

# International VIEWPOINT

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## Women and Islam

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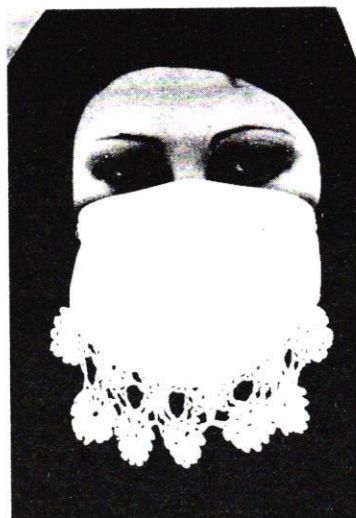
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# The dynamic of the *intifada*

**INTIFADA**, an Arabic word meaning "uprising" or "insurrection," has become part of international vocabulary as a result of the new episode in the heroic struggle of the Palestinian masses on the West Bank and in Gaza. After 14 months continuous harassment of the Zionist occupation forces, the *intifada* is still showing no signs of flagging.

Abroad it is often seen only as a spectacle of demonstrators throwing stones at Israeli soldiers. That is, of course, the most visible aspect of the Palestinian challenge to the occupation. But the *intifada* is a much richer experience than simply stone-throwing. Its lessons, moreover, have implications that go far beyond the Palestinian framework.

## SALAH JABER

**T**HE OUTBREAK of the *intifada* on December 9, 1987, was not a bolt from the blue. It was the product of a long process of maturation — an explosion of resentment built up over 20 years of occupation and repression. The oppressor power was even more intolerable because it came into the world, with the creation of the state of Israel 19 years before the occupation of 1967, already based on the usurpation of the bulk of Palestinian territory.

From this historical standpoint, the *intifada* also represents a new generation going into action, the third since the Palestinian exodus of 1948, which is now taking over from the generation of 1967, symbolized by the *fedayeen*. While these are generations of the same people, they have not grown up on the same territory.

## *Intifada* presently limited to occupied territories

The fight of the 1967 generation was waged essentially by Palestinians in exile, first in Jordan until 1971, and then in Lebanon. The struggle of the 1987 generation, the *intifada* generation, is now being fought only in the territories occupied in 1967 — at least for the time being. In the aftermath of the occupation, their population remained stunned, overawed by an army that had gained a reputation of invincibility in six days of war.

The maximalism of the Palestinian resis-

tance organizations in exile offered the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza no credible perspective for liberation in the foreseeable future. These organizations, moreover, were mainly occupied with setting up secret cells for an armed struggle that was supposed to liberate the whole of Palestine. Given the effectiveness of the Zionist repression, under the occupation this sort of activity could only involve very small numbers, even if the fighters enjoyed the sympathy of the population.

The people looked elsewhere for deliverance — to the Arab states, which through diplomatic activity and military pressure might get Israel to evacuate the territories

occupied in 1967, including the Palestinian lands. The latter had in fact been under the jurisdiction of Arab states: Egypt had administered Gaza after 1949, and Jordan had annexed the West Bank. Therefore, the primary responsibility for recovering these lands fell on them.

This political view of things prevailed in particular because the society within the 1967 territories remained very traditional — a small proletariat scattered in workplaces on a cottage-industry scale; a large peasantry and petty bourgeoisie; the predominant role in the hands of the commercial bourgeoisie, landowners and lay and religious personalities who had been local relays for the Jordanian government.

## Massacres perpetrated by Jordanian army

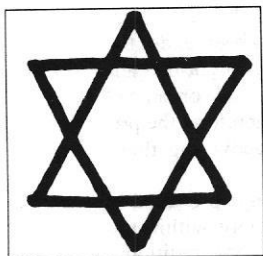
Thus, in the climate of bitterness that prevailed after the crushing of the resistance in Jordan, the municipal elections held in 1972 on the West Bank were won by personalities linked to the Jordanian monarchy. However, the political turn made by the PLO the following year upset this state of affairs (see *IV* 156, February 9, 1989). By adopting the objective, described as transitional, of an independent state in "all of the Palestinian territory that will be liberated," the PLO staked its claim to govern the territories if they were evacuated by Israel.

So political action, until then neglected, became fundamental. A Palestinian National Front was formed in 1973 in the territories, under the aegis of the PLO. It included the currents sympathetic to the Palestinian organization, as well as the local branch of the Jordanian Communist Party (which subsequently became the Palestinian Communist Party, PCP). The latter's program was always limited to the liberation of the territories occupied in 1967, by virtue of the Stalinist tradition on the Israel question.

Revolted by the massacres perpetrated by King Hussein's army, the popular majority lined up behind the banner of the National Front. It strongly opposed a return to Jorda-



'WOULD YOU SAY YOU ARE (A) OPPOSED TO AN ACCORD? (B) TOTALLY OPPOSED? (C) ADAMANTLY OPPOSED? (D) VIOLENTLY OPPOSED?'

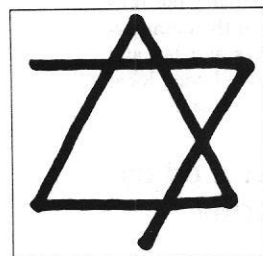


nian sovereignty<sup>1</sup>, and favored Palestinian sovereignty in the event of liberation. An important section of the bourgeoisie followed suit, attracted by the perspective of freeing itself from Jordanian tutelage.

The result was an overwhelming victory for the PLO's supporters in the April 1976 municipal elections on the West Bank. A year later, Likud, the Zionist right-wing bloc, won the parliamentary elections in Israel for the first time.

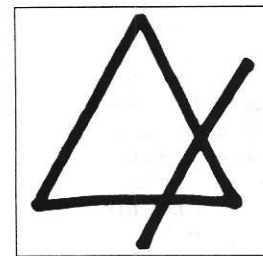
Despite Egyptian president Sadat's "peace initiative," Likud leader Menachem Begin proclaimed a plan for creeping annexation of the territories — maintenance of the Israeli occupation with administrative "autonomy" for the Palestinians and stepped up Zionist settlement.

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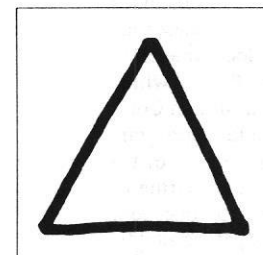
With Likud's encouragement, the number of settlers rose from 5,000 (34 settlements) in 1977 to 70,000 (124 settlements) today. Parallel to this, repression of the Palestinian national movement increased considerably. Between 1980 and 1982, the main mayors who supported the PLO were expelled or ousted. Likud tried to set up a network of collaborator "representatives" (the "Village Leagues"). In 1982, Likud tried to liquidate Palestinian nationalism by invading Lebanon.

ment increased considerably. Between 1980 and 1982, the main mayors who supported the PLO were expelled or ousted.



The bitterness of defeat — the evacuation of Beirut by the PLO fighters and the massacres that followed — was aggravated from 1983 on by the inter-Palestinian conflict. El Fatah split. Battles raged between the factions in Lebanon. A *de facto* split opened up inside the PLO over the Seventeenth Palestinian National Council in Amman in 1984, from which all the nationalist opposition and left formations stayed away.

by the PLO fighters and the massacres that followed — was aggravated from 1983 on by the inter-Palestinian conflict.



The main cause of the conflict was the "Jordanian option" chosen by the Arafat leadership, which culminated in February 1985 in the conclusion of the Amman accord between the PLO leader and King Hussein. In the meantime, Shimon

Peres' Zionist Labour Party returned to government in Israel in the framework of a ministerial coalition pact with Likud.

Peres' Zionist Labour Party returned to government in Israel in the framework of a ministerial coalition pact with Likud.

Also a supporter of the "Jordanian option" in his way, Peres chose to appoint replacements for the ousted nationalist mayors in concert with Amman. In November 1985, he appointed Zafer Al-Masri to head the city government of Nablus, the West Bank's main city (after East Jerusalem, which has been annexed to Israel). Al-Masri was a figure with a very distinct profile. He was chair of the local chamber of commerce, nephew of the vice-chair of the Jordanian Senate and an uncle of the kingdom's minister of foreign affairs.

### Resentment of 20 years of occupation

A few months after accepting the appointment with Arafat's blessing, Al-Masri was assassinated by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a left nationalist organization and the main Palestinian formation after El Fatah.

However, after King Hussein had worked out an overall plan for "sharing functions" with Peres, he decided to break unilaterally with Arafat in February 1986 and to close the El Fatah offices in Jordan. The bankruptcy of the right-wing PLO leadership was evident. It resigned itself to accepting Moscow's mediation in order to achieve a reunification with the opposition factions aligned with the USSR in April 1987.<sup>2</sup>

This tactical accommodation enabled Arafat to absorb the shock of his Jordanian fiasco, so that the opposition could not take full advantage of it. But it did not prevent him from resuming his moves toward Amman. The Arab summit that met in the Jordanian capital in November 1987 was the most glaring expression of the PLO's bankruptcy. Despite being treated with contempt, Arafat abased himself before King Hussein, while the left-wing of the PLO protested in vain.

It was against this background of the PLO's bankruptcy outside Palestine that the *intifada* broke out a month later. The resentment piled up over 20 years of occupation and repression combined with the exasperation at the lamentable spectacle offered by the organizations outside to produce a spontaneous explosion that developed into a general uprising.

Beginning on December 9 with a protest by young people at the Jabaliya refugee camp in Gaza against the death of four Palestinians killed in a collision with an Israeli truck, the demonstrations spread like a prairie fire throughout the territory. The day after the Jabaliya demonstration, a new fire broke out in the Balata camp near Nablus, and the flames quickly spread to the rest of the West Bank.

Since 1986, there had been an atomized but quite distinct revival of activities against the occupation. A few months before the *intifada* erupted, a report by the

West Bank Data Base headed by Israeli sociologist Meron Benvenisti, noted "a new and disturbing evolution for Israel: the violence [in the territories] seems more and more frequently to be carried out by unorganized, spontaneous groups.... Between April 1986 and May 1987, 3,150 violent incidents have been registered, going from mere stone throwing to barricading roads, and including 100 attacks with explosives or firearms." (*Le Monde*, September 15, 1987.)

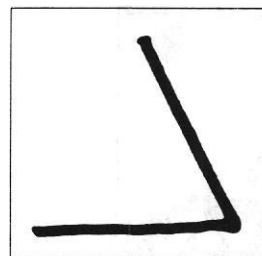
The political conditioning of the *intifada* and its incubation on the ground affected a population that had been profoundly changed in comparison with preceding decades. In fact, during 20 years of occupation/annexation the social fabric of the territories went through the classical effects of the linking of backward traditional societies to an advanced capitalist market — dispossession and proletarianization of traditional small producers, partially absorbed by the needs of the advanced market. "Palestinian society under Israeli domination appears as the result of internal colonialism — a totally distorted class structure, a peasantry deprived of its lands, a dispossessed urban population entirely dependent on Zionist society."<sup>3</sup>

In this sense, there has definitely been a "South Africanization" of Palestine — the establishment of a veritable apartheid regime with its "homelands"/reservoirs of labor power. According to official Israeli statistics, a third of the labor force of the territories are working within the 1967 borders of Israel in South-African-style conditions (travel controls, harassment and so on). In reality it is a lot more — 120,000 workers according to current estimates, taking into account the number that moonlight.

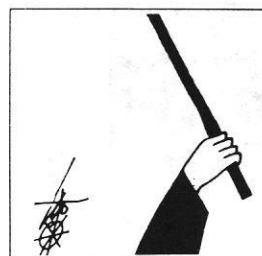
### "Stateless, impoverished and landless"

If you add to this the workers employed in the settler economy in the territories themselves, it emerges that the majority of the proletariat in the territories — which makes up the majority of the labor force — is directly exploited by the Zionist economy in underpaid jobs looked down on by Israeli workers (construction, agriculture, certain services and jobs in industry). In addition, there are the workers in the Palestinian subcontracting economy.

At the bottom of the social ladder and in the vanguard of the struggle are the workers/refugees from 1948, eloquently described by Meron Benvenisti as follows: "The refugees — stateless, impoverished, landless — are Israel's helots. On their way to work as Israel's menial laborers they



the same goes for Gaza, which Egypt washed its hands of, and which was included in Jordan's "United Arab Kingdom" project.



1. The same goes for Gaza, which Egypt washed its hands of, and which was included in Jordan's "United Arab Kingdom" project.  
2. On the balance sheet of the "Jordanian option," see IV's 121 and 122, June 1 and 15, 1987.  
3. Abu-Lughod et al., "Profile of the Palestinian People," *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, 1984.

pass by their ruined villages and plundered lands. They have nothing to lose except their chains of misery." (*Newsweek*, January 25, 1988.)

Against the background of a demographic explosion, the proletarianization of the population of the territories has gone hand in hand with a net increase in the proportion of young people — 75% are under 25 years of age; 50% are under 15! The proportion of young people is just as considerable in the working class. In 1984, 20% of the Palestinian workers crossing the 1967 border were under 17 (according to the study cited in footnote 3).

To complete this socio-demographic picture of the *intifada* population, the growing role of women should be noted. Their proportion has increased as a result of the fact that the economic emigration to the Arab oil-producing countries has essentially involved men. Women's social status has improved relatively, among other things under the influence of the Israeli example, which is much more advanced in this respect.

## Women playing front-line role

So today, a third of university students in the territories are women, a very high proportion for an Arab or Muslim society. Selective repression, one of the rare cases where sexism "benefits" women, has favored the participation of women in the struggles. In particular, almost all the 10,000 or so people presently detained in the territories (out of a population of a million and a half!) are men.

Women, moreover, are the only ones who sometimes carry out specific public activities within the framework of the *intifada*, as mothers of detainees or on International Women's Day. But most of the time they melt into the other social and demographic categories that make up the base of the uprising, in a struggle that is essentially a national one. All social classes and categories join the strikes of the *intifada*. Its base units are not the workplaces or educational centers but territorial units, the camps and the popular neighborhoods in the cities and villages, as the Palestinian Marxist researcher Khaled Ayed points out (see box).

His analysis of the social classes and strata in the territories brings out an important difference between the Palestinian case and that of South Africa, with which it is usually compared: the weight and role of the native bourgeoisie, which includes the landowners, as well as various categories of lay and religious notables.

In their great majority, the members of these possessing classes today swear by the PLO, since the pro-Jordanians have taken note of King Hussein's official renunciation of the West Bank on July 31, 1988. They are exercising their influence over the society in the territories through institu-

## Social forces in the occupied territories

“THE PRINCIPAL centres of the *intifada* are the densely populated camps where nearly a quarter of the total population of the West Bank and Gaza are concentrated (nearly half in the latter territory). If we add the [1948] refugees living in the popular neighborhoods of the towns, refugees altogether represent more than half of the total population . . . They belong overwhelmingly to the working class and the poor petty bourgeoisie....

Similar to the camps are the poor neighborhoods of the big towns, whose inhabitants belong to the popular classes: blue- and white-collar workers, petty bourgeois layers.... The third component of the *intifada* is in the villages, where the majority of people are poor peasants. Here, the Israeli occupation seized the land...and transformed tens of thousands [of peasants] into exploited and humiliated workers, working in the colonies themselves or in the Zionist state....

At the center of these three circles are the youth, notably the revolutionary intelligentsia [students and those with qualifications]...sons of the camps, the poor neighborhoods and the poor villages, who are the nerve-center of the *intifada* and its day-to-day leadership on the ground....

Facing the front of the people's uprising are a minority belonging to social layers that are either linked through self-interest to the Israeli occupation or vacillate between the occupation and the *intifada*. These are, first of all, traders in land... and in labour...bosses of subcontracting industries [categories whose self-interest links them to the colonies or the Israeli economy]. There are also the big hoarding merchants....Of all these layers, the big merchants are the most dangerous for the *intifada's* future.... Because:

- They have at their disposal legal organizational frameworks — the various chambers of commerce — that have sheltered them from the blows of the occupying authorities;

- During the *intifada*, this layer created 'patriotic merchant's committees' that benefit from the support of the interior United National Leadership of the *intifada* and the exterior PLO;

- Most importantly, this comprador layer vacillates between two blocks: the first is its...own self-interest in establishing any sort of



Palestinian entity following the *intifada*; the second is the possibility of endangering its immediate interests....

