

# International VIEWPOINT

ISSUE No 77

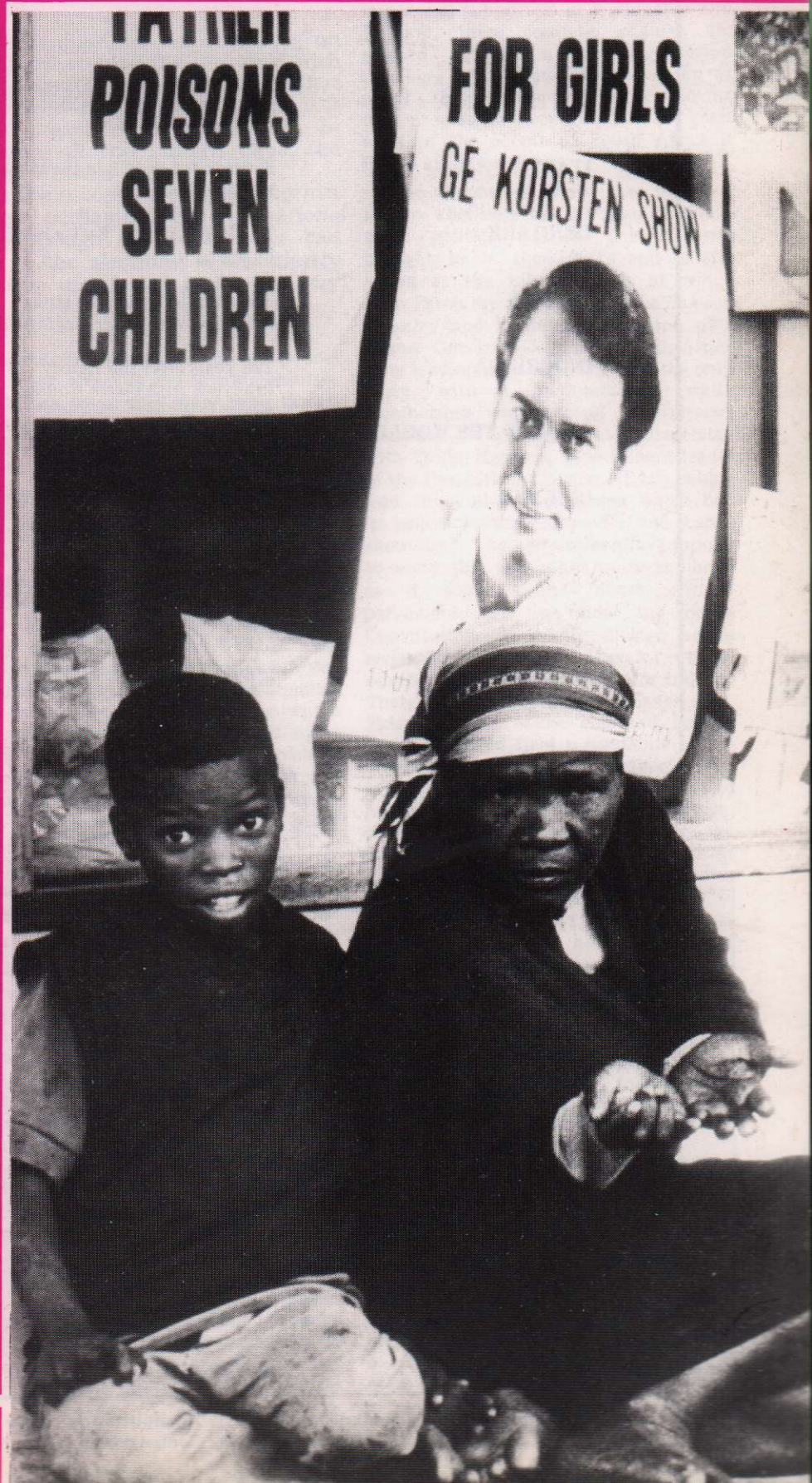
3 June 1985

**South Africa's  
crisis widens**

**Results  
in two battles**

**After the British miners  
After the Danish strikes**

**Vietnam –  
what progress  
since victory ?**



# International Viewpoint

ISSN: 0294-2925

Fortnightly review of news and analysis published under the auspices of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, in conjunction with the French language fortnightly *Inprecor*, which appears on alternate fortnights.

|                  |   |    |
|------------------|---|----|
| SOUTH AFRICA     | Government policy — the stick and the carrot<br>by <i>Ndabeni</i>         | 3  |
| ITALY            | Setback for the CP in the local elections<br>by <i>Livio Maitan</i>       | 5  |
| DENMARK          | The legacy of the 'Easter rebellion'<br>by <i>Joergen Arbo</i>            | 7  |
| BRITAIN          | The situation after the strike<br>Interview with <i>Peter Heathfield</i>  | 11 |
| INDOCHINA        | Ten years after the victory (2)<br>Interview with <i>Pierre Rousset</i>   | 14 |
| AROUND THE WORLD | El Salvador, Antigua, Ecuador, Italy, Austria, Israel,<br>Prisoners' fund | 26 |
| IRELAND          | Victory for the anti-imperialist movement<br>by <i>Gerry Foley</i>        | 28 |

News closing date 27 May 1985

## Subscribe now!

French francs preferred. Cheques to PEC. Postal transfers to PEC, CCP No 2 322 42T Paris. Bank transfers to PEC, BNP Robespierre, Account 230179/90.

Sterling: Cheques to International Viewpoint. Bank transfers to Williams & Glyn's Bank, Account 14612874, Code 16-00-58, Islington, London.

Mail all subs to: IV, 2 rue Richard Lenoir, 93108 Montreuil, France.

### SUBSCRIPTION RATES :

6 months 1 year

Surface mail all countries 120FF 200FF

|                               |     |     |  |
|-------------------------------|-----|-----|--|
| <i>Airmail</i>                |     |     |  |
| Europe, Middle East, N Africa | 135 | 245 |  |
| The Americas, Africa          | 165 | 300 |  |
| Asia                          | 185 | 340 |  |

### Exchange rates:

|     |       |         |
|-----|-------|---------|
| FF  | £     | US Doll |
| 120 | 9.50  | 16      |
| 135 | 12.50 | 19      |
| 165 | 15.00 | 22      |
| 185 | 17.50 | 25      |
| 200 | 18.00 | 31      |
| 245 | 20.00 | 37      |
| 300 | 27.50 | 42      |
| 340 | 31.20 | 47      |

## International Viewpoint

1984 collections of *International Viewpoint* are now available in limited numbers only. Please send your orders in now. The cost for each collection including surface postage is 100 French Francs. Send orders to: IV, 2 Rue Richard Lenoir, 93108, Montreuil, France. ■

### BLOCK LETTERS PLEASE

LAST NAME ..... FIRST NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... COUNTRY ..... CODE .....

IV, 2 rue Richard Lenoir, 93108  
Montreuil, France.

RENEWAL

SUBSCRIPTION

## Government policies... The stick and the carrot

The two treason trials which opened in Durban and Johannesburg on Monday, May 20 reveal the other side of the coin to the 'reforms' with which the Botha regime have been trying to demonstrate to the world that it is in the process of, slowly but surely, abandoning apartheid. Even as it 'liberalises' the constitution, the state organs of repression are in increasing evidence in the Black townships of the Eastern Cape, the Vaal triangle, the Orange Free State and the Western Cape.

The background to the treason trials is the successful campaign against the August 1984 elections to the tri-cameral parliament (See *International Viewpoint* No 74, April 22, 1985). Although the government had anticipated some apathy and resistance to the elections, it was clearly taken aback by the overwhelming rejection manifested in the derisory polls.

### NDABENI

It is axiomatic for the South African government to refuse to recognise that the masses can act spontaneously against the repression imposed on them by the apartheid regime. There must always be leaders, some hidden hand, which manipulates the innocent and ignorant people. As the cases were adjourned till July to give the defence an opportunity to study the charges against the accused, the exact terms of the indictment have not been made public. We can, however, safely assume that it will follow the line of the accusations against Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and others, when 156 persons were indicted in the notorious treason trial in Pretoria, which dragged on from 1957 till March 1961. They were charged with membership in a 'country-wide conspiracy' to overthrow the state by force and violence, inspired by 'international communism'. The evidence, assembled by the prosecution over a long period, was so flimsy that all the accused were found not guilty and discharged.

Mandela and Sisulu were, of course among those arrested in the Rivonia raid in July 1963 and sentenced to life imprisonment which they are still serving. It was only international pressure and fear of the consequences within the country — this was in the aftermath of Sharpeville — which saved them from the death penalty.

The present trial follows directly on the successful anti-election campaign. No doubt the prosecution will be able to underpin the indictment with similar accusations of conspiracy and violence. This despite the fact that all the reports of the campaign stressed its non-violent character. The only violence came from the police and the military.

Among the accused are the six people who took refuge in the British consulate in Durban when they were being threatened with arrest; Albertina Sisulu, a president of the United Democratic Front (UDF); Ismail Mohammed of the Transvaal Anti-Presidents Council Committee; and three trade union leaders, Sam Kikini, Isaac Ngcobo and Thozamill Goweto of the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU).

There are indications that things may go harshly for the accused. The judge presiding over the Durban case has warned that demonstrations which 'assume that the accused are not guilty' and which demand their release would be guilty of contempt of court. Apart from the press, the public was excluded from the first hearing and the slogan-shouting crowd outside the court buildings were brutally dispersed by baton and sjambok-wielding police.

Once again it will be necessary to rouse the international labour movement in defence of the accused.

In the meantime the Botha regime continues on its path of camouflaging repression with its snail-pace reforms. Since the Uitenhage massacre in March it has announced two measures which managed to get into the headlines. The first of these was the proposed abolition of the Mixed Marriages and Immorality Acts. These acts which were once regarded as the sacred lynch-pins to preserve the purity of the white race in South Africa, prohibited intermarriage and sexual relationships across race lines. It was, from the start, a farce. No law could effectively counter-act sexual attraction and transgression of the law was commonplace. It was, however, a policeman's charter and between 1974 and 1982 1,916 persons were prosecuted under these racist acts. But this legislation did not touch the lives

of millions of Black people living in the townships and 'homelands'. They rarely mixed socially with whites and the residential segregation imposed by the apartheid laws made even the most platonic relations difficult.

These residential laws are still in force. This means that marriages or liaisons across the race barriers will still confront the couple with the problem of where to live and which school to send their children to. To the outside world, especially to the regime's imperialist supporters in Washington and London, these cosmetic changes are grasped at like a drowning person clutching at a straw and blown up as proof that South Africa is moving in a progressive direction. For the great mass of the people of South Africa it means exactly nothing.

The second of these new 'reforms' is the abolition of the ban on interracial political parties. This act was brought in in the 1960's and chiefly aimed at the Liberal Party of which Alan Paton the author of *Cry the Beloved Country* and Patrick Duncan, son of a former Governor-General of South Africa were leading members. This was the only party with a predominantly white membership which stood for universal franchise. Duncan was closely associated with Philip Kgosana, a prominent leader of the Pan-African Congress (PAC), which led the anti-pass campaign which had its sequel in the Sharpeville and Langa shootings. The government's proposal to scrap this act is not quite as liberal as it sounds. The South African parliament, set up under the Botha Constitution, is strictly divided across racial lines — one chamber for whites, one for 'coloureds' and one for Indians. There is no proposal to change this. This means that if the 'coloured' Labour Party wants to field a candidate in the election for the white chamber or the Indian chamber, that candidate would have to be white or Indian. Similarly, if the ruling National Party or the Progressive Federal Party want to contest elections for the 'coloured' or Indian chambers, they would have to find candidates from the appropriate race groups. There is to be no mixing of parliamentarians across the race lines. Even the dining room in the white parliament is barred to members of the other chambers. The much-trumpeted reform turns out to be a miserable squeak from a tuneless penny-whistle.

But while the government plays about with its pathetic reforms, the struggle goes on in the urban townships. The funeral of Andries Raditsela, who died shortly after his release from police custody, a leader of the Chemical Workers Union and executive member of the strongest independent body of Black trade unionists, the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), was attended by over 30,000 people. In South Africa, funerals of the victims of state violence have become symbols of revolt. It was a funeral which acted

as the catalyst for police violence in Uitenhage on March 23. This time, with the trade unions involved, the police were wise enough to keep their armoured cars and water cannons on the outskirts of Tsakane during the funeral. Hardly a day goes by now without incidents of violence in the townships. These are no longer confined to the Eastern Cape. There have been clashes also on Soweto and in 'coloured' townships in the Western Cape.

Black violence is directed, not only against the police and military but increasingly against the stooges in office in the 'self-governing' authorities in the townships. It is today almost impossible to find a live mayor or serving councillor in any of the townships of the Vaal triangle. This rejection of the Black township councils was underlined in the last weeks when not a single candidate offered herself or himself for election to fill ten vacancies in the Lekoa town council. This council is the local authority for four Vaal townships, including Sebokeng and Sharpeville. The white town clerk of Lekoa blamed 'intimidation' for the failure to stand, adding that there was no point in even trying to hold the bye-elections before November as on June 16 people would be commemorating the anniversary of the student rising in Soweto in 1976 and on September 3 they would be commemorating last year's revolt against the increased rents proposed by the council. The publicity secretary of the Sharpeville Civic Association, Philip Molefe, had a more realistic appreciation of the absence of candidates which he hailed as a victory for the residents. "The Lekoa council has proved to everyone that it has failed" he said, "and nobody wants to join a failing body." He could have added that nobody was anxious for a rapid departure from this mortal coil.

The intensification of the liberation struggle in South Africa has also sharpened the rivalry between the organisations striving for leadership. This has been evident since the setting up of the National Forum Committee (NF) in March 1983 and the United Democratic Front (UDF) three months later. (1) This rivalry was aggravated during the campaign against the new constitution and the August elections. Although supporters of both organisations actively organised and participated in the campaign, the UDF publicity machine was the more effective and they hogged most of the credit. Members of the Cape Action League and Azapo, affiliates of NF, who clashed with the police during the anti-election campaign were particularly annoyed to read in the newspapers next morning or to see on the television screens that they were UDF. Newspapers actually carried photos of protestors carrying Azania and National Forum posters but bearing captions or commentaries describing them as UDF supporters.

This came to a head after the Uitenhage



South African police (DR)

massacre. The UDF took complete charge of all funeral arrangements. Azapo and NF supporters were barred from attending by youths wearing UDF T-shirts. A message of condolence from Azapo president Ishmael Mkhabela was not read out at the funeral. Bereaved families told Azapo that they had 'strict orders' not to hold discussions with any other organisation except UDF.

It would appear from available evidence that most of the provocation has come from UDF who seem determined to establish itself as the only legitimate anti-apartheid organisation in the country. There have been physical attacks, not only on Azapo but also against members of FOSATU and other unions.

At a meeting attended by several hundred workers in the Jubilee Hall in Langa township, FOSATU levelled serious charges against the UDF. FOSATU had previously approached relatives of the shooting victims to see if they required any assistance but had met with the same response as Azapo. FOSATU charged that a leading official of UDF had hoodwinked many workers about the true position at the funerals. It accused the UDF and other Black organisations in the Black community of a 'dictatorial attitude toward the workers'. Those organisations deliberately ignored the reality that the liberation struggle would be won by the working class. Violence between the two rival organisations first broke out after the visit to South Africa of Senator Edward Kennedy. The visit was broadly supported by the UDF but vociferously opposed by NF and Azapo, which succeeded in forcing Kennedy to cancel his final visit to Soweto.

While the inter-organisational rivalry may have been spontaneous in origin, there can be little doubt that government agent provocateurs are fanning the flames. Both groups have denied responsibility for anti-Azapo slogans daubed in red paint on the Regina Mundi church in Soweto as well as for inflammatory pamphlets now circulating in the townships in which they berate each

other in violent language. Leaders of both organisations have expressed their belief that some of the physical attacks on individual members of their respective organisations was probably the work of government agents.

The African National Congress (ANC), from its headquarters-in-exile in Lusaka, Zambia, has expressed its concern at this situation, calling for the 'careful preservation of unity', which, it adds, is a 'top priority'. It goes on to state 'Let us stop the enemy from exploiting the temporary problems between the UDF and Azapo ... We should not give comfort to an increasingly uncomfortable and frightened regime.'

Our watchwords, says ANC, must be 'Unity in mass action ... confront the enemy on all fronts.' The present unrest has opened the way 'for the people to seize the initiative and build their own organs of popular power which must be the only authority in the townships ...' This undoubtedly reflects the new direction which seems to be emanating from the ANC consultative conference in Lusaka, its first since 1969. The force of events in South Africa has raised many doubts within the ranks of ANC. The growth of the trade union movement has led to a demand for a closer definition of the primary position of the working class within the liberation struggle than the vague reference to its 'leading role' as defined by the Morogoro consultative conference in 1969.

