

International VIEWPOINT

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France unsheathes its claws in New Caledonia

Special on Philippine revolutionary movement

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Solidarity with British miners



International Viewpoint

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France tries to build settler state in the Pacific

Francois Mitterrand's sudden junket to New Caledonia on January 17 highlighted the role the conflict in this island group is assuming in French politics. The direct intervention of the president himself is the ultimate political resort for a state built on a bonapartist presidency. In fact, Mitterrand has been trying to elevate himself more and more above the political divide as the 1986 legislative elections draw near. In the news conference he gave before leaving for the Pacific, he stressed that he was not affected by public opinion and "I am trying to serve France and the French."

However, the Kanak revolt is sharply polarizing French political life and showing how much the state administration has remained the same old rightist, repressive and colonialist one despite the formal rule of the left.

Gerry FOLEY

The murder of pro-independence leader Eloi Machoro on January 12 was a fine example of the traditions of the authoritarian French republic, a murder by security forces acting in concert with parallel-police rightist gangs.

The "official version" made even the "respectable left" press that has grown sluggish and sleepy under the left government gag. In the January 15 issue of *Le Monde*, Daniel Scheiderman took apart the high commissioner's statement point by point and showed that it not only did not hold together but contained what could only be hastily dreamed up alibis. For example, the statement said that the soldiers could not fire at Machoro's legs because of the tall grass. Schneiderman wrote: "No chance. A simple visit to the spot shows that there is no tall grass there."

Genocide

Machoro's death was celebrated by European demonstrators in Noumea, the major town in the territory, who had been mobilized on the basis of the death of a European youth in an obscure clash in the countryside. In the January 15 *Le Monde*, Jean-Marie Colombani wrote that these demonstrations, which had led to riots, showed that "part of the European population is determined to have a bash," that is, a pogrom against the native Melanesian population.

In fact, the plan for settling New Caledonia involved a deliberate genocide against the Kanak people. In 1972, for example, Pierre Mesmer, then premier of France, wrote in a letter to his minister of colonies, "New Caledonia is a colony for settlement...in the long run, national demands from the natives will only be avoided if the communities of non-

Pacific origin become a majority." (Cf, *Ce que veulent les Kanaks, Dossier Rouge*, No 11, Paris, 3rd Quarter of 1984).

In the last century, the native Melanesian, or Kanak population, was confined to reservations. Recently, it has been put in a minority of about 42 percent by the French policy of settlement. Thus, the Kanak revolt, the boycott of the territorial elections last year and the subsequent attempts to make it impossible for the French authorities to govern, are a last stand by a people threatened with being overwhelmed in their own country.

One of the main objectives of the boycott of the French sponsored elections last year was to block application of the Lemoine Law, the scheme drawn up by the former high commissioner and passed by the French National Assembly in July 1984.

The plan called for the establishment of a State-Territory Committee made up of one half of representatives of the various parties in the territorial legislature, in accordance with their strength in that body; and one half of representatives of the French state. This committee would then organize a referendum for 1989 in which the residents of the territory would vote on its future.

The Kanak liberation front, the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) rejected the Lemoine Law specifically because it saw it as ratification of the French government's long-term plan to create a new Caledonian entity in which the native people would be a minority.

In a statement, the Caledonian Union, the major component of the front, said, "No consistent reform of the Caledonian electoral system is envisaged [in the plan].

Thus, the proportions in the population of the territory, that is, two fifths Kanaks and three fifths non-Kanaks will be reproduced after the elections in the new Territorial Assembly and therefore in the representation for the territory in the State-Territory Committee....

"The Lemoine Law grants the French National Assembly, in which there are no Kanaks, and the State-Territory Committee in which the Kanaks would have no more than one fifth the representatives, the right to define the electorate that will exercise the right of self-determination in 1989."

Since the blowup on the island, the high commissioner has proposed a scheme for "independence-association" and a referendum sooner. But there are only two alternatives from the Kanak point of view, either maintaining the constitution, that is, direct French responsibility, or granting self-determination to the Kanaks. They reject any "third road," by which they mean an attempt to give Caledonia a new status that would confirm the position of the Kanaks as a minority in their own country and give France a legal facade for concealing its responsibility for the situation of the Kanak people.

"One Algeria was enough!"

In fact, the demonstrations in Noumea during Mitterrand's visit confirmed that any independence or autonomy for a New Caledonia ruled by the settlers would be a sort of Pacific Northern Ireland. There was a massive mobilization of the settlers, 30,000 people, under violently reactionary slogans such as "France, yes; socialism, no!" "Kanak [a Kanak state], never; French Caledonia forever!" "Socialists — traitors!" "One Algeria was enough!" *Liberation's* correspondent wrote that when he asked participants what they thought about Kanaky, the standard answer was, "Oh, you mean the Planet of the Apes."

Regular terror raids against the Kanaks ended only at the beginning of this century. In the recent conflict, ten Kanaks were killed in an ambush organized by the settlers in Hienghene on December 5.

In both New Caledonia and in France, the right has sought to blame the crisis on the Socialist Party and the president, arguing that the victory of the left encouraged the Kanaks to think that they could win their aspirations. That is quite true historically. And there is no way that Mitterrand can elevate himself above the dilemma, either preserve the colony, which cannot be done without giving the right free rein, or yield to the demands of the colonized and face the fury of the right. Moreover, it is not just the French and settler right that Mitterrand has to worry about. The US ambassador in France, Evan Galbraith has felt obliged to make a statement stressing that the US does not want to see any "new Grenada" in the Pacific. ■

Eloi Machoro, victim of French imperialism

Eloi Machoro was general secretary of the Caledonian Union, the largest of the independence organizations grouped together in the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS), which was formed in September 1984. He was also minister of security in the Provisional Government set up by the FLNKS. Together with Marcel Nonarro, FLNKS leader in Canala, he was assassinated by French colonialist forces on the morning of January 12, at the culmination of a large-scale military operation and a siege that had lasted the entire preceding night.

The FLNKS activists were caught by surprise at a meeting which was held on the property of a Kanak, a member of the FLNKS, and not that of a European colonist, as claimed in the official version put out by the French high commissioner in New Caledonia, Edgard Pisani.

The two Kanak leaders were shot down as they came out to negotiate by members of the National Gendarmerie Intervention Group (GIGN) sent by Edgard Pisani. The FLNKS has revealed that the action of the repressive forces was carried out in close collaboration with a group of fascist commandos who were on the spot at the same time.

These two Kanak fighters for independence paid with their lives for the commitment to the cause of Kanak socialist independence. The loss of Eloi Machoro will undoubtedly leave a big empty place in the FLNKS. After the occupation of the town of Thio, which Machoro led without shedding any blood, he set about building a system of self-defense for the Kanak tribes on a national scale to prepare to fend off any violent reaction by the extreme rightist colonists. This was why the French government wanted to get its hands on the independence fight leader.

Question. What is your assessment of the mobilizations for independence in recent weeks?

Answer. The active boycott campaign succeeded. The results show an abstention rate of 50 percent, which is a lot for a population that is three-fifths non-Kanak. Nonetheless, the Administrative Tribunal ratified the election results. The French government found it difficult to approve the results, but, as always, it did not want to take a clear position. So, we decided to launch actions throughout the islands to get the election results annulled. Our objective was also to prevent any application of the Lemoine law.

Q. On the last point, the FLNKS seem to have achieved some success.

A. That is not yet certain. The government has not yet taken a clear stand. Replacing the high commissioner, pushing Lemoine aside to some extent, and putting the Caledonian question in the hands of the premier may be indications of a

change. But that could be a good or bad sign. In fact, the government keeps sending observers here who come to look for a third road, when there is no third way.

We will never accept a third road, because what we are asking for is simple justice. Like all his predecessors, Edgard Pisani came here to look for a third way. At the present time, the FLNKS and our provisional government have asked us to remove the road blocks so as not to pose any obstacles to discussions with the government. We are respecting this order. But during the two months that the government's representative has gotten to gain an understanding of the Caledonian problem and find a solution, while we may not be on the roads, we will be active in other places.

We are going to maintain the mobilization so that, if need be, we can reoccupy the positions that have already been won, and also so that we can organize ourselves better.

In fact, the neocolonialist plan concocted by Edgard Pisani has the concomitant of resuming operations designed to restore fully colonialist order. These operations are in line with the strategic choice of protecting the interests of the European colonists. Nonetheless, the organizational work undertaken by Eloi Machoro will be carried on. At present there are in New Caledonia 2,300 CRS (elite militarized police) and gendarmes mobiles (members of a repressive force attached to the army) and 2,000 soldiers. This is for a population of 145,000, of which 64,000 are Kanaks. And the French government has just sent off a thousand additional soldiers, paratroopers who were involved in the military operations in Chad and Lebanon. The Mitterrand government has already touched off the typical spiral of colonial war.

For many weeks, the bourgeois press and the government strained every effort to portray the FLNKS activists and especially Eloi Machoro, whom they presented as a blood-thirsty military chief, as criminals. To the contrary, Eloi Machoro, with whom members of the French section of the Fourth International were able to meet on a number of occasions, was representative of a new generation of Kanak nationalist political activists.

In the spring of 1984, Machoro spoke at a rally organized by the LCR at Le Bourget [near Paris], expressing the FLNKS' rejection of the Lemoine Plan. At the time, he was very favorably impressed by the support shown him by the thousands of activists present on that day. Since then, French Fourth Internationalists who went to New Caledonia were always welcomed by him in a very fraternal way.

The following interview was given to Vincent Kermel in the town of Thio in New Caledonia on December 6, 1984.

Q. The action conducted around the town of Thio has been the most important of these initiatives. What is your explanation for that?

A. In this region, we could have staged actions locally in all the townships. We preferred to conduct an action at Thio because on the east coast this town has always been one of the strongest bastions of the anti-independence forces. The mayor, Roger Galliot, is a member of the extreme rightist Caledonian National Party.

Moreover, in this region there was a crucial question to be settled, in particular since Galliot's party, like the other rightist parties, had begun to try to buy Kanaks.

So, we came from several places in the region to settle the problem at Thio, that is, to assure that the Kanaks, who are the majority in the local population, had control of the town in their hands. The fact is that the Kanaks in the Thio region have become conscious of their strength and





An FLNKS barricade in Ouéga (DR)

are organizing so as to be still more effective.

Q. What was the attitude of the FLNKS toward the European population of Thio when the town was occupied?

A. We asked for a meeting with the Europeans in the town to explain to them the meaning of our action. Unfortunately, they were afraid, and only about a dozen of them came to our meeting. We explained the general objectives of our action, making it clear that we had one specific aim for this town — to make sure that the town was run by people who wanted to work together for the benefit of everyone and not to gain their own personal ends, as was the case of the present mayor, Roger Galliot.

Galliot was the one who obstructed discussion among people. Everyone knew that he belonged to the extreme right. He banded together a half-dozen "super-hard." We gave a list of their names to the non-Kanak inhabitants of Thio. We also explained to them that their tranquility depended also on their behavior and the relations they maintained with the Kanaks.

Moreover, we asked the gendarmes in Thio not to come out of their barracks, promising them that order would be maintained. So, we organized to protect the sectors for which we had responsibility.

Q. As regards the negotiations that are to begin with the representative of the French government, Edgard Pisani, you may be offered a referendum to determine the future of the territory with the right to vote accorded to the Europeans and immigrants who have been here for example for more than six or more than ten years. What do you think about that?

A. Such a proposition by the French government would be a bad one. Why ten years and why not the "victims of history," as we have described the European Caldoches whose fathers or mothers were born in New Caledonia? And, to take it further, why not the Kanaks alone?

In fact, the government's problem is that it does not want to take a position. It does not want to adopt our point of view so as not to be accused of letting the FLNKS drag it around by the nose. But, the French government should decide either to stick by the French constitution or to carry out a decolonization policy favorable to the Kanak people.

In all the proposals we have made, we have always demanded a reform of the electoral register to assure that it is the real inhabitants of the territory who decide on its future, and it is in this sense that we have talked about the Kanaks and the "victims of history." This request has been rejected by the National Assembly [in Paris] as unconstitutional.

At present, we are fighting for the self-determination of the Kanak people alone,

Eloi Machoro (DR)



and we have legal grounds for this. Article 75 of the French constitution recognizes the special character of the Kanak people by granting them a special status. It is up to the government to choose. We will do everything possible on the ground to tip the balance in our favor.

In order to take up the discussion with Pisani, we made a lot of concessions, such as releasing the subprefect of Lifou, or removing the road blocks. In return for this, they are still killing us, as in Hienghène. In the incidents that have occurred, the Kanaks have never been the ones to start it.

Everytime they have fired, the Kanaks have done so to defend themselves. In Thio, we took over the town without firing a single shot at a European.

The Socialist Party government has been carrying out a right-wing policy here because the right is helping the government keep the territory under the domination of France. The French government does not want to let New Caledonia go because of the strategic position it holds and because of its riches.

The only basis of support for such a position here is the colonialist right. So, decolonization remains on the agenda, it has not yet started. For the Kanaks, the colonial situation has not changed.

Q. There is a lot of talk about support from Libya [for the Kanaks] and Australian designs on New Caledonia.

A. Australia, as well as New Zealand, are corner stones of the Pacific Nations' Forum. They are also two satellites of the United States. There is the problem of imperialism and control of the Pacific region. That is why over the years we have seen a shift in the position of Australia and other countries in the Pacific Nations' Forum. At the beginning, they were very favorable to independence because they had designs. They wanted, with the help of the Kanak people, to get France out of here and gain control of the Pacific.

However, as our demands became more well defined, these countries became afraid of removing a power such as France from the Pacific. We think that it is because of this fear that today they are supporting the policy of France.

Moreover, we are a native people, and so that [a victory for the Kanak people] would pose the threat of provoking reactions from their own native people. Thus, the last position taken by the Pacific Nations' Forum was to support the Lemoine statute that we have rejected.

We knocked for a long time on France's door asking for help in decolonizing our country. The answer was a document [the Lemoine plan] designed for the destruction of the Kanak people. We asked the Pacific Nation's Forum to support our struggle. They supported the policy of the French government. So, we have been obliged to go looking for help elsewhere and we will seek it wherever it may be found. ■

British railworkers support the miners

Rank and file railway workers have been among the strongest in their support for the miners in the fight for jobs. In the Leicestershire coalfield where the bulk of the scabbing miners are concentrated, railworkers in support of striking miners have managed to seal off rail traffic for 38 weeks from April 4 to December 17. This action was taken by 100 workers who have stood by a union directive not to move coal, coke or oil.

Unfortunately, the leaders of the rail unions have given little support to the action taken by their members. On January 17 they were forced to call one-day strike action in support of the Leicestershire railworkers who since Christmas have been subjected to harassment from management in its attempt to get scab coal moving. Although the action was confined to the London, Midland and Eastern regions only by the union leadership, rank and file workers in other areas also came out showing clearly that the support for the miners is there and could help to win the strike.

Doreen WEPPLER

As the miners enter the tenth month of their titanic battle, the strike shows no signs of decisive cracks. Yet the solidarity from other groups of workers has still not reached the level necessary to give the miners victory. This is not because rank and file support for the strike is absent. Broad layers of workers appreciate that their own future at the hands of the bosses and the Tory government is bound up with the outcome of the miners' strike.

This is particularly true of railworkers. More than any other group of workers, it has been railworkers — especially those employed at pithead depots that transport coal to the power stations — who have been in the front line of solidarity action with the miners. The fortunes of coalminers and railworkers are closely linked. If the Tory government gets its mine closure plan through, thousands of railworkers whose livelihood depends on the coal industry will lose their jobs. A full 80 per cent of coal is transported by rail, comprising 60 per cent of the total freight carried on Britain's railroads.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the miners' strike today dominates the concerns of the two major rail unions — the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) and the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF). However, railworkers are also responding to the massive attacks underway against their won jobs, working conditions and union organisation.

Any one of these issues could provoke railworkers into action. A combined struggle of miners and railworkers would tip the scales decisively for the miners. From the outset, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her transport minister, Nicholas Ridley, have recognised the

political stakes involved and have instructed the employers, the British Rail Board (BRB), to avoid at all costs any united action between miners and railworkers.