This go-between merchant layer expressed, and still expresses, its willingness to 'negotiate' the national cause and to play the role of an 'intermediary' between the popular uprising and its Zionist and imperialist enemies....

Both it and its ideological agents<sup>1</sup> are concentrated in the Jerusalem area. It has a great deal of influence, that it shares with the PLO in a number of 'legal' institutions: newspapers and magazines; the administration of Bir-Zeit university; the Arab Studies Society<sup>2</sup>; the Palestinian Center for Studies on Non-Violence; press agencies; and local centers that carry out research and documentation.... ”

*Khaled Ayed, Palestinian Marxist, researcher at the Institute for Palestinian Studies. The above extracts, from an unpublished work, are taken from the Lebanese daily As-Safir, November 14, 1988. ★*

1. As examples the author cites the names of Hanna Al-Siniara, Fayez Abu-Rahmeh, Fayçal Al-Husseini and Sari Nusseibeh.

2. The director of this society, Fayçal Al-Husseini, the son of a big family of notables, was recently liberated with a big media fanfare after several months of sporadic "administrative detention". Shortly before his release he had discussions with a representative of the Israeli defense minister, Itzhak Rabin.

## Positions of the PFLP branch in the occupied territories

**1** The objective of the present stage is the establishment of the state, self-determination and the return [of the refugees], in a way that does not close the door to the realization of the strategic and historic objective of the liberation of Palestine and the establishment of a democratic state where all can live without discrimination between nationalities, religions, races or between men and women as part of a progressive, socialist, united Arab society....

**2** We reject the Security Council's Resolution 242 and we oppose it totally. We consider its approval by the majority of the PNC as a submission to international and Israeli demands, and an unwarranted concession with nothing in return....

**3** The PFLP does not base its programs on the supposition that the political settlement will take place at any time in the foreseeable future, but on the basis of a long-term struggle. The wager that some are making on the international factor, bang in the middle of a period of detente between the two super-powers, is a lost bet.... Hence, we are against the tendencies for "moderation and flexibility" advocated by Shultz, to which certain people are progressively adapting with their attitude toward Resolutions 242 + their recognition of the Zionist entity + secure boundaries + the rejection of violence....

**4** We categorically refuse the capitulation imposed on our people, such as the obligation put upon the PLO to recognize the enemy state....

**5** We, in the PFLP, are waging a long-term struggle...to create a new relationship of forces that will impose the holding of an International Conference on the basis of the right to return and self-determination and of the independent state. This is the only sort of Conference that we will accept as a mechanism for a settlement, and we reject a Conference meeting on the basis of the liquidationist Resolution 242....★

*Extracts from a programmatic manifesto, dated December 11, 1988, and distributed in the occupied territories.*

tions that they control — the municipal governments elected in 1976 and not ousted, chambers of commerce, the Islamic High Council, local and religious courts, self-employed professional associations (lawyers, doctors, engineers), the Council of Higher Education, and so on.

These institutions are called "national" in contrast with those that are appointed by the occupiers or are directly controlled by them, such as the appointed municipal governments or the Palestinian police. The attitude of the Zionist Labourites toward these "national institutions" is clearly different from that of Likud. For the Zionist right, consistent with its program for the territories, even the most "moderate" of the Palestinians have to be repressed when they reject the occupation. This is the attitude that has prevailed since 1977. It sharpened at the beginning of the *intifada*, to the great annoyance of the "enlightened" Zionists, who were shocked by such shortsightedness.

Back in January 1988, the pro-Labour Israeli daily *Haaretz* issued a warning: "If we continue in this way to harass and eliminate the most moderate Palestinian leadership, we are going to find ourselves face to face with the one emerging from the camps, the young people of Balata and Jabalyia."

A few months later, the same *Haaretz* (September 11, 1988) could note bitterly: "The *intifada* has greatly modified the char-

acter of the activities of Palestinian society. On the one hand, organized social work has become clandestine, in particular because of the government's harassment of the Palestinian 'national institutions' (the shutting down of several of them and the arrest of many of their active members). But on the other hand, and parallel to this, this work has become more popular, penetrating more widely and more deeply into the society. It involves essentially the activity of the 'people's committees,' which have formed in almost every village, neighborhood and refugee camp."

## People's Committees organize the uprising

As a matter of fact, the *intifada* has acquired an original form of grassroots self-organization, the People's Committees (PCs), which have largely supplanted the traditional institutions in the organization of society in the territories. Two factors have combined to render these traditional institutions inoperative: the fact, on the one hand, that being legal they are known and therefore kept under surveillance; and, on the other, the *intifada*'s revolutionary character. The uprising has set in motion a mass vanguard that, because of its youth and social composition, had nothing to do with the established institutions. The latter were

completely unadapted to the new forms of struggle.

The role of the institutions, nonetheless, has not been eliminated. It has changed. From claiming the leadership of the masses, they have come to seek to play the role of a moderating intermediary between the uprising and Israel, as well as its American godfather (see the document of K. Ayed). The PCs spread throughout the territories from the first weeks of the *intifada*. It is thanks to them that it has assumed a durable character.

## Clandestinity imposed by the occupation

Sometimes formed from pre-existing structures (committees of students, women, sympathizers of political organizations and so on), and in their majority composed of previously unorganized rank-and-file activists, the PCs bring together on a geographical basis — blocks in the camps, town districts or streets, villages — all those who are active and ready to take on the tasks of organization, mobilization and direct action linked to the *intifada*. In this sense the PCs are similar to Soviets only potentially, given that delegates cannot be directly elected by the inhabitants because of the clandestinity imposed by the occupation.

For the time being, they are more like action committees of the new mass vanguard that has been thrown up during the uprising. The PCs are not, however, surrogate bodies but are well and truly organisms leading the population involved in the *intifada*. Their extension is in direct relation to the repressive conditions. For example, in the villages where the daily repression is less evident, the committees' meetings are much larger than in the zones strictly controlled by the occupying army, such as the towns. In the latter, the PCs are compelled to adopt a pyramidal structure. But in both cases, the PCs divide up the various tasks among their members, or link up with "specialist committees" (bringing together professional or experienced people).

The People's Committees functions vary considerably and cover all the aspects of social life and of the struggle in the framework of the *intifada*: propaganda and mobilization, organizing production cooperatives; boycotting of Israeli products; solidarity fundraising for victims of the repression and the unemployed; legal and material aid for prisoners; medical aid; teaching (to compensate for the closing of schools and colleges); provisions and so on.

The PCs have also taken on legislative and judicial functions, the most important being the control and limits exercised on the possessing classes: controlling prices; fighting hoarding; controlling the fees of the liberal professions (private medicine, lawyers); reducing rents; imposing the payment of wages for *intifada* strike days; setting up popular courts to sort out certain

disputes; putting on pressure for the resignation of functionaries appointed by the Israeli administration (police, municipal employees) and so on.

In order to efficiently carry out all these functions, as well as paramilitary tasks — stewarding demonstrations, harassment of the occupying army and colonists with stones and molotov cocktails, keeping up the shopkeepers' strike, night guards for residential areas, punishment of collaborators and so on — the PCs are equipped with "shock committees", a veritable revolutionary guard with the peculiarity that, for obvious reasons given the balance of forces, they do not use firearms. These "shock committees" have even recently proclaimed themselves as a "people's army".

Of all the bodies described, only the "shock committees" as a general rule exclude women. Supporters of women's liberation in the occupied territories, men and women, have to fight to change this situation, which is both an injustice and an error.

So the *intifada*, thanks to the PCs and its allied bodies, has at its disposal a real structure of people's power, essentially proletarian and peasant, that gives it its original contribution to regional and international revolutionary experience.<sup>4</sup> In the occupied territories it has *de facto* created a real duality of powers — incomplete, true, in view of the vast inequality of the opposing forces. Moreover, many villages and districts

have proclaimed themselves "liberated zones", which they certainly are between two interventions of the occupying army. The Israeli defense minister, Itzhak Rabin, was right on target when he went onto the offensive against the PCs last August, accusing them of wanting to "institutionalize the uprising". Since then, participants are liable to get ten years imprisonment, something that has in no way discouraged them from keeping up their action.

### Continued harassment exhausts troops

The autonomy of the People's Committees at camp, town or village level is perfectly adapted to the specific form of struggle practised by the *intifada* against the Zionist army: "guerilla"-type demonstrations and scattered actions. This sort of harassment, which is unpredictable because it is the result of a multitude of autonomous decisions, exhausts the occupying troops and forces them to deploy themselves in large numbers. Without a great deal of success, moreover, because short of drowning the uprising in blood — an option that is avoided for the moment by the Zionist government for reasons that are as much internal as international — quelling the *intifada* efficiently would necessitate declaring a general mobilization in Israel to ensure a dissuasive presence in all

the populated areas of the occupied territories.

Evidently, however, the PCs' autonomous role in the harassment had to be complemented by centralizing the *intifada's* political decision-making, the designation of general strike days and directions on rules of action and social organization whenever united action makes for strength and efficacy. But just as the conditions of the occupation prevent the PCs from being soviets of delegates, they make it impossible to give them direct democratic coordination and centralization on the scale of the whole of the territories, or even at the level of the West Bank (it is perhaps possible in the 360 square kilometers of Gaza).

So there was a role to fill that only the existing clandestine organizational networks could take on; this was done by the main ones — the internal extensions of the formations brought together in the framework of the exterior PLO. Less than a month after the beginning of the *intifada*, as soon as it was apparent that the uprising was going to last, central "appeals" in the form of communiqués began to appear and circulate in the territories. At first they came from a United National Leadership for the Intensification of the *Intifada*, which became, starting from Communiqué 4, the United National Leadership of the *Intifada* (UNL).

This leadership was certainly self-proclaimed, but it nevertheless played an indispensable role and was followed and recognized by the large majority of the masses. The political content of the first communiqués revealed the decisive role played in setting up the UNL by the PLO's left: the PFLP, the Democratic Front (DFLP), the Communist Party (PCP), and even the radical current of El Fatah in the territories.

### A parity coalition with a mass base

Indeed, the real relationship of forces on the ground, in the clandestine struggle under the occupation, has nothing to do with the bourgeois, manipulative composition of the PLO's leading bodies externally (see the last issue of *IV*). While these are totally under the hegemony of the right-wing historical leadership of El Fatah, the UNL was, and remains in fact a parity coalition of PLO formations with a mass base — that is, the three left-wing formations and El Fatah. This is what led the head of the PFLP, George Habash, to say the following in an interview given to the Kuwaiti journal *Al-Qabas* last July:

"The UNL in the occupied territories is the arm of the PLO.... That doesn't prevent me from pointing out that this arm, acting

4. Of course, the PCs have received very little coverage in the Western media, which are much more interested by the most insignificant declaration of "moderate" Palestinians, who are good at expressing themselves — literally as well as metaphorically — in Hebrew and/or English.



for the PLO in the interior, puts forward the PLO's Charter, adheres to its stagist program and to the PNC's resolutions — much more so than certain opportunists and capitulationists in the framework of the PLO... These latter currents live in fear and dread of being overtaken by the UNL".

The difference in nature between the UNL and the PLO's leadership inevitably leads to falling out and friction between the two. The UNL's first communiques in January 1988, while insistently calling on the masses to rally around the PLO, were not presented as coming from the latter.

### UNL more radical than exterior leadership

Communique 2 defined the first program of the *intifada*. Strategic objectives: return (of the 1948 refugees), self-determination and an independent Palestinian state. Immediate objectives: "army withdrawal from the towns, camps and villages," "democratic elections for local and village councils," as well as a whole series of demands against the repression and other aspects of the occupation. Communique 4 expresses an approach completely the opposite of that of the PLO leadership: "The *intifada* has definitively buried the plans of the rulers of Amman, Cairo and Tel Aviv, and those of their agents, to settle the Palestinian question in the framework of the American imperialist project."

It was at this point that the first intervention came from the exterior leadership. A circular from the "coordination", dated January 27, explained that in the *intifada* "no organization was more worthy than another," and that many of the participants did not belong to any tendency. The circular proposed to centralize and unify the publication of communiques. At the same time number 5 appeared: for the first time the signature PLO/UNL appeared, and it remained from then on. The UNL was subsequently presented and recognized as an authority of the PLO and under its control in the final analysis. Communique 5 is, in fact, a politically watered-down version of number 4 (without the phrase quoted above).

In any case, the UNL has not lost its specific character. It therefore remains clearly more radical than the exterior leadership, even more so given that the repressive and clandestine conditions mean that it is not always the same people who participate in writing the communiques. Thus number 6 (February 2) declared: "We reject Mubarak's plot [the Egyptian president, a great friend of Arafat's], and the attempts of the Jordanian regime and its collaborators... to bypass our legitimate leadership and dictate to it capitulatory conditions, such as the recognition of [UN] Resolution 242." Communique 6 reiterated the programme in number 2, and in addition contained — as would be the rule from then on — indications and directives for action for the

People's Committees, as well as a program of boycotts of institutions of the occupation and calls for the resignation of those employed by it.

Communiques 8 (February 20) and 10 (March 10) vigorously denounced Reagan's secretary of state George Shultz, who began a series of visits to the region on February 25 to try to nip the *intifada* in the bud. The UNL called for demonstrations and a boycott of Shultz's visits. This went against the advice of Arafat who, according to George Habash, had already given the green light in January for a trip to Washington and a meeting with Shultz of two "moderate personalities" from the territories who are close to the PLO chief (Siniora and Abu-Rahmeh). In March, the same Arafat again authorized two PNC members who held American citizenship, Edward Saïd and Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, to meet the US secretary of state.

The dissensions inside the UNL itself broke out into broad daylight in May: two different versions of Communique 16 were produced, followed above all by two politically contradictory versions of Communique 17. It was the eve of the Reagan/Gorbachev summit in Moscow. A first version of Communique 17, dated May 21, reflected the line of the El Fatah/PLO leadership: it contained many religious references; added to reference to the PLO was "under the leadership of brother Yasser Arafat"; emphatic praise is showered on the Soviet position; finally, the objective is "global and just peace".

### "No alternative to protracted people's war"

The other version, dated May 24, reflects the line of the main left Palestinian group, the PFLP, and in particular its branch in the occupied territories, which is particularly radical: the *intifada* has shown the impossibility for coexistence with the Zionist entity; "there is no alternative to the choice of struggle and protracted people's war"; a radical attitude concerning the Arab regimes (demanding democratic freedoms and the opening up of borders to the Palestinian armed struggle); "we maintain our people's rejection of all suspicious projects, notably the Camp David accords, [UN] Resolutions 242 and 338, the Shultz initiative and the sharing of functions (Peres' and King Hussein's common policy in 1985-87); and a call for a general strike at the time of the Moscow summit.

The affair of Communique 17 provoked the energetic intervention of the exterior PLO leadership. Starting from number 18, centralization of the communiques was ensured in the framework of the majority consensus in the organization. From then on, they had as a heading the Koranic expression, "In the name of God, the clement, the merciful." By way of a compromise, Communique 18 asserted the "rejection of all liquidationist solutions," without mention-

ing Resolution 242 and calling for the International Conference. It repeated the immediate objectives outlined since Communique 2.

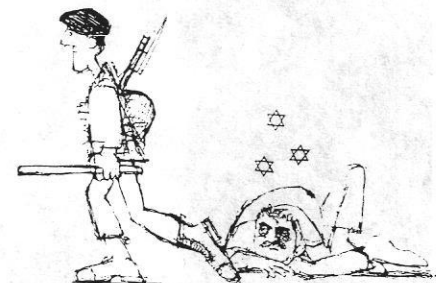
However, the functioning of the UNL's majority consensus was finally carried out to the detriment of the PFLP, although the latter played a key role in its creation. Thus, Communique 29, dated November 20 and covering the results of the PNC, argued in favour of an International Conference based on Resolutions 242 and 338 (without even mentioning the other UN resolutions), when the PFLP's opposition to these resolutions was well known. In addition, the PLO's new political right-turn since the last PNC meeting risks aggravating the dissensions inside the mass movement in the occupied territories.