The final outcome of the Lusaka Conference remains to be seen. ANC has not, as yet, ruled out talks with individual members of the South African government, but insists that these must, in no way, be seen as negotiations and that any talks must be premised on an agreement that apartheid must be completely dismantled. To Azapo, any thought of talks with the regime is anathema. ■

1. The UDF identifies with the Freedom Charter, which is the point of reference of the African National Congress (ANC); Azapo, the black consciousness organization, participates in the National Forum. — IV.

## Setback for the CP in local elections

The May 12 and 13 elections were important for three reasons. First of all, they were to determine the fate of a series of regional and provincial councils, as well as of city governments where left coalitions have ruled for ten years. A number of these went into crisis as a result of the defection of the Socialist Party (PSI), which opted for alliances with the centrist parties.

Secondly, these elections would test whether the five-party coalition of the Christian Democrats, the Socialist Party, and the small Social Democratic Party (PSDI), Republican Party (PRI), and Liberal Party (PLI) that rules the country was losing momentum electorally. This bloc has been continually rent by internal conflicts and has been defeated several times on parliamentary votes.

Thirdly, a lot of political attention was focused on the question of whether the Communist Party (PCI) would top the vote of the Christian Democrats for the second time. It passed this milestone first in the 1984 European elections.

Livio MAITAN

The results were clear enough, and for once the winners and the losers did not have too many differences over the assessment of the vote. The following table (table 1) shows the overall results in the regional elections, which were politically the most significant.

Obviously in assessing the vote shifts, you have to take into consideration the type of election. Some voters make different choices depending on the nature of the elections. It has to be noted, for example, that on May 12, the PCI got 30.2% in the regional elections, while it got only 29.9% in the provincial elections, and 27.6% in the municipal ones. On the other hand, in the city of Bologna its vote declined more in the regional elections than in the municipal elections. Nonetheless, the general tendencies emerge quite clearly, and overall the general political motivations have a greater weight than local ones.

Thus, it is more useful to compare the latest results with those of 1983 and even with 1984 than those with more remote ones of 1980. It has to be taken into consideration, moreover, that the percentage of abstention dropped, and that most often there was a coincidence between variations in percentage and in absolute figures, which makes it possible to draw conclusions with a greater certainty.

So, what conclusions should be drawn? The DC scored definite gains this time both with respect to 1983 and 1984, and this time it has topped the PCI. The PSI also made progress, getting its best result since 1968 (among other things, it gained from the fact that the Radicals [a protest party] did not run a slate). The other parties of the

government coalition got uneven results, in general more favorable in the case of the PRI than in that of the PSDI and the PLI.

In other words, the DC consolidated itself as the strongest force in the ruling coalition and the PSI as its main ally. The latter can exploit its position in the government to play a role out of proportion to its electoral strength.

The PSI's margin for maneuver is still greater at the local level. In fact, it will be able to sit in most local executive bodies, taking advantage of the relationship of forces to gain inclusion both in left administrations and those run by centrist coalitions.

What is more, the five-party governmental coalition has unquestionably come out of these elections stronger, and it can now seriously envisage remaining in office until the term of the present legislature ends in 1988 (which does not exclude shifts in the composition of the government).

The MSI, in general, maintained its positions. But the national average is the sum of quite different regional tendencies. It declined or stagnated in the center and the south, but it gained in the north. In the city of Bolzano, the capital of a province in which the majority of the people are German speaking and where the national question thus remains acutely posed, the MSI gained a plurality.

The DP gained .01% by comparison with the European elections and notably more, 0.6% by comparison with the 1980 regional elections, but it did not exceed the level of the 1983 legislative elections. Nonetheless, it can now play more of a role in the regional councils, where it will have nine representatives. In 1980, it got three seats.

The LCR, Italian section of the Fourth International, was represented on the DP slates and contributed to the good results they achieved. In some cases, its support proved decisive in gaining seats. (this could be seen by the preference votes cast for some of the candidates). Three LCR members were elected to city councils (two in Vicovano near Rome and one in Spezzano in Calabria) and three were elected to ward councils, (Venice, Brescia and Livorno). (1)

The Greens made their first relatively large-scale appearance, although this took widely differing forms. In part, for example, they identified with representatives of the Radical Party. Their average score, 1.7% was relatively modest. But they did not run everywhere, and in those areas where they did present candidates they got 2.6%. If the Greens continue to run in elections, they can pose some problems for the Radical Party, as well as for the DP, the PSI, and the PCI.

However, the most important aspect of the May 12 elections was unquestionably the decline of the PCI, whose vote dropped by 4.3%, a very big change in the context of stable Italian voting patterns, from the level of the European elections.

In particular, the PCI was beaten in the big cities where it had gotten spectacular results since 1975 and even in working-class and poor neighborhoods and wards. Now it will be frozen out of the city council in Turin and Rome and very likely in Milan. The situation remains quite uncertain in Genoa and Venice.

Only in the traditionally red regions (Emilia, Tuscany, Umbria) did the PCI hold its strength. But even there it lost its momentum.

The PCI's decline was all the more grave because, as I noted, it did not correspond to a rise in abstentions, nor did the votes it lost shift toward the DP, except possibly in the most marginal way. It is not easy to plot exactly the shifts in the vote. But according to the PCI electoral department, by comparison with the 1983 elections, the party gained from the drop in abstentions and spoiled or blank ballots, while losing votes to the PSI, the Greens, and the DP.

Both the DP and the Greens gained only in the region of 0.2% (the study does not distinguish between those votes that went to the Greens and those that went to the DP).

Discussion has opened up, including in the PCI itself, about the reasons for what the party organ, *l'Unita*, called in its first comment "a severe blow." There

1. It has to be noted, however, that in Spezzano, the LCR was on a slate under a different name than that of the DP, and in Vicovano, because of the refusal of the local DP to apply the national agreement correctly, the LCR made an agreement with the PCI (which, for its part, got three seats). The wards are subdivisions of the boroughs in the big cities.

TABLE 1

|                   | 1985 regional elections |      |       | 1980 regional elections |      |       | 1983 legislative |      | 1984 European |      |
|-------------------|-------------------------|------|-------|-------------------------|------|-------|------------------|------|---------------|------|
|                   | Votes                   | %    | Seats | Votes                   | %    | Seats | Votes            | %    | Votes         | %    |
| PCI               | 9,686,140               | 30.2 | 225   | 9,574,077               | 31.5 | 233   | 9,863,564        | 31.2 | 10,359,829    | 34.5 |
| PDUP              | —                       | —    | —     | 363,012                 | 1.2  | 8     | —                | —    | —             | —    |
| DC                | 11,223,284              | 35.0 | 276   | 11,154,807              | 36.8 | 290   | 10,228,994       | 32.6 | 9,907,043     | 33.0 |
| PSI               | 4,267,959               | 13.3 | 94    | 3,851,978               | 12.7 | 86    | 3,608,282        | 11.4 | 3,397,026     | 11.3 |
| PSDI              | 1,150,788               | 3.6  | 23    | 1,506,649               | 5.0  | 30    | 1,277,345        | 4.0  | 1,008,482     | 3.4  |
| PRI               | 1,280,563               | 4.0  | 25    | 924,347                 | 3.0  | 18    | 1,635,029        | 5.2  | —             | —    |
| PRI-PLI coalition | —                       | —    | —     | —                       | —    | —     | —                | —    | 1,845,861     | 6.2  |
| PLI               | 702,273                 | 2.2  | 13    | 818,250                 | 2.7  | 15    | 935,455          | 3    | —             | —    |
| DP                | 470,626                 | 1.5  | 9     | 274,911                 | 0.9  | 3     | 471,450          | 1.5  | 429,267       | 1.4  |
| PR                | —                       | —    | —     | —                       | —    | —     | 722,380          | 2.3  | 969,949       | 3.2  |
| Greens            | 553,353                 | 1.7  | 9     | —                       | —    | —     | —                | —    | —             | —    |
| MSI               | 2,087,404               | 6.5  | 41    | 1,787,395               | 5.9  | 37    | 2,088,115        | 6.6  | 1,886,987     | 6.3  |
| miss.             | 608,724                 | 2.0  | 5     | 95,527                  | 0.3  | —     | 682,752          | 2.2  | 196,095       | 0.7  |
| Total             | 32,031,114              | —    | 720   | 30,350,953              | —    | —     | 31,573,366       | —    | 29,999,639    | —    |

Abbreviations: PCI, Communist party; PSI, Socialist Party; PDUP, Party of Proletarian Unity, the *Il Manifesto* group; PSDI, Democratic Socialist Party, an old right-wing split from the PSI; PRI, Italian Republican Party, a small bourgeois party; PLI, Italian Liberal Party, small right-wing bourgeois party; DC, Christian Democrats; MSI, Italian Social Movement, ultrarightist, with neofascist connections; DP, Proletarian Democracy, far-left slate.

were no doubt various factors. In the cities it had run for long years, in particular Rome and Turin, the PCI found its credibility wearing out. This was because of its yielding to all sorts of blackmail from its allies and the government and because it chose not to put up a fight, by mobilizing the masses, against the constraints imposed by the state.

The PCI did not even respond with the necessary energy to the operations that led to its exclusion from the governments of cities such as Turin and Florence. In the conditions of a continuing economic crisis, the PCI seemed to a section of the voters incapable of solving such acute problems as housing and transport. But what lay above all at the root of this setback were general political and social factors.

In 1983 and still more in the initial months of 1984, massive social and political struggles developed, culminating in the gigantic demonstration on March 24. The PCI played an indisputable role in this. Even Berlinguer's funeral fitted into this context. Above and beyond being homage to a popular leader who died suddenly, it was an enormous and extremely militant political mobilization. The PCI's surpassing the vote of the DC on March 24 reflected all that.

The period that began in June 1984 has, however, been marked by a decline in mobilization and political tension. The level of struggle has been the lowest in the whole postwar period. The PCI, which had tried to channel the movement, helped to demobilize it. At the same time, it played a decisive role in paralyzing the peace movement.

In such a context, all the economic and social difficulties arising from unemployment, economic stagnation, and so on, began to weigh negatively on the political situation itself. And the conservative ideological offensive which the

workers' movement and the PCI in particular have proved incapable of responding to with any seriousness, sowed disarray and provoked a retreat of some sections of the masses, which bourgeois parties, especially, the DC, were able to recapture. It is significant, among other things, that for the first time in long years the Church actively mobilized against the PCI.

It would be wrong to draw sweeping negative conclusions from this. The situation in Italy remains unstable, both on the social and political levels, and the workers' movement still has the necessary strength to meet the offensive of its adversary, even to begin a counter-attack.

The campaign for the referendum to be held on June 9 is an initial opportunity for a fight back. (2) This campaign has to be fought and won, combating all hesitations and maneuvers. The LCR threw itself into this work right after the project was launched on December 12.

Finally, the electoral setback has provoked very sharp debates and public

*Italian Workers demonstrate (DR)*



differences in the PCI. On one side, Senator Napoleone Colajanni plunged into an open criticism of the party's present organization from a more right-wing point of view.

He has gone so far as to recommend the replacement of the party national secretary, Natta, by the union leader, Lama. (The latter has decided to withdraw from the leadership of the CGIL [Italian General Confederation of Labor] at the congress that is to be held in a few months.)

It is obvious that Colajanni would never have made such a statement without the agreement of other leaders higher up than he.

Other PCI leaders struck a different sort of note already during the election campaign (for example, in Rome the former CGIL leader Sceda). As for the PCI youth organization, the FGCI, its secretary gave an interview to the daily *Paese Sera*, which has become the forum for elements critical of the party's present orientation. Among other things he said that the party's losses had to be attributed to the ineffectiveness of the left municipal governments in the recent period and to the decline in the mass mobilizations from the 1984 level.

For his part, Natta presented some initial elements of a self-criticism that could lead to a rectification of the party's general orientation. He recognized, notably, that "in the immediate circumstances the democratic alternative has appeared to be without substance and concrete possibilities."

The PCI Central Committee is in session as this article is being written and it will no doubt give some new indications about the present situation of the party and its leadership.

2. This is the referendum demanded originally by the PCI against the decision made by the government in February 1984 to restrict the sliding scale of wages.

## The legacy of the 'Easter rebellion'

For three weeks around Easter, the Danish working class mobilized against the conservative government and the national labor contract that it imposed by law. This was the biggest mass movement since the Second World War, fitting into a general context of rising class confrontations throughout Europe.

The situation that made it possible for a "widespread" conflict to develop within a few days into an all-embracing general strike started to take form with the change of government in 1982. What was involved, in fact, was not an ordinary change of government but a turn by the bourgeoisie away from eighty years of class collaborationism.

Over the previous 35 years, there had been an almost unbroken chain of Social Democratic minority governments. But the deepening of the economic crisis meant that the bourgeoisie had to resort to more drastic solutions than the Social Democrats could go along with — cutting social services and wages and breaking the influence of the unions. It was for that purpose that the conservative Poul Schlueter took over the government.

Joergen ARBO

The Schlueter government has ruled now for two and a half years on the basis of a bourgeois majority. And it has moved fairly rapidly to tackle some of the decisive problems for the bourgeoisie. Not the least important of its initiatives has been a direct assault on the trade-union movement, which up until now has been a strong bulwark for the working class, both because it is a unified movement and because 90% of the Danish working class is organized.

Poul Schlueter started his career as premier by making sharp cuts in the state budget and intervening into collective bargaining. He succeeded in liquidating some of the gains the union movement made in the 1960s and the 1970s. First and foremost, he got rid of the automatic cost-of-living increases, which offered protection against a decline in real wages, especially for the low paid. He also imposed a waiting period before workers could begin to draw sick benefits and eliminated the rule of parity for wages of private and public workers.

This offensive, which hit the low paid and unemployed particularly hard, was aimed at transferring income from wages to profits and breaking the unity of the trade-union movement. It was only the beginning. Further social cut-backs followed, in health, in education — in every area but military spending and support for NATO's stepped-up arms drive.

One of the major targets was unemployment benefits. This was to make it possible to bring to bear more effectively the weight of unemployment (about 10%) to push down wages and weaken the union movement. The attack

was followed up by all sorts of attempts to split the union movement, directly by means of government legislation or by giving 100 percent political backing to the employers' divide-and-rule policy.

The divisions between skilled and unskilled workers were widened by increasing wage differentials. Political support was given to union members who resigned from their organizations and who, in return for certain benefits, went over to yellow unions.

The Schlueter governments' previous "high point" came in the spring with two bills. One was clearly designed to remove the long-term unemployed from the labor market and consign them to living on social welfare. The second was to make it more expensive to get insurance against unemployment through the unions, in order to set in motion a mass withdrawal from the system and reduce the state contribution to unemployment insurance.

Right from the outset of the Schlueter government, the workers were ready to resist. Already in October 1982, the new government was met with massive strikes and demonstrations. And in the following two years, various groups of workers waged prolonged strikes against the government's offensive.

However, at no time did this resistance develop into a serious threat to the government. That was not owing to any lack of combativity in the working class but to the weaknesses of their leadership that is, the Social Democratic party and the Social Democrats in the top echelons of the unions.

The Social Democracy in fact abdicated governmental power without calling an election. Its problem for this entire period has been that it has to cling

to class collaborationism. But its partner, the bourgeoisie, has rejected this. And, on the other side, the demands from the workers are growing for the Social Democracy to offer an alternative to the bourgeois government.

So, the strategy of the Social Democracy for the entire period has been to let the bourgeois parties govern in peace for the whole four-year maximum term that they can remain in office before calling an election. It has, thus, a naive hope of getting the opportunity to "restore" the workers' standard of living. But the question is whether this strategy will ever be realistic.

So far, in any case, this line has led the Social Democracy to hold back every mobilization that could have led to the government's fall. The union leaders remain committed to class collaboration, which is the basis of their well paying jobs. But at the same time, a large part of the union bureaucracy has been subjected to direct pressure from the membership to give moral and economic support to groups of workers involved in struggles.

Such pressure from the membership has been particularly strong in the country's biggest union, the SiD [Speciellearbejderfoerbund i Danmark — Federation of General Workers in Denmark], which has 325,000 members. It has been hardest hit by the cuts and by bourgeois splitting maneuvers.

Pushed by the circumstances, the SiD leadership, with the union president, Hardy Hansen out in front, has had to lay out an alternative line to 100 percent passivity and offer economic support for strikers, although this is against the rules of the labor-court system.

The active line that the SiD has stood for has led to a significant split in the union bureaucracy, while at the same time the members in many unions have pinned their hopes on the development of action in the union movement as a whole. On the other hand, the bourgeoisie has fought the active line with all the means at its disposal, partly through a general witch hunt and partly by imposing heavy fines on the SiD through the labor-court system (on one occasion the fine was 20 million kroner, or about 1.5 million US dollars).

Another result of the many strikes and actions has been that the trade-union left wing has been strengthened. It is not so much the traditional opposition in the union movement led by the Danish CP that has benefited from this. To an increasing degree the lead is being taken by a new layer of union leaders who are either members of smaller revolutionary parties, independents, or members of the Social Democratic party who refuse to follow its passive line.