The Tories have been aided in their efforts by the rail trade union leaders. Desperate to avoid any united struggle, at the 1984 pay talks, the BRB dropped its previous insistence that the pay settlement must be linked with five productivity exercises. A massive increase in productivity is central to the intended restructuring of the rail industry in the interests of the bosses.

However, despite this favourable situation for the railworkers, the union leaders accepted a measly five per cent pay increase — hardly more than the rate of inflation. As many angry activists asked

Workers' solidarity can win (DR)



at union meetings up and down the country: 'Why aren't our leaders out to reverse cuts in the industry now that we are in the strongest negotiating position ever with the miners out on strike?'

The pressure is so great from the rank and file that the Federation (the body uniting the two major rail unions) has been forced to call a series of one day stoppages since the miners' strike started. The end result is that during this time large numbers of rail workers have been involved in industrial action — both in defence of their own jobs and conditions, and in support of the miners. But because of the policy of the union leaderships, this has been on a grade by grade, or on a local or regional basis. In all cases, however, any action taken by railworkers has automatically linked up with the miners' strike.

Towards a national walkout

In the end preparations for national, industry-wide action were started at the end of the summer when union leaders called for a 24-hour strike on September 10. Joint local strike committees of both major unions were elected throughout the country; picket rotas were drawn up; and union literature was distributed.

The issue was job loss. British Rail management suddenly announced that yet another 18,000 jobs would be slashed in the next five years, and this figure did not include 10,000 workshop jobs at risk! These cuts would bring the number of British Rail employees down to 137,317 by 1990. And this in an industry where jobs have already disappeared on a massive scale: In 1950, 497,000 staff were employed; by 1981, numbers had fallen to 166,000.

In the face of the threat of widespread action, management threw down a few more sophs. This time they promised little more than a slowing down of the closure programme and cuts in staffing levels. Yet it was enough for the top union officials to call off the September 10 strike at the eleventh hour.

So, as we enter 1985, all the issues remain. The BRB is using every opening it can take to push ahead with its plans to slash the workforce and increase the productivity of the remaining workers. The rank and file are still prepared to fight back. The longer the miners' strike lasts, the more likely it is that widespread industrial action will break out.

Jimmy Knapp, the NUR's general secretary, is seen by most workers as a welcome change from the company unionism of the former secretary, the right-wing Sidney Weighell, but he is still very much on trial. So, for instance, while railworkers have generally welcomed his efforts in establishing the Federation and breaking down the historical animosity between the craft union of the drivers (ASLEF) and the NUR, there is growing concern amongst union activists about his record to date. He is attempting to balance between old divisions which exist

in the industry, with the end result that any developing unity which has real power is being defused.

This is especially serious in light of the dire situation facing railworkers. For instance, low pay continues to plague the industry. The 1984 pay award did not alleviate the problem.

Long hours are put in on the railways by workers trying to tackle the decline in the real value of their low wages. Running the industry on overtime suits management. It is less expensive than employing new workers, and it divides and weakens workers who are vying against each other for additional needed hours. In 1979, railway staff overtime averaged 14 and a half hours a week, compared with a national average of six hours. Furthermore, the overtime rates themselves are poor. So manual workers on British Rail ended up with a total weekly wage in 1979 which was £3 below the national average, although they put in double the hours of overtime!

Low wages and long hours make British railworkers more productive than their counterparts in 12 other European countries. Management can truthfully claim that it runs the most cost effective major railway system in Europe. However, this has been achieved on the backs of the workers. Far from aiming to run the rail industry as an efficient, safe service in the interests of working people, the Tory government and management are out to increase profit margins and share out the dividends with Britain's wealthy few.

This is what is behind today's wide-scale privatisation in an industry like rail, which was nationalised in 1947. It is part of a more general drive by Britain's rulers to increase their rate of profit which has been badly damaged by the economic recession, at the expense of the working class. The goal is to roll back the frontiers of public ownership which workers recognise as a gain.

By taking profit-making sectors away from the industry and promoting a balancesheet approach to it they hope to put more pressure on the remaining workers to increase their productivity to make the books balance, even though large profit figures have now disappeared from the income columns. Furthermore, they hope to weaken union organisation on the job by splitting up the workforce between different employers.

The damage to date has been severe and there is still more to come. The 1980 Transport Act put the National Freight Corporation into private hands. Then British Transport Hotels, Sealink, Hovercraft and some BR property were sold off with the 1981 Transport Act. In every case working conditions have deteriorated. The British Rail Board recently awarded the contract to build a new lightweight train to a private firm, instead of to the BR-owned engineering works — BREL — for the first time since nationalisation. This is part of the preparations to sell off BREL as a whole.

Management is taking any opening it finds to put the industry in private hands. Outside contractors are being used for everything from track maintenance work and station cleaning, to on-train catering services. Entire money-making lines are being earmarked for privatisation, such as the London to Gatwick airport line.

These measures were carefully prepared by the publication of the Serpell report at the end of 1983. This report is the product of a governmental inquiry into the dire financial straits of the rail industry. Although neither the government or the BR Board has officially endorsed its drastic proposals, they are being implemented by the back door.

Serpell proposes in his report that up to 80 per cent of Britain's railways be shut down, including all major freight carrying lines around Manchester, Nottingham, South Wales and Scotland. As the miners' strike has revealed, if it were implemented, this plan would sever the links between railworkers and miners by transferring the transport of coal to the road haulage industry. The political character of this proposal is evident. Serpell considers that the expense, danger on the roads and irrationality of carrying out 200 lorry movements for each trainload of coal or ore is a necessary price to pay to weaken the trade union movement.

In a country where 39 per cent of all households do not own a car and 60 per cent of the population do not hold drivers' licences, the report argues that passengers should be transferred wholesale to bus services.

Squeeze on the railworkers

Needless to say, in an industry which has been starved of investment, Serpell wants to continue the situation whereby the level of investments per train-kilometer on BR is the lowest of the ten major railways in Europe. As the rail unions often point out, in 1982 - 1983, the government was more than willing to fork out an average of £13.50 per household *per week* on arms expenditure, yet it can find no more than £15 per head for each person in Britain *per year* towards the railways. A defence budget of £14 billion for 1982 - 1983 compared to £4.3 billion spent on the entire British transport system.

Today BR management is introducing the proposals in the Serpell report in a piecemeal way. This is part of the preparations to tackle the rail unions head-on. The miners' strike has slowed down the British Rail Board's plans. Although the Board agreed to separate the 'productivity exercises' from the negotiations on pay, they cannot afford to put these measures off much longer. The principle of the eight-hour working day already has been lost with the introduction of flexible rostering. Now the Board wants to bring in 'Driver Only Operation' next. This particular productivity exercise will

leave drivers on their own on the train to cope with everything from mechanical problems and passenger needs to mishaps of all kinds — including derailments, fires and so on. The entire grade of guard (brakeman) is at stake, threatening 12,000 jobs in the most militant grade of the NUR.

So far national industrial action — where railworkers would be out with the miners — has been avoided. But the miners' strike has had a deep impact in the rail industry. Railworkers' confidence to fight back against attacks on them has increased as a result of the miners' strike. Unofficial industrial action by local railworkers in Coalville, Leicestershire, demonstrates railworkers are also prepared to take action in support of the miners. The hundred railworkers at Coalville are in the heart of scab country. Yet they have refused to shift the mountains of stockpiled scab coal which now dominate their depot. The work of their depot is based primarily on transport of 135,000 tonnes of coal each week, from four local pits to the big power stations in the Trent Valley.

Roy Butlin, one of the rank and file leaders at the depot, told *International Viewpoint* about the pressure his members were under last April, when they decided to support the miners:

'Serious financial difficulties were only one consideration. When we decided to back the union decision not to shift coal, we were only entitled to £1 strike pay a day. It wasn't until late June that the union changed this to £11 a day.'

'But just as important as the money was the recognition by all of us that if we voted to back the union, we were putting ourselves on the line with respect to our neighbours, friends and families. I say this because only 30 of the 2,500 miners in our area are on strike. Our town is built on the mining industry. Most people are connected to it in one way or the other.'

'So, support for the union had a price. We'd be struggling to make ends meet when big wage packets from these high productivity pits would be coming into every other house on the street. And we'd find ourselves unwelcome in the local Workingmen's Clubs (social clubs) which are controlled by working miners. This extends to Coalville's social club that is owned by the Labour Party, because the Party is, not unnaturally, led by miners in our town, and they are all scabs. Even the pubs became known as either 'scab' pubs or 'strikers' pubs from very early on in the dispute.'

Despite these pressures, Coalville voted to obey union instructions. What the railworkers probably did not know at that time was how far management would go in pressuring them to spurn their principles. In the past ten months they have withstood:

— A closure threat in September which the local manager said would go ahead if the men did not start to shift coal 'first thing Monday morning'.

— Transport police raids on the homes of seven railworkers the same night as families first heard about the closure threat. The raids resulted in criminal charges of theft against three railworkers. One charge sheet listed a few clothes as the stolen property. The three were immediately sacked from British Rail, but active campaigning has since forced management to reinstate one, and two others are still appealing.

— Two of the remaining four railworkers whose homes were raided were put on serious disciplinary charges by the BR Board in December.

— Blatant bribes from their superiors offering the more vulnerable workers jobs and conditions which are theirs by right if they shifted coal.

Rank and file leaders at the depot responded to each attack with appropriate action. When the first railworkers were sent home for refusing to work their coal trains, they called the entire depot out on strike. Paid union officials, on the other hand, made clear that if the strike continued, the men would not get national backing for their action.

The depot returned to work, but decided that the best way to defend their members against victimisation and harassment was to take their case to the labour movement, especially other railworkers. Working closely with 'The Dirty Thirty', as Leicestershire's striking miners are warmly called, Coalville leaders sought out public platforms, press coverage, financial support and solidarity from other trade unionists.

Today few major miners' support meetings are held where Coalville speakers are not on the platform. And the support they have won has increased as the pressures have mounted to shift the coal to the power stations, now that the supplies have reached danger levels.

But the extent of the support is primarily due to the efforts of the Coalville railworkers themselves. They have consistently demanded that national union leaders organise support for them, but they have not waited for the official seal of approval before acting. When the union fell short of what Coalville felt was needed on November 5, the depot organised a solidarity rally attracting over 100 railworkers from different parts of the country. This inspiring meeting showed Coalville railworkers that they were not on their own.

As support for the rally grew, the national executive of the NUR agreed to send a platform speaker. Railworkers welcomed his greetings on behalf of the Federation of both major rail unions, but he also faced angry questioning from members who felt the union was not doing enough for Coalville. Workers from nearby depots demanded the national leadership call for regional strike action to stop management's campaign of dirty tricks. As one freight guard put it, 'You always say the members aren't ready to act. Well, we're saying today that it's down to you. You set the date, and we'll support the call.'



Railworkers attend solidarity meeting in Coalville (DR)

The situation at Coalville is duplicated many times over in other coal depots. However, unlike Coalville, rail depots in other divided coalfields are themselves often bitterly split down the middle. These divisions have allowed management to run roughshod over established working practices and conditions. In the Shirebrook depot in Nottinghamshire the harassment of loyal union members got so bad that the Federation agreed to the rank and file demand for an official regional 24-hour strike in October. Yet again this action was called off. Management quickly retreated on its most blatant attacks, once the widespread support for the strike was evident.

First attempts to move scab coal

During the week before Christmas, the situation at Coalville changed dramatically. For the first time in 38 weeks, a coal train ran through the middle of town on its way to a nearby power station. The movement of scab coal was not unexpected. And the arrival of large numbers of police in the area indicated that it would occur soon. But most railworkers considered that the only way more coal would be shifted was by bringing in the army to load up convoys of army trucks. Already every conceivable truck in the area was being used in a vain attempt to cope with the loss of transport by rail — from small trucks owned by local farmers to the large lorries of the big haulage firms.

The amount of coal moved by train during the week before the Christmas shutdown of the depot was insignificant. Two trainloads a day would only keep the power station ticking over for about two hours. But as Butlin explained: 'The fact that a single coal train moved at all was important. It was a huge moral and propaganda victory for management.'

To achieve it, management stooped to the lowest depths seen to date. They first

tried to bribe a local signalman to stay home on full pay. This would allow them to bring in outside scab signalmen and get coal trains moving. The local signalman refused. So, the manager then decided that the signalman was 'mentally unstable' and unfit for duties. He was sent home pending a medical examination!

An immediate strike by signalmen brought the remaining work of the depot — shifting rock from a local quarry — to a standstill. The failure of national union leaders to call an immediate regional strike in protest against these outrageous tactics angered Coalville railworkers. But rank and file leaders at the depot have spent the Christmas shutdown making their own links with the other workers in the region to pressurise the rail Federation.

A strong lead by the union executive would get considerable support in the industry. Most depots and local union meetings take regular collections for the miners. There is widespread sympathy with the miners' struggle and once railworkers hear about the victimisation of members supporting the miners, there is considerable anger about management's antics.

As the stakes in the struggle increase, these antics will get worse. Rail managers are using every opportunity to weaken union organisation. Unfortunately, they already have an opening in the industry with the existence of the Federation of Professional Railway Staff (FPRS). This is a 1,500-strong break-away union, set up by the scabs during the 1982 wave of strikes against productivity plans which shut down Britain's railways for a total of 51 days.

The founding platform of the FPRS states its opposition in principle to strikes. It has attracted a conservative layer of workers who think they can save the industry from government attacks if they unite with management. They fail to see their interests as workers are fundamentally opposed to the common

interests shared by the Tory government and the industrialists who sit on the BR Board.

The FPRS is not recognised by management. The closed shop agreement gives negotiating rights to only three rail unions, including the white collar union, the Transport and Salaried Staff Association (TSSA). Now this could all change. The 1982 Tory anti-union laws stipulated that from January 1985 the closed shop agreement will no longer have legal status unless a full 80 per cent of the workforce endorses it through a secret ballot. This ballot has not yet been held at BR.

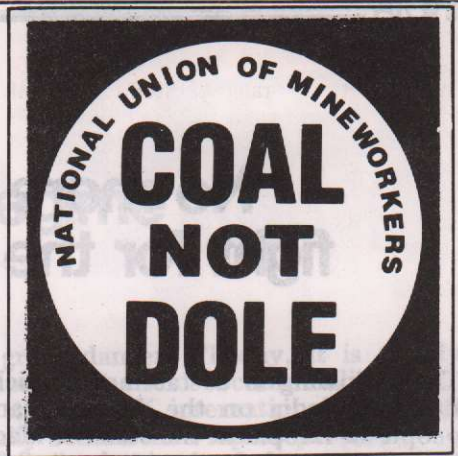
The FPRS has applied for negotiating rights in the 1985 pay round. It has the law on its side, and it will not be shy to use the courts. Today the FPRS is not a serious force in the industry. But it will in no way be ignored by the BR Board. To the contrary, the BRB will use the FPRS as a welcome weapon to put pressure on the bureaucracy of the major unions in the industry.

Another serious development has been recent newspaper reports outlining plans by supposedly 'ordinary' railworkers to use the courts to prevent the rail unions from channelling resources to aid the miners. The miners have documented how right-wing employers' organisations are behind the so-called 'ordinary' miners who are trying to destroy the NUM through the courts. The FPRS is a ready tool for such organisations.

The use of the courts against the rail unions will be one further element of the assault which is underway at every level against workers in the rail industry. Britain's bosses know that to increase productivity to the degree they require, they must take on and defeat the rail unions in open combat. Today their aim is to weaken the unions as much as possible in preparation for this battle. And above all, they know they must bend over backwards to avoid a rail strike while the miners are out.

But if widespread industrial action by railworkers does break out, this will be no thanks to the new 'left wing' union leadership. Instead, it will be a testimony to the power of the miners' strike and to militants like those at Coalville who are prepared to act on their firm class principles. ■

International solidarity with British miners



Currently, entering its eleventh month the British miners' strike is now the longest in the country's history. At the same time it has also sparked off the largest movement of international solidarity for any industrial dispute at least since the Second World War.

Rank-and-file trade unionists from all over the globe have been sending in donations of food and money. In Denmark there are now 125 miners' support committees across the country. Australian dockers claim to have stopped all shipment of coal to Britain over the last ten months. Support has even arrived from trade unionists in Afghanistan who sent £10,000 and 10 tons of dried fruit!