### Programmatic and political autonomy

The PFLP, and even the DFLP, joined with the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, in calling a general strike on November 29, the anniversary of UN Resolution 181 (1947), which so viciously divided Palestine. For the first time in its history, El Fatah refused to join in such an appeal, the PLO having officially accepted Resolution 181 and, even worse still, Resolution 242. On the day of the strike, brawls broke out not only between El Fatah and Hamas, but even between El Fatah and the PFLP at Nablus. The fact that an organization like El Fatah could arrive at a position of opposing by force those who were calling for a protest strike against the resolution that legitimated the Zionist's venture in 1947 is a telling indicator of its degeneration.

The field is wide open for the highest bidders of the nationalist-Islamic current, who are not going to let the opportunity slip through their hands. It is a good thing that the PFLP's branch in the occupied territories, with positions that are clearly more radical than those of the exterior official leadership of the Front (see box p.6), do not give the religious fanatics the privilege of appearing as the only current opposed to capitulation.

The attitude of the PFLP's interior activists is globally correct: unity of action with the UNL in every possible arena; autonomous action when necessary; programmatic and political autonomy, and public criticism of bourgeois and opportunist allies. ★





# Nicaraguan revolution faces economic disaster

**THE CURRENT disastrous economic situation in Nicaragua places the Sandinista revolution in great difficulties. Even if the contras' apparent disbanding has reduced the danger of an armed counter-revolution, nearly ten years after the July 19 triumph, Nicaragua is nonetheless under siege, on the edge of economic strangulation.**

**DOMINIQUE LEGRAND**

**F**OR Nicaraguans, 1988 was a year of austerity. The situation will be even worse in 1989. In a special session of parliament, President Daniel Ortega announced that a new shock plan for the economy was being put into operation. This is the fifth such "package" in two years, and it comes only four months after the last readjustment.

Ortega painted a grim picture of the disastrous crisis affecting Nicaragua, pointing to the steep decline in exports linked to the collapse of production, the astronomical inflation rate, and the bottomless pit of the financial deficit.

Export revenue went from nearly \$500 million in 1981 to \$267 million in 1988. Inflation skyrocketed to 36,000% between December 1987 and December 1988. It was at 111% in November, 1988, 126% in December and 200% this January. As for the deficit, it went up to \$237 million in 1988, nearly matching income from exports. The Gross National Product (GNP) fell 9% in 1988. Thus, the downward spiral of the last five years (apart from the small gain of 1.7% in 1987) is continuing.

Finally, the foreign debt, which was at \$3.8 billion in 1983, reached \$6.7 billion last year. The interest payment alone represents 103% of export value.

The draconian economic plan for 1989 provides for regular devaluations of the cordoba until it reaches the level of the official and parallel exchange rates; an



almost complete halt to investments; enormous budget cuts; a sharp reduction in the production of currency that feeds the fiscal deficit; and higher direct and indirect taxes.

## Minimum of investments for forthcoming year

On January 4, 1989, the cordoba was devalued by 117%, and on January 27, by another 16%, which put the official exchange rate at 2,300 C\$ and the parallel rate at 4,500 C\$ to the dollar, with the black market rate remaining at 5,000 C\$ to the dollar.

From January 30, bank credit will not be extended to anyone but heads of firms and producers who can guarantee its repayment. For everyone else, credit has been cut off.

The minimum of investments will be maintained this year, with a priority on finishing projects that are nearly completed,

and, above all else, putting to rights the damage done by Hurricane Joan to production equipment and essential services.

Reducing the state budget by 48% means a cut of 40% in the ministry of the interior, 29% in defense, and 19% in education. Health is also being affected, as are all of the public services. These figures should be regarded with caution, because, taking into account the effects of inflation, the cuts could be even more drastic.

The printing of currency designed to finance the deficit will be reduced to 4%, from its 1987 level of 52%. Taxes will be imposed on new sectors such as the agricultural cooperatives, and indirect taxes on non-staple items like cigarettes and drinks will be raised.

## Higher unemployment and lower demand

To reduce its expenses, the state will "shrink" the workforce it employs, which means beginning massive lay-offs. It should be remembered that 210,000 people are employed in the public sector, nearly half the total number of wage-earners. According to preliminary estimates, nearly 35,000 may be affected, or close to 17% of the state workforce. But, here too, the figures must be carefully appraised, because many of those affected will be demobilized soldiers as a consequence of the relative peace which has existed since the Sapoa accords.

All the same, there is no doubt that these measures will mean higher unemployment and a much lower demand, which it is hoped will ease the inflationary pressure. State aid in terms of public transport, health and basic foodstuffs will be continued for public sector employees, those who are the worst affected by these measures. And the Sandinista Workers Federation (CST) is sending brigades into some regions to look at the possibilities for reclassifying unemployed workers.

Ortega is said to have stated in his announcement that it is better to pay a certain social cost today than to watch the economy collapse under inflation tomorrow. In the same way, he warned that if some areas of production and distribution do not conform to the economic plan as it has been laid out, the only alternative will be to institute a "war economy" of the type found in Europe after the Second World War.

There are two obstacles facing this economic plan, he continued. First, the deficit and the lack of foreign aid; and second, the lack of workers' confidence in the producers and heads of enterprises.

As if echoing these words, the employers' organizations and the representatives of the large landholders have rejected appeals made to them to respond positively to these measures, presented by Daniel Ortega as being the recommendations of "the capitalist banks." ★

**T**HE TRANSITIONAL period in Namibia begins on April 1, with the coming into force of UN Resolution 435, which was adopted in 1978 to dictate the terms for the granting of independence to this South African colony. In November 1989, elections for a constituent assembly are to be held under the surveillance of thousands of UN observers. This assembly will adopt, by a two-thirds majority, the constitution of the independent state that is to come into being at the beginning of 1990.

In exchange, South Africa gets an assurance that the Cuban forces will be redeployed toward the north of Angola, before leaving the country once and for all on July 1, 1991. This gradual withdrawal will be spread out over a period of 27 months. A first contingent of Cuban soldiers has already left Luanda. Quite rapidly after the signing of the tripartite agreement, it became clear that dismantling the ANC's bases in Angola was also part of the deal.

The United States, represented directly at the negotiating table by Chester Crocker; and the Soviet Union, operating behind the scenes, made a considerable contribution to the success of these talks. A "United Nations Group to Assist the Transition" was given responsibility for Namibia's accession to independence. At the same time, a "United Nations Oversight Mission for Angola" is monitoring the Cubans' application of the accord.

### South African defeat at Cuito Cuanavale

This apparent détente in southern Africa reflects a diplomatic turn by all the parties concerned. These negotiations in fact come in the context of American-Soviet collaboration to de-escalate regional military conflicts. The Angolan and Namibian dossier has been on the agenda in several meetings between US and Soviet authorities over the past two years. But the final materialization of the agreement was also the result of the military setback South Africa suffered in Angola in the spring of 1988.

At the end of 1987, Cuba decided to beef up its military support to Luanda to counter the South African invasion of the southern part of Angola that was launched under the code name of "Operation Modular." Three thousand South African troops had come to the aid of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), Jonas Savimbi's Angolan rebel movement, in order to save it from defeat at the hands of the government forces. The South African general staff's objective was to install UNITA in the most important city in the Cuando-Cabango province, Cuito Cuanavale, and to have it proclaim a "provisional government" there.

South Africa suffered its first major military defeat in the Angolan theater since the failure of its 1976 invasion. Logistical problems — the loss of supremacy in the

# The implications of the Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola

**AFTER eight months of hard negotiating and many meetings in London, Brazzaville, Cairo and Geneva, a tripartite agreement between Angola, Cuba and South Africa was finally signed on December 22 in New York at the United Nations. This 14-point document put an end to South African aggression in Angola, opened the way for the independence of Namibia — the continent's last colony — and set in motion the gradual withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola.**

CLAUDE GABRIEL & VINCENT KERMEL

air to the Angolan army's MiGs and the commitment of the Cuban forces — explain the defeat of the South African forces at Cuito Cuanavale. Not only did this bring about a change in its entire strategy toward its Angolan protégé Savimbi, but Pretoria also had to face political risks from its military intervention. Dozens of young whites killed in the fighting were a spur to the anti-conscription movement. This movement was, to be sure, quite limited, but it was precisely such developments that could help it extend its influence.

Black troops — South African Black battalions, veterans of the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA) or members of the Namibian territorial forces (SWATF) — were put into the front ranks in the fighting, sometimes in UNITA uniforms. And during some of the most intense moments of combat at Cuito Cuanavale, some members of the SWATF refused to go into battle.

### Paradox of tripartite negotiations

Pretoria's troops thus failed in their attempt to take this major south Angolan city in order to support their protégé, UNITA. All the press at the time stressed the importance of this Cuban-Angolan victory. The contrast between this military success and the ambivalent content of the accord signed in New York is the principal paradox of these long tripartite negotiations. The talks that produced an agreement for the departure of Cuban troops from Angola have, in fact, had very contradictory effects, starting with the ANC being compelled to withdraw its bases from Angola.

How should this gap between the situa-

tion on the ground and the contradictory outcome of the negotiations be interpreted? Of course, Namibia is supposed to get independence. But this is in the framework of a wide-ranging scheme for settling the conflicts in southern Africa apparently based on a tacit agreement between Moscow and Washington.

In fact, did not the Soviet Ministry for Foreign Affairs spokesperson, Anatoli Adamishin, pay homage to the United States for its "major contribution" to concluding the agreement on Angola and Namibia? And Chester Crocker returned the favor by pointing out, "There is no doubt that the Soviets have indeed used their role and influence, not on two, but on the three parties to the agreement." (*International Herald Tribune*, December 15, 1988.)

All those directly involved in the December 22 accord in fact had an interest in trying to find a way out of this conflict. South Africa's government is involved in a reform policy. It has to reduce the costs of apartheid and of its military commitments in the region as quickly as possible. It needs to win back a part of liberal public opinion, get the approval of certain business circles, and expand its export market as soon as possible. Keeping thousands of soldiers on the Angolan and Namibian fronts for an interminable conflict no longer made any sense, given the international commitments that could be obtained both from the Americans and the Soviets.

For symmetrical reasons, the Angolan regime could hardly hope for a total military defeat of the UNITA/South Africa coalition. War had ravaged the country, making its popular support narrower and narrower

1. *Le Monde*, November 25, 1988.



and increasingly precarious. Moreover, Luanda is engaged in a major reform designed to liberalize its economy in order to obtain Western financing and membership in the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The war was an obstacle to the progress of these reforms.

### Cuba's grave economic crisis

National reconciliation became a central theme of the regime's propaganda, leading to an amnesty law in early February for all those who have been involved in armed opposition to the regime of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA).

Finally, Cuba has been experiencing a grave economic crisis. Since 1975, it has sent about 300,000 troops for terms of duty in Angola. It also had to find a way out. Otherwise, the internationalist enthusiasm of the first years could give way to doubt and discontent.

But the political and military impasse could only be overcome because the Soviets, prompted by Mikhail Gorbachev's new political thought, included southern Africa in their program for settling "regional conflicts." Soviet diplomacy in Africa thereby broke from the Brezhnev orientation, which in the mid-1970s consisted of taking advantage of the conflicts in Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia to extend its influence on the continent.

At the moment of the coup d'état in Portugal on April 25, 1974, the MPLA controlled liberated zones but was not in a position to challenge the colonial regime, especially in the cities. It had also to confront the existence of two other "liberation movements," the FNLA and UNITA, which in reality were only right-wing nationalist factions that had long been manipulated by the American secret services.

The MPLA essentially had a military

and UNITA pledge to respect the property and legitimate interests of the Portuguese resident in Angola." It stipulated that "only the liberation movements, the sole legitimate representatives of the Angolan people, will be able to present candidates in the elections to the constituent assembly."

It was not this accord in itself that was to create the conditions for the civil war between the MPLA on the one side and the reactionary alliance of the FNLA and UNITA on the other. But, on the other hand, it was to create all the conditions for helping the latter two movements get a foothold in the regions, especially in the capital Luanda, and to gain unhoped-for opportunities to mount attacks on the people's movement. The MPLA leadership, headed by Agostinho Neto, hailed a period of national understanding that was supposed to be ushered in by the accord.

### South African troops come to aid of UNITA

The government born out of the Alvor accords began a normalization of the mass movement, banning rallies and strikes. However, the internal tensions remained strong. The FNLA and UNITA militias were gaining confidence, and the MPLA leadership recognized the danger. In July 1975, it decided to move. Its troops confronted those of the FNLA, which they expelled from Luanda on the grounds of "failure to respect the Alvor accords, mainly by the FNLA but often in collusion with UNITA." The war began.

A few weeks later, South African troops invaded Angola and offered decisive aid to UNITA on the southern front. The MPLA was not prepared for such a confrontation, and the reactionary forces advanced very rapidly, coming even to threaten the capital, Luanda. It was in that context that Cuba decided to intervene, for its own reasons, but with the help of a very large-scale

strategy, and the sudden change in the situation after the coup in Portugal brought it abruptly up against political and social tests in the cities, for which it was totally unprepared. A part of the Portuguese left put pressure on it to come to an amicable settlement of the question of power.

On January 15, 1975, the three Angolan organizations and the Portuguese government signed an accord in Alvor for a coalition government. According to the terms of the treaty "the FNLA, MPLA

Soviet air bridge bringing in urgently needed military equipment. The Cuban general staff saved the MPLA from defeat and stabilized the front. Very quickly, the Cuban expeditionary corps grew to 35,000 men, and then to 40,000.

If the Cuban troops had not come in, the progressive wing of Angolan nationalism would have been defeated, and a regime favorable to South Africa would have emerged in Angola. But although when in power the MPLA adopted "Marxism-Leninism" as its official ideology, it by no means set out on a revolutionary path. The MPLA itself was a product of Angolan society.

### Hue and cry about Cuban military presence

The experience of the liberated zones, far from the cities and often in isolated regions, was not sufficient to clarify the social stakes of the national liberation struggle. The urban mobilizations of 1975-77 had, to be sure, produced some forms of people's organization (neighborhood committees and embryonic trade-union structures). But all these were quickly tamed.

The MPLA never based itself on this movement in order to deepen the social and political mobilization of the masses. Moreover, a dozen years of existence in exile caught up in the machinery of African and international diplomacy had promoted bureaucratic tendencies within the organization. The clique conflicts that seriously divided the leadership of the movement, even before April 1974, sharpened in the context of rebuilding the Angolan state, which had been thrown into disarray by the colonial withdrawal.

The Cubans, but also the Soviets and the East Germans, joined in with the Angolans in building the new state. They were in the storm center of all the contradictions and clique battles. The first test was an attempted internal coup in May 1977 by a group in the Angolan leadership around Nito Alves. The Cubans helped to defeat it.

For 13 years, Havana displayed a line totally in keeping with its initial choice. The Angolan government had asked for military aid to defend itself against the South Africans, and this help could only be stopped when the Angolan authorities requested it. Pretoria, in response, took this as a pretext to justify its aid to UNITA and its involvement on the Angolan front.

The international press raised a big hue and cry in the early years about the Cuban military presence in Angola. It raised the spectre of some great expansionist scheme of Fidel Castro extending from Ethiopia to southern Africa. Washington, which was seeking to stall on the Namibia question, created the concept of "linkage" in order to tie independence of this territory to a withdrawal of Cuba troops from Angola and to have an excuse for not applying UN Resolution 435 on Namibia. Up until the recent

negotiations, the Cubans and Angolans refused to accept such a tying together of the two problems.

The Cuban military intervention was certainly justified by the South African danger. But it was possible in a very special international context, marked by the US defeat in Indochina and very strong Soviet pressure on all those regions where Washington could not regain the military initiative. Thus, without violating the rules of peaceful coexistence, Moscow tried to improve its own positions.

In April 1977, Podgorny made an important tour of Africa.<sup>2</sup> Soviet pressure on US imperialism and its diplomatic offensives were, among other things, relayed through a whole series of "progressive" regimes.