This new layer of union leaders has been strengthened by experience in struggle and drawn together by the fight against the Schlueter government. So, it is no accident that despite the limited positions it holds in the union movement it came to play a big role in

the development of the mass actions around Easter.

The decisive event in the Danish labor market is the national contract signed every two years between the union movement (LO — Landsorganisation i Danmark, the Danish National Confederation of Labor) and the employers' organisation (DA — Danske Arbejdgiverforeningen, Danish Employers' Association).

Between contracts, relations between the unions and employers are governed by a system of labor courts that substantially restricts the right to strike. In other words, there is a solidly organized system of class collaboration in which the new-contract negotiations can serve as an outlet for the workers' discontent. In fact, in the past there have been extensive strikes when the national contract has come up for renewal.

Of course, it can be said that the LO and DA themselves establish the relations on the labor market. But nonetheless various governments intervened directly or indirectly. And during the 1970s it became standard practice for Social Democratic governments to step in directly and impose new contracts when the LO and DA could not reach agreement.

In this year's new-contract negotiations, the conditions were impossible. On the one side, the bosses, with the full backing of the government, refused to budge an inch, offering nothing to the workers. On the other side, the workers were in a fighting mood and united around some central demands, not the least of which was the call for a 35-hour week without loss of pay. So, the LO could not just sell out the workers' demands in order to keep on chummy terms with the bosses.

Conflicts — strikes and lockouts —

*The forces of law and order in Denmark*



thus could not be avoided, and they started on Monday, March 25. As sure as there was going to be a fight, there was going to be government intervention. The question was when?

The government should have stepped in early so as to keep firms from losing business or late in order to be able to take advantage of the depletion of the unions' strike funds and crush the combativity of the workers. As it happened, it did neither, but intervened after one week, when the conflict was under way and combativity was at its highest.

The conditions for launching the strikes were thus quite exceptional. There was talk that the situation was quite normal, with the union bureaucracy in control. But, on the other hand, it was clear that the government was going to intervene, and then the union bureaucracy would be impotent. It would not lift a finger to keep the strikes going — quite the contrary.

At the same time, no one could doubt that one week's official conflict would not lead to any serious improvement for the workers. The government's intervention would inevitably take the form of passing a law that would impose a settlement in accordance with the employers' demands.

So, the first week was distinguished by an exceptional level of activity and discussions about what should be done in the event of government intervention. In that week, the basis was laid for the coming weeks' rebellion against the government. In various unions, shop stewards and other union activists got involved in organizing blockades, rallies, and demonstrations. The strike was not just an unwanted holiday but more and more became a mobilization of the new union activists.

When the government's move was announced on March 27, the line of many workplaces was clear — continue the strikes against the government. Already before the strike started that was the slogan put forward by a number of unions. Now almost all united around it.

A contributing cause was also the fact that the government's intervention corresponded fully to the workers' worst expectations. In the first place, it involved imposing a wage raise for both public and private workers of only 2% the first year and 1.5% the second. Secondly, the reduction of the workweek was kept to one hour, and it was to go into effect only from January 1, 1987, which can only be regarded as a mockery of our demand for 35 hours here and now. And finally, corporate taxes were cut, so that the bosses' real payments would amount to nothing, as they had demanded. This was simply a provocation, which brought two and a half years' suppressed anger boiling over.

The government's intervention set in motion a dynamic out of the control of the Social Democracy and the union bureaucracy. They made a last desperate effort to put on the brakes by organizing a demonstration in front of parliament for the last legal strike day, on Friday, March 29. The idea was to make a "decent" protest before a return to work on Monday. The whole leadership of the LO, along with the chair of the Social Democratic party, Anker Joergensen, would speak and advise the workers to be sensible.

The demonstration turned out to be a militant one in which 125,000 workers rallied and loudly protested the leading Social Democrats' bowing to the government's legal ultimatum. This Friday demonstration was not a hail and farewell but a sendoff to the struggle for the workers' demands — 35 hours now and without any cut in pay, plus ouster of the Schlueter government.

In attempting to put the brakes on the movement, the Social Democratic leadership in the LO lost its grip on the developments. And it was subsequently to become clear that they had to get help from others to regain control.

The government had undoubtedly expected its intervention to be met with protests. It was clear that the three working days before the Easter holidays were written off to scattered strikes and protests, and after that they expected that peace and tranquility would prevail. That was an underestimation of the Danish working class, which not only threw itself into all-embracing strikes but at the same time rapidly became conscious of the stakes of the struggle and the means for waging it.

Monday, April 1, was marked not by scattered strikes but by a widening of the strikes, which came to embrace even more than the 300,000 private-industry workers involved in the official conflict. As good as all the private work-





Demonstrators on April 10 (DR)

places were paralyzed, and the public workplaces able to have an effect in shutting down the society followed suit — for example, bus drivers, teachers, radio and TV, postal workers, hospital personnel, and a lot of office workers.

Throughout the country, the situation verged on a general strike. And many workplaces set up action centers in which thousands of strikers organized blockades against strikebreakers and all nonessential services. For example, in Randers — a middle-sized industrial town — the employment services were shut down by a blockade and replaced by blockade services to which groups of workers could turn and get support for blockading their own workplaces.

In the rest of the country's industrial cities, moreover, the working class set the pace. Most cities reported a "near" general strike. Others did not need to use the qualifying adverb. For example, in Esbjerg and Aalborg, where 50,000 of the cities' 150,000 inhabitants joined in the demonstration.

From the first days' sweeping strikes and demonstration of the strength and cohesion of the working class, the understanding grew that the proper objectives of the struggle were to bring down the government and win the 35-hour week with full pay. In line with this, the means proposed became more and more ambitious — a general strike until the government fell, pressure on the union leaderships to provide economic support

from the strike funds, and withdrawal of the LO from the labor-court system (which is where the striking workers were fined in the sacred name of class collaboration).

These demands indicated the level of consciousness, and in practice they represented a revolt against class collaborationism and all the bourgeois propaganda about wage restraint and respect for the parliamentary system. Before the conflict, these demands were only put forward by a few people on the revolutionary left wing, and in fact even there some of the left regarded them as an escalation of rhetoric. But, nonetheless, they quickly became mass demands as soon as the struggle got underway.

The first three days of struggle against the Schlueter government showed with all the clarity you could want that the fight could have been won. But it was just as evident that the struggle needed a leadership able to offer a perspective for the next step in the fight.

Practically no one could have any illusions that the LO was the sort of leadership needed. It had abandoned the strikes and quickly went from passivity to collaboration with the bourgeois witch hunt against the strikers.

However, there were in fact good possibilities for an alternative national leadership. In the first years under the Schlueter government, the left wing in the union movement had been

strengthened, and on the purely organizational level as well.

This organizational strength was reflected in the *Tillidsmandsringe* (Shop Stewards' Circles) in most big cities, which are made up of shop stewards from workplaces and unions and have the common objective of building activities in support of the workers' demands.

Before the conflict, the *Tillidsmandsringe* had a limited influence, because to a large extent they were limited to shop stewards from the Communist Party. But as the strikes developed, there was a massive influx into the *Tillidsmandsringe*. Many new ones were formed, and in line with those already existing became a broad rallying ground for all the currents in the union movement that wanted to fight against the government.

The local *Tillidsmandsringe* were able at the start of the conflict to gather together the activists, but it was also necessary from the outset to build a national leadership with an eye toward national coordination and common guidelines for the fight. Here the responsibility lay on the *Tillidsmandsringe* in Copenhagen, which represented by far the largest section of the strikers. Thus, the meeting of this committee on the Tuesday before Easter was to a large extent responsible for the struggle's outcome.

Four thousand shop stewards met in a mood of conviction that the struggle

could be won but also aware that the Easter holidays could scatter and isolate the strikers. The great majority of the speakers at the meeting drew cheers and clapping as they called for a general strike until the government fell and for a national shop steward meeting to build a leadership for the struggle.

Nonetheless, in the end the meeting did not come out in support of those demands. That was owing solely to the fact that the party line of the CP was against it. The CP was not, and is not, interested in building a movement that it cannot control and which could develop in a revolutionary direction.

As the old established core of the *Tillidsmandsringe*, the CP had control of the meeting and was able to outmaneuver the majority and avoid a vote. Instead the meeting called only for a day of action after Easter and left the rest to the individual workplaces. Against this background, it was in itself impressive that most of the strikes continued.

An important reason why the strikes continued despite the obstacles were activities that made them and discussions of the objectives of the struggle, as well as the means for waging it, ever present in daily life. In these actions the new layer of union leaders that developed in the two years' struggle against Schlueter played a central role as organizers by building collaboration between individual workplaces and unions.

The most important activities were blockades, which became very extensive through the participation of thousands of union activists. In many places, the organizers were representatives of revolutionary currents in the union movement.

These activities and blockades took on particular importance as the Easter holidays began and the strike mobilization threatened to come to a standstill and dissipate. Over all the holidays and on the day after, the blockades continued so that at no time was there any peace and quiet in the Danish workplaces, other than that brought about by the shutting off of the machinery.

It was not only in organizing the actions that the new union leaders played a decisive role. They also did so in advancing demands and initiatives necessary to win the struggle. For example at the shop stewards meetings it was they who took the lead.

Today, after the end of the conflict, it can be noted that this layer of revolutionists and political independents were too late in presenting themselves as a united alternative to the CP leadership in the *Tillidsmandsringe*. But the question remains whether this could have brought the movement forward without a decisive split.

In any case, the new union leaders were able to keep the strike mobilization alive after the Easter holidays. The extensive strikes continued Tuesday. And Wednesday, which was proclaimed a day of action by the

*Tillidsmandsringe*, became another day when Denmark was shut down by a general strike.

If it were not crystal clear before what its position was, the CP nailed its colors to the mast at the meetings on the Tuesday following Easter. Under no circumstances would they offer any guidelines for strikes after Wednesday's day of action, which was to be the last united protest against the government. And it was also noticeable that from Thursday on the CP shop stewards joined in the chorus of the lead-bottomed Social Democrats, who were calling loudly for a return to work.

The line coming from the CP was that we should continue the fight on the local level. Through local wage struggles in individual workplaces, the government's 2 percent wage ceiling was to be undermined. Only in very few, very strong workplaces could such a strategy actually be pursued. Of course, in such places the CP has a number of shop stewards. Even though the strikes continued another week in several big workplaces, the hope that continued struggle could lead to victory was definitively ended.

An alliance of the Social Democracy and CP leaders succeeded in stopping the mobilization that could have toppled the government. And this happened precisely at a time when the sweep of the strikes was undiminished despite the lack of leadership and when the union leaders were under pressure to open up the strike funds. It was a betrayal of all of us who had been fighting for weeks with a determination to win.

It neither can, nor should, be concealed that the "Easter Rebellion" ended in defeat. But at the same time the struggle has put the working class in a better position for the confrontations that are coming.

In the first place, there has been a significant rise in trade-union activity and consciousness. There is a confidence

today that was not there before in the strength we have if we stand together and fight for our own interests.

In the wake of the conflict, this consciousness has already been important. All the bosses' attempts to fire union activists and shop stewards have been met with strikes and solidarity from other work places. And a great number of workplaces are striking these days for higher wages.

In the second place, the layer of new union leaders has been strengthened. More experience has been accumulated, both positive and negative, and a lot of new people came into activity in the course of the three weeks. Not the least important, the revolutionists in the union movement have been strengthened, and in the coming period there will be an opportunity to build up a coordination that in future mass actions can offer an alternative to the reformist leaders in the Social Democracy and the CP.

The initial elements of the coordination exist today, with closely converging proposals coming from a number of trade-union groups. Most prominent in this respect are the proposals from the building-workers union, from shop stewards in a number of big workplaces, and from groups in the SiD. From these groups has come extensive criticism of the betrayers of the Easter Rebellion. At the same time, they have pointed to united struggle as a means for mobilizing the working class in the future. And gradually people have come to agree about offering an alternative to the Schlueter government — a workers government that will pursue a working-class policy, repeal the bourgeois legislation passed in the last two and a half years, and implement our demand for a 35-hour week with full pay.

If it proves possible to unite these healthy forces and others, the present defeat can be turned into a victory for the working class when the coming struggle is fought. ■

Holding the banner high — Danish worker on the April 10 demonstration (DR)



# The situation after the strike

## Interview with miners' leader

Two months after the end of the miners' strike in Britain, the effects are still being felt by the British labour movement. Below we reprint an interview with Peter Heathfield, general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) on his balance sheet of the strike. The interview was given to *Socialist Action*, a revolutionary socialist paper within the Labour Party, and published on 3 May 1985.

*Question. The NUM has just emerged from an historic 12 months. Would you like to look back and tell me what your assessment of the strike is? Was it worth coming out?*

*Answer.* There are many aspects of the dispute which need to be analysed.

I think the most significant feature of the strike was the willingness of the overwhelming majority of miners to resist the pressure of Thatcherism, and to indicate to the labour movement as a whole that it had to fight back, that the gains of former generations were going to be taken away. The strike has shown the rest of the movement that a fightback is possible.

Amongst the many lessons was the uniqueness of the dispute with no claims on the table. It wasn't about wages, it wasn't about improving conditions — it was in defence of jobs. For the first time a new generation were prepared to defend their jobs in a fashion that led to a dispute that extended over 12 months.

The disappointments were that we were unable to motivate the whole of our membership, and the fact that the trade union movement didn't fulfill its promises. That of course prolonged the strike and created enormous problems.

The fact that we didn't win the support of the Nottinghamshire and the Midlands miners indicates that we failed to campaign adequately before the dispute started. We failed to recognise the political lesson of what was happening in the East Midlands, which is dominated by mineworkers who elected a Tory MP in 1978 and 1983. That should have shown us a great deal.

So, with hindsight, I'd say there should have been more intensive campaigning before the decision in the areas was made. We must recognise that the 1978 objective of dividing miner from miner, that the level of earnings in the East Midlands compared to the level of earnings in Scotland brought about divisions within our ranks that we were not able to overcome. But of course we didn't select the timing of the dispute — it was imposed upon us.

The other very pertinent point is that, ostensibly, the dispute was about

four million tonnes of capacity that MacGregor wanted to take out of the industry. In reality, I think everybody recognised it was about reforming the role of the coal mining industry within the British economy.

It was preparing the industry for privatisation. Most miners recognise that. But many trade unionists in other industries have failed to recognise that miners were fighting a battle for the whole movement.

They were fighting a battle on behalf of public ownership. Sadly, I think many more trade unionists will be caught up in that because of their apparent lack of enthusiasm to join with us to defend the gains and achievements of past generations.

*Q. I'd like to ask you about some of the criticisms that were levelled at the NUM during the strike. Obviously there were those from the right of the trade union movement. I think you'd expect that. But towards the end of the strike, there was a lot of criticism from the left and the so-called left about the tactics of the union and its national leadership. For example, from the Communist Party, Tribune, the Labour Coordinating Committee and even Militant. (1)*

*The main arguments, to concentrate on those of Marxism Today (journal of the Communist Party), were that the national leadership didn't do enough to persuade public opinion onto their side. Essentially it was because you refused to hold a national ballot that you weren't able to do that. And the tactics of mass picketing you adopted, alienated a lot of people.*

*Militant took up a left version of that. Ted Grant, on the eve of the Labour Party Young Socialists conference attacked the NUM leadership. He said there should have been a ballot, not having one was an indication that the leadership lacked faith in the working class.*

*What would you say to those critics?*

*A.* I find it strange that these so-called comrades decide to criticise the leadership. Some of the individuals

named in publications like *Marxism Today* throughout the dispute were part of the decision making process. They were people who participated in determining the strategy — actually, people who were arguing for mass picketing! Now, after the event, they find that mass picketing was not the way of dealing with problems.

I have been a consistent opponent of a ballot in the NUM. That has been our collective decision. The dispute started from area strikes and the national union making them official. I believe in ballot box democracy, but this raises the fundamental question of whether a worker has the right to vote his mate out of a job.

I would argue that if a ballot is to be part of the democratic process in the trade union, the question posed on the ballot paper must equally affect all those participating. I don't accept that when 70,000 jobs are going 185,000 should vote. Effectively that's giving people in long-life pits the veto over someone else's right to defend their job. I reject the view of those who with hindsight have changed their minds.

I accept that after the setbacks we've endured there will be critics. But the policies have been clearly defined to the rank and file. I have consistently advocated the defence of those policies and their application. If that warrants criticism, so be it.

There are those too who have sought to personalise the dispute. They have fallen into the media trap of Scargill versus MacGregor. In fact, Scargill, Heathfield and McGahey — indeed the national executive committee — were responding to conference decisions, collective decisions supported by the overwhelming majority of the NEC.

The question of violence is one that many of us have declared ourselves on. We must distinguish what's happened. There are many innocent victims of picket line violence among our membership. There are many of our members who are victims of police line violence. There are many cases of agents provocateurs who have created violence on the picket lines.