However, coal continues to arrive in Britain from Germany, Poland, Russia, South Africa and even China, to the extent that coal imports have more than doubled in the last year. If even the narrow guidelines of the TUC to maintain coal exports at levels before the strike were adhered to, the situation could change dramatically.

The solidarity shown for the miners so far illustrates that it is possible on an international level to get the kind of support needed.

In Belgium, for example, support for a blockade is now very strong. Dockers in Ghent, Antwerp and Zeebrugge have agreed not to load extra shipments of coal. As one port workers' leader explained to a BBC interviewer: '...this is not a normal, simple strike. It is a social struggle and we have met these situations in Belgium and we are maybe going to meet them in the future. We have a strong feeling of solidarity for people who are fighting to save their jobs.'

In Australia the miners' federation has a 10 dollar per month levy on each of its 13,000 members. Schoolteachers, building workers and longshoremen have all contributed to the estimated 800,000 dollars (about £570,000) so far forwarded to the NUM. The Seamen's union and the Waterside Workers Federation have banned the shipment of coal to Britain. According to miners' leader, Arthur Scargill, 6,000 Australian workers have been laid off at one time or another as a result of this action.

The USSR has provided more than any other country in donations and money. By last November, Russian aid had reached the £1 million mark. Soviet miners in particular have shown support with anything up to three quarters of a million roubles being raised in some regions. This kind of support has not been matched at the level of concrete action, for Soviet coal is still going to Britain despite initial statements to the contrary. The refusal of both the Soviet and the Polish authorities to stop coal exports to Britain flies in the face of the solidarity shown by rank-and-file workers the world over in support of the miners.

The bourgeois press in Britain has chosen to ignore this widespread solidarity and concentrate instead on money supposedly coming from Libya. The National Union of Mineworkers has effectively countered this propaganda campaign, declaring that they welcome international support and solidarity from all quarters. Such action must be stepped up in this, the most crucial, stage of the strike. ■

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International solidarity meeting called - February 16

The second international miners' solidarity meeting organised by Socialist Action will take place on Saturday February 16 in South Wales. The meeting will be held in the Miners' Welfare Hall of Penrhiwceiber Lodge of the National Union of Mineworkers. The meeting will be addressed by leading figures in South Wales NUM and will be attended by miners and miners' wives from all over the British coalfields.

International trade unionists and those involved in solidarity with the British miners will be very welcome. For details phone Jude or Redmond at (44) (1) 359-8371. ■

No more Bhopals, fight for the right to live

The following is a statement which was issued by 16 organisations in Bombay, India on the death of an estimated ten to twenty thousand people in Bhopal in the state of Madhya-Pradesh (the official estimate of the number of deaths is about 3,000) from poisonous gases from the Union Carbide factory. The Inquilabi Communist Sangathan, Indian section of the Fourth International, is one of the supporting organisations of the Movement for a Safe Environment.

We have witnessed the worst ever industrial and environmental disaster in the history of humankind in Bhopal recently. This horrendous tragedy has forced people from all walks of life to react strongly and actively.

Industrialisation in India has taken little account of either the appropriateness of technology, or work-related health issues, safety measures or health hazards for people at large. Hazards and accidents in industry — whether in textile, chemicals, mines, petrochemicals, railways, docks, cements or fertilizers are either hushed up, underreported or are totally ignored. And even when they are known, neither the management nor the government, nor workers' organisations nor voluntary groups have paid much attention to it. The time for passive acceptance of industrial hazards is forever past.

What happened in Bhopal is not merely a tragedy — it is a crime against people. We mourn the dead. And strongly condemn those who were responsible for it.

This incident proves to us over again that we cannot depend on industrialists or governments to ensure our health and safety. We appeal to the citizens — professional bodies, civil liberties' organisations, workers' unions, women's groups and individuals — to press for the following demands through demonstrations, mass education, signature campaigns, letters to the editor in the press, legal action and sending petitions to assemblies and to the parliament.

— *Citizens' committees:* Citizens' vigilance committees which can co-opt legal, medical and technical experts in the field should be constituted for supervision and effective implementation of the measures recommended here.

— *Punishment of the guilty:* All persons, organisations and agencies responsible for the tragedy — Union Carbide management, state and central government which sanctioned the plant, supervisory and monitoring agencies including factory and explosives inspectors — must be severely punished.

— *Rehabilitation, compensation and other aid to victims:* Victims should be

paid a compensation that is at least equivalent to that legally available in the parent country of Union Carbide, i.e., in the USA. Those who have been disabled should be rehabilitated and provided employment. Union Carbide should be charged with the financing of the setting up of rehabilitation centres. A special court must be constituted for the speedy processing of Bhopal cases. Long-term monitoring of health conditions of victims, epidemiological and environmental studies must be instituted immediately, paying special attention to the fact that women might have been more susceptible. The results of these studies [should be] published in the mass media. All arrangements must be made to provide health care facilities for those who still suffer from long-term effects of the poisoning in the years ahead.

— *Right to information:* All the information with Union Carbide especially with reference to details of manufacturing process, immediate, long-term, carcinogenic and genetic effects of MIC (methyl isocyanate) and phosgene (chloride) must be made available to the public. The government must intervene to obtain

Victim number 569. Leela, age 5 (DR)



this information immediately. All hospital records of victims and post-mortem reports of the dead must be made public. All information — process details and toxicological data of products — of all hazardous plants in neighbouring areas [should be made available] in a language that they [the local population] understand. All studies undertaken by institutions such as NIOH, CDI, ITRC, NEERI, etc. must be made accessible to the public.

— *Review of existing laws:* Existing laws concerning industrial zoning, industrial health and safety, and environment should be implemented uniformly all over the country. A reexamination and thorough review of these laws must be undertaken immediately and it must be made public. All such laws must be periodically reviewed.

Current compensation laws do not adequately protect the health and safety of all sections of the population. A comprehensive law covering all compensation issues, making payment of compensation a strict liability of the company must be brought into existence.

— *Environmental and health studies around existing and proposed industries:* The government should finance citizen's committees or another independent authority to undertake environmental and health studies around existing hazardous plants and industrial areas. These should be accessible to the public and periodic surveys carried out to assess ill effects. It should be made mandatory to issue public notice adequately in advance of the setting of any new potentially hazardous plant. Health and environmental studies must be undertaken around the sites and made public.

— *Rights to workers, unions and citizens' committees:* Independent committees of workers and their representatives should be given the right to investigate work conditions and to make direct complaint to the court where necessary. All workers in such plants should be provided with relevant safety equipment. All workers — whether temporary, permanent, badli [transfer workers] or contract — should have the right to stop working with full payment until hazardous conditions are remedied.

People unite now! No more Bhopals!

The Movement for a Safe Environment is made up of the following organisations:

People's Science Movement, India; Committee for the Protection of Democratic Rights; Inquilabi Communist Sangathan; Narjuvan Bhouat Saoha; Lok Vigyan Sanjathana Maharashtra; Medico Friends Circles, India; Doctors for Peace and Life; Maharashtra Association of Resident Doctors, KEM; Mazdoor Mukti Committee, Calcutta; Shramik Mukti Dal, Maharashtra; Kashtakan Sangathan; Yurkrand, Maharashtra; Krantiba Phule Sanskrutic; Khad Kangar Sangh; Forum for Science, Technology and Society; Indian Federation of Trade Unions. ■

The crisis of the Marcos regime

The crisis which has rocked the Philippine regime for more than a year is far from being resolved. In fact it is deepening.

It was the wish of the American administration that the 1984 legislative elections on May 14 should prepare the way for a peaceful transition from the existing family dictatorship of President Marcos to a new bourgeois majority government better able to confront the rising social, democratic and revolutionary struggles.

This project did make some progress, such as the dividing of the opposition and the rallying of sections of the urban petty bourgeoisie to an electoral perspective. However, the election results and the dynamism of the boycott campaign pursued by the popular forces indicated that the American counter-revolutionary scheme was on its way to failure. (1)

The subsequent events have confirmed, in an often striking manner, that Washington has not yet managed to bring into line those forces within the regime and the army that are opposed to democratic reform and defend the status quo. The United States has, moreover, been unable to isolate popular movements and the militant anti-imperialist wing of the opposition. On the contrary, the revolutionary forces continue to grow. The recent successes of the New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas, especially on the island of Mindanao, reinforce this trend.

In fact, the Philippine archipelago has become the focus of political and social struggle of the highest importance. The US is aware of this, in particular since on Luzon Island it has some of the biggest military bases in the world.

The increasing imperialist intervention in the coun-

Paul PETITJEAN

After two months of shilly-shallying the board set up by the government to inquire into the murder of former senator Benigno Aquino produced its report at the end of October 1984. Or rather, it produced several reports. All members of the board were unanimous in rejecting the official version of the murder of President Marcos' main competitor, according to which one man — a communist agent — had single-handedly killed Aquino as he stepped off the aeroplane that brought him back from exile. All are agreed also that those immediately responsible for the killing were the soldiers charged with protecting the victim.

In other words, the entire Board of Inquiry confirmed, after one year's investigation, what everybody in the Philippines already knew: Benigno, 'Ninoy' Aquino can only have been killed by one of the men in the official escort.

But the board was divided as to who was responsible higher up. The board chairperson, Corazon Agrava, found herself in a minority of one in accusing,

apart from those in the escort, Brigadier General Luther Custodio, chief of staff of Air Force Security (AVSECOM), who was in charge of Aquino's reception. The four other members of the board wanted to implicate the chief of staff of the army, General Ver; and the head of the Manila metropolitan command, Major-General Prospero Olivas. In all, 25 military men and one civilian were accused on various counts in the board's majority report.

Inquiry Board points the finger

The board did not dare accuse Marcos directly. He was not named in either of the two reports, and the entire opposition, even including the moderates, protested against this omission. In this regard, Salvador Laurel, the main spokesperson of the United Nationalist Democratic Organisation (UNIDO) [and possible candidate in the presidential elections], who is a pro-American but anti-Marcos, stated on October 24, 'No one will ever believe that they [Custodio,

try represents a grave danger. Today, it is mainly political, but tomorrow it could become military. In the face of this threat, the international solidarity movement must rally behind the Filipino people.

We publish below interviews and a report by the journalist and activist, Deb Shnookal, done in connection with her visit to the Philippines last September. During that time, an international solidarity conference was held in the Philippines on the twelfth anniversary of the imposition of martial law on September 21, 1972. The conference was prepared by several meetings and fact-finding commissions.

Deb Shnookal followed the progress of one of the commissions on the spot. She was able to give an eye-witness account of the repression which is hitting peasants in the Quezon province. This is a typical example of the militarisation policy that the Marcos regime has brought in, and of exactly what it means to people.

Deb Shnookal was also able to meet with Jose Maria Sison who is currently in detention. Known as "Jo-Ma", he is the main historical leader of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) which is leading the NPA guerrillas.

We also publish below an interview with Rolando Olalia, president of the KMU (Kilusang Mayo Uno — May 1 Movement), an independent union confederation.

These articles originally appeared in *Intercontinental Press*, published in New York, in October and November 1984. The article which precedes them looks briefly at the recent developments in the Philippines up to the beginning of December 1984.

Olivas and Ver] ordered the execution of Aquino on their own initiative.' (2)

The Board of Inquiry chosen by the president did not dare to point the finger of suspicion at either the head of state or his wife, the powerful Imelda. It must be taken into account that this body was subjected to intense pressure by government and military circles throughout its investigations. The fact that there were two reports shows how effective this pressure was. But the implication of high-ups in the army, and especially of General Ver, on its own will have important consequences.

General Ver is not just any old brass hat. A distant relative of Marcos, he is not a field officer, and did not come up through the ranks on the basis of his service record. He is, what they call in the Philippines, a 'political' officer. He became chief of staff through the direct

1. See *International Viewpoint*, No 59, September 17, 1984.
2. Quoted in *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)*, November 8, 1984, by Guy Sacerdotti, p. 15.



Anti-Marcos demonstration violently dispersed by police (DR)

intervention of President Marcos, for whom he served as chauffeur and body guard. He is considered today to be one of the dictator's right-hand men, as well as one of his most respected advisers.

President Marcos' displeasure at the implication of a man so close to him was well-known. In a letter to Ver, Marcos wrote unabashedly that, 'the circumstances under which the board has chosen to implicate you with its findings are fraught with doubt and great contradictions of opinion and testimony...we are deeply disturbed...' (3)

The decision, reported a long time ago, of the majority of the Board of Inquiry to point the finger of blame at General Ver reflects first of all the political situation in the Philippines. The May 1984 legislative elections did not mark the end of the mass mobilisations that followed the assassination of Benigno Aquino on August 21, 1983.

Very large demonstrations took place during the election campaign itself. These were given impetus by the call for a boycott, and were followed up after the ballot on May 14.

On August 21, 1984, for the first anniversary of the death of 'Ninoy' Aquino, the largest crowd ever, assembled in the capital. Up to two million people are thought to have demonstrated that day in the metropolitan area. One million of those gathered together at a huge central rally in which mingled the yellow colour of the 'Aquínists' and the red of the popular forces. In this context, it was impossible to accept the official version of the murder.

However, the board was only able to investigate General Ver himself because they had the support of Washington to do so. The American administration is in fact extremely worried by the turn of events. Since the murder of Aquino they have been trying to prepare the way for a successor to Marcos by reinvolving the traditional business class in the political game. This section of the bourgeoisie has been pushed into opposition by the

nouveaux riches of the presidential clique. The American administration also seeks to impose democratic reforms capable of rallying sections of society such as the urban petty bourgeoisie.

But Washington has come up against strong resistance from within the regime and the army. The presidential clique did not show the slightest inclination for a real compromise, and the government established after the May 14 poll is a carbon copy of the one which preceded it. Moderate opposition politicians who are still snubbed by the regime have had to go back again to the 'parliament of the streets' and participate in mass demonstrations against the regime.

Regime intransigent

The repression is becoming more and more violent. While the massive rallies of August 21 were not attacked by the forces of 'law and order', this forbearance was not repeated one month later, on the occasion of the twelfth anniversary of the declaration of martial law.

On September 21, 1984, 50,000 demonstrators were forbidden access to the Mendiola bridge, symbolic because it leads to Malacanang, the presidential palace. At dawn on September 22, 4,000 demonstrators who had organised an evening of prayer to protest against this ban were dispersed in a brutal fashion through the use of water cannons, tear gas and plastic bullets fired from American M16 Armalite rifles. Some thirty demonstrators were seriously hurt during this confrontation.

On September 27, a further demonstration was organised against police brutality. But this time the order to fire live ammunition was given. This repressive action led to one death, that of a passer-by killed by a pistol bullet. A student, Fidel Nemenzo, was not expected to recover, although he later did, and several demonstrators disappeared, probably picked up by the police.

Public feeling ran high. The traditional business sectors took a notably sharper tone. Cardinal Sin, the archbishop of Manila, delivered one of his more forceful speeches. Even the National Assembly felt obliged to demand an inquiry into the facts.

The regime persists in displaying complete intransigence. The mayor of Cagayan de Oro on Mindanao island has just had his election to the National Assembly made null and void by Comelec (4) and his seat given to a government party candidate. Aquilino Pimentel is in fact a moderate bourgeois opposition figure who has a mass base in the area and who could emerge as a national figure in the framework of the 1987 presidential elections. Other local politicians, again on Mindanao island, were crudely murdered by hired killers. (5)

The American strategy seems to be to keep Marcos in until the 1987 presidential elections, whilst also preparing the way for a successor. The American administration is divided, and President Reagan has aroused fury amongst the moderate oppositionists in the Philippines by declaring — to the embarrassment of the State Department — during the US election campaign that there was no alternative to the Marcos regime except the Communists.

However, the dominant line in American diplomacy remains to get a process of transition underway. As part of this, they need to insure control over the Philippine army. But the army's hand has been considerably strengthened since the declaration of martial law, twelve years ago. It had never, until then, played a directly political role. It now possesses formidable power. Formed and financed by the US, it is nonetheless the main backer of the Marcos family dictatorship.