At the beginning of the 1960s, when many African countries gained independence, the Soviets in fact introduced a new theoretical category based on the experience of nationalist regimes such as those of Nasser in Egypt or Nkrumah in Ghana. The "non-capitalist road" was supposed to express the nature of these regimes, which had broken with imperialism but were not communist. Moreover, for reasons related to the history of African nationalism, the 1970s saw a proliferation of regimes proclaiming a socialist or "Marxist" ideology.

The seemingly radical but fundamentally deeply confused line of Brezhnev called for consistent military aid for these regimes, even when the economic aid often still came essentially from the imperialist countries. For example, in the oil business Angola has never stopped dealing mainly with the Western world, and in particular with the United States.

Between 1975 and 1979, Ethiopia got \$1.2 billion in military aid. But in 1987, Africa still accounted for less than 2.5% of the USSR's overall foreign trade. Diplomatic interests were the main motivation for the Soviet moves. For this purpose, such reactionary and repressive regimes as those of the Congo and Madagascar found themselves elevated to the rank of the Soviet Union's allies.<sup>3</sup> And some bloodthirsty dictators, such as Idi Amin, were accorded the accolade of "patriotic military officers", according to the twists and turns of Soviet diplomacy.

The serious problems began with the sharpening of the economic crisis. The African "progressives" sobered up, toned down their Marxist declarations of faith and looked for openings to Washington. The debt of African countries to the USSR mounted up, without much hope that they would ever be paid off. Just one example is the \$4 billion owed by Luanda.

The Soviet doctrines proved to be wrong and opportunist. They were by no means

designed to help the people but, to the contrary, to get the approval of the existing regimes. They could only lead to failure. Moscow, moreover, suffered some spectacular setbacks, such as the virtual overnight expulsion of its 1,500 advisors from Somalia in 1977, after the Mogadiscio regime shifted its alliances.

The Nkomati accord between Mozambique and South Africa in 1984 showed the precariousness of the Soviet positions in the region. The few economic advantages that Moscow could draw from its involvement in Africa proved so expensive that the Gorbachev era was to see a questioning of this whole policy.<sup>4</sup>

The prophet of *perestroika*, in fact, laid out the main lines of this review in a few succinct pages. According to him, his country has no specific interests to defend on the continent and pledges not to compromise the economic relations long established between this region and the West. At most,

of the fall in the price of oil, Luanda was already no longer "paying a kopek", and that "is making things expensive." In the same vein, a representative of the official agency Novosti recently pointed out that the Kremlin intends to "be more careful with money and pay attention to the economic cost of political solutions."

It is known, moreover, that Moscow is involved in a scheme for very wide-ranging negotiations with South Africa itself. Do Fidel Castro's remarks reveal another episode in the conflict between Havana and Moscow? In this case, it should be noted that the Cuban's margin for independent maneuver is narrow.

On December 5, 1988, Fidel Castro spoke again about the conditions prevailing before the battle of Cuito Cuanavale: "When this situation was created, because in truth, our military projects were not taken into consideration...everyone asked us to act and expected Cuba to solve the problem. But today, as we can see, Cuban forces and Cuban logistical support were not sufficient to solve the problem."

Fidel Castro acknowledged, therefore, that a political solution was needed in Angola. The economic pressures on Cuba, both imperialist and Soviet, no doubt made it impossible to continue such a war effort. The *lider maximo* [supreme chief] also knows that the initial enthusiasm has flagged among an Angolan population weary from so many years of war and privation. It has at times even been led to express irritation at the foreign military presence, and sees clearly that the MPLA regime is sinking into crisis. The Cuban youth itself saw the war dragging on without any hope of solution.

Undoubtedly, many factors pressed for a political settlement of the Angolan conflict. But the problem is that the political solution in the final analysis is not really to the advantage of the Cuito Cuanavale victors. The independence of Namibia, as positive as it may be for the future of its Black population, fits into a broad political context in which the major active forces are the US administration and the Soviets. Their aim is to pacify the region and find a long-term *modus vivendi*.

The epicenter of this process is now in South Africa. Exploratory contacts are

IF YOU LIKED VIETNAM, YOU'LL LOVE THIS ONE!



the USSR might seek to cooperate with the African countries on the basis of real mutual economic interest. It is in this new international context that the Cubans are retreating from Angola.

On July 26, 1988, Fidel Castro took up the Angolan question in his speech for the anniversary of the Cuban revolution. "At the end of last year," he said, "a difficult, a critical situation, arose in Angola. I am not going to explain what caused it. Let history speak for itself, and I think that one day history will reveal what was involved, where the mistakes were made, why they were made. I will limit myself to saying that Cuba was not responsible for these errors."

What were these mistakes? And who made them? There is more and more talk about the Soviets refusing to continue delivering arms to the Angolans because they were not being paid. An official of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Anatoly L. Adamishin, in fact recognized that because

2. In the same period, Fidel Castro also toured certain African capitals.

3. The Soviet doctrine was gradually enriched with a vocabulary intended to distinguish a whole gamut of categories. For example, sometimes a distinction is made between "countries of a confirmed socialist orientation" and "countries of a socialist orientation."

4. Other vicissitudes followed — the death of Sékou Touré in Guinea and the turn by the regime there, the difficulties of setting up a single, "worker's party" in Ethiopia and then the beginning of a cooling-off of relations with Moscow.

undoubtedly already being made. In December, in Brazzaville, Anatoly Adamishin met his counterpart, South African Minister for Foreign Affairs Pik Botha, in order to explain to him the positive implications for Pretoria of the Kremlin's new diplomatic orientation. This evolution comes when the Luanda regime is weaker than ever. Ruined by a civil war that has lasted for more than a decade, the Luanda government has turned to Western backers for the means to reflate its economy.

## Imperialism's economic blackmail

Until now, the United States has opposed Angola getting into the IMF and through that finding the means to break its financial logjam. The country is clearly suffering from a high level of debt — \$2.46 billion at the end of 1986, not counting the military debt to the USSR.<sup>5</sup> This has been progressively aggravated by the fall in the oil price (90% of exports) over recent years.

International institutions are making implementation of the economic and financial stabilization plan (SEF) adopted in 1988 the *sine qua non* for opening up lines of credit. The SEF calls for loosening price controls, privatization of some sectors of the economy and opening up the country to foreign capital. The results expected in the coming months of this general reform are a devaluation of the currency, the ending of state-subsidized prices for basic necessities and greater administrative autonomy for various economic sectors.

However, clearly, the inter-effects of economic crisis and military settlement are dividing the Luanda regime over various options regarding the extent and pace of the reforms to be undertaken. Thus, more reform-minded sectors are clashing with more traditionalist ones that are more attached to certain doctrinal reference points.

Many foreign companies are operating in Angola, making Angola the second most important oil producer in Black Africa, after Nigeria.<sup>6</sup> But while major oil production is supporting the trade balance, the concessions granted long ago to the foreign companies are continually shortchanging the state treasury and thereby contributing to the financial difficulties.<sup>7</sup> Angola gets only 56% of oil export receipts, that is, far less than the average for OPEC countries. But the state has to shoulder military expenses that officially amount to 40% of its total spending. And the war has reportedly caused \$4 billion in damages and resulted in 60,000 deaths.

In recent years, President Dos Santos has complained several times about the irrationalities in the economy and "the incoherent system of leadership that does not permit enterprise managements to respect the conditions of profitability." In this "socialist" society, the regime's economic base is centered around public enterprises and the oil contracts. It is a market econo-

my to which are tacked on state structures copied from the Stalinist model (state stores, hyper-bureaucratic control of commercial channels, privileges for government officials and all the rest). All this has aggravated the social and economic crisis, leading to an enormous growth of the black market and trafficking of all sorts.

The debate over the economic reform is currently dividing the MPLA and overlapping into the question of the war. Last spring, the technocrats responsible for drawing up the SEF were openly chastised for their overzealous reforming, especially for having publicly unveiled all the consequences such a reform would have (especially the fact that they regarded devaluation of the national currency, the *kwanza*, as inevitable).

Recently, the minister of the interior, Kito Van Dunem ("Loy") was elbowed out of his job, and, it is said, put under house arrest. He was accused by President Dos Santos of having formed a militia for the purpose of engineering a coup d'état. It is not easy to discern what is involved in such internal settling of accounts. But it is easier to understand what is at stake in these differences. The tripartite accord stopped South African aggression, but UNITA's war has not ended.

UNITA is a very highly organized guerrilla movement. It is said to have 10,000 troops organized as an army and 15,000 in militias. It has a certain capacity for implantation. Before independence, UNITA already had influence among the Ovambo population.<sup>8</sup> The MPLA's weaknesses on peasant and ethnic questions left UNITA large margins for maneuver between 1974 and 1976. Savimbi's movement managed, in this way, to occupy important positions in the center-south of the country, which served as the point of departure for his guerrilla movement against the central government.

## United States to continue aid to UNITA

Despite the fact that it signed the tripartite agreement, the United States has announced that it will continue its aid to UNITA. No doubt, it has not given up hope of getting direct negotiations between the MPLA and its protégé Savimbi, or even getting a coalition government — in a way a return to square one, to the Alvor accord. For the moment, there is no indication that the MPLA leadership is ready to take such a path, even if it has declared its readiness to incorporate UNITA members who accept the amnesty into the state apparatus.

Pretoria could not keep up its military intervention in Angola and risk aggravating the political crisis. At the beginning of 1988, when Botha announced a major economic reform involving privatizations and deregulation, his government welcomed Franz Josef Strauss, premier of the state of Bavaria, after a visit by the latter to Mos-

cow. During a press conference, the German rightist leader announced that the Soviets were looking for an accord in southern Africa. "He stated that he had said to [Soviet foreign minister] Shevardnadze that he would convey the latter's views to the South African government. He said that he thought that Russia would be interested in a solution in Angola including UNITA."<sup>9</sup>

In the same week, the Angolan president announced that he was ready to negotiate the Namibian problem and that of the Cuban troops in Angola together. On July 13, an initial agreement was concluded between a South African and an Angolan-Cuban delegation. In this way, the process was set in motion on the South African side. But right up until the end, the Pretoria leaders sought to get the maximum concessions.

## Namibia's future full of pitfalls

For example, a few weeks before the conclusion of the accord in New York, they were still refusing to sign, on the pretext that the timetable for the Cuban withdrawal from Angola (27 months) was too long, much longer than the process of Namibia's accession to independence. Even after the signing of the accord, the South African army's journal published a speech by General Malan questioning the sincerity of Cuba and the USSR.

Moreover, in Angola itself, Pretoria seems to want to keep two irons in the fire. On the one hand, its diplomats are playing the independence game. But on the other, South Africa is holding on to major means for putting pressure on the future independent state. Botha has announced his intention of holding on to Walvis Bay, Namibia's only deep-water port, and of maintaining a South African military base there.

Namibia's economic dependence on its neighbor is enormous. Moreover, the South African general staff seems anxious, at any cost, to integrate a part of the armed forces that it has built in Namibia into the future national army of the independent state. Thus, the road ahead for Africa's last colony remains full of pitfalls. ★

5. The USSR's trade balance with Angola, which has observer status in COMECON, showed a surplus of 152 million rubles in 1986. *Marchés Tropicaux et Méditerranéens*, November 13, 1987.

6. Gulf Oil, BP, Fina, Agip, Texaco, Elf, Total, Britoil, Hispanoil, and so on.

7. Angolan crude is of good quality and sells at a good price on the market.

8. UNITA was formed in 1964. Jonas Savimbi left Holden Roberto's organization (the future FNLA), spent a brief period in the MPLA in the Congo, and founded his own organization. Its language was inspired by Maoism, and it formalized relations with Peking afterward. Some months before the April 25, 1974, coup in Portugal, UNITA and Savimbi established ongoing links with the Portuguese military authorities (as documents supplied by socialist sympathizers in Luanda confirm without doubt).

9. *The Argus* (The Cape), January 25, 1988.

**I**N THIS REALITY, a women's world is limited to the four walls of her home, she cannot go out unless accompanied by a family member or covered by the *chador* or the veil. Her world is made up of forced marriages, of "crimes of honor" and other current practices preserved by families, codified in law, reproduced by social institutions and defended by all — whether in the name of religion, or that of protecting the family. The persistence of such antiquated beliefs over the centuries is a result of the deformed and backward development of our societies, which creates a situation where the most sophisticated forms of progress coexist with the most backward social structures.

It is clear that the religious factor is a sizeable obstacle to the liberation of Arab women. But what has allowed this ideology to persist in spite of the social upheavals which have taken place in the centuries between Islam's emergence and today?

Pointing to Islam as the only factor capable of explaining the situation of Arab women today would be a very partial and dangerous evaluation. One might think that the entry of these societies' into the framework of capitalist production would mean the beginning of the end of old family relationships and the breakdown of the traditional concepts found in pre-capitalist societies.

But women in these societies were not able to leave the tribal framework for one that was more adapted to the needs of the capitalist market — as occurred in the West — precisely because these new relationships of production were introduced from outside and did not, in fact, involve a transformation of existing social relations as a whole. Capitalist development in the region was deformed, and it had a contradictory impact on the socio-economic structure. It was in the local bourgeoisie's interests to preserve pre-capitalist structures and, in particular, the religious superstructure. Islam serves, in effect, as a regulating force for this dependent bourgeoisie, and a safety valve for the potential explosions of discontent due to the working classes' poverty and misery.

### Chasm between rural and urban areas

The region's integration into the world capitalist market had contradictory effects on the situation of women. New economic relations permitted them to escape some aspects of their oppression, but at the same time, strengthened and exploited traditional attitudes towards women.

However, the changes that affected Arab society with the introduction of capitalism did not have a single homogeneous effect on all parts of it, because they were linked to the needs of the local market, and its needs were linked to those of imperialism.

It is clear, for example, that the situation of women in the Gulf states is very different from that in the majority of Arab countries. This is due to the enormous weight of the still dominant pre-capitalist tribal structure, in spite of today's modernization as a result of the oil revenues.

There are also differences within each country itself, in particular that of the chasm opened up between rural and urban areas. Pre-capitalist economic relations persist in the countryside, but the cities have grown enormously, and peasants are not able to compete with capitalist production and its sophisticated methods. Families have been forced to emigrate to the towns, and this exodus has had contradictory effects on women.

### Role of the family in Arab societies

On the one hand, their situation is improved because they have the possibility of getting an education, finding a job, having relative economic independence and breaking out of their isolation. But they find themselves in contradiction with the traditional vision of women's role in society. On the other hand, market requirements impose a new exploitation on them as women, in addition to their domestic tasks.

The family plays an irreplaceable role in the structure of our Arab societies, all the more so as there is still production in the countryside — wage relations are not firmly in place there, and the family has therefore not disappeared as a unit of production. It can continue to exercise power over women, who, despite having won a measure of economic independence, hesitate to break with the family circle because of the pressure of social, historical and religious traditions.

Women's status must be viewed differently depending upon their class. Bourgeois women are privileged: they are educated, have greater freedom, and are involved with a much more extended network of people. This is due to the weaker influence of religion and traditional values and to the influence of Western culture. In the "lower" classes, where illiteracy and misery are the common denominator, religion and traditional values are a refuge from the bleakness and even the hostility of daily life.

Women are also denied their political rights — even today in some of our countries women do not have the right to vote, and in the rest of the countries there are virtually no women in the leaderships of political movements, even nationalist or progressive ones.

Women's virginity is still considered as a concern of the whole family, and "crimes of honour" frequently take place. As the law does not consider these crimes in the ordinary sense, they are punished very lightly. A man who kills his sister or

# Women in WO

**WOMEN in the Arab countries face oppression that are among the most severe seen as inferior from birth. These chains have come upon them and in order to attain what is a right under unrelenting social, mat**

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his daughter because she has lost her virginity or has married without the consent of her family, will, in Arab countries with the most advanced legal systems, get no more than three months in prison, and some countries refuse to view this as a crime at all.

Polygamy is a tradition which is still solidly entrenched, and its current decline is probably more due to the economic difficulty of keeping two or more women. Apart from the Personal Laws in Tunisia and Somalia, the other Arab codes of law all permit it and consider it to be part of Islam.