Our members have reacted to violence imposed on them by the state. Without defending violence, I am unwilling to accept that what happened on picket lines was at the instigation of our members. The miners have been projected as brutal people who are not interested in law and order. I reject that totally.

*Q. Socialist Action doesn't share the views of the left critics who compare the scale of defeat to that of the 1926 General*

1. These are all supposedly groupings of the left inside the Labour Party. *Tribune* used to be the newspaper of the left group of MPs in the parliamentary Labour Party. It has since moved towards the centre. The Labour Coordinating Committee, formerly an organisation of the left which supported the campaign for Tony Benn to become deputy leader of the Labour Party, is now a supporter of the policies of Kinnock. *The Militant* is the newspaper whose supporters dominate the Labour Party Young Socialists.

*Strike. We say far from being the last struggle that closes an era, the miners' strike opens a new era.*

*For the first time since AJ Cook (2), we've seen a new calibre of national leadership — a leadership of the NUM that's shown right from the beginning that it's absolutely determined to win. I believe one of the things that's helped keep the miners out for such a long time is that they've had the confidence that their national executive is not doing back-door deals, looking for ways of getting off the hook.*

*Something else has arisen from that. There is a differentiation within the left — you can see it most clearly in the Labour Party. The rank and file of the party poured into support committees, even though the leadership didn't offer anything like that same support. We've seen that differentiation among left organisations within the party. Tribune for instance came out in support of Neil Kinnock, the LCC made similar criticisms to Marxism Today, and so on.*

*But Socialist Action has drawn rather the opposite lesson than 'the game's up, let's pack up and go home'. Perhaps you'd like to comment on that, and the support you've had from the Labour Party and the solidarity committees during the dispute.*

A. I think it's far too early to draw conclusions about the impact of the 12 months strike on the broader labour and trade union movement. There are some who argue we had a Labour government in 1929 because of what happened in 1926, so I would not accept the analysis



## Solidarity with prisoners and sacked miners

The campaign to raise money and support for miners sacked or imprisoned during the miners' strike is still underway. One thousand miners and their wives demonstrated in the South Wales area recently against the sentences of life imprisonment imposed on two miners found guilty of murder during the strike. The murderers of the six miners who died during the dispute of course will never be brought to justice. Meanwhile many miners still await trial in an atmosphere that is becoming more and more repressive.

Women in the Nottinghamshire region are approaching Women against Pit Closures nationally to launch their own campaign. 'Everybody seems to want women speakers on this subject', said Doreen Humber, who is involved in the national campaign for the defence of prisoners and their families; 'My friend Sue's husband has been sacked and he doesn't get anything for himself because they say at the DHSS (social security offices) that he's still in dispute with the Coal Board.' This is the experience of many of the sacked men who end up receiving the minimum of £14 per week for themselves and their families. That is why the campaign of solidarity is so urgent.

*A special fund has now been set up for sacked and imprisoned miners. Send donations to Co-op Bank plc, West Street, Sheffield. Sorting code 08.90.75. Account No 3000 0009.*

that many so-called left wingers are projecting.

We've seen a politicisation within the labour movement without precedent. I know I've fallen out with some of the pundits who said in 1972 and 1974 — the two last major strikes in the industry — that they had brought about the politicisation of miners. They were about declining standards of living, about money wage militancy.

But this strike has certainly seen the politicisation of a new generation of miners. I think the lessons will be projected through a decade or more.

The experiences of young miners (the average age of miners is 36), the experiences of the past 12 months will make a tremendous impact on their future outlook and attitude. The movement as a whole will be much richer for that experience. It will help to sustain the labour movement in the future.

The choice that faced the leadership of the NUM was whether it was prepared to do what trade unions have predominantly done for almost a generation now: that is to be identified with the management of the decline of British industry, or to try and project our alternative policies to ensure that working people have the right to work — that they should not be treated like flotsam and jetsam, that there are policies that would enable them to plan their lives free from the fears and anxieties of unemployment.

Out of the 1926 strike the theories and philosophy of public ownership emerged more clearly and the suffering, the poverty of miners in the 1920s and early 1930s helped bring about a post-war Labour government that sought to take the industry into public ownership and alleviate those kind of problems. I think a future Labour government will inevitably draw on the experiences of miners in 1984-5 and hopefully fashion policies that prevent that sort of situation developing again.

From the money pouring in from Labour Party branches, individual members, constituency parties, it was obvious the strike had captured the imagination of literally thousands of rank and filers. Indeed the response to the

miners' delegation to the TUC and Labour Party conference indicated that at grass roots level there was a tremendous support, and a recognition that the fight was not only the miners' fight but that of the broad trade union movement.

The disappointment was the attitude of those leaders who chose to highlight the irrelevant aspects of the dispute when they should in fact have been clearly indicating their support for the miners' struggle.

There was tremendous solidarity from large sections of the labour movement. For example we received cheques from branches of the EETPU (electricians' union), from AUEW (engineering union) branches despite the hostility of some of their leaders. The money came pouring in from TGWU (transport union) branches and from GMBATU (public sector manual workers) branches, and — surprise, surprise — from ISTC (steel union) branches, indicating that at grass roots level there was considerable support.

Internationally the financial support was absolutely magnificent. I would think that 90 per cent of the cash we received came from abroad. Throughout the dispute there were rank and filers contributing substantially to our strike.

Q. *I'd like to come on to the future of the union. At the end of the strike the reason you'd come out — the programme of pit closures that MacGregor, supported by the Tory government, was going for — hasn't been withdrawn. Do you think the union is in a fit state to continue fighting closures and how would you project that being done?*

A. The next six months especially are going to be pretty difficult. The National Coal Board are indicating that the agreement they entered into with NACODS (3) will not be applied. So there are enormous difficulties facing us. I too we have to resolve the internal difficulties with the Nottinghamshire area.

But it's important to say that the policies MacGregor projected in early March 1984 have not been applied. I think there may be difficulties in him applying them in 1985. In many ways we have rendered those policies inapplicable.

That in itself is some achievement. The problems facing the National Coal Board have not disappeared.

There is still tremendous spirit in the ranks of the NUM, in the course of the next year we will reassert ourselves. The principle of defending jobs and defending the industry is as pertinent in 1985 as it was in March 1984. We will continue

2. AJ Cook was a left leader of the Mineworkers Federation during the 1926 general strike. After the defeat of the strike he suffered a personal breakdown and drifted toward the right.

3. NACODS is the national union of pit deputies and overseers. During the NUM strike they reached a separate agreement with the Coal Board on procedures for pit closures, following a ballot of their membership which showed 80 per cent in favour of strike action.

to be a campaigning organisation: we will not alter our style of leadership, we will continue to campaign amongst our members — and I'm sure we'll get a response from them.

*Q. The fact that Notts and a large part of the Midlands refused to come out on strike actually weakened the position of the union, both from the point of view of stopping the movement of coal and closing power stations but also because it gave the so-called moderate trade union leaderships an easy way out of refusing to build the sort of industrial solidarity needed to win the strike. What do you think the attitude of the union as a whole should be towards the Notts area?*

*A.* I think most striking miners would readily acknowledge that had the Nottinghamshire miners joined in the struggle, it would have been over in three months. That would have brought about a substantial modification of the Board's and the government's attitude.

Notts failed to recognise that we were defending the industry from the sort of attack that is designed to bring about privatisation. Sadly, they failed to recognise that fragmentation of the NUM was precisely what the government wants to achieve. There's been an enormous conservative influence brought into the Nottingham coalfield, advising the working miners committee. There's been a whole galaxy of Tory lawyers and business men ready to finance the breakaway in Notts.

The miners there have failed to recognise that the government are more able to attract private capital if there's fragmented trade union organisation. The development in Notts, for example would enable the prospects of multinational oil companies buying up the coal reserves there at give-away prices.

The defence of the industry is about the case for public ownership as well as the defence of jobs. Notts has created a wedge that the government will continue to exploit.

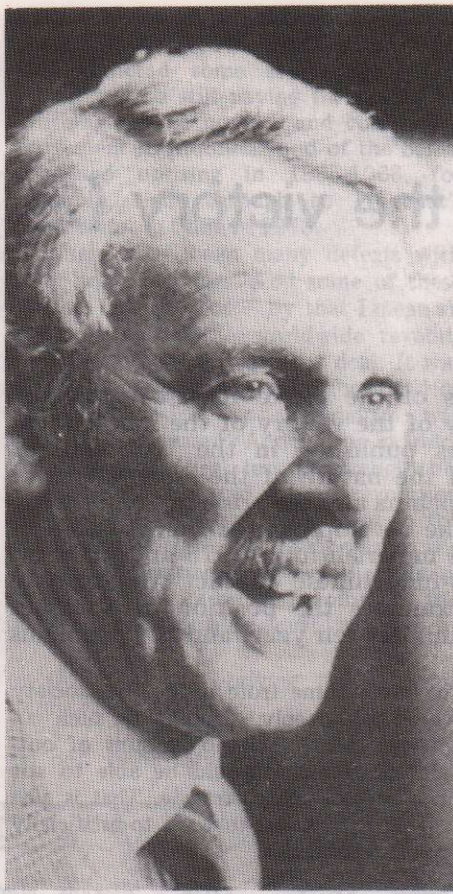
In the weeks and months ahead our job is trying to seek a reconciliation that brings them back into the fold.

*Q. Aside from the question of pit closures, the other unfinished business of the strike is reinstatement and amnesty for those miners sacked or facing dismissal. Does the union have any plans to launch a campaign?*

*A.* We have said since last October that we want to negotiate reinstatement of those victimised by the Board. It's not a question of violence, it's a question of the dismissal of people who are died-in-the-wool trade unionists.

In Kent for example, the overwhelming majority of people dismissed are elected representatives. Similarly Scotland. The NCB have adopted a discriminatory policy.

Everybody knows nationally we were



Peter Heathfield (DR)

denied the right to negotiate reinstatement — I don't use the term amnesty because it implies guilt. At a recent meeting with the NCB, we raised it again — we drew a blank. That doesn't mean to say we're prepared to turn our backs on those people.

We are currently helping to support them in the hope that, through the areas, we will be able to reinstate them. We have been partially successful.

The national leadership have been denied the right to negotiate by the NCB. But after 12 months of strike our campaign is obviously limited. That's the price of not winning an outright victory. I would hope that those people who went back to work early now recognise they have made our task more difficult in the short term.

*Q. That's fine for areas like, for example, South Wales where I've been recently, where everyone was pretty confident of finding a satisfactory reinstatement policy. But that's not the case for Kent or Scotland, where there are the largest proportion of dismissals. Do you think the solidarity committees set up during the strike can be brought behind a reinstatement campaign?*

*A.* It's important that those groups raise their voices. My own view is that we should be calling for a public enquiry into the attitude of the National Coal Board. We are failing to get any publicity at all on the discriminatory nature of the Board's attitude.

We are monitoring the situation. In

areas like Derbyshire for example, they are dramatically reducing the number of people presently dismissed, but there are still a lot more cases to go before the courts. There's been a breakthrough in Yorkshire where the Board have at long last agreed to discuss individual cases with the area leaders.

It's a process that's slow and cumbersome, but it's one we're obliged to go through. In the meantime we'll sustain the families of these people.

*Q. Finally, I want to ask you about the women's movement during the strike. I think it was a fantastic success, not just in terms of the amount of support and solidarity they gave to striking miners and the NUM, but also in terms of the number of women whose confidence and talents were developed during the strike.*

*There's been a lot of talk about the continuation of the support groups and Women Against Pit Closures, that they should now have formal links with the union. Can you comment on that?*

*A.* Yes, it's been a fantastic development. I think every striking miner in the country is ready to acknowledge the contribution women have made in a whole variety of ways.

They've been incredible. They've been involved as equal partners on picket lines, planning, pamphleteering and organising the solidarity that's needed in this sort of dispute. We must find ways of integrating that valuable support. Experience during this strike has confirmed that we've got to establish formal links with the union. It's not easy because of the need for rules to be approved. But I think within the majority of areas there's a willingness and an eagerness to maintain and strengthen links with the women's groups.

Indeed the fact that there's 750 people scattered around the coalfields that have been refused reinstatement is helping keep the women together. They are currently organising a national conference. They are organising their education, like weekends schools at Northern College, which will help maintain our internal links and those they have forged with other support groups nationally and internationally.

The political movement as well should seek to harness this new development. I would like to see more recognition for them throughout the whole labour movement. In Wellbeck, for example, about 15 striking miners' wives applied to join the local branch of the Labour Party. They didn't want to know — a sad reflection on the state of that particular branch of the party. But I hope those sort of difficulties can be overcome.

We've got to look for ways of involving the whole family in trade union activity. In my view that is an important development I'd like to see encouraged, not frowned on. The advantage would be felt not only by the NUM but by the broader trade union movement.

## Ten years after the victory (2)

We publish below the last two parts of the Pierre Rousset interview to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the victory of the Indochinese revolution. In the first two sections published in the last issue of *International Viewpoint*, we discussed the nature of the imperialist war and its long-term consequences for Indochina and the crisis in Cambodia.

In this section we try to look at the development of the situation in the region following the defeat of US imperialism in 1975 and make an assessment of the impact of the Sino-Indochinese conflict which broke out in 1978-1979. The final part examines the position of Vietnam today and makes a balance sheet of the last ten years and the problems which still exist.

*Question.* Can we come on to the development of the relation of forces within the region? Ten years ago we were hoping that a victory of the Indochinese revolution would open up a rapid rise of revolutionary struggle in South East Asia and in the rest of the world. The US government itself had long held the so-called 'domino theory', that is that if South Vietnam were to fall then Cambodia and Laos would also fall. If Indochina were to fall then the whole South East Asian peninsula would be lost in the short term... The reality of the situation did not fit in with such schemas. Why?

*Answer.* You are dealing with two different things here. The impact of the Indochinese revolutions and the domino theory which has been used for a long time as anti-communist propaganda by Washington. We have never defended an alternative version of the domino theory! This was tainted from the start.

The point of departure of the domino theory was actually that revolutions are above all the product of subversion — subversion from the outside. The enemy of course takes advantage of the errors and weaknesses of a particular national regime. But according to Washington, subversive activity by Moscow and, at the time, also Peking, explains why there was a revolutionary struggle in Vietnam. To capitulate in the face of pressure of subversion in one case (that is Vietnam) was to facilitate subversive activity everywhere else. The cold war philosophers use the same arguments today to justify support for the 'contras' in Nicaragua; a strategy of international subversion aims to ensure Russian-Cuban domination in the whole of Central America...

This theory does not hold water and US experts know this very well. The existence of a real revolutionary struggle is in reality an expression of a crisis in society, of class conflict (combined or not with the national struggle), of which

the roots come from inside. If a society were not deeply shaken by such an internal crisis, then no amount of outside interference would be able to stir up a revolutionary struggle. That is also why it is pointless to want to artificially export revolutions.

*Q.* But international factors do play a role.

*A.* Of course, but for international factors to play a role in the unfolding of revolutionary struggle, there must be a crisis of society, social forces must be in movement and national political forces must be in a position to act. Of course the main international factor at play here is not 'communist subversion' either. The whole history of the Indochinese revolution shows that Russian and Chinese aid did not precede, but followed — and often very late — the development of the struggle in Vietnam itself. The main 'international factor' which assisted the extension of the Vietnamese revolution to Laos and then Cambodia, was in fact the intervention of imperialism. Cambodia was of course 'stirred' by the impact of the struggles in Vietnam, but the need to take a position on the Vietnamese war and US pressure were both factors in destabilising the paternalist regime of Sihanouk before 1970.

It was the 1970 coup d'etat organised by the Americans because of the demands of their Vietnamese campaign and US military intervention which brutally shattered the fragile stability of Cambodian society and influenced the course of the revolutionary struggle. (1) It was this 'international factor' — the activity of imperialism — which was a major factor acting on Cambodian society in a brutal fashion. This action was not even comparable with the so-called subversive action of the agents of Moscow or Peking...

The situation in the region being what it was in 1975, it was unthinkable that all

the dominoes — that is a whole range of countries from Vietnam to Singapore — would all fall at the same time.

*Q.* But the victory of the Indochinese revolution nevertheless had a profound impact both regionally and internationally.

*A.* Yes. This victory did create a 'favourable situation' for national and social liberation struggles at an international level. The exemplary character of the revolutionary struggle in Indochina showed that victory was possible, even against the all-powerful United States of America. Moreover the capacity of direct American intervention had been checked by the political crisis within the US itself and within the imperialist camp. The US government could no longer get involved in direct military intervention and no other imperialist power was in a position to replace it on an international level.

In this situation the US were forced to dismantle the bulk of their bases in Thailand just at a time when this country was being shaken by a deep wave of national and social struggles. Washington was unable to intervene with any force in the spectacular overthrow of a regime as important as that of the Shah of Iran in the Middle East. It was unable to replace Portugal in Africa when the anti-colonial struggles in Angola and Mozambique (as well as Guinea Bissau) drove it out. And moreover it was not able to take the necessary measures to attempt to save the Somoza dictatorship or to nip in the bud the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua.