'Political' officers such as General Ver owe their positions (military and economic) to personal links that they have with the president's family or with his wife, Imelda Romualdez, as do the businessmen around the president. They are seeking to maintain and strengthen their positions, which would be very difficult if the regime were democratised. They pose a very serious threat of a coup d'état — which would be without precedent in the history of the country — and are blackmailing Washington.

The spokespeople of the American administration, from vice-president Bush right through to the US ambassador in the Philippines, have let it be known publicly that they are not happy with Marcos' intransigence and that they would like to see the conclusions of the Board of Inquiry's majority report containing the accusation against General Ver followed up by real action.

It is now widely known that Washington supports General Fidel Ramos,

3. Ibid. p. 14.

4. Comelec is the body charged with 'overseeing' the elections.

5. The most notable case was that of the mayor of the town of Zamboanga, Cesar Climaco who was killed on November 14.

currently acting chief of staff, while Ver is provisionally suspended from duty. General Ramos, himself also a distant relative of Marcos, is in fact a product of American military schools. He is considered to be a 'professional' field soldier who earned his stripes in action against the Communists in Korea and against the NPA in the Philippines.

Ramos probably represents US interests among senior staff in the same way that the technocrat prime minister, Virata, represents those of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) within the government.

The rivalry between Generals Ver and Ramos goes back a long way. It took on a new political content with the assassination of Aquino, and most particularly when the Board of Inquiry made their findings public. A violent internal struggle is probably going on within the regime, its army and the government.

The majority of the top officers' corp have reaffirmed their support for General Ver, following his suspension. Sixty eight of the 83 generals in the armed forces issued to the press an unprecedented 'Manifesto' declaring 'unwavering loyalty and support' for Ver. They added, 'we are morally convinced that he is innocent of the dastardly crime being attributed to him.' (6)

As for General Ver himself, he dismisses the Board of Inquiry as an instrument of enemies of the state. General Ramos did not sign the manifesto. But he has indicated doubt that he could use his current position to purge the army. He stated on November 13 that the temporary character of his office prevented him from introducing the necessary reforms within the army, despite the urgent need to eliminate from 'within our ranks such... enemies as arrogance, ceremonial pomp, intrigue, waste, abuse of authority, laziness, corruption (and) divisiveness.' (7)

In the face of the crisis and of American pressures, the president's clique and the businessmen and high-ranking officers who are close to him have retrenched themselves in their position, as if it were an impregnable fortress. But the general situation is becoming more and more explosive. It was not for nothing that the US ambassador in Manila, at a meeting of the Rotary Club, referred pointedly to the situation in Iran before the fall of the shah. He warned that 'those countries in which power is concentrated in the hands of a few and which lack institutional mechanisms for facilitating internal compromise are less able to accommodate pressures for change. Change may be resisted, but when it breaks through — as it inevitably will — it disrupts societies and may even tear them asunder.' (8)

Nevertheless, the United States continues, concretely, to support President Marcos. Washington's only alternative was murdered more than a year ago. He was Benigno Aquino.

The crisis of the regime is only a reflection of the social crisis which is tearing the country apart. As the price for rescheduling of part of its huge foreign debt, the Philippine government had to accept a series of measures imposed by the IMF and banks to which it owes money, including allowing the peso to float and levying new taxes.

The annual inflation rate for 1984 has already been estimated at 65 to 70 per cent. That is unique in this region. The official wage is far from keeping pace with inflation. At the beginning of November, the minimum wage for an industrial worker in Manila was due to go up from 35 pesos a day to 37 (that is, about £2.50), and the cost-of-living bonus from 14 to 17 pesos a week. Similar 'adjustments' had taken place in May and June, when the value of the Philippine currency had gone from 14 to 21 pesos to the dollar since the beginning of the year.

Over and above such figures, larger and larger sections of the working population — workers, peasants, the urban poor, but also teachers, etc. — are sinking from poverty to destitution and sometimes with no hope of escape.

The spectre of hunger riots such as those that were sparked in Latin America brought on by the austerity plans imposed by the IMF is beginning to haunt the Philippines, and this is at a time when the Communist Party's guerrilla movement is gaining strength day by day. (9)

The situation in the Philippines is as precarious as Marcos' health. Already the August 1983 crisis — with the return and subsequent assassination of Aquino — probably opened up because people thought Marcos was about to die. Since then, medical treatment succeeded in getting him back on his feet temporarily. But, in a period of political upheaval, President Marcos had to disappear from the scene for three weeks for health reasons at the end of November [and again recently]. The battle for the succession is already in full swing among the regime's supporters.

However, what is more important for all revolutionists around the world is that there exists in the Philippines a mass movement that is engaged in an independent struggle, seeking to impose an anti-imperialist solution to the crisis. This is what the Nationalist Alliance gave expression to in its appeal published on September 21: 'Today the Filipino people stand at a crucial point in the nation's history.'

Emphasising that it was necessary to step-up* extra-parliamentary struggle, maximise the organisational capacities of the movement and reinforce unity, the appeal continued: 'The need to strengthen unity among the present anti-dictatorship forces cannot be overemphasised. So that it will be stable and lasting, let us base our political unity on the principle that US imperialism as well as its junior partner, the Marcos regime, are the targets of the anti-dictatorship struggle. Let us share, too, a strong commitment to rely principally on the people's strength and their unrelenting initiative in dismantling the present rule. While differences on many matters are bound to occur within any broad front, these can be resolved or relegated to secondary significance so long as we hold supreme the interests of bringing down the present dictatorship and liberating the Filipino people.' (10)

December 3, 1984

Funeral of Marcos' would be assassin turns into a demonstration against the regime (DR)



6. FEER, p. 14, op. cit.
 7. Quoted by Guy Sacerdotti in FEER, November 22, 1984, p. 10.
 8. Quoted by Nayan Chanda in FEER, November 8, 1984, p. 16.
 9. See IV, No 49, March 26, 1984.
 10. The appeal was published in full in the July-August 1984 edition of *Solidaridad II*. The quote is from page 13. The full name of the Nationalist Alliance is the Nationalist Alliance for Justice, Freedom and Democracy (NAJFD). It unites a series of local organisations of the masses on a general 'class struggle' orientation.

Imprisoned Communist Party leader speaks

Interview with Jose Maria Sison

Jose Maria Sison, president of the underground Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) has been detained by the Ferdinand Marcos regime since November 1977. The CPP was created in 1968 on the basis of a split with the old pro-Moscow CPP and of a pro-Chinese orientation. Since the turn to the right by the Chinese regime with its policy of detente with Washington at the beginning of the 1970s, which led to them supporting the maintenance of US bases in the Philippines, the CPP has gradually taken their distance from Peking.

According to the figures given in the December 1983 issue of the CPP journal, *Ang Bayan*, this party, which when it was founded organised no more than one hundred members, had 30,000 members in 1981. The CPP plays the foremost role in a whole series of urban and peasant mass movements and, most importantly, leads the main armed opposition force against the Marcos regime — the New People's Army (NPA) which in 1981 organised about 20,000 fighters.

Deb SHNOOKAL

The Military Court at Fort Bonifacio was a large, light and airy room with three long tables and high-backed chairs arranged in a U shape, facing the rows of seats for the audience. The Military Commission No. 25 was to hold yet another hearing of the "subversion case" against several alleged leaders of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) (1) charged with seeking to overthrow the government by force in collusion with an unnamed foreign power, presumably the Peoples Republic of China.

Jose Maria Sison, who has admitted to being chairman of the outlawed CPP, was chatting in a lively manner with journalists. When we were introduced, he shook my hand warmly and immediately started to talk. "I never listen to the court proceedings," he said. "I prefer to talk with the people who come here."

Sison was arrested with his wife,

Juliet, in November 1977. For most of his detention he has been kept in solitary confinement. After his arrest he was beaten and tortured and then manacled to his bed for 24 hours a day so that he was unable to move.

For two years of his imprisonment, Sison was allowed to be together with his wife, who up until that time had also been in solitary confinement. Juliet Sison was released in March 1982 after she gave birth to their child. Sison was then placed in solitary again until July 1984.

Sison's case has gone to the Supreme Court five times with petitions for habeas corpus. The way Marcos "openly flouts the law," Sison said, "he has practically destroyed jurisprudence in this country."

Two others accused along with Sison were also present at the August 31 hearing at Fort Bonifacio — journalist Satur Ocampo and teacher Mila Aguillar-Roque. Roque had only been arrested three weeks before. She was suspected of

being the highest woman official of the CPP. Her husband, a CPP leader, had been killed in an armed conflict two years ago. Since then she is supposed to have said that she no longer wished to be politically active and wanted to bring up her child in peace. She is presently being held in solitary confinement at Camp Crame.

Sison was very cheerful, joking with his guards, who sat close behind him in order to make sure they heard every word spoken. "I always talk with my guards," he said. "They are dissatisfied with their conditions, the bullying they suffer. They want a wage raise too, don't you?" he asked, turning to his prison guards, who looked sheepishly at the ground. "All the funds Marcos gives the military never get to these men," Sison remarked.

I asked Sison what he considered the major problems the Philippines faced today. "First," he replied, "we need to achieve national independence in the political, economic, cultural and other fields.

"Secondly, we need to realize democracy; that means the elimination of the fascist dictatorship. And lastly, we need to solve the land problem. By national independence," he continued, "I mean the cutting off of the dependence on a superpower like the United States.

To develop democracy we have to eliminate feudalism, to liberate the peasant from feudal and semi-feudal bondage. Marcos has only carried out a bogus land reform. Only about 2,000 hectares [1 hectare equals 2.47 acres] have been transferred to the peasants while Marcos' cronies have grabbed hundreds of thousands of hectares.

"We have to break up the feudalism," he said, "so that the local forces of capitalism can be liberated, that is, the national entrepreneurs and smaller businessmen. The property owned by the multinationals and traitor elements will be taken over by the state. Our economy would be a combined one — of state and Filipino private ownership.

"This involves a change of political power, of course," he concluded. "That is, a fundamental transformation of society. US imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism have developed a virulent form of fascism in the Philippines. The solution is a national democratic revolution of a new type. That is, with the class leadership of the proletariat. The revolutions of the old type

Jose Maria Sison with Deb Shnookal (DR)



1. The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) was established in 1968 and arose out of the student and nationalist movements of that decade. At the time of its formation it supported the Maoist leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. It described itself as "re-established" to claim the early legacy of the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), a pro-Moscow party formed in 1930.

Since its formation, the CPP has gradually moved away from loyal adherence to the views of the Chinese CP. Following its detente with Washington, Peking withdrew support from national liberation struggles in Southeast Asia and came out in favor of the maintenance of US bases in the Philippines — positions the CPP rejects.

The CPP leads the New People's Army, the major armed opposition to the government.

were led by the liberal bourgeoisie."

What role did he envision for the liberal bourgeoisie, I asked. "They will still be progressive, but they will not have the political hegemony. They do not have the political, ideological or organizational leadership necessary to cope with US imperialism.

"There are four forces in the Philippines today. First, the workers, who represent about 15 percent. Then the peasants representing 75 percent. Thus the workers and peasants make up 90 percent of the population. This is the basic foundation of the united front necessary to win victory. Then there are additional forces in this united front — the urban petty-bourgeoisie (the small property owners, the educated people) and lastly there is the middle bourgeoisie.

"The class enemy is the comprador bourgeoisie — those who control the banks, the big landlords and so on. The old Filipino revolution was unable to liquidate this layer."

Australia's role

I asked Sison what he thought the role of Australian imperialism is in the Philippines. "I think the United States is pushing Australia to assume more counterinsurgency responsibility," he said. "The main projects are militarily oriented. On the surface the aid looks like simply economic aid. But in fact it is used to create a psychological effect — to discourage the revolutionary movement, to create infrastructures, not just for the landlords, but also for the military, like roads for example.

"The Philippines government is also receiving direct military aid from Australia," Sison said.

If a revolutionary, popular government came to power in the Philippines, I asked, did he think the United States would respond the same way it did in Grenada with an invasion?

"Grenada was a small country," replied Sison. "If the 52 million people here decided to change the entire system, I think the United States would have great difficulty in overthrowing that power.

"Because of the outrageous abuses of the Marcos dictatorship, the long hoped for united front has come about. Even within the military clique itself there is disunity. There is a scrambling for foreign exchange. Export earnings and foreign loans are dwindling. The United States wouldn't be able to intervene. It is a declining power as the battle in Central America has shown.

"The fighting in Central America is a prologue to a bigger revolutionary upheaval in the whole of Latin America. There are several candidates for this revolutionary upheaval — Brazil, Chile, Argentina.

"The Americans learned a lesson from Vietnam. It would be quite a change of policy for the United States to send troops overseas again," he stated in answer to a question about the possibility

of Washington sending troops to Central America.

Struggle in the Philippines

I asked how he saw the development of the struggle in the Philippines.

"The maturation of the Filipino revolution will come about in five to ten years. I am considering the decline of the United States and its lack of military capability to counter the Filipino revolution," Sison said. "The American people will not permit Reagan to launch new adventures. I expect the Filipino revolution to win alongside several other revolutionary advances."

"Today the Marcos regime is much weaker. The August 21 rally [to commemorate the anniversary of the assassination of oppositionist Benigno Aquino] was unprecedented in militance and magnitude. American policy-making bodies couldn't help but be impressed by this demonstration of Marcos' isolation from the people."

Could this lead the United States to dump Marcos, I asked.

"On balance, it appeared that Reagan would prefer a slow process of phasing out Marcos, but I think this will be accelerated now. Of course, I'm not relying on the United States. The US government will decide to dump Marcos, first if the legal, democratic mass movement continues to grow in strength, and secondly, with the growth of the armed struggle. These two factors will decide Marcos' fate.

"There is already a stalemate. The New People's Army [NPA] has reached the stage of wiping out larger units of the army. The NPA is now on its own counteroffensive — hitting smaller military

detachments one by one. The military's blind attacks on larger communities and the bombing of peasant villages is only increasing support for the NPA."

What were the chances of a further military crackdown in the future, I wanted to know.

"A military crackdown or takeover that continues Marcos' policy cannot last long," Sison answered. "There may be a liberal-minded military group that would pave the way for a civilian government, as happened in Argentina. Or there might be a transitional government with some support from the left. There are several possibilities."

Finally, I asked Sison how he passed the time in prison. "I read and write, and now I can talk to the two other detainees. By shouting I can communicate with two others over a wall. I can read anything that is legally available — for instance I read drafts of opposition documents and published materials of the National Democratic Front. But I am not allowed CCP material. I now have over 500 books in my library. I am reading slowly these days."

When I asked Sison about the present state of his trials, he explained, "We play for time, so that some day Marcos will weaken and so that the commission will not have a chance to convict us. If we were to be convicted, it would be quite a scandal, because China would be implicated. This would embarrass Marcos because the Philippines depends on China for 20 percent of its crude oil and also for rice imports."

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Interview with a leader of the independent trade-union movement

Attorney Rolando Olalia is the chairperson of the May First Movement (KMU), an independent coalition of 12 labor federations and more than 100 individual unions. He also heads one of its component federations, the National Federation of Labor Unions (NAFLU), and the National Coalition of Workers Against Poverty (PKMK).

Olalia is the son of the founder and former chairperson of the KMU, Felixberto Olalia, who died in December 1983 after his health had been seriously undermined by nine months in detention.

Question. How was the KMU formed?

Answer. The KMU was officially organized on May 1, 1980. It started with about 100,000 members. It now includes around 400,000 to 500,000 workers from the garment, textile, mining, steel food and hotel industries. Its organizations extend all over the Philippines.

Q. Can you function quite openly?

A. Definitely yes, because it is a legal organization. Although the military of course claims it is a front of the CPP

[Communist Party of the Philippines] and the NPA [New People's Army] or that it is a "subversive" organization.

It was because of the continuing repression of the trade-union movement that the KMU was organized. This repression started with the declaration of martial law in September 1972.

Q. How strong is the trade-union movement today?

A. At present there are only two trade-union centers in the Philippines.

There is the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP), which is recognized by the government, and the KMU.

The TUCP is controlled by the government. It has about 600,000 members. We admit that the TUCP is bigger than the KMU. But in terms of sympathizers, the KMU is much bigger, because it is supported by all sectors. The TUCP is a company union. Practically all its officers are government officials.