Women have no say at all in terms of marriage or divorce. Marriage — as defined by the Islamic *sharia*<sup>1</sup> and the Personal Laws in some Arab countries — is

# the Arab Id

suffer discrimination and  
worst in the world. Women are  
who have attempted to break  
against their friends and family,  
le's birthing, they must live  
and psychological pressure.

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contracted in the pres-  
ence of two partners,  
but in reality it re-  
quires the agreement

of the man and the guardian of the woman,  
who has only a formal presence. Women  
are always considered minors under the  
guardianship of other male family  
members.

Dowry is a necessary condition of marri-  
age, since the family is a whole economic  
unit, and the loss of one of its members  
deprives it of income. Its continuation to-  
day, in spite of the decline of traditional  
values, reveals the persistence of some of  
the worst tribal customs in these societies.  
The mention of dowry in the marriage  
contract shows its mercenary nature, the  
woman being nothing but merchandise.

Women do not have the right to divorce  
and are at the mercy of their husbands.

According to Sunni law, all a man has to  
do is repeat "I divorce you" three times  
and she is divorced. She is suddenly con-  
fronted with a new world where she will  
always be "guilty" of having been di-  
vorced. She is faced with the society's  
contempt for divorced women, exploita-  
tion in her workplace, and the fatigue of  
trying to take care of her children — if she  
has been allowed to keep them.

The above is only a brief look at some of  
the aspects of women's oppression in Arab  
countries. Missing from the list are such  
daily occurrences as insulting looks and  
hostile jokes in the streets, rapes, murders  
and the mental illnesses caused.

## Religion guarantees stability of regimes

With very few exceptions, civil law in  
this region does not deal with laws con-  
cerning personal status. In the majority of  
Arab countries this area of legislation is  
left to the religious institutions.

The separation of religion and state is a  
taboo subject for the region's govern-  
ments. It could not be otherwise, given  
that it is religion that guarantees the stabl-  
ility of these regimes. The introduction of a  
Code of Personal Law by the Algerian  
government is a case in point: "This law is  
based on the Koran and public opinion...  
it is intended to be a response to the needs  
of development and the Arab-Islamic trad-  
ition." The law's Islamic and Koranic  
inspiration destroys any even vague hope  
of ameliorating women's status and  
situation.

Countries like Syria, Iraq, Morocco and  
Tunisia have instituted similar Codes of  
Personal Law that are not opposed to the  
Islamic *sharia* — women do not have the  
right to decide about their marriages, a  
guardian is required, divorce is only a  
man's right, and where a woman can ask  
for one, she must present justifications and  
witnesses and so on.

Tunisia is a special case. Its reformist  
Code, promulgated in 1956, proclaims  
men and women equal in theory and does  
in fact give women rights like abortion  
and the availability of contraceptives with-  
out women needing the authorization of  
their husbands. The Code is favorable to  
women in that it abolished polygamy, and  
marriage and divorce can be contracted by  
the woman herself.

But women are still legally minors: an  
unmarried woman is the legal responsibil-  
ity of her father until she is wed (Article  
46), whereas a boy is responsible for him-  
self once he is sixteen. Moreover, the  
Code continues to sanction the obligatory  
dowry, and forbids women to marry non-  
Muslims.

These, along with other practices, mean  
that a Tunisian woman, whether married  
or divorced, is kept in an inferior position,  
considered as non-productive, incapable of  
providing for her own needs or of deciding

on her future.

Lebanon is the only Arab country not to  
have a single Code of Personal Law. There  
are seventeen recognized religions, and  
each community applies its own laws in  
terms of marriage, divorce and inheritance.  
The fact that Personal Laws are thus left to  
community leaders and *imams* is but one  
aspect of the confessional structure of  
Lebanon.

The recognition of these communities  
first appears in Law 60 under the French  
mandate in 1936. This legislation ceded  
prerogatives over laws concerning person-  
al status to the leading religious bodies.  
Beyond the differences in each religion,  
the Codes of Personal Law bore certain re-  
semblances to each other, particularly in  
relation to women.

As far as marriage is concerned, the  
Family Code backs up the religious laws  
of Christians and Muslims since these say  
that women owe their husbands obedience.  
Divorce is only attainable, according to the  
Islamic *sharia*, on the demand of the man,  
and even without the woman's consent.  
According to the Sunnis, a man can di-  
vorce his wife without recourse to the law,  
whereas for the Shi'ites, a woman can de-  
mand divorce if it was part of the marriage  
contract provisions. But it is rare for a  
woman to invoke this once married.

For Christians, divorce is authorized (ex-  
cept for Catholics) at the demand of one of  
the spouses, but its use remains very limit-  
ed. As for inheritance, if the 1959 law de-  
crees men and women equal, this does not  
penetrate the Muslim community, where  
the Islamic *sharia* states that "one man is  
worth two women." From these examples  
it is obvious that, whatever their faith,  
Lebanese women experience an oppression  
very similar to that of their Arab sisters in  
other nations.

## Demand for a secular state is vital for women

The demand for a secular state is vital  
for Arab women. The bourgeois feminist  
movements which have arisen here have  
not taken a direct and radical approach to  
this problem, and the tone of their de-  
mands has remained timid and hardly wor-  
ried the religious and political powers that  
be.

Worse still, the Arab Communist parties,  
which were established throughout the re-  
gion and sometimes had a mass audience,  
showed no interest in the question at all.  
As a result of their reformism and religious  
opportunism, they did not dare raise the  
slightest democratic program containing,  
for backward countries like ours, a demand  
for secularism.

1. The *sharia* is the religious law comprising the whole  
of the obligations that derive from Koran and the Sun-  
na (the tradition of the prophet's teachings). It embrac-  
es all aspects of the individual and collective life of  
Muslims.

How then could they be expected to raise demands for abortion, contraception, a struggle against "crimes of honor" — in short the minimum if one considers that women are human beings.

It is impossible to propose a detailed program for all of the Arab countries — the social as well as the juridical differences force the movements in each country to come up with demands and priorities at both the programmatic and pragmatic levels. But the similarities of women's oppression, codified by religious legislation, allow us to outline certain tasks to be taken up by the revolutionary socialist movement.

A major goal is to participate in the construction of an autonomous mass women's movement, to help to radicalize such a movement and win the most conscious elements in this movement to the need for a program of social change based on class struggle.

This fight must start from the premise that the liberation of women is inseparable from the socialist liberation of all society.

### Linking democratic and socialist demands

The continued existence of pre-capitalist structures and relationships and the deformation of the capitalist socio-economic structure are, in the final analysis, props of Arab women's inferior status. Thus, their emancipation is linked in large measure to the struggle for national liberation and the necessity of breaking imperialist domination.

The absence of a revolutionary movement that could link democratic demands to socialist ones has meant that, throughout modern Arab history, national anti-imperialist struggles have never gone beyond the limits imposed by their bourgeois leaderships, and have ended up still dependent on imperialism. This has had repercussions for women, Algeria being a case in point.

Algerian women participated massively in the struggle for independence — many died heroically, others had leadership responsibilities. Nonetheless, with the war barely over, they were told to return to their traditional roles. From that day to this there has never been a tradition of autonomous struggle bringing them together around their own issues in the context of this national struggle.

The struggle for women's liberation necessarily implies a confrontation with right-wing forces, including bourgeois women, because the dynamic of this struggle must go beyond a strictly democratic framework and it therefore implies a confrontation with the class enemy.

It also implies a mass women's liberation movement. Its fight will necessarily converge with that of the oppressed working towards the overthrow of the ruling class. ★

# Women and Islam

## INTRODUCTION

THOUSANDS OF WOMEN were active in Turkey before the September 1980 coup d'état, within the left and far-left as well as in fundamentalist and fascist groups. But the question of women's oppression was never really discussed, either being simply ignored or relegated to second place in the name of "priorities". It was only with the appearance of an autonomous women's movement in the mid-1980s that this question was forced onto the broad political agenda.

On the other hand, in the period following the coup, the Islamic fundamentalist movement<sup>1</sup> grew considerably, with the blessing of the military (see IV 120, May 18, 1987). Whilst encouraging this rapid growth of Islam and using it to eliminate any left influences and the

national Kurdish movement, the government even so opposed some "excessive" fundamentalist demands that openly challenged the secular, Kemalist traditions of the state (see box).

One of these confrontations between fundamentalists and the state came about when militant Muslims organized a series of spectacular actions throughout the country to protest against the ban on wearing the turban [headscarf] in the universities. Some women Islamic militants have, moreover, begun to demand greater equality between women and men inside their movement.

The following extracts are from an article that appeared in the Turkish socialist-feminist journal *Kaktüs*, which subsequently sparked off a debate in the journal around all these questions with Islamic fundamentalist women.

## "Islam cannot resolve women's problems"

**I**N THE ARTICLES on "Women and Islam", the general tendency has been to study the verses of the Koran on women, defending or refuting certain pre-established theses.

Even if a study of the sacred texts is not useless, I do not think that it is indispensable to refer to the Koran in order to talk about the interventions and contributions of religion to the daily life and oppression of women. There are two reasons for this:

● All religions... whether they worship one or more gods, have always considered

woman as a creature that is inferior to man — or, at the very least, they have tried to reduce her to the role of "reproducing female". From this point of view, in its ideological arguments and forms of intervention in our daily life, Islam is no different from other religions.

### Islam maintains that the Koran protects women

● Even if the ideological rhetoric of the Islamic movement that is organized and inspired by the Koran is today much more influential than the Koran itself, one cannot speak of an influence of the Koran "as such" in traditions and customs. In fact, the manifestation of Islam is permeated with a whole social system and mixed up with other ideologies. Consequently, the questions raised in this discussion, those whose thesis on women we must analyze and assess, are the epigones of Islam rather than the sacred texts.

I said above that Islam was no different than other religions. It is clear that fundamentalists are immediately going to oppose

1. The generic term "fundamentalist" covers the whole range of "political Islamic activists" (the term used in the following articles is *islamci* in Turkish). Later on in the debate, the author makes a distinction between this layer of activists and Muslims in general.



that assertion. The Islamic daily *Zaman* ("The Times") regularly publishes a column on the "women's question". Nearly all these articles maintain that God indeed created man and woman as subjects on an equal footing, and that the Koran protects women.

## Campaign against ban on wearing the turban

What is proposed to us is the following framework: Man and woman are equal in the eyes of God. All the inequalities that exist, the oppression and exploitation, are injustices that are the responsibility of the patriarchy, capitalism and other religions — or, in a word, the West. As soon as our society has freed itself of this yoke and is reorganized on the Islamic model, women's oppression will automatically disappear. According to them, women are oppressed because of prostitution, exploitation at work and because they cannot wear the veil as they would like to....

Let us take the example of a double confrontation: between ourselves, feminists, and radical fundamentalists on the one side; and between these same radical fundamentalists and the Turkish state on the other. Our state, secular but Muslim, vacillating totally between its Kemalist tradition and Islamic ideology, has suddenly decided to ban the wearing of turbans in the universities. The radical Islamic groups began to organize protest actions against this ban and to defend their democratic rights: "The state should not meddle in the freedom of citizens to dress how they want to!"

Before going on to analyze this concrete case, where fundamentalists and the state are in "confrontation", it would perhaps be useful to verify the real extent of the antagonism between the state and fundamentalists.

We have lived with Islamic ideology for

nearly one thousand years. Islam was the dominant reference in feudal society. Under capitalism and a secular state, it was isolated to the cultural sphere and kept away from the economic and political domains. Starting in the 1950s, and with the ousting of the Kemalists from the government by the Democratic Party (DP), Islamic ideology again came to the fore at various levels through the sects, in political parties and in the government.

In addition it is clear that since the military coup d'état on September 12, 1980, we are going through an accelerated process of Islamization. Prime Minister Turgut Özal never forgets to refer to Allah in every one of his speeches. Governmental declarations go even so far as to imply that price rises are also divine will! But, at the same time, we are living through an epoch where relations with world capitalism are more intense and where foreign capital has even penetrated our bedrooms.

## The question of democratic rights

The media and "democrats" question the contradictions existing between the ruling Motherland Party (ANAP) on the one hand — which is fundamentalist, nationalist, conservative and basically for "free-for-all capitalism" — and supporters of "more orthodox" Islam on the other. Muslims complain about the torture that young fundamentalists suffered equally after the coup d'état, and they cannot attend their university courses wearing turbans. The military repression has also affected them....

Even if one tries to make us believe, in the framework of a general speech on democracy, that there are big contradictions between fundamentalists and the regime, in my opinion the only point where they are really at odds with the ANAP government is in their uneasiness about the fact

that the state's Kemalist tradition has not been totally destroyed yet. Given a future renunciation of secularism and application of the *sharia* [see footnote with preceding article] and our fundamentalists would have no more reasons for opposing the existing order.

Starting from this point of view, I want to underline two points on the question of the wearing of the turban. I am opposed to the state having any say in the clothing of citizens. And I defend the right of self-organization in all areas. So fundamentalists, if they want to, can organize to fight for the right to wear the turban. But it is uniquely this right that I would defend, and not the fact that they wear the turban. Not to see the nuance between these two positions would be a serious error of analysis. Those [in certain left circles] who defend democracy in general and the creation of a "civil society" [as a guarantee against the all-powerful, oppressive state] make this mistake. They defended the right of fundamentalists wearing the turban to attend school, thus putting themselves on the same level as the fundamentalists. This fine example of analytical error and response is, in my opinion, very instructive from a feminist point of view.

What I would say to women who want to wear the turban is: "You certainly have the right to organize — as do others — around the subject of wearing turbans or any other question. That's all. But I would like to discuss something else with you. Have you already thought about how veiling yourselves contributes to women's oppression and to reducing sexuality simply to the role of reproduction?"

## Debate over women-only transport

For me, the dialogue with fundamentalist women only makes sense insofar as it allows us to explain to them feminist concepts, perspectives for the struggle and why Islam cannot resolve the problems of women; to discuss our common oppression with them; and to exchange our experiences of daily life as women. But there is no question of carrying out unity in action with them "in the name of democracy", a concept that is more or less confused.

Another concrete example was raised by the campaign for "special buses reserved exclusively for women". Those fundamentalists around the journal *Women and the Family* took as their starting point the sexual harassment that women suffer in public transport, particularly on the jam-packed municipal buses, and launched a campaign to demand women-only buses.

The objective was very clear. In the light of Islamic ideology, which searches for every possible means to keep women veiled and away from men, the goal is simply to separate male and female "spheres of existence". In a country that has had a tradition of harems and where women

## "Kemalism" and the Turkish state

**MUSTAFA Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), the "father of all Turks" and general in the Ottoman army, was the main leader of the Turkish national movement and founder of the Turkish republic, proclaimed in 1923 on the ruins of the old empire. After becoming president of the republic, he got rid of his Islamic allies who had helped him to beat the Greek occupiers, repressed the embryonic workers' movement and massacred the Kurds. He created a nationalist/populist, quasi-totalitarian, single-party regime based on the development of a form of state capitalism.**

**He implemented a series of modernist and Western-style reforms: secularization of the state; abolition of the caliphate; unification of education; reform of the civil code (based in future on the Swiss model); adoption of Western weights and measures and calendar; abandonment of the Arabic alphabet in favour of Latin; banning the wearing of the *chador* and veil for women, the *fez* for men and so on.**

**The Turkish state, and above all the army, is supposed to guarantee the Kemalist reforms against the "fundamentalist threat". But, starting in the 1940s, politicians have relied more and more on the religious sects to keep them in power. The project of eliminating Islam by force had failed. And it was in the 1980s, under the regime of the generals — the "true Kemalists" — that Islam saw its biggest growth. ★**

were only allowed to participate in social life from the 1920s onwards (after the proclamation of the republic), this is a considerably "backward" demand. Some feminists have made a wrong analysis on this subject...and have supported this campaign, saying "there are certainly good reasons why women demand non-mixed buses".

### "We have to fight in the same space"

I agree that in many areas it is *very difficult* for women to live in the company of men. But, after noting this, to demand the separation of public transport seems to me to make a conceptual error. It is precisely because we are against the position that women and men occupy at present in society, because we no longer want to be oppressed, humiliated, attacked and raped, that we have to prevent men doing this to us.