Since the end of the Indochinese war, Washington has been attempting to share out the responsibility for the maintenance of the imperialist order more equally. This is clearly the reason for the pressures being exercised on Japan to get the government to build up its military strength in a qualitative way. The US government is also trying to re-establish its own capacity for direct intervention. That is why it attaches so much importance to the question of support for the 'contras' in Nicaragua. It has scored some political points in this regard, but it has far from succeeded in winning public opinion to the idea of a major direct involvement in counter-revolutionary activity.

*Q.* In this context, how do you see the turnaround in American policy toward China, formerly isolated on the international level and now welcomed with open arms?

*A.* This about-turn is an expression of two things, I think. One is good the other is pretty bad. The failure of Washington's policy in Indochina, in the 1960s also implied a failure of its Chinese policy. The war in Indochina was only the highpoint of a general approach aimed at 'containing' and stemming

1. See the first part of the interview in *International Viewpoint* No 76, May 20, 1985.

the tide of the revolution in Asia which had begun its progress after the Second World War. Taking over from the defeated imperialism of Japan or the weakened ones of Britain and France, the US managed to isolate China. They set a price on this: the Korean war; aid to the regimes in Seoul, Tokyo and Taiwan; the establishment of a considerable military strength (the Seventh Fleet, the Korean bases, the bases in Japan, in Okinawa and the Mariana Islands, in Thailand and the Philippines...). And they undertook a direct show of strength in Vietnam. China was also included in this policy — behind the attempts at detente — as well as the whole of the 'socialist bloc' and the national liberation movements.

The US government was that much more determined to put a stop to developments in Vietnam because of the victory of the Cuban revolution (1959-1960) which pointed to the reality of socialist revolution in Latin America itself. The Vietnamese war — and then the second Indochinese war — was therefore part and parcel of a whole world-wide policy, constructed by the United States acting

as the leader of the imperialist bloc. In the 1950s and 1960s, the counter revolution inflicted some severe blows for which we are still paying the price: the crushing of the popular and communist movement in Indonesia and of the Santo Domingo uprising in 1965-1966, for example, right through to Pinochet's coup d'état in Chile in 1973.

There have been many defeats with only some victories. And some of these defeats have cost us — by that I mean all components of the worldwide revolutionary movement — a great deal. It was above all in Vietnam and Cuba that this counter-offensive by imperialism was blocked, exhausted. And it was in Indochina that the real test of strength between revolution and counter-revolution on a world scale was played out in the most violent way. Indochina was, as the expression coined by the Vietnamese said the 'most advanced point' of the international struggle against imperialism.

*Q. You are talking in the same terms as ten years ago.*

*A. That's true. I know this language is not fashionable anymore in those*

milieux who are disillusioned with the solidarity campaign of the past. But it is no less relevant. Vietnam was not a local war but the main place for the crystallization of a very violent imperialist counter-offensive. If Washington had been successful there as it was in other places it would have been free to pursue its policy of 'stemming the tide'.

The people of Indochina have fought on all our behalfs and we should not forget it. Yes Washington's policy at the time was one of warlike barbarism — unfortunately for those who sing the praises of the good deeds done by American liberalism.

Bogged down and defeated in Indochina, Washington had to compromise elsewhere — and firstly vis a vis China. For twenty years the US government had refused to recognise China on the international level. In the expectation of a return to normal (for imperialism), the only China represented at the United Nations for example was Taiwan, the refuge of the Kuomintang armies. In 1970, Washington was still hoping to win in Indochina, but the government already knew that it would have to give way concerning China. It was a good thing for them. A very good thing. The point is that the government was able to make a virtue out of necessity and managed to turn the reversal of its previous policy to its own advantage.

*Q. What do you mean?*

*A. This is the second essential aspect of the development of Washington's policy toward China. The US were from now on going to implement a policy of 'peaceful coexistence' by reintegrating China into international organisations in order to isolate the revolutionary movements in Asia; just as they had previously used 'peaceful coexistence' with the USSR in order to isolate China.*

And the Chinese bureaucracy, deeply shaken by the experience of the Cultural Revolution in 1966-1969, confronted with major economic difficulties and worried about the autonomous dynamic of the Indochinese revolutions, was prepared to play along with this. This was what was being negotiated in secret contacts which took place during Kissinger's visit to China in 1971 and during Nixon's Peking and Moscow trip in 1972.

The effects of the Sino-American rapprochement were immediately felt in Indochina. The negotiations took place behind the backs of the Vietnamese to whom they were of primary concern. The war in Indochina and Vietnam was in fact being stepped up. But the US government was able to take advantage of the negotiations underway with China to present itself, in the eyes of public opinion as if it were seriously preparing for peace. This undermined the anti-war mobilisation in the US itself. The situation became particularly clear at the time of Nixon's visit to Peking and Moscow which was endorsed





*Vietnamese soldiers en route to Cambodia (DR)*

by China and the USSR even though an American airborne fleet was bombing Hanoi and the strategic port of Haiphong at a most unprecedented level.

The disorientation of the anti-war movement in the US was a key factor in the outcome of the struggle in Indochina which was weakening. Elsewhere pressure was building up on the Vietnamese not to be too 'ambitious'.

The Vietnamese gave a dual response to this. On the political level, they gave public voice to their disagreements, denouncing in inflammatory editorials those 'opportunists' within the world communist movement who had let themselves be beguiled by Nixon's policy (of isolating the most 'advanced point' of the struggle — Indochina — by making a compromise with China). And on the ground, they launched a very important military offensive in order to put themselves in a good negotiating position. The Vietnamese knew, in effect that, because of growing war-weariness in Vietnam and the evolution of Chinese foreign policy, time was no longer on their side. They had to conclude a rapid agreement for the withdrawal of US forces, accepting the temporary maintenance of Saigon forces. This resulted in the Paris accords in 1973 which opened up the final phase of the liberation struggle.

**Q.** *What were the long-term consequences of the conflict between China and Vietnam?*

**A.** Very big. The turnaround in Chinese diplomacy was not merely

conjunctural. For the first time, following the social and political shockwaves brought about by the crisis of 1966-1970, the Chinese bureaucracy was settling into a long-term defence of the status quo regionally and internationally, in the same way that the Soviet bureaucracy had done. The relation of forces in the region was completely overturned by the parallel development of US policy toward China and the new foreign policy of Peking.

I think we can trace the real political rupture between the VCP and the Chinese Communist Party to 1971. Before, there had been several disagreements, but usually on the basis of a similar ideological framework. Now international and regional strategies were coming into conflict with one another more and more often; the theory of the 'three worlds' (2) made the USSR the main enemy for Peking (up until a few years ago), whilst Moscow remained at the heart of Hanoi's policy of alliances. For the Vietnamese, Chinese diplomacy directly threatened their struggle for liberation. For Peking, the Vietnamese revolution was an uncontrollable factor which challenged its policy of integration into the regional and world-wide establishment. I think that in 1972, the US were still hoping, precisely because of this change in Chinese diplomacy to be able to 'freeze' the relation of forces in Indochina thereby keeping control of the 'Mekong line' at least as far as Cambodia.

Moreover, the Sino-Vietnamese split was to have profound repercussions on the revolutionary movement in the

region. The vast majority of the revolutionary organisations in the region were basically Maoist and often very much linked to Peking. Now in the 1970s it was no longer China but Vietnam that was giving revolutionary inspiration. The tensions between the Chinese and the Vietnamese divided the movement in the region and when military conflict eventually broke out, alliances were brutally shattered with Communist Parties supported by Hanoi (like the Thailand CP — TCP) taking the side of the Khmer Rouge. (3) At a time when, with the victory in Indochina, unity should have gained the upper hand, only divisions resulted.

**Q.** *How was it that the revolutionary movements in the region were nearly all Maoist and the political influence of Vietnam was so weak?*

**A.** Careful; this was the case in the 1970s. Since then the crisis of Maoism had developed including in South East Asia. But it is true that the preponderant weight of Maoism in the region up until very recently was rather surprising. One can easily find some explanation, but it is still surprising.

What is the explanation? Firstly the

2. The theory of the 'three worlds' was developed in 1974 by Teng Siao-ping. According to the theory the three worlds were USSR and its allies, imperialism and the 'third world' — which was the revolutionary motor force.

3. On the history of the TCP, see the articles in the French-language *Inprecor* Nos 84 and 85 of 11 and 25 September 1980.



victory of the Chinese revolution in 1949; a new road seemed to open up at this time as a response to the serious defeats suffered after 1945 by several parties linked to Moscow (for example in the Philippines). Vietnam seemed to be simply continuing along the Chinese road. In fact Vietnamese strategy took up and extended many of the essential aspects of Chinese strategy. Objectively it was the expression of a more advanced and more dialectical experience, if only because it was confronted with a deeper and more sustained intervention by imperialism. But the cadres of the revolution in the area only took this into account much later.

You also have to take account of the fact that the communist movement in the region from the 1930s onwards often grew up within the Chinese communities. At the beginning the communist movement in Thailand and Malasia-Singapore was even organically linked to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) — it was their overseas branch.

And, with the Sino-Soviet split in 1960 the CCP offered a global line of march which was an explicit alternative to that of Moscow. The Vietnamese remained very cautious for reasons of conviction and expediency. Peking's line corresponded more directly to the preoccupation of a new generation of militants. This was especially obvious in the Philippines, where the 'new party' was set up in 1968 with the Maoism of the Cultural Revolution as its reference point. (4) The first generation of communists were often made up of Chinese with many links with Peking. These new recruits saw in China the country of the continuing revolution, a global response to 'modern revisionism.'

*Q. But doesn't the weak influence of the Vietnamese reflect quite simply their lack of an internationalist perspective?*

A. I don't think that is a very good explanation. The VCP did actually have a regional view (and an international one) and above all they had a regional plan.

This was particularly clear in 1975-1979. The VCP understood the worldwide consequences of a defeat of imperialism in Indochina. They knew that a favourable period had opened up. They were betting on a global reinforcement of the 'socialist camp' which they still hoped would bring about its reunification. The VCP pledged extension of the revolution throughout the region. They knew that would be in their interests. They proposed to give massive support to the national leadership of the CP in Thailand and then to the regional leadership in the North East of Thailand in order to give impetus to the revolutionary struggle in the country, which was developing rapidly from 1973 (when the military dictatorship was overthrown) and 1976 (with the bloody coup d'état). But ... the Thailand CP went over to the Sino-Khmer Rouge side in 1979. It was

a complete break.

It is possible that the VCP had been very careful in its political dealing with the Maoist CPs in the region because it did not want to open up a conflict with Peking since the aid they were sending was indispensable. Strict conditions had been put forward by the parties concerned. For example, the Thailand CP used to send cadres to be trained in medicine and military matters in Hanoi. But they weren't allowed to discuss politics with the Vietnamese. For political education they were sent to China and taught by the Chinese — often formally members of the TCP. But it is clear that in 1975 the VCP thought that South East Asia was an area where it should establish direct links, at the expense of Chinese influence, which obviously did not please Peking at all.

*Q. And today?*

A. Today the dynamic opened up by the victory has been broken, except in the Philippines. (5) This is especially the case in Thailand, where the TCP has entered into a deep crisis, where the guerilla struggle has for the most part disintegrated and where the revolutionary left is divided and greatly weakened — on the defensive. (6)

The Vietnamese are also on the defensive today. They do not believe any more in a rapid extension of revolutionary struggle into neighbouring countries. They are more dependent on support from the Soviet Union. They are seeking to break up the diplomatic front being presented on the question of Cambodia by the member countries of ASEAN. (7) The mutual distrust which separates the Vietnamese CP from other revolutionary formations in the region will be difficult to overcome.

However some contact is retained or is being renewed. A group of Thai militants are still linked to Laos — where the TCP had training camps up until 1979 — and there is talk of a new party having been set up, although it's difficult to gauge the real significance of this. Moreover, the TCP itself (or at any rate the latest 'younger' elements who remained in the TCP despite the crisis and who are now on the Central Committee) proposed renewing contact with the Vietnamese. A Vietnamese diplomat based in Bangkok has even been expelled from Thailand last year for agreeing to meet one of them.

Finally, it must be noted that the Vietnamese have given discreet support (in the form of military, political, technical and medical training) to several movements in Africa and Latin America. But I don't know what the situation is now.

*Q. To conclude this section, two questions; firstly what is your overall assessment of the situation in the region today?*

A. I think that, on the whole, the situation in the region reflects the contradictory heritage of the 1975

victory and the crisis of 1979.

In the 1970s, the popular and guerilla struggles began to develop in special ways in two countries; in Thailand, in the North of the ASEAN area and in the Philippines, in the South. The revolutionary dynamic was interrupted in Thailand, but it is more alive than ever in the Philippines. This is precisely an expression of the contradictory impact of developments in the region but also of national political factors (such as the bureaucratic rigidity of the leadership of the TCP and the tactical flexibility of the Philippine CP) and economic factors (the Philippines is going through an unprecedented crisis at this level as well).

Moreover, the Cambodian crisis has given new life to ASEAN which used to only exist on paper. The economic projects of ASEAN are still not very substantial, but this coalition of six countries is now playing a notable international role. Internal divisions have obviously come out within ASEAN, especially with regard to Cambodia, Vietnam and China. But there now exists a bloc of pro-imperialist regimes which is confronted with an Indochinese bloc and which is benefitting from an effective system of alliances: including both the US and China. Furthermore several of the member countries have undergone real economic development.

*Q. Can you elaborate on what you see as the main lessons that we can draw from what we have been discussing?*

A. I would like to stress four aspects. First; it is more and more obvious that each national revolutionary organisation must understand how to retain a real independence of decision making and action in relation to governments who might support them; that is the real meaning of the faction fight between Mao and Wang Ming. The Vietnamese CP also had to win its independence of decision making, on the national level first (after the difficult experience of the democratic front in 1937-1939 mainly, but also in 1945-1946 when Moscow refused to recognise the new independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam). Then on the international level.

Following the Yalta accords in 1945, Stalin agreed to certain Chinese and Vietnamese zones of influence without even consulting the interested parties. In 1954, the Vietnamese were seated at the conference table in Geneva. But

4. On the history of the Philippine CP see the articles cited above.

5. For articles on the current situation in the Philippines see IV Nos 37 and 38, October 3 and 17, 1983 and Nos 49 and 59, March 26, 1984 and September 17 1984.

6. See the article 'The crisis of the Communist Party and the left', IV No 49, March 26 1984.

7. ASEAN stands for the Association of Nations of South East Asia and its member countries are Malasia, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Brunei. This alliance opposed Vietnamese presence in Cambodia.

nevertheless it was Molotov (USSR) largely and Zhou En Lai (China) subsequently who actually imposed very serious compromises on Indochina. In 1968, after the Tet offensive, the VCP felt strong enough to demand that the Paris negotiations be conducted by those directly concerned (that is the Americans and the Vietnamese), without the participation of the other powers, whether they were members of the Western bloc or the socialist camp. That is how they found themselves in a position to negotiate a delicate compromise which was basically in their favour; the 1973 accords.

More recently some parties, like the Thailand party have paid dearly for their subordination to Chinese diplomacy. This lesson obviously applies to everyone.

It is obvious — indeed I would say inevitable — that revolutionary parties in South East Asia will some day or other be looking for aid from Vietnam. In any prolonged struggle, aid from countries like Vietnam, Cuba, USSR or China is a factor in the eventual outcome. But it is important that they don't become materially and politically dependent on Hanoi as some of them did previously on Moscow or Peking. The Vietnamese regime will probably grant aid although the present conjuncture is not favourable on this level, but they will also develop a state diplomacy which could be in direct conflict with the interests of the revolutionary struggle. It would be dangerous to forget this.

Second; it is important to understand the profoundly counter-revolutionary dynamic of inter-bureaucratic conflict between the USSR and China. The historic responsibility for this conflict rests, I am convinced, with the Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow. But now that the Chinese bureaucracy has entered into the game of peaceful coexistence it is doing to Vietnam what Moscow did

to China in 1960.

Once again, if it becomes necessary to obtain aid from countries like the USSR or China, it is vital to guard against becoming involved in the logic of the Sino-Soviet conflict. The conflict itself must be fought against. Its consequences in South East Asia are very serious.

You can't replace one set of alliances (for example with Peking against the USSR and therefore with the Khmer Rouge against Vietnam) with another set of alliances (that is with the USSR against Peking and therefore for a Soviet intervention in Afghanistan). It is necessary to define an independent position, that of the revolutionary movement.

Thirdly; it is necessary to fight for a new sort of internationalism. The crisis of the socialist camp, the Sino-Indochinese crisis and various other splits and realignments have profoundly shaken internationalist beliefs. Fighting for internationalism is not a utopia, it's a basic need in every revolutionary struggle.