Q. What are wages and work conditions like in the Philippines?

A. The minimum wage is 35 pesos a day. There is an emergency cost-of-living allowance of 14 pesos, which brings the wages to 49 pesos. Workers outside of Manila receive less. These wages are below the poverty level.

The rate of inflation is about 50 percent per year. This makes the ordinary factory worker even more impoverished. Even the government statistics indicate an ordinary worker needs 75 pesos a day to support a family of three.

Q. What is behind the struggle of the Artex textile workers, who have been on strike since April?

A. The reason the Artex workers went on strike was that the company did not want to comply with labor standards concerning the minimum wage law. In fact the Artex workers are receiving only 23 pesos a day, including the allowances. You can imagine, if 49 pesos a day is below the poverty level and you can hardly exist, how much worse it is on a wage of 23 pesos.

Of course the owner of Artex and his brother are very close to Marcos. When I met with the minister of labor, I asked him why the government can't enforce its own labor laws.

The primary reason there are strikes in the Philippines is that there are violations of the labor laws on minimum wages and allowances and so on.

Q. Does the KMU organize agricultural workers?

A. The biggest organization of sugar workers in the south, the National Federation of Sugar Workers, is an affiliate of KMU. Its membership is about 120,000. The sugar workers are among the most oppressed and exploited.

Q. I understand machinery is being introduced from Australia that will eliminate thousands of jobs.

A. This is true. It will increase unemployment. Mechanization may mean up to 50 percent of the workers, maybe 100,000, will be permanently laid off.

The Philippines cannot solve unemployment because it has no industrialization program. It is concentrating on agribusiness, which is controlled by Marcos' cronies.

The sugar workers' wages are below the minimum wage. The working conditions are those typical of the feudal sys-

tem where the landlord controls the movement of the workers. The sugar workers can't protest, because most of the sugar owners in the south have their own armies. Imelda [Marcos, the wife of the president], comes from a wealthy sugar family. But the sugar workers' union is very militant.

Q. How many trade unionists are presently in jail?

A. There are presently five KMU leaders still under detention from the six who were arrested on July 22 this year. Then there are a number of others who have been detained since the crackdown in August 1982 when my father was arrested. Crispin Beltran [secretary-general of the KMU] was arrested at this time. They were charged with subversion and economic sabotage.

The minister of labor, Blas Ople, has endorsed the temporary release of Beltran. But Melacanang [Marcos' presidential palace] refused. Under the Preventative Detention Act you can be arrested at any time, without any evidence against you. And you cannot be released until the president orders it. Beltran is a victim of this procedure.

Q. What are the main demands of the union movement today?

A. The major demands are the scrapping or repeal of several repressive laws and executive orders.

The "New Strike Law" enacted in 1981 restricts the right to strike. Management is given the power to lock out or dismiss workers; the president or labor minister can assume control over any dispute; strikes "adversely affecting the national interest" are banned; strikes must be voted for by two-thirds majority; union officers or members can be dismissed for participating in an "illegal" strike; and so on.

The "Anti-scab and Peaceful Picketing Law" of 1981 allows the ingress and

egress of nonstriking workers. Two other laws prohibit strikes in the export-oriented industries. This is perfect protection for the foreign investors, particularly in the Export Processing Zones (EPZs). Strikes are prohibited there, but there have been strikes because the people are so oppressed and exploited by the multinational corporations. They call the EPZs the "concentration camps of cheap labor."

Q. Are unions banned in these EPZs?

A. No, they are not banned, but they are banned from striking. Nevertheless we have had three general strikes in the EPZ in Bataan. The first was in June 1982 and was one of the reasons for the arrest of my father and the others. The issues of this strike were low wages, the dismissal of union officials, and union-busting tactics of the management. It lasted for three days.

Q. The comparison has been made between Nicaragua before the fall of Somoza and the Philippines today. Do you think this is accurate?

A. It is accurate because Somoza, the shah of Iran and Marcos are all the same. The political repression, the salivating of people, the arrest and detention of people for no reason whatsoever, the government's cronies flourishing in business — there are many similarities.

The primary comparison is the support of the US to Marcos and the others.

Q. What message do you have to the workers of countries that have big investments in the Philippines?

A. Our message is to forge stronger solidarity and to counteract and fight any repressive intentions of the multinational companies in exploiting and oppressing the workers of the world. ■

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Aquino's widow speaks at an anti-Marcos rally (DR)



Peasants victimised by military

Her name was Angelita and she was 10 years old, though exceptionally small for her age from malnourishment. Her eyes were wide and she chewed on a handkerchief, but her voice was clear and earnest as she related how she had witnessed the murder of her father, Jesus Nonsul, by the military.

Angelita was only one of many peasants from the barrios of Buenavista and Lopez in Southern Tagalog, Luzon, who had come to testify before a human rights fact-finding mission.

The fact-finding mission included 30 people from the Task Force for Detainees; MABINI, a lawyers' human rights group, Friends of the People of Quezon; and other human rights organizations.

The aims of the mission were to investigate reported military atrocities, to publicize its findings, and to provide material, legal and moral support to the victims. The investigation took place at Guinayangan in Quezon Province, a six-and-a-half-hour drive southeast of Manila.

Deb SHNOOKAL

Quezon Province is a typical example of capitalism imposed on a feudal system of agriculture resulting in the utter impoverishment of the people. Most of the province is owned by the Gala and Rodriguez families. The principal product here is copra — the dried kernel of coconut from which oil is extracted.

The imposition of martial law by President Ferdinand Marcos in 1972 only increased the burden on the peasants in this province. Now they were not only subjected to extreme economic exploitation, exacerbated by the fall in copra prices, but also became victims of the increasing harassment by the army, the Philippine Constabulary and the paramilitary Civil Home Defense Force. These attacks are made under the guise of the so-called counterinsurgency program against the New People's Army (NPA), a guerrilla movement led by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CCP), said to have up to 20,000 people under arms.

A project entitled "Chains of Love" (*Oplan Cadenda de Amor*) was launched in this area as part of this program. This fake civic works project and its successor *Oplan Katatagan* have failed completely to "win the hearts and minds" of the people. The ever-increasing atrocities committed by the military have only further alienated the peasants from the Marcos government.

Militarization of Quezon

About 7,000 military personnel are presently based in Quezon. This militarization has meant widespread abuses against the people such as massacres of peasants and their families, "salvaging" (summary executions), abductions, torture, illegal detentions, arbitrary arrests, looting and other crimes.

In the first seven months of 1984, 20 cases of salvaging, 60 disappearances, and 36 arrests were reported in Quezon Province alone. However, Quezon is not



Anti-Marcos demonstration in Manila (DR)

the hardest-hit province. The island of Mindanao, where both the NPA and the Muslim Moro National Liberation Front guerrillas are fighting government forces, last year saw 265 salvagings, 115 disappearances and 1,643 political arrests.

The September fact-finding mission included seven lawyers from MABINI, who took affidavits from a number of victims and witnesses with the intention of laying formal charges against the Philippine armed forces.

Carlito Buton, a 23-year old farmer from the barrio of de la Paz, Buenavista, described some of the problems he and his neighbors face. He said that the people are afraid of the military, but they suffer very poor conditions. Most are tenant farmers, growing coconuts, rice, corn, peanuts and a few vegetables. They must surrender two-thirds of their produce to the landlord, while having to meet all the costs of such items as fertilizer themselves. "To meet our needs we often have to go to the landlord to ask for extra work," he explained.

Buton was arrested in June 1983 and accused of being an NPA sympathizer. Every time he denied any knowledge of

the NPA, he said, he was hit with a rifle butt. He was held by the army for several days. "We're afraid of the military, but not the NPA," he said. "We provide them with food if we can. But we don't want to associate with the NPA because we're afraid of the military, not because we don't agree with them," he stressed.

"We don't hold it against people if they take up arms against the government. The people will give them food and water," he said. "The military are very unreasonable. They never listen to the people. Things have gotten worse here since 1983."

Young peasant tortured

Froilan Malveda is another young peasant from Buenavista. He was arrested by the 16th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army in May 1983 along with his neighbor Edwin Malapote. He was accused of collecting money for the NPA. He experienced various forms of torture at the hands of a Sergeant Fidel Mendoza, infamous for such activities. Mendoza has since been transferred to another province.

Before being released, Malapote and Malveda were forced to sign statements admitting they had been NPA members, but now supported the government. Malveda insisted he did not know what he was signing at the time.

Other testimonies were given to the lawyers by women such as Loreta Dia and Juanita Macaraig, whose husbands had been salvaged. Some like Ida Capili had not yet located the bodies of their husbands.

Sergio Papica, 54, described the abduction of his 15-year-old son, Isagani, by 20 government troops of the 47th Philippine Constabulary. His corpse was found later, along with two others, riddled with 17 bullet holes.

Diego Querobin, a farmer, was on his way to sell his copra when he met some men in civilian clothes. According to witnesses they took him to a military camp. His naked body was found next day in a nearby river with 18 stab wounds and obvious signs of torture.

Felicitas Fresco, a barangay [village or neighborhood] councilwoman from Buenavista who had come to give evidence on the Nonsul murder, commented that it had only been since 1983 that the military had made its presence felt in the area. She described many cases she knew about of torture, both physical and mental, threats, arrests and the looting of property such as chickens from farmers.

"The reason for the military presence," she said, "is the peasants' support for the NPA. The NPA apparently helps the people — by settling land disputes and protecting the rights of the common people."

When Fresco was asked if she was afraid to testify, she replied with confidence, looking around the room, "I'm not afraid because I'm telling the truth."

The testimonies were given in a crowded schoolroom in the small fishing town of Guinayangan. Many of the witnesses had walked 20 kilometers or more despite harassment and intimidation from the military. As they spoke with the lawyers and other members of the fact-finding mission, several obvious stooges for the military tried to listen in to what they were saying. Fresco's confident answer was obviously direct at these spies.

It was decided that the witnesses and the fact-finding mission members should stay together that night for protection and sleep in the large hall behind the *convento*, the local priest's house. Watch was kept all night in case of provocation or attack.

Guinayangan was itself the scene of a massacre in February 1980. A large group of peasants had been on their way to join a rally against an increase in the coconut tax when they were ambushed by the military. Two people were killed and 19 were wounded. The governor of the province, Eladio Cadiwara, whitewashed the whole affair.

After evidence was taken from 23 of the victims and witnesses, local people brought a simple meal of rice and fish. Following the meal, the lawyers gathered the people together to explain to them their rights and what to do if they were arrested or raided in the future.

The faces of the men and women were serious and attentive as they listened, while some children slept curled on grass mats on the concrete floor. Many questions were asked, especially by women. A woman lawyer, Leo Batat, concluded the meeting by saying, "If you permit fear to get into your hearts, then they will trample on your rights."

In fact, courage and determination are the only weapons these people have. Another young lawyer, speaking to me later, expressed great concern that these people may suffer further reprisals from the armed forces. "We can only really help them by publicizing their cases, and that's all," he said. "Their backs are against the wall. They have to fight or they will be slaughtered."

The next morning we all rose early. The local people again provided a breakfast of rolls, rice cakes and coffee. Some of the young men had a guitar, and they sat around singing nationalist songs in sweet low voices — such words as "What greater love is there than the love of the country that nurtured you?"

Then we set off in a convoy of a bus and a jeep carrying the witnesses along the rough, unpaved road to the highway, the blackening clouds of an approaching typhoon behind us. At the highway the fact-finding mission members parted from the peasants, who then faced their long walk home and an uncertain future. ■

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The tragedy of the far left

Interview with a leader of the RCL in Japan

We publish below an interview with Konno Motomu, a member of the leadership of the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), the Japanese section of the Fourth International, in which he traces the evolution of the Japanese left and the workers' movement, as well as presenting the situation of his own organisation.

The Revolutionary Communist League was born out of a split in the Communist Party at the end of the 1950s, in the context of a radicalisation of the student organisation, Zengakuren. This rupture in the CP in fact gave rise to the emergence of several far left currents which were originally all in the same organisation. That is why several of the organisations referred to in the interview still have the same name, that of the Revolutionary Communist League, and are usually differentiated through the initials of their particular faction. Apart from the section of the Fourth International (Daiyon Inta), this applies to Chukaku (the central faction) and Kakumaru (the Marxist-revolutionary faction).

Supporters of the Fourth International in Japan (1) were unable to develop a policy for involvement in the huge rise of political struggles in 1960 against the Japanese-American military treaty and the activity around economic issues. The group therefore split up into several regional formations.

In 1968, our movement was actively involved in the struggle on the campuses. This enabled it to reunite at a national level. The reunited organisation was heavily involved in the peasants' struggle against the construction of the new international airport on their lands in Narita, on the outskirts of Tokyo. Its influence was gradually strengthened because of this involvement. Its activity in the trade-union movement, based on a previous implantation in the Sohyo (2) and the Socialist Party, began to develop again.

However, a process of sectarian degeneration hit what were then the main far-left organisations, starting with the Kakumaru and the Chukaku. Along with Kaiho ('Liberation' from the Socialist Youth (3)), they became involved in those terrible internecine wars which cost the lives of so many militants. These conflicts were known as the 'Uchigeba'.

The Japanese section of the Fourth International has always refused on principle to resort to physical violence in the workers' movement. In contrast to this sort of thing, in 1978, they threw all their forces into the struggle of the Sanrizuka Peasants' League, which was waging a particularly important battle against the opening of the airport at Narita. There were several members of the section among those who managed to get into the airport, which was guarded by thousands of police, and occupy the control tower. They suffered severe repression as a result and several are still in prison. (4)

The Sanrizuka Peasants' League was thrown into crisis at the end of 1983, hit by a split supported by the Chukaku. In January 1984, this same Chukaku organisation launched the first wave of aggressive physical action against supporters of the Japanese section of the Fourth International, using the criminal practices of the 'Uchigeba' which had already done so much damage to the Japanese far left. (5)

A second wave of attacks took place last July, as a result of which one activist had to have a leg amputated. The Chukaku commandos operate at night, bursting into people's houses to grab them when they are still sleeping. They break their bones (usually the legs) and, in the case referred to above, they hit the kneecaps with an icepick.

The Chukaku are attacking an organisation that itself has always refused to use violence against other groups, and has never physically attacked any of the Chukaku's members. Such cowardly practices do great damage to the whole of the Japanese far left in a situation where it has already been weakened by the evolution of the political situation in Japan.

Question. How do you see the political developments within the Japanese workers' movement? And, first and foremost, what is happening to the Socialist and Communist Parties? (6)

Answer. The Socialist Party is the

largest workers' party in Japan. Since the Second World War it has been a particularly left-wing social-democratic party. In this, it was probably unique. But at the moment the Socialist Party is clearly beginning to lose this specific character.

And this development reflects the political drift to the right, which is working its way through the trade-union movement in the framework of the unity offensive. (7)

Let's take some examples. President Reagan came to Japan at the end of 1983 and gave a speech to the Diet (parliament). In the past the SP would have organised action against the visit of the chief representative of American imperialism. But this time it did nothing. The times during which the SP was opposed to American imperialism are almost over. The same problem will arise with the visit of the South Korean dictator, Chun Doo Hwan. Before, the SP was violently opposed to the South Korean regime. Nowadays, they are trying to establish new relations with South Korea.

In the 1950s and 1960s on the international level, the SP used to put forward an anti-imperialist position. They more or less maintained the position throughout the 1970s. Now that is over. Confronted with popular movements in struggle in East Asia, the SP has modified its policies and has adopted in reality more classic social-democratic positions.

On the national level, the SP established official relations with the trade-union federation, Zenmin Rokyo, which came out of a right-wing fusion within the trade-union movement. Its main objective is to enter into a centre coalition government, and their main problem is to work out how to pull it off. The political trajectory of the new SP president, Ishibashi Mashashi, who was elected in August 1983, illustrates very well that of the party itself. He used to belong to the left of the SP, but now he symbolises the 'new' realism and did not hesitate to make an official visit to the United States.