In order to get to that point, we must not separate our lives off from those of men but fight in the same space, struggling to create a world where men can no longer behave in that way.

Of course, it is true "that there are certainly good reasons why women demand non-mixed buses", but I also think that fundamentalist women who put this demand up front are not really preoccupied by these considerations, but are rather acting in the optic of setting up, by stages, an Islamic way of life. Some could say that this is a conspiratorial view of history, but fundamentalists themselves defend this strategy of going forward by stages in such an explicit way that if a conspiracy exists, it is not me who invented it.

### Rewriting the history of Islam

Another lesson to draw from this is that, in studying each demand, the practical consequences must be taken into account. Supposing that the demand for separate buses was agreed by the town hall (some mayors close to the fundamentalists have already reacted favorably — ed.), and that separate buses are run for men and women. What would happen to women who wanted to get in the same buses as men? It is already difficult for women to have a public life.

Whatever your job, your legs and chest are the first things men stare at. Knowing that this is the present state of things, there are no prizes for guessing what names women would be called who wanted, in spite of everything, to live in the company of men....

What would happen if women rewrote the history of Islam? The argument of fundamentalist women (some people even describe them as feminists) who have come out of the Islamic movement and who

want to reform Islam...can be summarized as follows:

History must be revised and the place of women in social life must be restored; they have been excluded from the stage of history because Islamic men have only told half the story. The historic mission of women is to use all their strength to promote their own creativity, that is to simultaneously have children, write poetry and make speeches. Women must provide both a prop for men to lean on (as mother, wife or sister) and accomplish her mission of self-fulfillment. The main demand that is put forward in the newspaper *Zaman*, from various female pens and with nuances and varying degrees of militancy, is the following: "To be able to participate in social life *so as to defend* a more orthodox and egalitarian Islam in relation to women."

Some of these authors draw more attention in particular to the oppression suffered by women who are shut away at home, serving men. Many of their propositions go in the same direction as those of feminists. But these fundamentalist women are very picky about not being confused with feminists, because they consider them (at best) as women who are demanding sexual liberation due to a false reaction to women's exploitation by the West.

### Struggle of fundamentalist women is positive

I think that the struggle of fundamentalist women to participate in social life is a very positive thing, be it only in limited areas and for the rewriting of history. Even if this is going to contribute little to the women's liberation movement by way of analysis or methods of struggle in general, it is a very important fight for fundamentalist women themselves.

As a feminist who knows perfectly well that our liberation depends on a daily struggle in every sphere of life, I think that it is positive that among fundamentalists there are women who are questioning masculine domination. They have a difficult and contradictory task, but I think that at least these contradictions are healthy ones. The day will come when the revolt of fundamentalist women as women will come into conflict with Islamic resignation, and some of them — even a small number — will radicalize in the right direction. Perhaps, one day, fundamentalist women will support our campaign around battered women, for example.<sup>2</sup>

That day will certainly be a joyful day for all of us. ★

*Sedef Öztürk, Kaktüs 2, July 1988.*

2. One of the first demonstrations of the independent women's movement in Turkey was around this question. On May 17, 1987, 2,000-3,000 women marched through Istanbul protesting against male violence (see IV 121, June 1, 1987).

## "Artificial categories and hasty judgements"

**WE** WOULD like to reply to your articles "Both believers and feminists" and "The woman question is on the agenda for radical fundamentalists", published in the journals *Feminist* and *Kaktüs*.

We are a group of women who disagree with the status of women in our society and its structures and who are struggling to put an end to this. We have already explained our ideas on the woman question in the journal *Zaman*. These were articles that looked at the theoretical gains of feminism as it has been expressed in Turkey and throughout the world, and which used these gains in a productive way. They made certain criticisms both of feminism and the way in which Muslims in Turkey see the question of women.

It was — and still is — natural to question our situation, our condition as Muslims and as women. We use the gains of feminism and we share certain points with feminists. Because, regardless of where you go or the historical period you study, it is possible to find common phenomena like the dominant male ideology, sexism and the oppression of women. And it is sad to note that Muslims, starting with those in our geographical zone, are not exempt from this. We are perhaps even forced to emphasize that in comparison with women in other situations and with their exploited condition that has been legitimated though this oppression, there are additional unfavourable conditions faced by Muslim women dictated by powerful traditional and religious factors.

### "There are no guarantees against oppression"

But, so that you will understand better, we must make it clear straightaway that we are referring to factors that are *created* by a particular reading of the religion. They do not come from the *religion itself*. But the result is the same: as women we have all experienced the same process in different forms and we continue to do so. More particularly, women who have been active in right-wing or left-wing groups have experienced and still experience similar situations.

So we are in favour of a better under-

standing and analysis of this process and its transformation. To be socialist, non-religious or non-Muslim does not offer any guarantee that you will be sheltered from the specific oppression of women. We do not have any problem in talking the same language as other women or feminists, because we are all oppressed.

This has not embarrassed us, because we knew and we know what we are and who we are. We are simply Muslims. The maxim of Muslims is *la ilahe illallah* ("there is only one God"). With this belief as our starting point, we do not expect you to be able to understand the way in which all Muslims, men and women, understand individual freedom or freedom in general. From this point of view, to defend the demand for freedom as it is understood by feminists would be above all, as far as we are concerned, to deny ourselves — and nobody can expect us to do that.

### "We cannot identify with the label 'feminist' "

So it is impossible for us to identify with the labels like "feminists", "veiled feminists" or "Muslim feminists" that we are given. We are concerned about all women and the whole complexity of problems that they encounter as women. We do not have time to waste with artificial categories and hasty judgements. What we want to remind you of is that in addressing a way of life and thinking that you have never wanted or even tried to understand, when you makes speeches around the theme, "You cannot liberate women, women's liberation is our monopoly", that unhappily does not allow you to save women. We consider that the attitude of wanting to "save women in spite of themselves" is not only anti-democratic, but also harmful for women.

You challenge the present representation of women, women's situation as it has been constructed by the dominant male ideology combined with capitalism. You want to replace it by another image of women, a *unique* model, something that *you* have created and which would, in fact, be completely artificial. And in doing so, as the feminist movement, you benefit from the advantage of being the representatives of a type of discourse which holds increasing sway in Turkey.

Is this not the case? Do you not speak like people who want power, who want to swell their numbers, to be recognized and approved? Is not your goal in entering into a dialogue with women — over and above the desire for an exchange and discussions on common aspects of oppression — to teach your female disciples the concepts of feminism and the perspectives for struggle, and, above all, that only feminists can bring them the salvation that no ideology or religion could?

It is clear that with this starting point it is impossible to be in solidarity and act together. When you talk of "solidarity with

women", we understand that this is, for you, a series of actions that you can use to organize your power. You are for the liberation of women, but only with the methods and forms that you have chosen. In this context, it is not difficult for us to understand the negative attitude that you have developed on the subject of "the campaign for women-only buses". Your position, instead of reflecting a political attitude of a women's movement, is rather a reflection of the place you occupy in the established order....

That said, if you really want to make "a concrete analysis of the concrete situation", you will have to take into account the simple fact that a big — and not insignificant or unimportant — section of the "concrete situation" that you have to analyze is composed of Muslim women. We would like to point out to you that, for the well-being of women, it would be a good thing if you remembered this. Consequently the feminist movement, like the socialist movement, has to differentiate itself from Jacobinist, monist, secular and republican ideology — that is, Kemalist ideology....

Now, if we are forced to use your formulations and admit that there is a contradiction between our Muslim belief and our rejection of our oppression as women — and, even if this upsets you, we should make it clear that, happily, we do not see any — this is entirely our problem. Your deep attachment to a phenomenon like fashion, created by the dress norms of capitalist consumption, as well as your own attire keeps you in a traditional female role. This is your problem. In the same way, knowing whether or not our veils ghettoize us into our role as reproducers and in our sexuality is our problem.

### "Islam's view of women is our problem"

Let us add something for socialist feminists: We have never considered using the contradictions that exist, and which will never disappear, between socialism and feminism in order to calumny the feminist movement. And we do not interpret what socialist feminists say simply by reducing it to these contradictions.

The way in which Islam sees the woman question or feminism is our problem. So please stop this monologue, we are fed up with it. What do we really say? Have you ever thought about it and tried to understand? If so please let us know, ladies.... ★

*A Muslim women's group from Ankara, Kaktüs, November 1988.*



## "Religion is the most rigid of all ideologies"

**T**HE CRITICAL article sent to us by a group of Islamic fundamentalist women from Ankara has been very useful in allowing a clarification of a number of points.

First of all, it has become clear that the basic ideology of fundamentalist women (I am deliberately avoiding calling them Muslims because there is an important nuance that I will come back to later) is above everything else the Islamic religion. Consequently, their questioning as women of religious practices and interpretations remains within the limits set by Islam itself. On the other hand we totally share their statement that "to be socialist, a non-believer or Muslim does not give any guarantee that you will be sheltered from oppression as a woman", and this is perhaps the only possible basis for joint action with fundamentalist women. But beyond this point our paths diverge widely.

I think that it is unnecessary to reply at great length to the accusations that we want to monopolize women's liberation, that we simply use "artificial images" or that we represent "a type of discourse that holds

increasing sway in Turkey". These are simply assertions that could easily be disproved by an attentive study of our writings and by an analysis of the political and sociological structure in Turkey. In my opinion there are other points to be clarified.

## Religion must be analyzed objectively

*Subjectivism:* This is a concept based on the belief that each Muslim is going to have a different interpretation of religion and that we must make a separate analysis of the ideas of each individual believer (and this is what fundamentalist women demand by asking us "have you asked yourselves what we want to say?"). This is an uninteresting subjectivist approach that we reject. In order to analyze religion as an ideology, the power relations that it incorporates and sustains, its sexism, and the mystifying role that it has had throughout human history, we have to have objective criteria. This is the only way that we can understand the ideology and social references that are hidden behind the words of the holy texts.

In brief, we have an analysis of religion and we are not going to change it because a group of women have started to challenge their situation as women, even though they are Muslim. Moreover, their slogan "We are first of all Muslims" shows that there is no need for any such change. Apparently, the problem of Muslim women is not the Islamic religion, it is the partial interpretation made of it by Muslim men. Aside from the fact that the partial fashion in which it is interpreted by men is sexist, we think that the very concepts of the religion are sexist, and that, historically, religious ideology has contributed to the process of institutionalizing sexism in combination with relations of production that are based on exploitation and oppression.

*Muslims and fundamentalists:* We are reminded that if we want to make "a concrete analysis of a concrete situation, 90% of our concrete situation is composed of Muslim women". The Muslim identity is one which — aside from individuals belonging to religious minorities — all people living within the border of the Turkish republic acquire at birth. For a big section of the population, particularly the half that lives in the towns, the fact of being a Muslim only makes itself felt during religious holidays, on Fridays [the holy day for Muslims], at weddings and funerals.

The vast majority of people do not want to send their children to Koran classes, wear the veil, see men with skull caps on their heads and baggy oriental trousers, women walking three paces behind men, or the application of the *sharia* laws and so on. Only a small minority — the new, politicized, form of Islam, the radical Islamic groups, make such proposals. Thus, those who remind us what our "concrete situation" is should not forget their own. Yes, the great majority are Muslim, but not fun-

damentalist. If the fundamentalist women will allow me to tease them, in this context "your situation is no better than ours!"

*Secularism:* We are asked to differentiate ourselves from the secular ideology of Kemalism. Well, if there is one thing we can take from Kemalism, without any hesitation, it is its secularism. This is the only legal tool we have for preventing religion spreading its hold into all domains of our lives, including through the laws. We are forced to oppose this hold, because above all it threatens women and consolidates their second-class social situation.

We must defend the concept of secularism that exists, adding a criticism of religion as ideology. The frightening example of Iran is always before our eyes, in all its force. The opposition that based itself on religion in its fight against the Shah, and above all the thousands of women who demonstrated in the streets for the *chador*, have paid heavily for this mistake, finding themselves in Khomeini's prisons or at the front during the war against Iraq.

## The concept "individual choice" has its limits

The weakness of the analysis of the potential for expansion of religious ideology and its capacity to take power has made possible the creation of a society where women are cloistered in the home; hidden under the *chador*; where they must send their children from 13 years upward to the front for the "holy war"; where the Revolutionary Guards enter homes and kill people under the pretext that they drink alcohol, without any other form of trial. Many social and cultural gains have been eliminated in this way. There is a high price to pay for unbridled religious fervour.

*Liberties:* When I spoke in my preceding article of the question of wearing the turban, I made it clear that I could not defend the fact that women wear the turban, but, only if they wish, their right to defend this right, and that a "democratic" stance seemed to me to be appropriate. If a woman wants to wear the veil, we should not forcibly remove it.

However, the concept of individual choice has certain limits. We cannot invoke "individual free choice" when little girls of 6 years old are sent to Koran classes wearing the turban. They are not able to choose anything at all, because they are forced to do this. In schools, the religious education is no longer optional but compulsory. School children therefore are no longer free to choose to go to these classes, they are forced to learn the Koran.

Religion is a real problem for us, because it interferes in the education of children who are not in a position to make a free choice; it affects the individual behaviour of people who live in our society (in this country there is still acid thrown at women who walk around with short sleeves, and men have been killed for not observing

Ramadan)<sup>1</sup>. Religion has the power to abolish individual free choice or to limit freedom. Our conception of freedom is indeed very different from that of the fundamentalists.

In their article, the fundamentalist women make it clear that they do not expect us to be able "to understand the way in which all Muslims, men and women, see individual freedom or freedom in general". They are wrong. It is not a question of not understanding — we understand only too well, and what we see does not please us at all, which is putting it mildly.

*Saving us despite ourselves!:* As women living in groups of classes, nations, races, religions and so on that are different and adopt various ideologies, we are all involved in a struggle, despite ourselves, for ourselves. Sexist values, behaviour and conceptions are rooted in all fields of life and we have internalized them. We all have to face up to them and challenge them.

There is therefore well and truly a sexist system that we, as socialist feminists, and the women who criticize us, as Muslims, have to challenge — at the cost of certain contradictions and, sometimes, entering into conflict with the ideological barriers that limit our thinking. And we have to do this *despite* the political structures in which we are active, *despite* the convictions with which we are impregnated. This is the second point we have in common with fundamentalist women.

Fundamentalist women are going to continue a struggle in a field where we cannot follow them — that of changing the religion from inside. And, in addition, they must continue this struggle believing in and having adopted Islam, one of whose pillars is precisely women's oppression. This is a very difficult fight, because of all the dominant ideologies, religion is the one that is the most rigid and inflexible, and the least tolerant of any opposition. ★

Sedef Öztürk, *Kaktüs* 4, November 1988



1. For a more general analysis of the situation of women in Turkey, see Elif Keskin's article, "Women in the land of the generals", *IV* 120, May 18, 1987.

# “Every issue is a women’s issue”



**WOMEN** in the Indian sub-continent face a wide range of prejudice and oppression stemming from class, caste, cultural and gender discrimination. The following article takes an overall look at the position of women in Indian society today, and the successes and difficulties facing the organized feminist movement.

**TRUPTI SHAH**

**F**AMILY, caste and village bondages are being used by capitalists to keep women workers subjugated, and pre-capitalist forms of oppression — like dowries, *sati* or female infanticide — have taken on new forms with the penetration of capitalism. Some people think that the dowry system, *sati* and so on are just remnants of the past, because of people’s feudal outlook. But this is not true. The form is pre-capitalist, but they are being used by capitalism to strengthen itself.

Let’s take the example of the dowry system. In the past, in the pre-capitalist era, dowry mainly concerned the higher and propertied classes, mainly the land-owning castes. The women from these castes were not allowed to work outside the home, so they were unproductive. But lower-caste women were always part of the production process, and were not considered as a burden to be fed by their families. So, there was no dowry system among the lower castes. Instead, there was sometimes the practice of “bride price”, but not the dowry.