Revolutionary organisations have a big responsibility in this regard. The only way to rehabilitate internationalism is to apply a real internationalist policy, one which corresponds to the objective interests of the struggle of the people and not to the interests of a particular organisation or current or even nation state.

Fourthly; There are certain immediate solidarity tasks which must be taken up. In relation to Central America but also with regard to South East Asia: solidarity with the current struggles in the Philippines; but also solidarity with the revolutionary forces in Thailand who are attempting to draw the lessons of the crisis and of the sudden retreat and who are trying to establish new unitary relations.

Here again in the course of carrying out concrete solidarity tasks one will help to awaken internationalist sentiments.

## The evolution of the Vietnamese leadership

*Question. Let's move on now to the question of Vietnam itself and the policy of the Vietnamese Communist Party. In analysing the crisis in Indochina today you have stressed the objective factors, such as the effects of the destruction of the war, the policy of imperialism as well as that of the Chinese bureaucracy and the evolution of the Khmer Rouge current. But hasn't the Vietnamese leadership itself also taken wrong orientations which have deepened the crisis.*

*Answer.* I think that the Vietnamese leadership has mainly been reacting to the increasing crisis following the victory. But it also appears that it has effectively followed a wrong orientation overall which has had negative repercussions in all areas. The existence of this problem was recognised in most spectacular fashion by the Central

Committee of the VCP on the occasion of the official self-criticism which the latter presented to the fifth congress of the party in March 1982. (1)

The orientation mapped out immediately following the victory in 1975 can best be described as triumphalist and voluntarist. The perspectives and the objectives were far too optimistic and ambitious. This triumphalist vision was fed by the euphoria of victory at the time, by the feeling that nothing was impossible for those who had successfully resisted US intervention. The voluntarism was expressed in the attempt to use the dynamic of victory to mobilise the population in an immense programme of reconstruction and development.

The Vietnamese leadership obviously understood the political, social and economic difficulties of the situation but it largely underestimated them.

However the leadership soon began to realise that their appeals for a mobilisation of the population were not getting the response they had hoped for. For example, the general secretary of the party, Le Duan, in his report to the fourth congress of the VCP in December 1976, noted that they had not yet managed to create 'really powerful movements' similar to what had existed during the war. But it was only very slowly that the Vietnamese leadership began to draw the lessons of this failure and to modify their overall orientation.

It must be said that it was difficult in 1975 to avoid making an error of perspective. It was difficult, for example, to be able to foresee, immediately after such an important victory, the scope and depth of the crisis which was on its way. But if the mistake was an easy one to make this did not make the implications any the less serious. The more complicated and difficult a situation is, the easier it is to make mistakes but the more dangerous those mistakes then become.

*Q. You said that the wrong overall orientation from 1975-1976 bore grave consequences in all areas. Can you be more precise?*

*A.* On the economic level, first the production targets of the fifth five year plan (1976-1980) given, were such that a virtual 'forced march' in industry and in agriculture was needed. In 1980, the country should have produced the equivalent of 21 million tonnes of rice per annum. It had only produced 13.5 million tonnes in 1976; production fell to 12.2 million in 1978 to rise to 14.3 million tonnes in 1980. The failure was obvious.

Coal production should have reached 10 million tonnes by 1980. Despite the prudence of Vietnamese theory of economic development, which underlined the importance of agriculture and light industry, decisive resources were put into huge energy projects such as hydro-electric power and into industrial projects which were supposed to turn Vietnam into an industrial country in twenty years. A leadership which, during the war, had understood the importance of balancing regional and local economies had from henceforth become fascinated by big projects, similar to the ones which the World Bank or the Soviet bureaucracy are so keen on. Most of these grand projects have had to be abandoned or suspended, and any hope of a big industrial leap forward is now very distant. Now they are returning to more balanced forms of industrialisation.

On the political level, despite the warnings made by cadres of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in the south and by the Communist Party, the political bureau decided on the very rapid reunification of the country which was accomplished institutionally in 1976,

1. See IV No 12, August 2, 1982.

mainly through the organisation of legislative elections.

Personally I have thought for a long time that this was not a terrible problem given that the reunification was already well on the way following the victory on April 30, 1975. From that time on there was only one leading party, only one army, one body of civil servants, even if there were two separate policies because of the huge differences between North and South. However, the practically instantaneous winding up of the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) in the South and the institutionalised unity forced on the country does seem to have had important negative consequences in preventing the development of an independent political process in the South. This contributed to the increase of tensions within the VCP and the NLF.

On the social level, in the South the collectivisation of agriculture was implemented much too rapidly. In 1979 there existed, at least on paper, more than 13,240 production teams (required for the first stage of collectivisation), each using between thirty and fifty hectares. The following year nearly 10,000 of them had disappeared.

New economic zones were opened up in areas where the war had destroyed villages and agriculture. In 1975-1976 400,000 people from Saigon/Ho Chi Minh City — an area whose population had vastly increased during the war — had been displaced in order to populate these new zones. But because of a lack of preparation, as much on the political as on the socio-economic level, the measure became particularly unpopular. It seems that 60% of the people sent to these zones have returned in an uneven way to Saigon in the months following their removal.

In the North the transition to

'large-scale socialist production' had been pronounced, but the regime came up against strong social resistance when, in the name of economic efficiency, they sought to dissolve local village authorities into structures one step higher up.

On the international level the VCP quickly lost interest in the solidarity movement and left it to fall apart. Bearing in mind its economic policy, the Vietnamese regime directed its efforts toward Western governments. But the attempts to achieve an opening in the West were sharply rejected by the US and, though more insidiously, by Western Europe and Japan.

Convinced of the international prestige of Vietnam, it seems that the VCP leadership had not foreseen that the conflict with China would flare up still more in 1978-1979, sharpened by the conflict with the Khmer Rouge. The international propaganda and information work having been completely neglected during those crucial years by the Vietnamese, the Khmer Rouge and China were able to occupy the field at this particularly bitter stage in the conflict. Here also the Vietnamese regime paid a high price for its neglect.

These are only examples of what the triumphalist and voluntarist course taken from 1975-1979 really meant.

*Q. Could these errors also be classified as leftist?*

A. Often, yes, but not always. I indicated that the policy of the Vietnamese government during the first years following the victory included making overtures towards Western Europe and Japan in particular. Judging from the way this policy was carried out, the Vietnamese leadership seems to have

underestimated the resistance that would be put up from within the imperialist bloc. In fact, the international policy of the VCP for a time combined an appeal for revolutionary struggle and a strengthening of the 'socialist camp' with an attempt to develop multi-lateral relations not only with the USSR and China but also with the West. The negative response from Europe and Japan strengthened the 'hard line' wing of the party. Then the break with China had made the USSR and the Soviet bloc practically the only allies that Vietnam had, with a few exceptions in the third world — India for example. If triumphalism brought hopes of open diplomacy, the policy of 'realism' which followed, fed a new siege mentality.

Lets take another example, this time on the internal level. In the aftermath of victory the Vietnamese leadership also seems to have underestimated the capacity of the enemy within, the large commercial bourgeoisie of Saigon-Cholon, who were generally of Chinese origin. In the name of the 'national unity' and 'reconciliation' which are not exactly ultra-left terms, the leadership took limited measures against this important section of the native bourgeoisie. But this big bourgeoisie was able to build a barrier between the regime and the peasants. It controlled a whole network of trusted commercial intermediaries, through whom it could buy up rice at bargain prices and offer producer's and consumer's goods to the population in the countryside. At that time the government could not compete with them in these areas. This commercial bourgeoisie also controlled the market and could therefore create scarcity. Because of their immense wealth they could also resort to bribery and corruption. Nothing could stop them using any means they chose to accumulate profits, but also to sabotage the government's efforts.

In 1978, the VCP reacted somewhat late to this by mobilising the population against private commerce. But they did so at the worst possible moment when the country was beset with economic problems and in the full swing of the conflict with China. Under this dual pressure the leadership reacted in an ultra-left way.

The following lessons can be drawn from all this; that in order to implement even a moderate policy of alliances, for example, with the peasantry, it is necessary to hit the big bourgeoisie who can insert themselves between the new regime and the social layers it is trying to reach agreement with. And usually even to be moderate, it is necessary to create the necessary relation of forces by taking state power, on the one hand, but also, on the other hand, by breaking up or at least holding in check the most dangerous social centres of the counter-revolution.

One must therefore avoid drawing unilateral conclusions in this area. In order to have some influence on the interna-

## VIETNAM SINCE THE VICTORY

30 April 1975. The taking of Saigon by the forces of the NLF and the North Vietnamese army. China immediately ceases all military aid.

June 1975. The creation of a unified state bank and the suppression of other banks in the South.

1975-1976. Creation of new economic zones and the displacement of a section of the population of Saigon and other towns over-populated as a result of the war.

July 1976. Formal unification of the country and the establishment of the socialist republic of Vietnam.

December 1976. Fourth congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party.

1978. Armed conflict with Pol Pot's Cambodia. Incidents on the Chinese border.

March 1978. Expropriation of the large private businesses in the South.

June 1978. Vietnam joins Comecon.

July 1978. Cooperation treaty between USSR and Vietnam.

December 1978-January 1979. The Vietnamese army and the Cambodian forces of Heng Samrin intervene in Cambodia and overthrow the Pol Pot regime.

February-March 1979. China invades part of the northern provinces of Vietnam in order to 'punish' them for their action in Cambodia and then withdraws after several weeks. In this time there are 50,000 killed or wounded on the Vietnamese side and 60,000 on the Chinese.

March 1982. Fifth congress of the VCP. The party leadership makes a self-criticism.

tional level it was necessary to maintain links with the solidarity movement, insofar as it still existed. In order to proceed at a steady pace in agriculture, it was necessary to take firmer measures more rapidly against monopoly traders.

*Q. Are you proposing any new guidelines for post-capitalist transition?*

A. Obviously not. You have to take into account the whole of a given situation and the real difficulties they faced. If the Vietnamese leaders did not hit out at the big Chinese traders more quickly, it might have been because they were afraid of a reaction in China. But it might also have been because they did not have the network of retailers, or intermediaries, nor the financial means to replace these traders. It is easy to see mistakes with hindsight. It is useful to think things over politically. But it is another thing to be able to say, at the time what concretely should be done. I would pose the problem this way: How could you hit the commercial bourgeoisie and still maintain a small or medium-size trade network?

*Q. But, from a more general point of view, how can we understand the scope of the errors committed? I mean on the level of the ideological terms of reference of the Vietnamese leadership and not just in relation to real objective problems. Do such errors reflect the political and programmatic weaknesses of the Vietnamese leadership, with its Stalinist education?*

A. There is a Stalinist heritage which most notably underlines their conception of power. But this is not the only or even the most profound influence. The Maoist influence was very strong in the past and despite official statements it must still count for something.

I should imagine that Lenin is more widely read by the Vietnamese leaders

*A young Vietnamese recruit (DR)*



than Stalin or his successors. The political thinking of the Vietnamese leadership was, above all, determined by their experience in struggle, as much on the national as the international level.

For my part, I would avoid talking too sharply about the 'political weaknesses' of the Vietnamese leadership. It certainly has its limitations, which generally reflect precisely the limits of its own national experience. But it also showed on several occasions, an exceptional capacity for political leadership which allowed it to resolve issues such as the conquest of power, despite the continuing difficulties due to imperialist intervention.

*Q. Could you explain what you mean by that?*

A. Here we are touching on one of the main lessons of the Vietnamese revolution I think, as is the case with many other revolutions. It is one which seems obvious when you bring it up today. But we must also remember how many errors have been committed by so many revolutionary organisations, including the Fourth International, through ignoring this lesson.

I would put it this way; you must have a strategy for the conquest of power which answers a certain number of key questions. For example, what are the social forces in the revolution? What is the role of the struggle for power? Around what basic national and social goals can the masses be mobilised? It is important to have a national implantation to invest and accumulate forces as part of a long-term plan. But for all that you cannot plan all the stages of the struggle for power and national liberation in advance, for obvious but very important reasons. The first is that you have to take the enemy into account. The enemy will react and as they too begin to learn about revolution and counter-revolution, they will regularly try to shift the terrain of the battle by changing their tack. The second reason is that the course of the struggle in any country will be affected and sometimes very profoundly by the course of regional and international struggles which will not conform to a pre-established schema. The third reason is that every phase of the struggle is conditioned by the results of the preceding stage. And these results, which then become a part of the stakes involved can never be foreseen in any detail.

Examples of this abound in the history of the Vietnamese revolution. The development of US policy in Indochina forced the Vietnamese leadership to re-evaluate more than once their perspectives and their methods of struggle. In the 1930s, the course of the mass struggle was very different from what it became during the wars of national liberation in 1950 and from 1960-1970. One of the reasons for this was that, during the 1930s, there was a

possibility of a convergence of anti-colonial struggles in Vietnam and the class struggle in Europe, mainly at the time of the 1936 general strike in France and the Spanish civil war. The mass strike, the organisation of the masses into action committees in the Saigon area could have led to a victorious insurrection, the imperialist forces being tied up as they were in the metropolis itself. The defeat in Europe and the march toward world war closed off this perspective.

In 1945, in another international context, at the time of the defeat of the Japanese, it was basically through a mass insurrection at a national level that power was first seized. This power was still very tenuous. But it was now an independent country which had to be conquered afresh by the French. This is what gave the national resistance that grew up its particular character.

No one could have foreseen all this and integrated these events into a pre-ordained schema for the conquest of power. The Vietnamese leadership, however, was itself a temporary prisoner of such schemas. That is why it was often late — by quite a few years in some cases — in modifying its policies. It is interesting to read what Giap, the leader involved in the taking of Dien Bien Phu, wrote on this in his book 'People's War, People's Army'. He writes about the call for agrarian reform during the anti-French resistance, a reform which was set aside for far too long. The errors committed during this struggle were numerous and it is very important to study them. That is how we draw the lessons of past experiences. But at each turn, the Vietnamese leadership was able to change direction and integrate new developments before it was too late.

To be schematic, I would say that the fundamental programme and Marxist theory give us the means to analyse and draw up historic objectives. A strategic dimension gives every tactical choice its own horizons. But the correct orientation at a given stage of the struggle flows from a concrete analysis of the situation which must draw together the maximum national and international data. Any tactic is conditioned by strategic objectives but determined by the needs of the moment.

A revolutionary struggle requires neither the oversimplification of tactics nor the too rigid strategy which could flow from the application of any model. The language of the VCP reflects an awareness of this problem. The notion of the combination of forms of struggle, of regions of struggle etc. is put forward against an oversimplification of tactics. The idea of the need to determine 'the favourable moment' underlines the belief that victory will not come as the result of a gradual accumulation of strength in the framework of a rigid schema, but out of the capacity of the leadership to seize the time which is most favourable,



Working in the fields in Vietnam (DR)

when the enemy is weakened and paralysed. That is what the VCP did in Vietnam in 1975 and before that in 1945. You cannot plan a twenty year process of prolonged revolutionary war from the stage of the defence strategy right up to a balance of forces and then to the counter-offensive, just as you cannot plan the mass insurrection years in advance. But simply seizing the right moment is not enough. It is also necessary to help create it through a policy which extends to all areas — the area of alliances, diplomacy, international action and in the political and military field. In this, the Vietnamese were expert.

*Q. To come back to my first question. How was it that a politically experienced leadership could make the mistake it did in the period 1975-1980, even taking into account the objective problems?*

*A.* Once the objective difficulties have been underlined, you have to take other elements into account. First of all you have to take into account the big changes in the framework which was in operation after the victory. It is a very different to fight for power and national independence than it is to begin a process of reconstruction and transition toward a new society. That raises another problem. The type of organisations you have to build for revolutionary combat are not necessarily the same as the type of organisations needed to begin the transition after the victory. I am talking here about all types of organisations; parties, mass organisations, organisations of workers power. What is involved here

is not only the structure of these organisations but also their method of functioning and the conceptions which underline them. This is an old problem which we must approach in a new way. The difficulty lies in the fact that you have to begin by overthrowing the old class rule in order to allow a revolutionary transformation of society and that the manner of overthrowing the old rule is not merely a matter of preference but depends also on objective conditions and the actions of the enemy.

How is the problem posed in Vietnam? The struggle was very long and very costly and it took the form of a military combat where the social revolution itself was finally expressed in the framework of a movement for national liberation. And all this took place in a largely agricultural society with a Confucian culture. These are the factors which, among others, made their mark on the Vietnamese communist movement and the new regime immediately following the victory.

We have already drawn attention to the consequences of the prolonged and costly character of the struggle. (2) The most obvious weakness lay in the apparatus made up of inexperienced cadres with few local roots and the very low level of self organisation of significant sections of the population.