On its side, the Communist Party now finds itself isolated in the framework of the right-wing fusion of the trade unions. It has reached a political impasse. They lost out more than any other party in the last elections. In this context, their sectarian orientation has been reinforced. They are, for example, consolidating their hold over Gensuikyo, the peace movement linked to them. In order to do this, they changed the secretary of the organisation.

Q. What is happening with the Chukaku? What is the context in which they are carrying out their criminal attacks on your members?

A. The Chukaku organisation is set on a course of sectarian isolation and physical attacks on our members are part of this general direction. There are several examples of this development that are very revealing. In the 1970s, the Chukaku had some influence in radical democratic circles. These links are now almost completely broken. The group of lawyers that used to defend Chukaku members arrested under the anti-subversion laws at one time numbered about 25, including law professors who were sometimes quite well known. Today

there are no more than four.

Another example was the intervention of the Chukaku in the Women's Democratic Club. This feminist organisation was set up after the Second World War, and during the 1950s it was dominated by the Communist Party.

In the early 1960s, the bulk of the group broke with the CP and the SP founded its own organisation. The Women's Democratic Club thereafter became a component part of the independent, democratic left. Within it there were radical democrats, socialists and sections of the 'new left', independent of the SP and CP. Some members of the leadership were ex-members of the CP.

Chukaku's activities within this organisation began in the 1970s. Last June at the national congress of the Women's Democratic Club, Chukaku members physically halted the progress of the conference from the outset, and were ultimately excluded from the organisation. This action by the Chukaku is explained solely in terms of the fact that the Women's Democratic Club is supported by the Sanrizuka Peasants' League (majority).

Chukaku's orientation in the trade-union movement is a further illustration of their political evolution. The Chukaku believe that it is vital to defend the Sohyo against the rightward moving Zenmin Rokyo. But this is only a verbal commitment, and in practice their members do not actively participate in building an independent left current in the trade-union movement. The main stay of their local trade-union support is in the Chiba section of the train drivers' union — Doro. [This section eventually split from the national union.] Chiba is the region that covers Narita airport and the village of Sanrizuka. The Chiba train drivers' union organises more than a thousand members. Chukaku have not, however, been involved in any trade-union opposition at a national level or in the framework of the regional unions.

The Chukaku are preparing in fact for a fundamental compromise in the trade-union movement. That is why they attack the independent left currents, and why they label as 'provocateurs' both

those unions set up by our members who were expelled from Sohyo in the telegraph and telephones industry and on the railways and other small unions.

Finally in the Movement for the Liberation of the Buraku (8), which is led by neo-reformists and social democrats, the Chukaku attack the left current that is emerging within this movement rather than any other.

The Chukaku's political direction is therefore extremely sectarian. At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, we had formed a bloc with Chukaku. We broke off relations with them publicly in 1972 when they had already begun an internecine war with Kakumaru. We were opposed in principle to any use of physical aggression within the far left and we could not therefore maintain relations with the Chukaku. From 1972 to 1976 Chukaku was a prisoner of its 'war' with Kakumaru, and they had no other systematic political activity.

In 1977, when the number of physical confrontations declined, Chukaku took up their intervention in the mass movement again. The key axis of this was the mobilisation in Sanrizuka, and they started to politically oppose our organisation in this field. Meanwhile, although in a less intense fashion, they continued to pursue their violent internecine wars in this period. Last year they found themselves in a political minority in Sanrizuka. (9) They therefore provoked a minority split from the Peasants' League, denouncing the League majority as 'capitulators' and us as 'counter-revolutionary'.

In January 1984, we suffered the first wave of nocturnal attacks, with the Chukaku breaking people's legs while they were in bed.

In July, came the second wave. It hit us very badly. One of our members had to have his leg amputated, whilst the other will probably be permanently paralysed. It was at this time that the majority of the legal group that had defended the Chukaku left them, and also the time when they were expelled from the Women's Democratic Club.

1. In 1960 there was no Japanese section of the Fourth International but two recognised sympathising groups — the RCL and the Internationalist Communist Party. The two groups supported the FI unification in 1963 and they united in 1965 to form the Japanese section.

2. Sohyo is Japan's major national trade-union confederation in the public and private sector. Its majority current is the SP and the CP is the minority current. There are two other national trade-union federations — Domei and Chiritsu-Roren. Domei is the trade-union base of the Democratic Socialist Party of the right-wing social democracy. Chiritsu-Roren is the federation of unions in the private sector.

3. Socialist Youth is the SP's youth organisation. Liberation was established inside Socialist Youth in the 1960s. It has a self-styled Luxemburgist stance. The group split from Socialist Youth at the end of the 1960s.

4. See *International Viewpoint*, No 7, May 24, 1982.

5. See IV, No 49, March 26, 1984.

6. The Japanese Communist Party supported Peking against Moscow at the time of the Sino-Soviet split at the beginning of the 1960s

and then broke with Peking at the time of the cultural revolution in the second half of the 1960s. Since then the Japanese CP has re-established somewhat distant relations with the Soviet bloc.

When these splits took place, pro-Soviet stalinists and pro-Chinese members went to the Socialist Party, the main organisation of the Japanese left. The SP traditionally organised several different currents such as the Kyokai faction (sometimes called Kautskyist) and the current for 'structural reforms' which was influenced by the positions of the Italian communists in the 1960s.

7. See IV, No 62, October 29, 1984.

8. The Burakumin are an oppressed people in Japan. On the racial, cultural, religious and linguistic level they do not differentiate themselves from the majority population. But, in the past, they specialised in the preparation of butcher's meat, in the slaughtering of animals for meat and in treating animal skins, all work which is looked down on within Buddhism. The Burakumin are still today subjected to discrimination in several areas like employment, marriage, access to education.

9. See IV, No 49, March 26, 1984.

The Chukaku's 'guerrilla struggle' against our supporters is under the command of the 'Revolutionary Army', their secret command structure. We believe, but we are not certain, that there were some internal disagreements about this last turn. But it appears that their 'Revolutionary Army' has seized control of the national leadership of the organisation.

A political struggle must have taken place within the national leadership of Chukaku between the open wing involved in mass work and the underground wing. But the latter group seems to have carried the day, judging by the very serious attacks carried out last July. Unfortunately, we will have to prepare ourselves for further physical attacks on our members.

Q. What has become of the other far-left organisations in Japan?

A. Along with the Chukaku, the most important of the organisations is the Kakumaru. Since the beginning of the 1970s, the Kakumaru have become the left wing of Japanese social democracy and of the reformist apparatus of the trade-union movement. They control the 40,000-strong national union of train drivers, Doro. The Doro leadership decided to cooperate with measures for rationalisation in this sector, supposedly 'in order to defend jobs'. For this they are ready to surrender certain rights gained in previous struggles by railway workers.

In following this path, the Kakumaru is in the 'Mindo' (10) tradition of the Sohyo bureaucracy. Members of Kakumaru in Doro have joined the Socialist Party. In Sendai, an important urban centre in the northeast of the country, members of that union who were fighting against government plans for rationalisation were expelled by the leadership and forced to set up their own union.

Another motive for expulsion is the support given by worker militants of our organisation to the Sanrizuka struggle, which the Kakumaru and the leadership of Doro did not support. The attitude toward Sanrizuka was the main source of conflict, especially in 1979, within the train-drivers' union, between the Kakumaru, who controlled the national leadership and the Chukaku, who form a majority in Chiba, where Narita airport is.

The Kakumaru decided to stick with the Sohyo leadership as a means of surviving the 'difficult' period that the trade-union movement was going through.

The situation of the Japanese far left is not brilliant. Our organisation is smaller than the Chukaku and the Kakumaru. There are other far-left organisations, but they are smaller than us.

Q. How do you see the situation in the trade-union movement developing?

A. The Communist Party has never formally recognised Sohyo as the only central union federation of the workers' movement. More than ten years ago, the CP, whilst remaining in Sohyo, founded



Confrontation at Narita airport, March, 1978

a United Trade-Union Coordinating Conference (Toitsu Roso Kon). Four national unions in the health, transport (lorry drivers), building workers' and state employees' sectors were members of this one federation. Local branches of other Sohyo unions or of the area structures also participated in Toitsu Roso Con, which according to its supporters had over one million members.

Within the framework of the right-wing fusion of the unions, there is a dual process going on. It combines a rejection by Zenmin Rokyo of the unions supporting the Communist Party in response to a more and more sectarian stance by the CP itself. It must be noted that those unions that support the CP, support it actively on the political terrain — during elections for example — but as far as trade-union action is concerned, the unions led by the CP are usually passive, and in many cases even more passive than other unions in relation to strikes, etc.

The CP is also strong in the teachers' union, among municipal workers and on the railways. These three national unions are key to ensuring the Socialist Party's majority in Sohyo, and they were traditionally led by the social democratic left (the Kyokai faction). But they have found themselves on the defensive when confronted with measures for increased productivity and reorganisation adopted by the government.

Q. And what do you think of the position of the trade-union left, and especially Rodo Joho, the class-struggle current?

A. The position of Rodo Joho today is confused. (11) This current, which our trade-union militants participate in, fought hard in 1981 and 1982 against the right-wing fusion of the trade-union movement. But they could not prevent the fusion that put the workers' movement under the control of an extremely right-wing bureaucracy. This threatened the unity and effective operation of Rodo Joho.

The confused nature of the situation came out in several different ways. For example, over the Sanrizuka peasants' struggle and the split in the Peasants' League, Rodo Joho did not find it easy to adopt a clear position. Regarding the physical attacks on our members by Chukaku, Rodo Joho obviously condemned such criminal activity but not, in our view, with sufficient force.

Political debates have also had a destabilising effect on Rodo Joho. The main issue was whether to construct a workers' party jointly between this current and other far-left organisations. In 1982 and 1983, a discussion also took place on the possibilities of differences developing within the Sohyo bureaucracy and within the Socialist Party. In our opinion, some members of Rodo Joho overestimated the possibility of such a differentiation.

The debate is continuing now around the possibility of differentiations occurring within the CP and the organisations that they lead, such as the peace movement, Gensuikyo. There are certain objective factors which help to encourage such expectations. A split did develop between the CP and a radical current in the lorry drivers' union, which is traditionally led by the Communist Party. But we are afraid that such examples are not grounds for great optimism.

On the perspectives for radicalisation within the reformist organisations: Since its creation in 1977 and up until 1982, Rodo Joho, which organises several very good trade-union cadres, has played a very positive role in uniting a class-struggle current. But the overall situation has changed a lot in the last few years and Rodo Joho has not yet found a place for itself. Of course, we have some respon-

10. Mindo is the dominant force in the Sohyo trade-union apparatus, consisting of SP members.

11. Rodo Joho (Workers Information) is the name of a periodical which puts forward the positions of a current of the trade-union left.

sibility in this situation. But our forces are limited, and we are mainly implanted in the Sendai region, in the northeast. We have some problems in working out a concrete orientation for our intervention.

It will not be easy to overcome the differences which have emerged within Rodo Joho, or to resolve the problems we are confronted with and to consolidate a united leadership. It will require a united leadership. It will require time. The situation of Rodo Joho is a reflection, in its own way, of the weakness of the trade-union left as a whole in confronting the right-wing bureaucracy's offensive.

Q. What are the perspectives for intervention today for the Revolutionary Communist League?

A. We are fighting against the stream. This struggle, in the context of the drift to the right on the political terrain, began with the 1977-1978 campaign in Sanrizuka against the opening of the Narita airport. The struggle of the Sanrizuka peasants constituted a radical, left and unitary pole of opposition. We were wholeheartedly involved in this, along with other currents and groups. It culminated in the occupation of the control tower on March 26, 1978.

As a result, we became the targets of severe repression. One hundred and fifty of our members were jailed, in many cases for two to three years. Some are still in prison today, having been given sentences of six to ten years imprisonment. A sort of national bloc against the March 26, 1978 demonstration was formed involving the Kakumaru, the SP, the CP and right through to the government's party. At this time a number of our members were expelled from the Sohyo unions, for example, in telegraphs and telephones, where the trade-union apparatus is the most right-wing of all the public sector unions.

In 1981, those who had been expelled along with those who supported them formed a small independent union. The same thing was done on the railways in March 1984 by expelled militants and their supporters.

The construction of these small independent unions is an expression, in some ways, of the state of the Sohyo bureaucracy and the degree of demoralisation of the mass of workers. Several small independent unions also exist in the private sector and we are working towards coordination.

Our orientation at the base is to aid in the construction of a current pledged to fight against Japanese and international imperialism — a current that solidarises with the struggle of the peasants and workers in East Asia and which is involved in the fight against the process of capitalist rationalisation of the Japanese economy. At the moment, the forces committed to such goals are very small.

We hope to be able to fight for this perspective within the structures of the

Sohyo and the Zenmin Rokyo unions. But owing to the repression introduced by the union bureaucracy we are forced to work in very difficult conditions. All class-struggle tendencies within the unions face the threat of expulsion, as in the case of groups of militants in telegraphs and telephones and on the railways.

Our general orientation is to try to take up two central tasks in a combined way. To create a class-struggle tendency within the large unions and to collaborate with the small radical independent unions. But we have to work out a medium-term perspective. The general political situation in Japan is very difficult. The role of the revolutionary organisation is, therefore, all the more important when there is so little to expect in terms of the spontaneous movement of workers in the near future. In order to resist the pressures there has to be a solid political foundation.

The trade-union left used to be accustomed to working within the left reformist trade unions. It was a framework for action within which the left currents and the combativity of the masses could find expression. The union structures were sensitised to pressure from the rank and file, and there was a certain dialectic between mass activity and the left reformist union structures.

The far left found here a milieu inclined toward action. But today this has disappeared. We were a component part of this left within this youth and working-class movement. We were able to develop activity within the framework of the rise in the struggles of the youth, students and workers at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. But this radicalisation, this new combativity, remained within a reformist framework, imprisoned within a reformist perspective in relation to the government question, in relation to parliament and to economic development.

When the economic recession came, accompanied with the betrayal of the reformist leaderships, the workers did not know how to respond. There was an inevitable decline in spontaneous activity, and the reformist dynamic of the mobilisation ended. In this situation we tried to maintain our activity within Sohyo, but we have been threatened for several years now with expulsion.

The general political situation has therefore changed a great deal, as compared to how it was in the 1960s and 1970s. All the forces on the left of the workers' movement have to reevaluate their perspectives as a result. How should

we resist, and what new orientation can we draw up? That is what we are discussing in the organisation at the moment. We must go through a period of political reorganisation.

In a new context the struggle which is unfolding at Sanrizuka against the construction of a second runway at Narita Airport is, in our opinion, taking on a central importance on the national level. The forces of the left in the workers' movement should rally behind this struggle. It is effectively the only struggle that actually directly challenges the government and also has a national significance.

Q. At what stage is the antinuclear movement against US missiles in Japan?

A. The Communist Party is the most influential group in the antinuclear movement and the one against American Tomahawk missiles. It is oriented towards the struggle for a neutral and pacifist Japan. The CP is very Eurocommunist, but Japanese-style of course. The CP campaign does not have a real anti-imperialist aspect to it. This fits in with their parliamentarist orientation and their refusal to confront the government and the state directly. It is strictly a legalist campaign.

The 1981 mobilisations, which were led by Sohyo were huge. There were hundreds of thousands of demonstrators, including about 300,000 in Tokyo, but without a clearly defined class character.

The SP's drift to the right this year meant that Sohyo did nothing to confront the issue of the Tomahawk missiles. There were, certainly, some independent mobilisations against Tomahawk, but with very little participation of organised sections of the workers' movement. It was the intellectuals and the radical peace activists who got these actions going. The dominant character of these demonstrations was rather like that of the 'Greens' ecology movement, with support from civil rights groups, community organisations and peace activists. But the antinuclear movement has shown a lack of unity in the face of important challenges like the visit in September of the South Korean president, Chun Doo Hwan. This is to mark the culmination of a process of normalisation between Japan (an old colonial power) and the South Korean regime, a process which formally began in 1965.

We are participating in the antinuclear and anti-Tomahawk movement with certain key objectives. Firstly, to develop an anti-imperialist dimension, and then to rebuild an anti-imperialist current within the workers' movement itself. Only such a current will be able to rally to the support of the struggles of the workers and peasants in the Philippines, the struggles unfolding in South Korea or to the Thai workers, who are going through a very difficult time.