With the penetration of capitalism the family no longer remained the unit of production, and lower-caste women had to go out to look for jobs, which was extremely difficult. With this change in the economic situation, and with the process of “Sanskritization”, the dowry custom became universalized. “Sanskritization” describes a process whereby the lower castes want upward social mobility, and to do this they adopt the customs and rituals of upper-caste people. So now dowry has become

universalized in all classes, castes and communities.

The second example is that of *sati* — burning widows with the dead body of their husband. The incident of *sati* that took place in Rajasthan last year was the subject of several studies that showed that this was not a predominantly religious phenomena, but the product of a complex mixture of economic and political factors.

## Impact of new medical technology

It is important to consider the impact of medical technology, such as the amniocentesis test that can determine the sex of the foetus. If the foetus is female then there is a widespread resort to abortion. This shows that the cultural and religious values, such as the preference for male children, are being used by the state — as well as the highly-educated medical profession — for their own benefit. The state support such practices because of their sexist population policy, and the medical profession for financial gain.<sup>1</sup>

So this treatment given to women, alongside their general status, is reflected in the negative sex-ratio of women in our country, which has been declining since the beginning of this century. In the early 1900s there were 972 women for every 1,000 men; now, according to the 1981 census, the number of women has declined to 935.

India’s constitution gives formal equality

to women in law and prohibits any kind of discrimination on the basis of sex. It also includes some pro-women legislation like prohibiting dowry, abolishing *sati* and laws against violence in the family and so on. But most of these laws are only on paper, in the statute books. In reality, the situation of women is very different and they are not able to use these laws.

On the one hand the constitution gives formal equality to women, and on the other it supports the Personal Laws of different religions. These Personal Laws give different rights to women as regards dowry, marriage, custody of children and women’s property rights.

All of the government’s policies treat women as mothers and wives, and not as equal citizens. For them, women are the primary target of population control, and they are being used as human guinea-pigs for doubtful experimentation and injurious techniques of population control — like Depo Provera [a long-acting, injectable contraceptive with hazardous side-effects].

Before independence, questions like *sati*, the remarriage of widows or women’s need for education were taken up by Western-educated “enlightened” male reformers. They were dying to do something for improving the situation of women, but for them women were never equal citizens but mothers, wives and sisters. During the independence movement, for the first time women came out of their homes and into the struggle. But afterwards, they were again pushed out of public life.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, as a result of the limited success of the first and second five-year plans, and job opportunities created by an expanding public sector, the ruling class could satisfy the educated masses and working youth. But by the late 1960s, declining real wages and increasing

1. See “Right to life for females”, *IV* 94, March 10, 1986.

prices forced the Indian working class to come out into the streets.

Various mass movements developed in response to the crisis during these years in both urban and rural areas. Some examples were the Naxalbari movement led by Maoist groups in the rural areas of West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab and Kerala; anti-price rise women's movements in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh; and a movement initiated by students and supported by all the middle-class in Gujarat. In various parts of the country there were movements of tribal masses against the landlords, money-lenders and corrupt government officials, and a movement of tribal women to save the trees and forests from government officials and contractors. The railway workers' strike in 1974 was the culmination of all these movements, and women were not only a very important part of these struggles, but led and organized some them.

### Emergence of autonomous women's groups

With the declaration of emergency rule in 1975, all these movements were crushed. But women activists from these mass movements became more and more sensitive to specific women's issues, because when they came out of their houses to participate in these movements they had to face a lot of difficulties as women, not only from their families and communities, but also from their co-workers in the mass movements. So they became more and more sensitive to their oppression as women, and started talking about their similar experiences in different groups. The celebrations around the International Women's Decade gave these women the opportunity to get together and talk about all these issues.

The emergence of autonomous women's groups is the important phenomena of this period. These groups are formed and led by women to fight against oppression, exploitation, injustice and discrimination. Their first priority is to fight against women's oppression, and for them the women's movement cannot be subordinated to the decisions or needs of any other political parties or social groups and organizations. They keep their autonomy from all the political parties, and most of the time their way of functioning is non-hierarchical and democratic.

From the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, such autonomous women's groups sprang up in almost all the major cities of India. Since then, these groups have remained the most dynamic force of the feminist movement in India.

Apart from traditional women's organizations and bodies set up by the government, which are not really part of the women's movement as such, there are six different types of women's organization in India — although sometimes the classifica-

tion is somewhat arbitrary and there can be an overlap in membership. The first are autonomous women's groups. These are groups that are agitational in nature, making propaganda and doing consciousness-raising work and they fight women's oppression in a very militant way.

The second are grassroots or mass-based organizations, like trade unions, agricultural labourers, democratic rights groups, tribal organizations or slum-dwellers. These organizations are mixed, but sometimes they take up specific women's issues and organize struggles around them. The third category are those groups providing services, like shelters, legal aid or health and social services for women. Fourth are professional organizations including women doctors, lawyers, scientists, journalists and so on. Fifth are women's fronts or women's sections in the different political parties — all the political parties have such fronts or women's wings. Lastly are those groups involved in research, documentation or publication of writings on women's issues.

The women's fronts of the various political parties are focusing their activities mainly on electoral victory. They come out on the streets for fighting for women's issues, but most of the time their programme is divided on narrow political lines and their first priority is not women but the needs of their own party.

The professional women's organizations focus their attention on discrimination, job promotion and equal opportunities, increasing wages and so on. The trade unions

and other mass organizations highlight the economic exploitation of women workers and toilers.

### Class, caste, culture and gender

Among all these different women's organizations, it is the autonomous women's groups that are the most dynamic and militant part of the overall women's movement. The leadership of these groups is mainly made up of middle-class, educated women, but they are very committed and dedicated to the cause of women. Most of them are feminists, and many of them are involved in other mass organizations. Some are liberal feminists and some are socialist feminists — there is no radical feminist current in India.

But this middle-class feminist leadership have tried to establish contact with women's organizations in rural and tribal areas. These autonomous, feminist groups have developed a perspective over a period of time that class, caste, culture and gender are four integral parts of women's oppression, hence the struggle against these four components is indissolubly linked.

What the relationship should be between these four dimensions has been the subject of debate for several years inside the feminist movement. Many of them have taken a position that we support, which is that all these four dimensions of women's struggle must be pursued simultaneously. A women's movement that ignores the influence of caste, class or culture will remain limited, ineffective and isolated from the motor forces that are the sources of structural change. On the other hand, a women's movement that allows the gender issue to be subsumed by class, caste or cultural questions is in fact negating the full liberation and empowerment of women as women, which can only be attained by the final uprooting the ideas and institutions that perpetuate inequality between sexes, even in post-capitalist societies.

The autonomous women's movement has always supported struggles against communalism and the caste system. For example, Manushi and Saheli were two of the main organizations to investigate and raise the issue of mass killings, rapes and atrocities against Sikhs after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. In other parts of the country autonomous groups — such as the Forum Against Oppression in Bombay, or Sahiyar in Baroda — have always supported the struggle against caste and communalism, struggles of slum-dwellers for housing, workers rights to unionization. For example, after the Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal, women's groups from all over the country sent delegations to give concrete aid, investigate the circumstances and organize the fight against the company's negligence.

These groups have developed the slogan: "Every issue is a women's issue". Women



are half of humanity, and all the issues that affect the oppressed and exploited masses also have a specific impact on women as women. The women's movement has taken on the task of interpreting all these problems from a women's point of view, and enrich the perspectives of these various movements with this dimension.

A widely discussed example of the relationship between the feminist movement and the mass movement is that of the Bogra movement. Bogra is a district in Bihar, and it was a struggle of landless labourers against the temple priest who owned most of the land in that area. It was led by a youth group influenced by the radical side of Gandhian ideology. The struggle faced heavy repression, not only from the state but also from the land-owner/priest, and women were always in the forefront of this fight.

## The fight for women's right to land

Women activists in this organization were very conscious of issues such as participation of women in meetings, language, representation of women at public meetings and so on, and they began organizing separate women's meetings to discuss all these problems. A whole series of issues were raised by them, like wife-beating, the traditional division of labour inside the family and questions such as alcoholism. At the same time, they fought side by side in the broader movement around the land question.

When the land was eventually won, there was a big struggle about whose name the land should be registered in — it being seen as natural that it should be in the men's names. But the women said, "We fought for the land just as the men did, so why should it be registered in our husband's names?" They had to fight not only with state and government officials, but of course with their male family members. Finally, some of the women did get land in their own name.

Both of these struggles — for the right to land and for women to have land in their own name — have had a positive impact on the status of women in that area.

There are other examples from all over the country of women's groups that try to incorporate feminist questions in the general class struggle and the mass movements. It is not always a very successful relationship. Sometimes there is a great deal of tension. But we can draw some general conclusions from these experiences for our future work in this direction.

The first is that it is generally argued in many of these mass organizations that the time is not ripe to talk about women's issues, because it will weaken and divide the movement, divide the working class and so on. But several of these experiences show that the fight for women's specific demands inside the mass movements or the

class struggle does not divide, but leads to the maximum possible participation of women. Secondly, when women were organized in any mass movement and came out of their homes, they begin to realize that the oppression they confront in the family as woman is not just a personal problem but a social one faced by all women. They become more and more aware of their specific oppression and begin to have doubts about the age-old patriarchal norms and forms of society. In organizing together, they gain strength to organize against this oppression and, if there is a correct leadership, they can provide a link between the mass movement and the feminist movement.

In India there is evidently a great diversity of local situations and struggles, and so the issues taken up by women's groups at local level cover a whole series of questions. Examples are: atrocities against women — rape, alcoholism or wife-beating, dowry harassment, violence in the family; problems of working women and the oppression and exploitation of *dalit* [untouchables] and minority women; communalism; campaigning against obscene posters; problems faced by servants; temple prostitution; deforestation and the environment; slums and housing rights; the torture and harassment of women prisoners; the Personal Laws and so on.

Some of these issues are very specific to the local situation. But there are a few issues that have been taken up nationally by several women's groups campaigning together. The first was the anti-rape movement in the early 1980s.

This was sparked off by an incident where a 16-year-old girl was raped by the police while in custody, and the Supreme Court gave a judgement in favour of the police. Women's groups all over India fought to reverse this judgement, and several new groups came into existence around this issue. The movement was successful in winning some pro-women changes in the rape law. But the main breakthrough of this movement was that it broke the age-old taboo of discussing issues like rape in public. Now questions such as rape and wife-beating are beginning to be seen as serious social problems and not simply "domestic" or private affairs. This campaign gave rise to the slogan, "The personal is political".

## Campaign around Personal Laws

The second nationwide issue was the question of the Personal Laws. This came to light during the Shah Bano case.<sup>2</sup> Shah Bano was an elderly Muslim woman who was divorced, and according to Muslim Personal Law she could not receive maintenance from her husband. A campaign around this was taken up all over the country, but it was a battle that was lost. However, this campaign helped clarify the

discussions in the women's movements on the relationship between women and religion, religion and the state, women and the state, and the increasing strength of fundamentalism.

The third national campaign was against injectable and long-acting contraceptives such as Depo Provera. This struggle is continuing, and it also focuses on broader questions of population control and governmental policies.

Today, the central national issue is around amniocentesis and tests for sex-determination. November 24 last year was a national day of campaigning around these issues. The campaign has the support of radical health groups and lawyers alongside the women's groups.

Different forms of struggle have been used at various times by the women's movement. Most of the time traditional campaigning methods are used — publications, petitions, mobilizing for demonstrations, public and street meetings and so on. But some new forms of struggle were also created, such as the widely-used cultural forums and alternative media. This is done through street theatre using mime and songs. This is very effective, given that 75% of Indian women are illiterate.

## National and international coordination

Though there is no national women's organization, the coordination between different local or regional groups is common through regional seminars or meetings, national meetings on specific issues and a national conference every three or four years.<sup>3</sup> The coordination between urban and rural groups is being strengthened, and this was evident at the last national conference in February 1988. Around half of the participants in this conference, attended by around 1,000 women from all over India, were from rural areas. And 12,000 rural women participated in the rally at the end of the conference.

There is also some coordination at an international level with other feminist groups in Asia. One example is AWARD, the Asian Women's Action and Resource Network, which promotes research and activity on issues such as the impact of population control policies, violence against women, tourism and prostitution, problems of workers in free-trade zones, as well as organizing workshops and schools for women.

Another is the Feminist International Network Against Reproductive and Genetic Engineering. There are a number of others, including the Asian Women's Rights Committee and Women under Islam, which deals specifically with the problems of Muslim women. ★

2. For more details on the Shah Bano judgement and the personal laws, see *IV* 107, October 27, 1986.

3. On the 1985 national women's conference, see "Perspectives for the Indian women's movement", *IV* *ibid*.

## Women and local government

# A programme for women in South America's largest city

A POLITICAL earthquake took place in Brazil in November 1988. Luiza Erundina, a woman and activist of the Partido de Trabalho (PT — Workers' Party), was elected mayor of the biggest town in South America, São Paulo. In last November's municipal elections, the PT had 36 mayors and 2,000 councillors elected (see the last issue of *IV*).

This article is taken from the December 1988/January 1989 issue of *Em Tempo*, the journal of the Fourth Internationalist Socialist Democracy current in the PT.

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**L**UIZA ERUNDINA, 53 years old, is originally from the Nordeste, the poorest state in Brazil. Very involved in the Christian circles identifying with liberation theology, she participated in the peasants' land occupations in this region.

As a woman and a left-wing activist in a continent rich in political *caudillos* (male "leaders"), she has received every kind of "compliment". Her predecessor as mayor, Janio Quadros, a 71-year-old right-wing politician, told the journalists who asked him what he thought of a woman occupying his post: "Personally, I like a woman to be at home, with a child round her neck and preparing a dish of beans for me."

The PT faces enormous problems in administering São Paulo. The city is bankrupt, 35% of the population live in shanty towns, 50% have no access to sanitary services, and homicide is the main cause of death among adults. The PT faces the task of reorientating municipal policy to respond to the needs of the mass of the people. The administrative machine alone is incapable of doing this and there will be an important role for the self-organization of the population in the people's councils which the PT announced it intended to create.

One of the most important things for the PT in the towns that it is going to run is to succeed in integrating an anti-discrimination policy into its general projects. Because of the PT's influence among

the most active sectors of the mass movement, its wish to politically represent, organize and lead the different oppressed layers, and because of the organized presence of women in the party in the women's commission, the party will be forced to develop a policy that can answer the needs and interests of women in the municipalities.

### Need for a conscious anti-discrimination policy

The first task is to understand the need for such a policy and to have adequate means for putting it into practice. This requires an understanding of two problems: first of all that the discrimination which women suffer is not simply an ideological or cultural problem; and secondly, that when the public authorities do not consciously adopt a policy against this discrimination they in turn reproduce the mechanisms of it, even if their general policies are favourable to the workers.

On certain important questions, state action can have a direct influence on the situation of women. This is the case for example with public policy on the question of domestic labour or women's control over their own bodies. The first point implies building public facilities: crèches, laundries, restaurants or canteens. The second requires modifications in health policies. Many other examples could be given,

on primary schooling, which is the responsibility of local government, on the attention that should be given to women who have been the victims of rape and sexual attacks and so on.

The elaboration of a policy on women means having the instruments necessary for such a policy, having a structure at executive level which has the power to plan, execute and coordinate, along with other bodies, all the different aspects of public policy that have an impact on the situation of women in society.

After the installation of a civil government in 1985, the government of the "New Republic", partly under the pressure of women organized within the ruling Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB), tried to broaden its social base and to "modernize" they way it governed. One aspect of this was the creation of "women's councils" at national, state and municipal level. It was in this context that the special women's police stations for rape victims and battered women were created.

### The limits of the existing "women's councils"

These councils are linked to the executive bodies, but they do not have any real power to interfere in the elaboration or implementation of public policy. In most cases, they are only appendages of the governors' cabinets. There is no definition of their sphere of activity and decision-making, either alone or in coordination with other government secretariats. In general they have hardly any administrative and financial autonomy. Their activity is reduced to making suggestions to the executive and mainly to organizing propaganda supporting the government's policy on women.

As these councils do not have any effective role in defining the policy of the public authorities, their role as representing the population and social movements is in fact nothing but a demagogic excuse for so-called public participation.