The problem was particularly acute in the Saigon area. In 1975, the VCP had 400 members in Saigon, for a largely rootless population of 3.5 million inhabitants. In 1954 the party had 3,000 members in this town for a population that was two times smaller. In the

sixth District of Saigon with a population of 225,000 people the party had only six surviving members. They had to recruit en masse after the victory, which is always the worst time. One can understand the scope of the problem by the fact that in the first district of Saigon 95% of party members joined after 30 April 1975. (3)

The regime was deeply marked by this situation. The same goes for the functioning of the party apparatus characterised by a feeling of weakness which gave way to authoritarianism. This was reinforced by the fact that the party had been shaped for three decades by a lengthy military struggle which had its own rules. No organisation could go through such an experience without being deeply marked by it. Amongst other consequences there developed a conception of secrecy and discipline, a certain command structure and a party which was constituted as a kind of alternative government, intervening in all areas, not simply in the leadership of struggles.

All this influenced the concept of state power. Vietnamese theory says that 'the party leads, the state manages the population exercise their power of control as a collective master'. The party, which is basically unique, is as a leadership constitutionally above the state. The origin of this conception is not exclusively Stalinist. You find

2. See the first part of this interview published in IV No 76 May 20, 1985.

3. These figures, like most of the figures quoted in this interview are taken from *Far Eastern Economic Review* May 2, 1985.

elements of it in the first years of the Russian revolution, as well as in the Chinese revolution. The idea is even present in a revolution like the Cuban revolution. It corresponds to a prolonged experience of military combat. Its roots belong in a political tradition which is that of the state belonging to the Asiatic mode of production, as well as in the Vietnamese cultural tradition. The consequences of this are manifold.

In the Maoist tradition in Asia, the party can, for example, rule the personal lives of its members, on the question of marriage mainly, not only for reasons of security and functioning but also in the name of a so-called proletarian conception of morality.

The moral character of a revolutionary organisation is in fact a very important question. Revolutionary activity has moral implications, but to make the party the judge, on behalf of the population is very dangerous. It is to make the party the keeper not only of political power but of ecclesiastical and state power.

The fact that the struggle in Indochina has taken the form of movements for national liberation is not without its consequences either. The anti-imperialist struggle was fed by an awakening of deep-rooted nationalist feelings, which was progressive. But that can also generate a chauvinist type of nationalism once victory has been achieved. This is what happened in varying degrees after 1975. The Khmer Rouge leadership developed a racist, almost frenzied nationalism. But in Vietnam also, once the conflict with China came out into the open, the leadership resorted to nationalist anti-Chinese propaganda which was very dangerous. In it they reminded people that for thousands of years Chinese dynasties had invaded Vietnam.

Finally, it is very tempting, when faced with huge socio-economic difficulties, as there were in Vietnam after the victory, to make simple recourse to the methods of action which have been tried and tested in the war; campaigns of rivalry, mass mobilisations, appeals to patriotism, leadership by the party etc. We saw it in China, for example, with the great leap forward at the end of the 1950s. We also saw it in Cuba in 1970 with the campaign for the 'zafra', that is the target of ten million tonnes of sugar cane. In each case the aim was to break the limitations of underdevelopment through a massive mobilisation of the population. This method has always failed.

*Q. It is in this framework that we have to understand the crisis which hit Vietnam between 1978 and 1979?*

A. 1978-1979 was the crisis point when all these contradictions merged together. The final break with the Khmer Rouge meant the final break with China. Imperialism rapidly tightened its grip once more, following the occupation of Cambodia by Vietnam in 1979. The

conflict within the VCP became more acute. Relations with the masses as a whole had seriously deteriorated especially in the South. Class conflicts with the commercial bourgeoisie hardened. Bureaucratic arrogance and corruption of party members reached a more dangerous level. The fleeing of the boat people became more significant.

*Q. Who were these boat people who left Vietnam in their thousands?*

A. They represented several layers of the population which actually illustrate the different aspects of the crisis which was hitting the country at the time. There were those who had collaborated with the Americans and were afraid of repression. There were those who belonged to powerful Chinese bourgeois clans in the South. There were those who were quite simply attracted by the promises of the 'voice of America.' There were also members of the elite in society whose standard of living had declined. Such an exodus is to be expected in a time of revolution. All other revolutions have undergone similar exoduses. And the Vietnamese war was one of the most harrowing experiences of revolution because of the imperialist intervention.

But there were also workers and party members in the North who crossed the Chinese border. Of Chinese origin, they feared in the climate of suspicion which was prevalent in 1978-1979, they might be seen as a kind of fifth column even when they had been workers and party members dedicated to the revolution. Peking seems to have favoured this exodus later on. Hanoi also favoured it. And then in the South there were those who had lost hope in the future. The liberation had not brought peace and stability. A new conflict was beginning with their huge northern neighbours. War had settled in in Cambodia. The economy was declining with the cessation of US

*In the paddy fields ... (DR)*



aid in the South and Chinese aid in the North. The future of the country seemed doomed. This particular exodus represented a serious defeat for the new revolutionary regime.

*Q. Doesn't this failure raise the question of the absence of socialist democracy in Vietnam. You explained before the historic roots of the VCP's political conceptions and of the structure of the new government. But in trying to take account of too much don't we run the risk of forgetting the programmatic and essential importance of socialist democracy?*

A. We can never understand 'too much' about history and politics. But I don't deny the programmatic importance of socialist democracy. On the contrary I would even go so far as to say that this democracy is even more important in backward countries where the socialist transition is much more difficult and less 'natural'. The process has to be led. In order to do this, it is necessary to understand the real situation in society, something which is not possible without mass socialist democracy. But the realisation of socialist democracy in a socially backward country, under imperialist pressure as well as pressure from the Soviet and Chinese bureaucracy, is infinitely more difficult than in an industrialised country. The problem is not to know what to do but to know how to go about it.

Of course, programmatic clarity is important as a guide to how to go about things. In this respect the programme of the VCP is inadequate, flowing as it does from the ideological formation of the Vietnamese leadership and its particular national experience. One of the functions of internationalism, by the way, is precisely to enrich and consolidate the programmatic gains of each national organisation in the face

of particular national experiences in relation to other countries. It is a way of getting beyond the narrow horizons of each separate struggle.

But it is inevitable that the structure of a new regime should reflect in the actual revolution, the course taken in the struggle, the alliances made at the time of the seizure of power, the political traditions of the particular country etc. As a result it is also normal that new workers states appear in different forms. The problem is to work out how, starting from this concrete reality, you can take steps towards effective socialist democracy. That is the importance, for example, of the debate on the impact of the elections in Nicaragua.

Treating the problem in a normative fashion — it is necessary to do this or it is necessary to do that — is not very useful. I remember writing an article in 1975 on the deportation of the urban population in Cambodia which basically said; 'If there had been workers and peasants councils this would not have happened like this ...' Obviously. But the point is this was so far from the reality in Cambodia at the time that it could not possibly constitute an alternative line.

*Q. But there are concrete democratic goals which could be put forward in Vietnam today, aren't there?*

*A.* Of course. The fight for real mass democracy is a pressing task from the very first steps in the revolutionary process and it is obvious that this fight is urgent in Vietnam. It is necessary to fight for the right to information against the monopoly exercised by the party apparatus. The last independent daily newspaper in the South, *Tin Sang*, has now finally closed.

We have to demand the generalisation of election procedures and an enlarged government accountable to elected bodies, the establishment of legal norms in the judicial domain, the reduction of the de facto powers of the political police.

*Q. What about the detainees in the re-education camps?*

*A.* That is a very difficult question to sort out. The civil war in Vietnam was terrible. The pro-imperialist Saigon army had as much as a million men with a very strong and reactionary officer corps. The American special services used tens of thousands of people as informers, executioners and for other repressive tasks.

The new revolutionary regime decided not to proceed with any executions for past crimes. Very quickly the vast majority of soldiers in the Saigon army were set free. It was one of very few revolutions where there were no summary killings at the time of the victory. It is to the credit of the Vietnamese leadership and the Vietnamese people.

A promise was made to either free or



*Vietnamese soldiers in training (DR)*

put on trial all the detainees in the re-education centres within three years. That probably reflects the optimistic view the VCP had of the future in 1975. But in 1978 there was fear and crisis. The promise was not kept. It is very difficult to know how many detainees are still in the camps. The estimations that I heard vary between 7,000, according to government sources, and 20,000.

I think it is very important to keep the promise made in 1975. The continuation of the present situation is arbitrary. Some are freed and some are not. Nobody knows how long their sentence is. And all this must reinforce the semi autonomous power of the security services.

*Q. You indicated that in 1982 the Central Committee of the VCP had presented a self criticism to the fifth congress of the party. What was this about and what changes in direction have been made since?*

*A.* The scope and clarity of the self criticism made by the leadership of the party in 1982 is reminiscent of the self criticism made in 1956 after the crisis opened up by the too rapid generalisation of the agricultural reform programme. But the context has changed and it will be much more difficult today to re-establish a dialogue between the regime and sections of the population. In my view, the 1982 self criticism centred on three basic questions.

First, the subjectivism of previous years — that is the voluntarism which we spoke of earlier — was denounced.

Second, the self criticism recorded the problems posed by the rift between the regime and important sections of the population due to bureaucratic sluggish-

ness and the absence of a real mass democracy and the decline in the quality of the revolutionary party. Le Duan's report to the fifth congress recognised that the institutional mechanisms were not functioning correctly, that they were inadequate and that the people had difficulty in taking advantage of their 'right to collective rule'. He had noted previously in 1976 before the fourth congress, that it was necessary to 'take practical measures to stop certain cadres and state employees from becoming a layer of privileged people', that is a bureaucracy.

This self criticism is very important. It shows that the problem of mass democracy in a country like Vietnam is a vital one and not an abstract idea of interest only to Western intellectuals. But Le Duan's report was as clear in outlining the problem as it was unsatisfactory and inadequate in proposing remedies and institutional reforms. The third essential element of the self criticism was on the economic and social policies.

*Q. That is?*

*A.* It is not only a question of working out more realistic objectives for production. There is also an easing of restrictions on the economy, of giving more responsibilities to individual units of production. The role of the free market is growing. Within the rural community, contracts are exchanged with families who take over sections of production and can sell an important portion of the products.

*Q. Like in China?*

*A.* Not really. The reforms are

a lot more cautious than they are in China where collectivisation has today largely been dismantled. But the reforms underway in the two countries raise important problems which we must think about more deeply.

*Q. Problems concerning an economy of transition?*

A. Concerning the economy of transition in countries like China and Vietnam but also in the struggle for power. There also, in studying concrete experiences we can see at what point we have to guard against schemas. I think that it would be useful here to clear up certain aspects concerning the agrarian question before and after the revolution.

Concerning the democratic revolution we have always insisted on the importance of the demand for the redistribution of the land. The self critical balance-sheet that Giap made on this subject for 1940 to 1950 confirms the importance of the problem. If they don't get the land they work on, the poor peasants who bear the brunt of the war effort can become demobilised. There is then a risk that the large landowners will retain a dangerous level of political power in the village. But an agrarian reform which is too radical or too hasty can force sections of the rich or middle layer peasantry into the arms of the counter revolution, which happened in China or it can alienate the village community still further from the revolutionary regime which is what happened in Vietnam in 1956.

The Party's policy must therefore be very concrete and democracy within the village is indispensable for determining what is possible and what is not.

Furthermore, the peasantries of the third world have changed a great deal in twenty years. The peasantry of the Mekong delta in South Vietnam lived through the Vietminh reforms, the Diem counter reform and then the 'green revolution' instigated by the Americans. In many cases the peasants had become landowners, individualists and educated in modern techniques of production as well as being integrated into the market, which was not the case in the North. It is therefore impossible to take the same road today in the South as was previously taken in the North.

Concerning the transition to socialism therefore, many well-established beliefs have been challenged by the experience in countries such as Vietnam or China. Concretely, what should be the mid-term goals that we should aim towards in relation to the degree of collectivisation?

In order to shed some light on the problem, I will say a couple of words about the development of my ideas on this subject. For a long time I used to think that the more that was collectivised the better, on the condition that this was done with the agreement of the peasants concerned and not through forced collectivisation. Then I realised

that it might be necessary to slow down the rhythms of collectivisation, for reasons of economic efficiency and also according to certain social needs, in order to maintain majority support in the rural areas.

And now I am not sure what degree of collectivisation is desirable in the medium term. However, this is a central question for a revolutionary regime. Outside of a real capacity for mechanisation, collectivisation has certain limits. All the more so, because even with the most modern agriculture in the West family farms often persist — at the level of production. And finally, in countries like Vietnam, quite apart from China with its one billion inhabitants, I cannot see how urbanisation and industrialisation can follow the same road as in Europe, with the same type of rural exodus.

*Q. But in the immediate term what is the result of these reform measures taken in Vietnamese agriculture?*

A. They are doubly positive. Firstly, production is increasing. It appears they have attained the equivalent of 17.8 million tonnes of rice in 1984, despite very unfavourable climatic conditions. And these measures have received a positive welcome from rural producers. That means that, despite a

dangerous growth in the population, the food shortage in Vietnam has gone down. This is a major objective today. And the regime can use these measures of economic liberalisation to political advantage.

*Q. But these measures are not unanimously supported within the leadership of the Party?*

A. Basically, some leading members are afraid that these measures will weaken the political hold of the party. State employees are affected by the price rise on the free market which their wages do not follow and this can lead to rampant corruption.

These measures seem to me to be necessary. But it would be wrong to see them as a panacea. New social differentiations could come to light in the countryside and we must not forget that the increase in family work is above all an increase of work for women and children.

*Q. That must raise problems for the participation of women in political life?*

A. Exactly. There you are touching on a very delicate issue. Production has

*The mechanisation of agriculture in Vietnam has a long way to go ... (DR)*





to be increased and so does productivity and also hours of work. This reduces leisure time, which is an indispensable element of democracy. Is it possible today to increase production in any other way? I don't know. But it is a real problem in leading the struggle for democratic rights as well as against the oppression to which women are subjected.

*Q. Aren't you just putting forward the same old argument there; bread (or rice) first and democracy afterwards? With that reasoning the time is never ripe for democracy.*

*A.* That is not what I mean. What I am saying is that Vietnam today needs a whole package of economic and political measures. It is easy to enumerate a certain number of democratic demands which are basic and essential. It is more difficult to put them into practice. And without such socio-economic measures the other demands could lose all content. My feeling is that we are, or anyway I am not, well-equipped to respond to this problem. It imposes a certain modesty.

*Q. What do you think of the probable evolution of the situation?*

*A.* I think that we are witnessing an ongoing crisis in Vietnam. But it is very difficult to make predictions. Without concrete knowledge and also because it is very difficult to know what is going on inside the VCP and the development within the party will have very profound repercussions. Finally, because the unfolding of the regional and international situation will also play a very important role.

*Q. You talk about the evolution of the situation within the VCP. Can you be more precise?*

*A.* There are disagreements but it is difficult to judge their depth and dynamic. But we do know something about these debates. Some important cadres of the NLF and of the PRG were opposed to the party's line in 1975-1976 and felt that people did not have confidence in them. Regional and provincial leaderships tried to prove their autonomy by applying the line in a 'creative' way. It seems that the Northern province of Vinh Phu, for example, started to establish in 1976-1977 a system of family contracts in agriculture, a policy which was not adopted by the central committee until March 1979 during the sixth plenum. The party organisation in Ho Chi Minh city said in a document that it was necessary 'to inform the political bureau of the reality of the situation so that they can lead us better'.

On the military level different conceptions came out, including on the subject of the 1975 offensive as is evidenced by the writings of those responsible, Van Tien Dung and Tran

Van Tra.

It took several years, from 1979 to 1982 to win the leaders of the party to a change in line. The central committee which prepared the reports of the fifth congress lasted a long time and the congress had to be postponed apparently because of the scope of the differences which emerged on the analysis of the crisis and on the responses which should be given to it. An official of the party, Nguyen Khac Vien, violently denounced, in a letter to the National Assembly in 1981, some high-up cadres for bureaucracy and illusions in China. (4)

*Q. Important differences also emerged at the level of the central committee and the political bureau? Who opposed who?*

*A.* That is a well-kept secret and it is possible that the realignments vary according to the people and the periods involved. What is obvious, however, is that among the leaders, Truong Chinh, president of the State Council and a member of the political bureau of the VCP who would have had a direct involvement in the 1956 crisis and To Huu, along with the support of some military cadres and middle cadres of the party were probably sceptical and opposed to the agricultural reform policy and the economic reforms which were implemented from 1979 onwards. Other members of the political bureau and of the old guard such as Le Duan and Le Duc Tho, or the party secretary of Ho Chi Minh city, Vo van Kiet, became defenders of the reforms.

Anyway, something is going on within the VCP but it will probably be a long time before anyone knows exactly what.

*Q. You were also talking about the development of the situation in the region as a whole?*

*A.* Yes because that will affect the internal situation in Vietnam a lot.

The present situation is partly on ice at the moment because of the question of Cambodia. The game of indirect negotiations has forced the main protagonists to make their positions clear. The current stumbling block at the level of diplomatic discussions is the position of the Khmer Rouge.