The military returns to the wings

The victory of the bourgeois Colorado Party in the November 24 general elections, after more than ten years of military dictatorship, gave rise to a cacaphony of interpretations, in which at times there was a perceptible note of disillusionment. Some saw in this victory the proof that, basically, the Uruguayan people are more moderate and conservative than it seemed at the time of the street demonstrations and actions. Others offered a more banal explanation, referring to the personal charisma of Julio Sanguinetti, the Colorado leader who was elected president of the country with 38% of the vote, as against 33% for the candidate of the other bourgeois party, the National, or Blanco Party.

The election results pose two fundamental questions: Why did the Colorados win? Was the campaign of the left, grouped in the Frente Amplio, a correct and effective one from the standpoint of the interests of the masses?

These two questions deserve more serious answers than the sort of superficialities that have been bandied about because they concern not only the past, that is, what happened in the elections, but also the future, that is, what will happen around the formation of the government in March? The second question is all the more important because the new president has made calls for the formation of a "broad government of national understanding."

Daniel JEBRAC

With the wearing out of the military dictatorship, three different perspectives were present in the November 1984 elections. The first was that of the military itself, the institutionalization of the dictatorship that was already codified in the 1980 draft constitution, and rejected in a plebiscite in a vote that, in fact, dealt the military its first defeat.

The second perspective was that of the traditional bourgeois parties, the Colorados and the Blancos, who wanted to replace a worn out and discredited military dictatorship with an authoritarian parliamentary regime, but without making any radical break in the continuity of the repressive institutions and the special powers laws.

The third road was that of intransigent struggle for democratic demands, focused around the call for free elections without any restrictions, exiles, political prisoners, and without anyone being deprived of his or her political rights. (1)

The negotiations between the military and the traditional parties had failed in 1983, but in 1984 an agreement was reached. Facing the rise and radicalization of the mass movement, the military resigned themselves to accepting the scheme of the traditional parties as the lesser evil. It called for a withdrawal of the army to its barracks and a gradual change in the dictatorship. The aim was to head off a social explosion and a real "democratic opening," with a repressive regime locked in confronta-

tion with the mobilized masses. This was the meaning of the so-called Naval Club accords, which set the rules for the elections in August 1984.

Up to the start of 1984, the Blanco Party's scheme coincided essentially with that of the Colorado Party. The nationalist "left turn" reflected by the Blancos' refusal to sign the Naval Club accords was in fact designed to achieve a better division of labor within the bourgeoisie itself on the eve of the elections. It was also aimed at challenging the popular movement's leadership of the antidictatorial struggle so as to better steal the prestige of the struggle later on.

Opposition bourgeoisie takes initiative

More fundamentally, the broad antidictatorial united front that had taken form over 1983 began to divide as a class pole emerged more and more clearly within it. This was reflected in the rally of November 1983 and the general strike of January 18, 1984, organized by the Interunion Workers Plenum (PIT), and in the 1984 May Day demonstration, at which the representatives of the bourgeois parties were excluded from the official rostrum.

After that, the opposition bourgeoisie pulled out all the stops to build up a bogey of civil war in order to make its proposal for transition to a civilian regime seem the only realistic alternative. Nonetheless, the real alternative was not between a negotiated realistic

transition and chaos. It was rather between the perspective of a controlled transfer of powers with truncated liberties, on the one hand, and a real democratic break from the dictatorship, based on mobilization of the masses, on the other.

This is why the Naval Club accords, which eliminated the second alternative, are the key for understanding the election results. For all practical purposes, these agreements amounted to accepting the Colorados' views and their project. That is, they had the following effects.

— They held back social polarization and radicalization.

— They created a division in the antidictatorial front, with the Blanco Party refusing to sign them and a significant part of the Frente Amplio rejecting them.

— They modified the relationship of forces in favor of the bourgeois and moderate elements.

The Naval Club accords were complemented by the expectations created around the National Programmatic Coordination (CONAPRO), which was supposed to carry the political accord into the social sphere. In this way, the fight for immediate economic demands was sacrificed to the vicissitudes of this sort of summit negotiations. Moreover, in order to eliminate any element that might create problems in the electoral period, the congress of the PIT, initially scheduled for September, was postponed until after the elections.

This whole series of accords and the logic it created, thus, swelled the sails of the Colorados. Since their project began to be put into practice before the elections, it seemed logical that they would be the best able to carry it through.

On the other hand, over and above the intricacies of a particularly tricky and complicated electoral system, the results revealed some interesting facts that were overshadowed by the Sanguinetti victory. For example, the combined vote of the Frente Amplio and the Blanco Party majority, both of which are favorable to a general amnesty and to reestablishment of unrestricted democratic rights, was higher than that for the Colorado Party.

This fact alone proves that there are still possibilities for mobilizing the masses behind radical democratic demands, which cannot be won through elections alone.

What is more, the Colorado Party has only 13 seats in the Senate, as against 17 for the Frente Amplio and the Blanco Party. In the Chamber of Deputies, the Colorado Party has 41 seats, the Blancos 35 and the Frente Amplio 22. (2)

The November 24 elections nonetheless marked an important turn in the

1. See *International Viewpoint*, December 10, 1984.

2. *Weekly Report, Latin American Newsletters*, London, December 7, 1984.

situation and the opening of a new era. The dictatorship is withdrawing from the stage, while an important part of its legacy remains in place — the repressive forces and restrictive legislation. However, there is no simple continuity of the old situation but a real change, which is above all the result of the mass mobilization.

The element of continuity lies essentially in the fact that this government, like the previous one, is still supported by imperialist finance capital and its local allies. Sanguinetti has gotten a red-carpet reception from the Association of Banks, and his government will accept the demands of the IMF tamely enough.

So, the masses have to expect that the new government will try to impose anti-labor schemes and they have to prepare to defend the people's demands against this government. Such a perspective thus, from the standpoint of defending the interests of the masses of workers and the poor, excludes any possibility of critical support for the government and still more any coalition with the Colorado majority in a government of national unity.

For his part, Sanguinetti has been clear. As soon as he was elected, he began raising the perspective of a national unity coalition to consolidate the reconquest of democracy. For such unity, he

proposed as the minimum condition the implementation of essential financial measures, initiatives to reactivate the economy, and measures to assure the regular functioning of the institutions.

In an interview published in the December 18 issue of *l'Unita*, the Italian Communist Party daily, Sanguinetti clearly dotted the "i's" on the three crucial questions of an amnesty, economic measures and relations with the armed forces.

On amnesty, he said: "We have said that Uruguay should undertake a program of national pacification, which involves an amnesty law. This amnesty should apply to all those imprisoned since 1973 for purely political reasons....Moreover, all the exiles should be able to return to the country in security and with understanding. But in my opinion an amnesty cannot include those who belonged to guerrilla organizations and tried to destroy democratic institutions by force and violence before 1973, at least not those who were involved in shedding blood. For such people, we might consider an act of generosity by the society that could lead to pardon, but not a clearing of their records."

With regard to the economic measures to be taken by the future civilian government, Sanguinetti excluded any possibility of refusing to pay the foreign debt

and even the idea of a moratorium on payments. He also opposed measures that would violate the prerogatives of private property. He said quite clearly: "As for the foreign debt, we can neither disregard it nor disavow it."

Finally, on relations with the armed forces, Sanguinetti adopted a technocratic language, stating: "We must seek a qualitative and quantitative reform of the armed forces. In recent years they have increased from 35,000 to 68,000 men. This sort of growth cannot be undone by the stroke of a pen, without throwing 30,000 youth who are today in uniform on the streets as unemployed....We have to take account of this and reestablish a mechanism for subordinating the military structure to the political authority."

The clarity of this scheme leaves little room for the Blanco Party or the Frente Amplio to enter a government of national unity, whatever may be the desires of some of the leaders of these two formations. Sanguinetti has understood this, and in fact envisages the formation of an all-Colorado government. Alongside this, is to be set up an organ for ongoing Social Coordination, through which "national unity" will be implemented.

Toward a test of strength

The aim of such a body would be to continue to neutralize the mass movement, as the National Programmatic Coordination did before the elections.

In this situation, the danger that hangs over the Frente Amplio is that it may slide from electoralist illusions into parliamentary cretinism. Nonetheless, the vote it received in the elections represents a consolidation and improvement of the score it achieved in 1971, before the 1973 military coup d'etat. The Frente Amplio's vote went from 304,000 in 1971 to 410,000. In Montevideo alone [nearly half the population of under 3 million lives in the capital], the Frente Amplio got almost as many votes as it did in the entire country in 1971, and its vote in the provinces doubled.

This success gave the coup de grace to the bourgeois two-party system, in a context where the Colorado Party is far from having achieved a clear mandate and the economic crisis keeps the possibility of a test of strength among social forces on the agenda.

The first acute question left unresolved by the elections is that of an amnesty and democratic freedoms. The demonstration of 200,000 persons on December 24 to demand total amnesty illustrates the vitality of this sort of mobilization for democratic demands. It indicates that the struggle may resume its course after the halt imposed by the Naval Club accords, and that it may wrest from the incoming government what the new authorities are by no means inclined to grant of their own accord.



Demonstration for amnesty in Uruguay (DR)

A new phase of struggle

The following statement was issued November 28, 1984, by the *Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (PST — Socialist Workers Party)* of Uruguay, which is in solidarity with the Fourth International.

On November 25, after thirteen long years, national elections were held. Given the results, it would be easy to say that the election reflected only the conservatism of the Uruguayan people, that calling elections was only a maneuver by the dictatorship and the bourgeoisie, a hook that the masses swallowed without difficulty, and that nothing has changed in the country.

It would be good, however, to begin by clarifying one thing: Those of us who have participated in the people's struggle throughout this dark decade know that the military were not so "tired" of ruling that they decided on their own to withdraw. They are retiring because the workers and the people have made this country ungovernable for the dictatorship. These elections represent the regaining of a right for the society as a whole thanks to the mobilization of the workers' and people's movement. They were not a gift from the dictatorship.

Nonetheless, when November 25 arrived, there were still persons banned from participating in public life, political prisoners, exiles, and there was the shameful trial against Ferreira Aldunate. (1) We got elections that because of their restrictive form excluded a large part of the people's demands. It cannot be denied that the electoral way out of the dictatorship has come *before* an opening to democracy, which would involve defeating military authoritarianism. This is why we reject any overoptimistic assessment of the elections, which would lead to disarming ourselves. This is why we say categorically that the struggle for democracy is not over.

It would be wrong to conclude that the great majority of those who voted for Sanguinetti did so because they wanted to avoid any break in the continuity of the political system. It would also be wrong to think that the negative effects of the Naval Club accords and Social Coordination on the masses were of little import.

The regime had its back to the wall (which does not mean that it was about to fall any day). Its authoritarian model was worn out, having been rejected by nearly the entire population. Without any doubt, the Naval Club accords enabled it to avoid a situation where there was a clear alternative between the dictatorship and the people's movement, between authoritarianism and democracy. But these accords did more. Not only did they divide the opposition front and the most consistent sectors in the fight against the dictatorship but they also opened up the way for the more regressive strategy, which sought continually to achieve an "honorable" settlement with the regime, and attempted by every means possible to sabotage the mass mobilization.

These accords reinforced the "gradualist" position, the proposal for "peaceful transition without trauma." The acceptance of this deal made the Colorado Party appear to public opinion as a responsible and coherent party, as the guarantor of the withdrawal of the military. In this way, a good part of what was won in the day-to-day struggle was lost at the negotiating table.

Social Coordination was the extension to the social sphere of what the Naval Club accords attempted on the public level. The meetings of the National Programmatic Coordination (CONAPRO) have become the major occasions of national life. They continued, building up increased expectations. Statements proliferated, fostering illusions. However, on the decisive questions there was no agreement. No social pact was concluded, not because of any unwillingness on the part of the Colorados and the bosses but simply because it was impossible to reconcile the interests of the exploiters and the exploited....

In fact, it is impossible to reconcile the democratic aspirations of the people and the interests of those who opposed a

general, unrestricted amnesty, and who have the affrontery to go so far as to say that they are ready to use the repressive machinery contained in Decree 19! [This is the cornerstone of the dictatorship's repressive legislation]

The election result must not lead us to a defeatist position underestimating the gains made up until now. A new period is opening for the workers' and people's struggle. And it must not be forgotten that the majority of the people have voted against authoritarianism, for democracy without tutelage, for economic and social changes. But we cannot either ignore the fact that the Colorado victory had a major negative impact, favoring social demobilization and promoting a confrontation between the most dynamic political forces in the opposition to the military regime that is as absurd as it is sterile. This is owing in the first instance to the Naval Club accords and national coordination. It is on the basis of this reality that all supporters of the Frente Amplio have to assume their part of the responsibility in the historic events we are living through.

It would be as wrong as it would be dangerous to try to evaluate the elections simply on the basis of the numerical scores. No one can deny that the Frente Amplio made important electoral gains, essentially in the working-class and poor areas. No one can forget the years of persecution, torture and prison that the Frente Amplio's adherents suffered, nor the thousands of its supporters and leaders who remain banned from political life or in exile. We cannot forget the virulent anti-Communist campaign against the Front and the pressures for voting "realistically." These elements have to be taken into consideration in an analysis, but they are not justifications. At the same time, we have to consider the overall vote for the Front and not just that for each of its components. To be sure, the meaning of the vote for the different components is not the same. Who can deny that the tens of thousands of votes for the Independent Democratic Left (IDI) gave support to a political project, for the aim of forming a party for socialist revolution, and weighed against the Naval Club accords? But while this is important, it is not yet the essential thing.

Moreover, there is something still more important. The results of the 1971 elections, as well as those of November 25, 1984, the vitality of the Frente Amplio as an instrument of working-class and popular unity and as an expression of the aspirations for radical change...unequivocally confirmed the fact that the breakdown of the bourgeois two-party system in this country is a definitive historical reality.

Thus, two roads are opening up now. Either the Frente Amplio, together with the social movements, will take the leadership of the workers' and people's struggle on the basis of total political independence from the traditional political parties and the new government, or it will become only an additional opposition party, trapped in the framework of bourgeois parliamentarism. It needs a political line designed fundamentally to serve the interests of the exploited, which excludes collaboration with, or participation in, the pro-imperialist capitalist government of the Colorado Party.

This is why it is becoming urgent to hold a congress of the base committees of the Front that would be democratic and sovereign. This is needed not only to resolve the problem of structures and of representativity in the Front leadership and to make the most accurate assessment possible. The essential thing lies elsewhere. It is the role of the Front in the workers' and people's struggle, in the fight for democratic demands, for a general and unrestricted amnesty, for the dismantling of the repressive apparatus, the fight for higher wages and a break with the IMF, the fight against the education law [which abolishes the autonomy of the high schools and universities vis-a-vis the government] and for the immediate reinstatement of all workers fired or demoted by way of reprisals. Of particular importance, moreover, is the fight for the abrogation of Decree No. 19, along with all the other repressive decrees of the dictatorship. ■

1. The leader of the Blanco Party, who remains banned from political life. In the period leading up to the elections, the military not only refused to lift the proscription against him but subjected him to new persecution. IV.

Stalinism's long war against an 87-year-old revolutionary

A founder of the Bulgarian Communist Party and of the Trotskyist opposition in that country, Dimitar Gatchev is now 87 years old and has spent 23 years in prison. Today, once again, he is being subjected to persecution in his country.

Cyril SMUGA

Oppositionist? The Bulgarian Stalinists have banned this word from their vocabulary. "Persons who have documents or express views not in conformity with those of the authorities are subject to penalties of up to five years in prison for 'agitation and propaganda hostile to the state,'" the 1984 report of Amnesty International says. Dissidents are pursued beyond the borders of the country. In this respect, the Bulgarian secret police has continued the notorious tradition of the Stalinist GPU.

If because of historical chance someone sentenced to 15 years in prison camps, which measure up in every respect to their Soviet models, finally gets out of them, that does not mean that that person will be forgotten. And if the circumstances are not favorable for the police persecuting such a person by "legal" means, they will do it by sending gangs of thugs to "work him over" and pillage his apartment. In short, they will use all the means of intimidation that a state apparatus has for undercover operations.

