wage rises, so they will be unenthusiastic when it comes to accepting extra costs to defend nature.

The Nobel Prize for Literature may well therefore be there for the winning, but in reality, since political power is in the hands of Capital, it is not hard to predict that, if various forms of eco-tax are adopted, they will be introduced in such a way that they will change little.

A political defence of nature is needed, but it can only succeed against capitalism and with the aim of its abolition. This is the maximalist position which, nonetheless can be read between the lines of almost all the papers for the Rio conference. The only real success of the capitalist world economy in this sphere has been its ability to displace the potential for conflict that lies beneath the environmental crisis. At least in the metropolitan countries, the "Ecology movement" has been domesticated.

The very promising signs of a massive independent movement of refusal have been integrated into the existing power structures of bourgeois society via reformist political ideas, propagated first by the Green parties and then by the old Social Democrats.

This process has cost money. Illusions and promises concerning restoration programmes, ecological capitalism and environmental protection as the industry of the future have been disseminated in millions of copies, quangos formed and events organized.

In Western Europe — less so in the USA and Japan — the rebellious youth have been brought up to be the most committed "rebuilders" of the existing society. Defence of the environment has become something of a sign of a positive attitude to "society". The widely repeated call "Join in" has successfully fostered the illusion that in this way one is "joining in" power.

Global revolution needed

This leaves us with the recognition that in fact a global revolution is needed. But this cannot be a revolution decreed from above. The appeal by Worldwatch director Brown to the world's 202 billionaires and 3 million millionaires to get involved, because riches in an unhappy world cannot make you happy, is staggeringly naive.

This will have to be a revolution by the three quarters of humanity who are poor and propertyless. This is a priority task for those of no property in the developed capitalist lands, even if they have bigger incomes than those in poorer countries. Capital must be made to pay decent wages throughout the world.

The Green environment minister Fischer demands that the big firms must meet the same environmental conditions in their foreign operations as at home; this should apply all the more to wages and working conditions. An international workers' and trade union movement must be built committed to pursuing these aims. Every step in this direction is immensely difficult but will yield results.

A broad movement of refusal, which fights for the right of veto over harmful production and defends its independence from the temptations of participation, would be one such step.

Campaigns of renunciation should have only one address: the firms must renounce their profits. Rather than the banks writing their memoranda in recycled paper, let them abolish the debts of the poor countries. The capitalist global economy, which controls and desecrates this planet and turns it into commodities, which draws its profits from the inequality in the distribution of property, and the exploitation of people and nature has no future.

Only a society that puts production for need at the centre of its economic considerations, rather than production for profit, has a future. Such a society could efficiently use resources and promote human solidarity. The idea of an efficient, solidarity-based and internationalist society implies the perspective of a society with new values and a different life-style. ★

Carry on as before

THE RESULTS of the Rio Earth Summit were as predicted: less than nothing. An initial balance-sheet by

HERMANN DWORCZAK

THE benefits of the big show in Rio de Janiero bore no relation to its cost. Essential questions such as the world economic order were not on the official agenda. The Bishop of the Brazilian See of Xingu, Erwin Kraütler, came to this conclusion: "After Rio the developed countries will go on as before. Neither the debt burden nor the problem of low raw material prices were seriously discussed here".

The gross output of texts was certainly impressive, but their content much less so:

- The 900 page all-embracing Agenda 21, which is to show us the ecological path into the 21st century, was considerably watered down. The vexed question of the financing of the relevant measures by the industrialized countries was covered by the formula "0.7% [of their Gross National Product to be made available] as soon as possible" (at the moment the figure is 0.3%).
- The Rio Declaration gives us 27 arid principles. Some feel of their vacuity is given by principle number three, which calls us to rally to a worldwide social partnership: "All states and peoples should work together to eliminate poverty, and income inequalities should be reduced".
- The Declaration of Principles on Forestry keeps up the pace on empty phrase-making: "The safeguarding of the forests will be connected with the provision of financial aid from the North".
- The Biodiversity Treaty was not signed by the United States.
- The Climate Convention is so wholly toothless that even George Bush felt able to sign it. The Austrian liberal *Standard* did not mince its words: "Bush only voted in favour because before the summit he had succeeded in blocking a binding timetable for reducing the emission of greenhouse gases".

Bush's presence in Rio had of course nothing to do with the environment and everything to do with the forthcoming American presidential elections. He acted like the proverbial bull in the china shop. The script for his thundering about was provided by the ultra-conservative Heritage Foundation think tank. The US negotiators at Rio were given a rule of thumb to follow: "Avoid any detailed plans which tie us down to a definite reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases within a definite timespan". "Or: Third World countries must themselves create enough wealth to finance their own environmental programmes".

Delegations which pressed for a more serious climate convention were put in the diplomatic wringer. According to a delegate from Iceland: "US pressure on our country was stronger than in the turmoil in the Gulf War".

While the USA came across unmistakably at Rio as the world's number one anti-ecological country, the "ecological awareness" of the other capitalist industrialized countries, is, despite all their rhetoric, hardly more developed. Thus much noise has been made about the stated intention of countries such as Austria, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, the EEC and Japan to bring down their greenhouse gas emissions to the 1990 level by the year 2000.

In fact, to meet the emergency a much bigger reduction is required, but in any case the promised "undertaking" is built on sand: back in 1988 Austria and other industrialized countries promised in Toronto to reduce their emissions of carbon dioxide (CO_2) by 20% by 2005. However, at present such emissions are 14% up on 1988.

The Austrian chancellor Franz Vranitsky was chosen as the West European spokesperson in Rio owing to his supposed "sympathetic attitude". In fact, he hauled the Third World countries over the coals and made it clear that they had to take more heed of the iron profit-driven logic of the capitalist market. "A solid and durable environmental policy cannot be formulated against or without the economy".

The lack of concrete results of the conference at least allowed a perceptible improvement in the atmosphere in the rarefied zone where the politicians live. According to German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, the Earth Summit saw "a new definition given to the notion of solidarity". The German newsweekly *Der Spiegel* felt able to talk of "a step towards an eco-change", while Brazil's former environment minister Jose Lutzenberger stated: "despite all its deficiencies, the conference led to a raising of awareness". Other, more hard-headed assessments of the outcome of Rio exist — expressed immediately by protests after the conference. According to Wolfgang Lohbeck, Greenpeace's climate expert: "The industrialized nations will carry on as before". ★

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