The ambiguity of this type of structure, a state body which includes sections of the population, spreads confusion about the meaning of the type of independent bodies proposed by the PT (people's councils, and so on).

Although the creation of the "women's councils" signified a recognition at the institutional level of the discrimination suffered by women, their real activity was not expressed in the creation of political mechanisms that could create the conditions for a change in women's situation. The PT can and must break with the limits of the present government's demagogic institutional policy towards women.

It is on the basis of an assessment of the limits of the "women's councils", and pushing an understanding of the need for the public authorities to establish a special policy, that the question of the special secretariat on the question of women is raised.



The creation of a structure equivalent to the government secretariats, participating on equal terms in the definition of government policy and with financial and administrative autonomy, provides a real possibility for defining, elaborating, executing and coordinating policy at all levels of direct and indirect public administration that responds to women's needs.

### Real difficulties are undoubtedly political ones

The problems linked to women's situation affect different sectors of the administration (education, health, and so on). Thus action has to be taken in coordination with these different secretariats so that the aspects relating to women are not isolated. This policy has to be put into practice in each sector of the public administration, and these specific programmes integrated and combined in an overall struggle against discrimination. Without underestimating the difficulties of putting into practice proposals of this type because of the need to reorganize the structures of the executive, the real difficulty is undoubtedly political.

Because of the lack of previous experiences to draw on, the weakness of the understanding of women's oppression and the integration of feminism within the PT, all proposals that imply giving a real priority to the question of women will only be won by a real political fight. So it is fundamentally important to strengthen women's organization in the PT and coordinate this with the broader women's movement. ★

### Women's commissions in the PT

Within the PT there are women's commissions which work with the leadership bodies at all levels to develop policy in relation to women.

These commissions are responsible for developing, proposing and examining all the questions related to the oppression and super-exploitation of women.

Far from being marginal or ghettoized into mere talking-shops, these commissions are composed of PT activists who consider that work among women is of vital importance for the party.

They have fixed a certain number of objectives:

- encouraging PT women to participate in the women's movement;
- creating the conditions for this question to be taken up within the PT itself. Creating adequate channels for this discussion to involve all the party's members;
- developing the PT's proposals on women's questions. ★

## "Old traditions are hard to change"

**MUNICIPAL elections are due to take place in France in March. This is the level at which women are "best" represented in French political life: they make up 14% of municipal councillors and 3.9% of mayors (mainly in small rural villages — only five lead towns of more than 30,000 inhabitants).**

**Michèle Ernis, a teacher and an activist in the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR, French section of the Fourth International), was elected councillor for the Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray suburb of Rouen in 1983 on a list supported by the LCR and Lutte Ouvrière.**

**Natacha Brink of the LCR's Cahiers du féminisme journal, spoke to her about her experience.**

### WHAT IS the representation of women in the council?

Many of the 39 members of the council are women, including the first deputy. A decision was made to feminize the council and its public appearance. However, during the full council sessions — held about 7 or 8 times a year — few people speak, and in particular few women. The women mainly work in the council committee and in the day-to-day running of council affairs.

### Is there sexism in the division of responsibilities?

Of course, there are strong prejudices in this sphere. The women councillors are above all responsible for old people, education, artistic questions and social welfare. The male councillors take sport, finances, town planning, the council newspaper. As a council member can only be in two committees at once I am personally in the finance committee and the committee for social welfare, young children and old people.

### Do you have a special relationship with the women in the town?



We have an experimental open committee on very young children. Around thirty women and two men come along from schools, family associations and the Family Planning Movement. They are above all concerned by the lack of facilities. There is no municipal crèche in Saint-Etienne, although 10% of the children are under five in a population of 35,000. There is only one public playgroup, which can only take 24 children for half-days, and cannot provide the midday meal. There are private facilities, registered childminders and a playgroup organized by one of the family associations.

The committee has started various activities in the localities. Discussions have been organized. But no money has been voted — the demands coming out of these discussions seemed to be too subversive for some women who have disappeared from these activities. However, the commission is continuing its work, in a less spectacular way, by proposing to organize a council information service on all the childcare facilities that exist in the town.

### Can you give other examples of your municipal activities?

Last year, the council decided to give subsidies for the March 8 International Women's Day celebrations. This was an initiative of the Family Planning Movement and was centred around the theme of sexism. Several teachers worked together on the question of sexism at school, showing up the stereotypes used in school textbooks and asking children to make drawings on this theme. Thanks to the cooperation between the council, the school and groups like the Family Planning this was very successful.

On another question, I denounced the subsidies the town hall gives every year for

the Mothers' Day celebration — which is a big event with medals, speeches and deserving mothers and lots of family pride. These subsidies would be very useful for collective facilities, but old traditions and mentalities are difficult to change.

■ **Is there a feminist programme that could be drawn up for the council?**

A whole programme is ambitious. But I think there's a real need for a feminist fight in the municipal councils. To be successful, this has to be taken outwards though collective work and groups that are rooted in the community. One cannot have a real effect as an isolated councillor. I can, for example, talk about the specific difficulties for women as far as the "minimum income for social insertion" [limited social security] is concerned, and the sexism of the existing law, but unless there is a women's group in Saint-Etienne which is going to take up this question then what I say will remain abstract.

What is more, it is not always easy to be a woman in a minority position in a council, even if the usual sexist remarks motivate rather than demoralize me.

A feminist activist in a town council has plenty to do. Intervening to make life easier for all the women's groups and associations, encouraging International Women's Day activities and supporting women's struggles. This is all possible. Demanding that there is a regular women's section in the council bulletin, forcing the council to organize sufficient and varied childcare facilities with a sufficient number of places, so that women can have a real choice. Organizing discussions around films, exhibitions and so on.

All this is within reach, so long as there are associations in the town who take up and continue these activities. For example, recently a group in Saint-Etienne supported by the council decided to organize activities for immigrant women at times when their children were at school.

■ **Have you been in contact with other feminist town councillors?**

Very little, unfortunately. I have had some individual meetings with women from the another left group, the PSU, and I was lucky enough to participate in the founding meeting of URCOL, the association that the Communist *rénovateurs* [split from the CP] created for their elected representatives in February 1988. After the introductory report by Alain Amicabile, one woman intervened straightaway, and a two-hour discussion took place on the question of women as elected representatives, sexism in councils and so on, although this was not at all on the original agenda. This was a sign that these are burning questions for women.

My impression from these contacts is that we all came up against the same sort of problems. But it would be useful to exchange experiences and have more discussions. ★

## Cuts threaten women's committees

**IN 1982 the Labour Party fought the local elections in the London Borough of Camden on the basis of a manifesto that included the promise to set up a women's committee. This was one of such women's committees to be set up after the creation of the Greater London Council women's committee.**

**T**HE COUNCIL organized four public meetings for women in the borough to discuss how the committee should be structured and what it should do. From these meetings, which were each attended by about 300 women, demands came forward for the cooption of specific women representing groups that might otherwise be excluded. The priorities for cooption were Black and ethnic minority women, older women, women with disabilities and trade-union women — and, somewhat as an afterthought, lesbians.

A women's unit was set up initially with three workers. The committee was given a budget in order to be able to give grants to women's groups in the area. It was decided that the priorities in terms of grants should be first Black women's groups, second lesbian groups and third groups for women with disabilities.

### Expansion of childcare facilities

As a result of this many new women's structures organizing around a whole range of issues have developed in the borough, and groups that already existed have drawn in more women and been more effective in their campaigns. The committee funded the first lesbian centre and Black women's centre to exist in London.

The women's committee pushed for the council to set up a baby-sitting service for women in the borough, in addition to the nurseries that already existed (although these are still insufficient), and to organize subsidized childcare for council meetings and for public meetings organized by the council.

Another council policy was in relation to its own employees. Camden became an "equal opportunities" employer — that is, it rejects discrimination in employment

and positively encourages applications from minority and oppressed groups and women.

It adopted a policy of "equality targeting", in other words that its workforce should reflect the composition of the population in London with 52% women, 18% ethnic minorities and 8% people with disabilities. Sexual and racial harassment were made disciplinary offences for council employees, and all council employees are entitled to up to 40 days leave per year for caring for dependents, adults or children, whether members of their biological family or not.

### Labour leaders running scared

The women's unit also appointed an employment officer with a particular brief on the question of low pay. For the council itself, the principle of equal pay for work of equal value was adopted, leading to Camden having the best paid telephonists, typists and home helps in the country.

By 1986, the unit had expanded to eight posts, each with different responsibilities for looking at the way the council as a whole could be more receptive to women's needs and liaising with different groups of women in the community.

However, over the last 18 months the impact of cuts in government grants to local authorities has been that all council services, and in particular those which are seen by the Labour leadership as being "fringe" issues, have been under attack. The grants budget has been removed and the women's unit is under threat. Recruitment of council employees has been halted and 2,500 jobs have been lost, particularly affecting those areas where advances had been made in integrating previously segregated employment.

Further, there is a climate developing — not just in Camden but across labour authorities — that committees organizing around women, race and lesbian and gay issues should be closed down and put under one umbrella equal opportunities committee.

This is not just part of a money-saving exercise but also due to the attempt by the "new realists" in the Labour Party to ditch what they see as contentious issues. It is justified on the basis that the key task is to elect a Labour government — despite the fact that there is no evidence that any of these issues lost Labour votes. Defence of women's gains is and will be a key part of the fight against cuts. ★

AROUND THE WORLD



SOUTH AFRICA

**Freedom for the Upington 25!**

THERE IS much talk about negotiations and detente in South Africa these days. The regime wants to project a reassuring image. There is a parliamentary debate scheduled on the deregulation of apartheid and a probable reform of the Group Area Act is on the agenda.

But, for the regime, this "reformist" approach must be combined with bringing the mass movement into line. That is why, behind all the pretty speeches, the repression continues unabated. It took a long and difficult hunger strike for hundreds of prisoners, most of them held without trial for a long time now, to regain their freedom. As a result, today some of them have been released.

The "special branch" — the political police — continue to hound activists and leaders of Black organizations, searching their headquarters, detaining them for days

at a time and impeding the functioning of democratic and trade-union organizations. No movement is spared, and the trade-union movement — which is still the largest organized force in the country — is subject to constant threats.

Among the worst methods of oppression employed by the police is their tactic of making anyone who was even *present* at a demonstration where the death of a police officer or other agent of the state occurs guilty of murder. This was what happened to the Sharpeville 6 for whom, fortunately, hanging was averted by a massive international solidarity campaign. There are other cases of a similar nature, such as that of William Ntomela, an active member of the shopworkers' union (CCAWUSA) who was accused — despite the lack of evidence — of the deaths of a security guard and a scab during a struggle in 1986. Ntomela faces the death-sentence.

Finally, there are the 25 people from the Upington township, to the north of Cape Province, who are also collectively accused of murder in the face of a total lack of evidence. This example of repression is getting a lot of press coverage in South Africa, and there are the beginnings of a democratic mobilization for their freedom.

All of them are accused of having participated in the murder of a police officer on November 13, 1985 during a demonstration against rent rises. The judge found them guilty of various degrees of involvement: three of them for direct participation in the death, twenty-one for collective complicity and one for attempted murder. The trial is based on the principle that there was common purpose on the part of those assembled to kill the police agent, thus most of them face the death penalty.

Their trial began on October 13, 1986 and is continuing to determine a sentence. The Upington 25 include several women and their ages range from 20 to 63 years old. But many of them are under 25, clearly products of the youth uprising of 1985-86. And it is the youth, today, who are organizing to defend their comrades.

In the Upington township, there are an average of two families per household, and unemployment is at 40% (according to the *Weekly Mail*, February 17, 1989.) In the Paballelo neighborhood, where the accused live, 92.4% of those who work earn far less than the official minimum wage of 557 rand a month (about US \$184). Almost 60% earn 250 rand a month (about \$83), and 36.9% earn only 150 rand (about \$50). Apartheid reforms are nowhere to be seen in Upington!

As for the Sharpeville 6, international solidarity must now be stepped up so that they are finally liberated. ★

MEXICO

**Polish protest for García**

PROTESTS and solidarity demonstrations following the kidnapping of our comrade continue in Mexico (see the last issue of *IV*).

We publish below the letter addressed to Mexico's President Carlos Salinas de Gortari from the General Council of the Polish Socialist Party-Democratic Revolution:

We are very concerned about the fate of José Ramón García Gómez, a leader of the PRT, kidnapped in Mexico on December 16, 1988. We are in full solidarity with the appeal launched by Ana Santander de García, the wife of the disappeared, and by the PRT leadership.

We know that José Ramón García was an organizer of the Civic Defence Committees created after July 6, 1988, and that he took part in political activities against election fraud. We hope and expect that both the Mexican government and yourself will undertake an in-depth investigation into the circumstances surrounding this kidnapping and do everything necessary in order to assure his safe return. ★

Warsaw, February 12, 1989

OBITUARY

**Abu-Baker Asvat**

ABU-BAKER Asvat, a leading member of the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO) was assassinated at the end of January. As a doctor and an activist, he dedicated his professional activity to his political work in the townships of Lenasia and Soweto, in rural regions, and within the ranks of the NACTU trade-union federation. All tendencies of the popular movement came together for his funeral.

His assassination once again lengthens the list of all those women and men who have run up against a pitiless South African government determined to smash the struggle. At the age of 46, Abu-Baker was a living example of the whole fighting generation who had been involved since the youth uprising of 1976 and took part in the huge mass movements from 1982-86. He was one of the great figures on the South African left. ★



IN THE OPINION OF THIS REVIEWER...

# Hugo Blanco released



**THE INTERNATIONAL campaign in solidarity with Hugo Blanco and other arrested leaders of the Peruvian Peasant Confederation (CCP) has achieved its first aim (see IV 157). Following the release of the others, Blanco was finally set free on Friday, February 24 and was able to return to Lima the following day to continue his work as organizational secretary of the CCP.**

**A**FTER HIS arrest in Pucalpa on February 9 following the peasant strike movement in the region, Hugo Blanco was taken to Lima. On February 21, the Lima prosecutor had ordered his release. However, the police ignored this order and attempted to forcibly take Blanco back to Pucalpa. A first attempt was prevented by demonstrators at Lima airport, who forcibly stopped the aircraft from taking off. But early in the morning of February 22, Blanco was returned to Pucalpa.

Blanco appeared in court in Pucalpa on February 24. His lawyer demanded the dropping of all charges and his release, arguing that there was no proof whatsoever substantiating the charges of "armed rebellion". The prosecutor again ordered Blanco's release, putting no restrictions on his freedom of movement.

This success is the result of an active international campaign of protests and pressure on the Peruvian government:

- Amnesty International made the Blanco case an urgent international action, thus aiding solidarity actions in many countries.

- In Sweden, where Blanco's wife and children live, a daily protest was organized outside the embassy, which included the classmates of Hugo Blanco's two younger children. Support was also mobilized in the trade-union movement, which led to the president of the trade-union federation sending a telegram of protest. On

February 18 a large meeting brought together representatives of the Communist Party, social-democratic MPs, writers and academics supporting Blanco's release.

- In Belgium, our comrades demanded that the European Parliament take up the case.

- In Switzerland, our comrades contacted the Socialist Party, whose Geneva section demanded a meeting with the Peruvian Embassy.

- In Germany, the Greens also approached the European Parliament, and a number of rallies were planned.

- In Spain, our comrades in the LCR immediately informed the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the General Workers' Confederation and the Workers' Commissions. A public meeting was held on February 13 in Madrid.

- In France, a delegation led by the International Federation for Human Rights, the Human Rights League and Alain Krivine from the LCR went to the Peruvian Embassy on February 13. The LCR organized an embassy picket and a special solidarity poster was flyposted.

- In Latin America and the United States many protest actions have taken place. The Peruvian embassy in Washington told callers that their telephone was ringing non-stop — they even had a call from Senator Edward Kennedy!

Once again an international campaign has helped our comrade Hugo Blanco escape from the clutches of the military. Peruvian peasants will continue to struggle against their conditions of poverty, repression and exploitation, and Hugo Blanco and his comrades in the CCP will continue their work with them. The danger of future repression demands ongoing vigilance. ★

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