If the person attacked complains to the police, demands that they do their duty with respect to the hooligans, they laugh in his face, they advise him to "think it over," they intimidate in a "chummy" way that everything might work itself out, that he might get an apartment in a more secure neighborhood, to say nothing of the honors he might be entitled to, on just one condition — that

he recant, publicly condemn the political ideas he has fought for his entire life.

He refuses, and the rancor of the apparatchiks against him is redoubled, the persecution grows worse. A petty bureaucrat is on the lookout his entire life for the means that will enable him to climb to a higher rank, he casts an avid eye at the automobile in which his chief parades, at the villa of a colleague who has made it, at the color TV set in a neighbor's home. Could such a product of the Bulgarian state apparatus even try to understand why someone would refuse to reach out to grasp the honors for which he has longed his entire life?

No! That is why Bulgarian cops feel directly concerned by the fate of the oppositionist. They are even ready to outdo themselves to break such a person. In fact, an oppositionist is a danger to the regime, not just because of what he or she might write or say but above all because of the example of human integrity such a person gives.

The existence of such an oppositionist is a grain of sand in the all-powerful police machine of the state. His or her integrity points up the cupidity of all the small and great dignitaries of the regime. The name of such a person is Dimitar Gatchev.

Born in 1897, Dimitar Gatchev became a doctor and a lawyer and joined the Socialist Party of Bulgaria at a young age. Later he participated in founding the Communist Party, the Bulgarian section of the Communist International.

Sent to Germany by the International, he helped the German section build its military apparatus. After returning to Bulgaria, he became part of the leadership of the CP's military apparatus and took part in the insurrection of September 1923.

Already in 1923, Gatchev solidarized with the positions of the left opposition in the Bolshevik Party. In April 1925, he was arrested, along with hundreds of CP activists, following a series of bombings that the Bulgarian police attributed to the Communists. Dimitar Gatchev was condemned to death. But he was not to be executed.

The "reactionary Bulgarian butchers," as the working-class press throughout the world then called them, measured the effect of the first executions and then commuted the death sentences of those who were not in the first lot shipped to the executioners to prison sentences.

In prison (where he would remain until 1932), Gatchev took an active part in the debates that were rocking the CP. These discussions were provoked both by the errors the party had made in Bulgaria (1) and by the reverberations of the differences that were rending the Russian party. It was in Plovdiv fortress that Gatchev formed the first Bulgarian Trotskyist group, which published the bulletin *Liberation*.

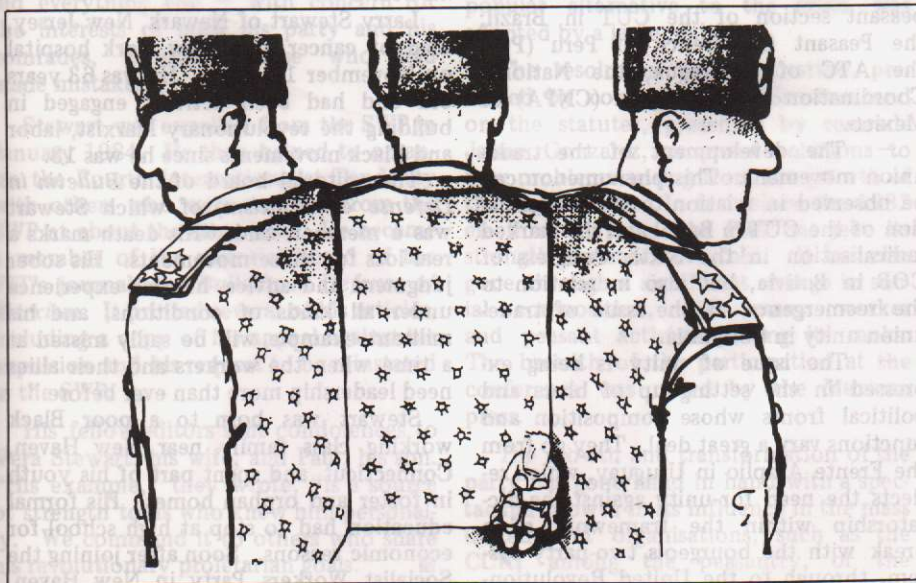
From this group arose in 1945, the Internationalist Communist Party, which asked for recognition as the Bulgarian section of the Fourth International. In a united front with the anarchists and the left peasant party, the Internationalist Communist Party took part in the struggle to defend democratic rights. At the time, Gatchev was one of the leaders of the League to Defend Human and Civil Rights and led the Plovdiv section of this organization.

Gatchev was the political secretary of the International Communist Party. But the activity of this party, as well as that of other revolutionary currents, such as the anarchists, was intolerable for the Stalinist regime that was stabilizing itself in Bulgaria. In particular, the Trotskyists and anarchists were beginning to gain influence in some factories and proving capable of offering an initial element of leadership for workers' strikes.

In May, June and July, the police struck. The Internationalist Communist Party was broken up, its activists sentenced to long terms in prison. Dimitar Gatchev was sentenced to life in prison. He got out only in 1962, after the Twenty-Second Congress of the Soviet CP. In the camps, his conduct was exemplary, and he always refused to make the slightest concession to the Stalinists.

Now the Bulgarian bureaucrats are trying once again to break this exemplary militant.

1. The failure of the Bulgarian insurrection was a major issue in the early Communist International and the debate around this one of the elements in the formation of the Left Opposition. Thus, there has been a longer tradition of Trotskyist work in Bulgaria than most other East European countries.





AROUND THE WORLD



Latin American political bureaus of the Fourth International meet

The second meeting of the political bureaus of the Latin American sections of the Fourth International took place in October, 1984. Delegates from sections or sympathising groups in Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Uruguay, Brazil, Chile and the Antilles participated, as well as fraternal organisations from other countries.

As a working meeting it was able to take up the following issues and thrash them out:

— The popular resistance to austerity and to the demands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), mainly with regard to the experiences of the 'paro civico' (community strikes) in Mexico and the social explosion in the Dominican Republic in April 1984.

— The struggle for the overthrow of the dictatorships and the problems posed by the processes of 'democratic openings'. In this framework the discussions mainly went over the experiences of Chile, Paraguay, Brazil and Uruguay.

— The recomposition of the workers' movement: the evolution of the Workers Party and the consolidation of the Workers Union (CUT) in Brazil; the Broad Front (Frente Amplio) and the Independent Democratic Left (IDI) in Uruguay; the United Left (IU) and the formation of the Mariateguista Unity Party in Peru; the lessons of the Sixth Congress of the COB and the political situation in Bolivia. In addition, a discussion took place on the negotiations between the government and the guerrilla movement in Colombia.

— The agrarian question in Latin America: agrarian policies, reforms and the peasant movements were discussed here.

— The dynamic of the Central American revolution and the solidarity initiatives in Central America and the Caribbean.

The discussions held at this second meeting, one year after the first, allowed a better assessment of the acceleration of certain processes underway in the workers' and popular movement, under the combined effects of the economic and social crisis and the impact of the Central American revolution.

In most countries, the central task that remains to be resolved is that of building a workers' movement independent of the state or of bourgeois populism both on the political terrain and on the trade-

union level. In those countries that are just emerging from many years of dictatorship, the attempts to carry through a transition to parliamentary rule on the basis of agreement with the military and under blackmail from imperialism via the IMF highlights the relevance of radical democratic and anti-imperialist demands. In this connection, the link between such democratic and anti-imperialist demands and social, economic and agrarian demands also shows up clearly.

Finally, the degree of social disintegration and the explosive situation amongst the popular masses in countries such as Bolivia and Peru and, in a different way, the Dominican Republic, pressage new tests of strength and leave no room for illusions about the democratic process lasting any length of time.

In this context and bearing in mind the experiences in Nicaragua, Salvador and Grenada, questions of unity and political pluralism are vital in the recomposition of the workers' movement and its vanguard. The development of this aspect of things in the space of one year is very noticeable. It has taken several different forms:

— The radicalisation of the peasants' movement, sometimes directly or organically linked to the workers' movement. The conference of peasant organisations which took place last November in Mexico confirms this dynamic. It was attended by several organisations including: The Independent Peasants Movement of the Dominican Republic; the peasant section of the CUT in Brazil; the Peasant Conference of Peru (PC); the ATC of Nicaragua; the National Coordination Plan of Ayala (CNPA) of Mexico.

— The development of the trade-union movement. This phenomenon can be observed in relation to the consolidation of the CUT in Brazil and the marked radicalisation in the Sixth Congress of COB in Bolivia, but also in relation to the reemergence of the issue of trade-union unity in Colombia.

— The issue of unity is being expressed in the setting up of blocs and political fronts whose composition and functions vary a great deal. They go from the Frente Amplio in Uruguay, which reflects the need for unity against the dictatorship within the framework of a break with the bourgeois two-party system, through to the United Revolution-

ary Leadership (DRU) in Bolivia, which is a partial united front of the trade-union left, and to coalitions that for all practical purposes are broad united fronts of the workers' and popular organisations, such as the United Left of Peru, the Dominican Left Front or the Democratic Popular Movement of Chile.

— Finally, organisations or regroupments like the Socialist Bloc of the Dominican Republic, the Mariateguista Party of Peru or the Democratic Independent Left, express, sometimes in a confused way, the fight for a pluralist and democratic socialist society and the need for unity among the vanguard organisations. Such a development toward unity would be impossible without taking into account the different traditions, history and origins of various components.

In relation to tasks, the meeting of the Latin American political bureaus helped to follow up and strengthen solidarity work with the revolutions in Central America and the Caribbean and to extend the distribution and use of the *Southern Cone Inprecor*, as well as to maintain and improve the framework for collaboration that has been built up over the last two years. ■

Larry Stewart - A fighter to the end

The following obituary of a veteran American Fourth Internationalist leader was written by those with whom he was most closely associated at the time of his death.

Larry Stewart of Newark, New Jersey, died of cancer at a New York hospital on November 16, 1984. He was 63 years old and had been actively engaged in building the revolutionary Marxist, labor and Black movements since he was 18.

The editorial board of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, of which Stewart was a member, said, "His death marks a real loss for those movements. His sober judgment and advice, his rich experience under all kinds of conditions, and his militant example will be sadly missed at a time when the workers and their allies need leadership more than ever before."

Stewart was born to a poor Black working class family near New Haven, Connecticut, and spent part of his youth in foster and orphan homes. His formal education had to stop at high school for economic reasons. Soon after joining the Socialist Workers Party in New Haven,

he moved to Newark because it was easier to find a factory job there. He remained in Newark for the rest of his life except during World War II, when he became a merchant seaman before being drafted into the army.

In the following years he held jobs in the steel and electrical industries and as a truck driver. Among the CIO, AFL and independent unions he belonged to were the United Steel Workers, United Electrical Workers and Teamsters. He knew what it was to be jobless for long periods and he was on strike several times.

In 1941 Stewart was a leading activist in the Newark branch of the March on Washington Movement, an all-Black group that fought against racism in industry and the armed forces. After the war he was active in the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and local committees against police brutality, and he defended the Black community against repression during the so-called Newark "riot" of 1967. He also tried to help build the National Black Independent Political Party in New Jersey when it was organized in 1981.

The SWP had high esteem for Stewart's many contributions to party-building. It valued his best proletarian traits — his steadfastness, his personification of the party's revolutionary continuity, his modesty and his sense of proportion. He was elected to his branch executive committee several times, and was a branch delegate to national conventions. He ran for Congress and other local posts on the SWP ticket and wrote for the party press when he had something to say.

The SWP national convention in 1976 elected Stewart to the four-member Control Commission, which investigates charges of violations of party discipline. The tradition in the party was that only the most responsible, fair and independent-minded members should be put on the Control Commission. He was reelected to this post in 1977 and served on it for another two years. He did this as he did everything else — with concern for the interests of both his party and his comrades, including those who had made mistakes.

Stewart was expelled from the SWP in January 1984. He then helped to organize the Fourth Internationalist Tendency with others who were expelled from the SWP at about the same time. He became a member of the editorial board of the FIT's journal, the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*. It printed several of his articles, including a copy of his appeal against his expulsion and his request to be reinstated in the SWP.

His fellow-editors sent condolences to Vera Stewart, his wife, and Paul, his son. "His example," they wrote, "is a source of strength to us who knew him personally. We commend it to others who share his revolutionary proletarian goals." ■

Mexican PRT in conference

The fourth national conference of the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), Mexican section of the Fourth International, took place in November in Mexico City. It was opened by a public meeting that brought together several thousand people under the banner of the PRT, including notably contingents of peasants, 'colonos' (shantytown dwellers) and trade unionists from all over the country.

On the platform at the inaugural meeting were several leaders of the workers' and peasants' trade unions, as well as leaders of popular movements and representatives of most of the parties of the Mexican left, including the PSUM — the Communist Party. Apart from the two spokespeople of the PRT, Edgar Sanchez and Margarito Montes, several others spoke. They included: a representative of Radio Venceremos in El Salvador; Hugo Blanco for the Peruvian section of the Fourth International; Ramon Jimenez, a leader of the Independent Peasant Movement of the Dominican Republic; and a representative of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International.

The work of the congress centred on five issues: a general political resolution; a resolution on questions of organisation and statutes; a resolution on electoral policy for 1985; a debate on Central America and finally a discussion on building the Fourth International.

The resolution on general orientation was presented by comrade Sergio Rodriguez. It dealt with the effects of the economic crisis in Mexico, the consequences of this for the populist regime of the PRI (the party of government for more than fifty years), the process underway in the trade-union and popular movements, the resistance to austerity measures and a balance sheet of the struggle for a national 'paro civico' (community strike). The resolution, which stressed the need for a democratic national and popular alternative to the crisis, was adopted by a large majority.

The resolution on organisation, presented by comrade Edgar Sanchez, and on the statutes, presented by comrade Jaime Gonzalez, proposed solutions to new problems arising from the growth of the organisation. In fact, since the 1982 election campaign, the PRT has seen its strength increase threefold. It has also gone through a significant change in social composition, with many worker and peasant activists joining its ranks. The breadth of the participation at the conference was noted by the Mexican press.

The growth and transformation of the party has gone hand in hand with a spectacular growth in its influence in the mass united-front organisations, such as the CCRI among the peasantry, or the

Popular Revolutionary Bloc (BPR) among the colonos. Its influence has also grown in the workers' movement and the women's movement. The conference reached the conclusion that it was necessary to review the criteria of membership and affiliation to the party, as well as to reorganise the structures at the base of the organisation into territorial units (based on 'zones'). The resolution and the statutes were adopted almost unanimously.

Presenting the resolution on electoral policy, comrade Ricardo Pascoe underlined the necessity to put forward an independent class alternative in 1985 in the form of an 'alliance of all the left'.

In fact the crisis has brought about a gradual but consistent disintegration of the PRI. The danger is, that in the absence of the sort of alternative which the PRT is proposing, the chief gains will be made by the main bourgeois opposition party (the Party for National Action — PAN), which is linked to imperialist interests.

At the municipal elections in the region of the Valle de Mexico, which took place the day before the conference, a left coalition, involving the PRT and the PSUM, obtained 8 per cent of the votes. The PRT, therefore, gained half a dozen seats on the municipal council. Similar agreements are being discussed in other states such as Colima and Sonora.

The PRT has shown the most determination and clarity in pursuing the goal of unity. But there are many obstacles. The electoral laws severely restrict the possibilities for forming coalitions. Thus, if two or three parties wanted to run a common slate, they could only do so by giving up their own legal status for the sake of gaining legal status for the coalition itself alone or by reorganising under the legal banner of one of the components of the coalition.

The proposal put by the PRT to the PSUM and to the Mexican Workers Party (PMT — a nationalist left grouping), as well as to the other smaller formations, goes all the way, that is towards a perspective of a coalition under a single banner. Divided and looking for an escape hatch, the PRT's allies have proposed common slates for the municipal elections and separate ones for the legislative elections.

The confidence of the PRT in their own forces and their faith in the unitary perspective represented a common thread running through the conference. The PSUM spokesperson noted this when he began his address, and all the delegates and observers stood up to shouts of 'Unity! Unity!'

Finally, the conference agenda included the election of a new Central Committee of about fifty members. ■



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