The question of the Khmer Rouge is important for two reasons. They constitute the main military force of the Democratic Kampuchea coalition and they are indispensable to the maintenance of an alliance between the West and China and especially between China and Thailand on the Cambodian issue.

I think that the problems with the negotiations stem from the fact that no lasting compromise is possible. Either Cambodia is linked to Vietnam and against ASEAN and the West, or it is linked to Thailand and against the two other Indochinese states. But from the

point of view of the Indochinese revolutions, this is a strategically very important question. Sihanouk, today even less than before, cannot represent a truly neutral solution. Taking all this as well as the major differences which we demonstrated earlier into account, a process of real self determination in Cambodia today is very unlikely.

Moreover, the relations between Vietnam and the USSR can be affected by the development of global diplomacy in Moscow. In 1975, the VCP did not want to see Vietnam become exclusively dependent on Soviet aid. Hanoi had begun by refusing several Soviet proposals, for example, the proposal to join Comecon (5), in order to be more free in its movements. But the failure of the opening with the West and the break with China brought the Vietnamese leadership to a position of integration in the Soviet bloc, especially from 1978 onwards, with the entry of Vietnam into Comecon and the signing of the treaty of cooperation with the USSR. Moscow brought important economic aid and Vietnam allowed the old American bases to be used by the Soviet fleet.

On the other hand the Kremlin is now part of the political power game in the region which they had previously been excluded from.

Moscow is therefore drawing important political and strategic benefits from its alliance with Vietnam. But the Soviet leadership also has other aims in mind and is currently accepting the opening up of a new dialogue with China. Peking is going to attempt to use the situation to prise the USSR away from Vietnam. Peking's policy remains to squeeze Vietnam down to the last Cambodian. Hanoi will have to be vigilant about the current developments of Sino-Soviet relations.

But one of the key questions for the future of Indochina and Vietnam is that of perspectives for struggle in the region and worldwide. The current rise in struggle in the Philippines or important developments in other parts of the world could overturn the rules of the diplomatic game which the big powers are participating in. Vietnam in a counter-revolutionary environment would be very different from a Vietnam freed from the dangerous pressures on it, by new revolutionary victories.

So again we find ourselves faced with the necessary task of solidarity. To support the anti-imperialist struggles in the region and worldwide and to support the development of social struggles in the imperialist centres and the struggles in the bureaucratised work states, is to aid the Indochinese revolutions, which today are so dangerously isolated.

4. The main part of this letter was published in the French language publication *Questions Internationales* on December 1 1983.

5. Comecon stands for Council for mutual economic assistance. It was created in 1949 and currently involves the USSR, the GDR, Bulgaria, Cuba, Hungary, Mongolia, Poland, Rumania, Czechoslovakia and Vietnam.



# AROUND THE WORLD



## EL SALVADOR

### Solidarity with political prisoners

The Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR) and the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN), along with the international solidarity movement with El Salvador have launched a campaign to win the immediate release of two FMLN militants presently being held by the Salvadoran army.

Yanet Samour Hasbun (Commandante Filomena) 34 years old, and Maximina Reyes, 26, were arrested in the town of San Miguel on 30 December 1984, by members of the National Guard.

After having been interrogated and tortured for three days by the commanding officer of the San Miguel National Guard, the two women were then put into the hands of the intelligence section of the Army High Command on 2 January 1985. The commander in chief of this section is general Onecifero Blandon, who has continued to submit them to physical and psychological torture.

Neither of the two prisoners have appeared before a court and the army has not even officially admitted their arrest, which indicates that their lives are in great danger.

Commandante Filomena, an ex-student, is a member of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Army of the People — Salvadorean Revolutionary Party, (ERP-PRS), one of the components of the FMLN.

A communique on the two women's case was transmitted by Radio Venceremos, the radio station of the FMLN on 21 January 1985. It accused the army commanding officer of being responsible for the violation of prisoners rights, rights which the FMLN itself respects in its treatment of the government soldiers it captures. 'Our forces have respected the lives of thousands of soldiers we have captured, officers as well as rank and file soldiers, among which are the ex-deputy defence minister Colonel Francisco Adolfo Castillo, as well as well-known assassins like Napoleon Medina Garay,' the communique said.

The FMLN statement appealed to the Catholic Church as well as human rights organisations to conduct an enquiry into the case of the two militants. 'We appeal to the international solidarity movement to develop a broad campaign to free Commandante Yanet Samour Hasbun 'Filomena' and comrade

Maximina Reyes Vallatoro', the communique concluded.

Amnesty International has also launched an urgent appeal for action on the case of the two women.

Telegrams and letters of protest should be addressed to the following addresses:

President Jose Napoleon Duarte, Case Presidencial, San Salvador, El Salvador.  
General Onecifero Blandon, Jefe de Estado Mayor, Estado Mayor de las Fuerzas Armadas, San Salvador, El Salvador.

## ANTIGUA

### Left press on trial

For the third time in three years, the government of the Caribbean island of Antigua has initiated a trial to try and gag *Outlet*, the weekly paper of the Afro-Caribbean Liberation Movement (ACLM). The ACLM, whose president Tim Hector is the editor of *Outlet*, is the most important left organisation in Antigua.

On April 1 nearly all the members of the Antiguan government, led by the deputy prime minister Lester Bird, appeared in court to give evidence against Hector and *Outlet*. Hector was found guilty under a public order law of 'publishing a false declaration' which could have 'undermined confidence in the conduct of public affairs.' The conviction was based on an article published on the front page of the 24 August 1984 edition of *Outlet*, which raised questions about an unidentified government minister who was arrested by US intelligence agents at Miami airport with two million dollars in his luggage. The minister had told the agents that he was carrying a suitcase for Peter de Savary, a businessman who has shady business connections with various South African interests. Deputy prime minister Bird had to testify himself in the case, his first appearance in front of a court for 30 years.

In another affair linked to the first, minister without portfolio Molwyn Joseph, brought a court action against

Hector in relation to a speech made in October 1984 in which Hector made reference to fraudulent practices in the local brewing industry.

In addition, *Outlet* lost its appeal against a 1983 court decision which fined the journal for having reported rumours concerning police brutality after the death of a young man in custody.

Several months before the start of the latest trial *Outlet* revealed the fact that Ron Sanders, one of the chief advisors of the deputy prime minister, had received large sums of money from the Space Research Company, who had made artillery tests for the South African military. It was the ACLM's revelations in the mid-1970s on the activities of the SRC in Antigua which had forced the Bird government to forbid all further testing on the island.

An article in the April 1985 issue of *Caribbean Contact*, the newspaper of the Caribbean Council of Churches, noted that the ACLM and *Outlet* had become the most effective critics of the Bird government.

The journal went on to say that, given the paralysis of the traditional opposition parties, the ACLM had led a most effective battle against the government. Its weekly paper was now the most widely-read in Antigua and its meetings are amongst those which attract the largest audiences.

## ECUADOR

### Fourth Internationalists meet

The Revolutionary Workers Movement (MRT) recognised as the Ecuadorian section of the Fourth International at its recent World Congress, organised an educational school on the problems of party construction at the end of March. This meeting, which was attended by a member of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, discussed the debate and decisions of the Twelfth World Congress, the previous experiences of building a revolutionary party in Ecuador, the problems of mass work and at the same time started to prepare the national conference of the section.

Presently experiencing a harsh austerity policy agreed with the International Monetary Fund, Ecuador has seen a rise of popular struggles in the last period, in particular the recent general strike called by the coalition of trade union organisations, the United

Workers Front (FRT).

In addition, at the international level, the Ecuadoran government of Febres Cordero is implicated in the events in Central America, through its complete support for Reagan's Nicaraguan policy.

Ecuadoran politics has also been influenced by the radicalisation of the Bolivian working class.

The Central American and Bolivian events are the reference points for the radicalisation which is beginning to develop amongst the Ecuadoran trade unions.

The situation which is beginning to develop inside the country is therefore a favourable one for revolutionaries. In this context the MRT is participating in a discussion with other revolutionary forces organised in the Socialist Front. The principal component of the Front is the Revolutionary Socialist Party of Ecuador (PSRE).

It was for this reason that the secretary general of the PSRE Jorge Reynolds, attended the public sessions of the school. Reynolds, a veteran of the communist struggle was delegated to the congresses of the Comintern on several occasions.

It is important to note that the theme of the public sessions was the experience of building the Workers Party (PT) of Brazil.

---

## ITALY

### A militant welcome for the royal parasites

British royals Prince Charles and Lady Diana recently visited Italy. Among the towns they visited was Livorno in Tuscany, a stronghold of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). The town's mayor, a PCI member, had organised a reception for the occasion of 2,000 people in the town square.

The local branch of the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), the Italian section of the Fourth International was standing candidates for the May 12 municipal elections on the Democrazia Proletaria list. (See elsewhere in this issue).

The LCR organised a completely different sort of welcome for the princely parasites. They distributed a leaflet which criticised the mayor for welcoming 'this family of the idle rich' instead of taking initiatives to support the British miners which her Majesty's government were repressing.

In addition when the famous couple took a cruise in the local harbour, two LCR militants standing in the elections sailed across the princes' prow. At the moment when the two boats were side by side the two LCR comrades hauled down the British flag that they had hoisted before and replaced it with an Irish tricolour and a placard

which declared 'Coal not Dole'.

The Italian national press the next day widely featured this rather spectacular and unusual solidarity action.

---

## SOLIDARITY

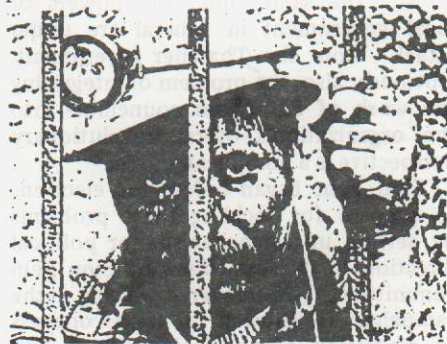
### Support the prisoners' fund

Only a few contributions have come in so far to the fund we launched three issues ago to finance free subscriptions for class-war and political prisoners. Nonetheless, even this small amount has made it possible for us to provide subscriptions for a half dozen sacked or imprisoned British miners. It is hard to think of anything else where a little money can have such an immediate good effect.

In the longer term, in times of deepening crisis, it is important to revive the tradition of mutual aid in the revolutionary and workers' movement, the tradition of providing for, and politically supporting those who have to bear the burden of battles.

So, we are not discouraged by the slow response to our appeal. It is obviously going to take some time for people to get used to the idea that there are a growing number of fighters who feel a need for revolutionary information and analysis but cannot pay for it. We will do what we can to assure that our readers understand this by reminding them regularly about the needs that exist.

We hope that in coming issues, we will be able to report that the contributions to our prisoners fund are increasing and give our readers a precise idea of the good use their contributions are being put to.



---

## AUSTRIA

### Austrians protest Reagan's aggression

Reagan's trade boycott against Nicaragua is a further step toward direct military intervention by the USA, and it has not gone unanswered in Austria. On May 5 in Vienna, some 700 people took part in a rally for free Nicaragua

organized jointly by the Austrian Confederation of Unions (OeGB) and the Austrian Solidarity Movement. The rally was addressed by Francisco Campos, a representative of the Juventud Sandinista, among others. Other rallies took place in Linz and Innsbruck.

At the Vienna rally, where 50,000 Schillings [about US 2,500 dollars] were collected, a resolution was adopted addressed to the Austrian government. On May 8, a delegation delivered the resolution to State Secretary Loeschmaier, who represented the chancellor. Commenting on the discussion that took place, delegation member Herman Dworzak said: "Further actions will be necessary to get the government to do anything concrete." On May 8, the Vienna office of IBM, a multinational that always speaks in the name of the principle of "free trade," was occupied. (From *Die Linke*, paper of the Austrian section of the Fourth International.)

---

## ISRAEL

### Defeat for zionism

The exchange of 1,150 anti-Zionist political prisoners held in Israeli jails in return for three Israeli soldiers captured in Lebanon has been seen both by Arab nationalists and Zionists as an important political defeat for the Zionist regime. In its May 27 issue, the West German weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* reported: "In Nablus [a Palestinian town under Zionist occupation], a placard read, 'We have defeated Israel.' In the liberal [Hebrew] daily *Ha-Aretz*, columnist Joel Markus wrote: 'Jibril has won.'"

The exchange was negotiated from the Palestinian side by Ahmed Jibril, commander of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command. Obviously, the outcry in Israel over the number of casualties in the Lebanon war was an important factor inducing the Zionist government to accept such a lopsided exchange.

Jibril also dealt the Zionists another defeat by insisting that an anti-Zionist Israeli Jewish fighter, Udi Adiv be included among those released.

**SUSCRIBE  
NOW !**

## Victory for the the anti-imperialist movement

The May 15 local elections in Northern Ireland were a watershed in the development of the anti-imperialist struggle. The revolutionary nationalist political organization, Sinn Fein, succeeded in holding the mass vote that it won in the wake of the H-Block prisoners' hunger strikes in 1980-1981. It did so despite a withering propaganda barrage from the capitalist media and all the established authorities in the British Isles and despite a new reactionary electoral law.

Using the pretext of combating impersonation at the polls, the Thatcher government pushed through a bill opening the way for harassment of electoral workers and in general making it much more difficult to vote, especially for the poor and the young. The new law requires that prospective voters present iron-clad identification, drivers' licences, passports, and the like, documents that the young and the poor, who vote predominantly for Sinn Fein, do not have. Many people were stopped from voting at the polls by police and Sinn Fein must have been the major loser.

Despite all these obstacles, however, the revolutionary nationalists won over 12% of the total vote and sixty seats in the local councils.

Gerry FOLEY

BELFAST — "Sinn Fein has translated the emotional support it won in the H-Block campaign into a formidable political machine," Bernadette Devlin McAliskey said, commenting on the results. "They succeeded in disciplining their vote and using it to maximum advantage within the proportional representation system. The result of these elections was a major victory for the anti-imperialist movement. It has revived people's hope in final victory."

A Sinn Fein leader I talked to in Belfast on the eve of the election explained that their fundamental objectives in this election were to strengthen their organization and to consolidate and discipline their vote, that is, to "build an ideologically secure base." He pointed out that in the elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly, the first elections that Sinn Fein contested across the North, their inexperience in electoral politics and a lack of consciousness on the part of their voters had enabled Austin Currie, a particularly despised bourgeois Catholic politician to gain a seat on the strength of Sinn Fein transfers. That was an example of the sort of thing they wanted to avoid.

On the other hand, the Sinn Fein representative noted that the party leadership understand that they have to give more thought to the problem of cutting further into the vote for the Catholic bourgeois party, the Social Democratic and Labor Party (SDLP).

"For that we need a political program", he said. He stressed that the party was still very inexperienced as a political organization and thought that it would

take five or six years to put it into the shape they wanted. One of the major objectives of Sinn Fein election work, in fact, was to build up an intermediate leadership.

The election of a whole body of elected representatives now presents Sinn Fein with new and more complex political problems. For example, the response of the pro-imperialist Unionists has been to call for a boycott of Sinn Fein councillors. Even the SDLP has floated the idea of a bloc of "all constitutionalists" against the "men of violence."

At the same time, the powers of local government in general are under attack from the Thatcher government. Obviously also, the problem of integrating the work of Sinn Fein councillors into the organization's overall revolutionary perspective is a complicated one.

Sinn Fein began before the elections to prepare for tackling these problems by setting up a mechanism for political direction of its councillors by Sinn Fein committees. Moreover, during the campaign it showed a fresh openness to discussion of political problems and to collaboration with other revolutionists.

"Most militants thought that the most important thing in this election was to assure the biggest possible Sinn Fein vote," John McAnulty, an outgoing Belfast councillor and leader of People's Democracy, Irish section of the Fourth International, told me. "We agreed with them in general. But we also thought that it was important to run our own campaign to begin to raise the questions of strategy and perspectives of where we were going to go after these elections." (Two PD leaders were elected to the

council in 1980 by pro-Sinn Fein voters before the revolutionary nationalists decided to contest elections.)

McAnulty, the single PD candidate this time, got 131 first preference votes in a Belfast district, more than twice the total for the Communist Party standardbearer, and also got a large proportion of the Sinn Fein preferences after those cast for its own candidates. Sinn Fein had advised its supporters to cast preference votes for PD.

I accompanied a team of PD door-to-door canvassers in West Belfast one morning just before the elections. They got a generally quite friendly reception, and most of the younger people bought copies of the PD paper, *Socialist Republic/ Poblacht Shoisialach*.

McAnulty pointed out that he understood the desire of Sinn Fein leaders to strengthen their organization but he hoped that they would not neglect the need for building broad mass-action movements at the same time. He thought that in particular it was important to build a united-front movement in defense of Sinn Fein's democratic rights on the councils, among other things in order to reach sections of the nationalist population that still support the SDLP on the basis of parliamentary illusions.

In fact, the SDLP remains a major obstacle to the anti-imperialist struggle. It is still the majority Catholic party, having gotten about 16 percent of the vote this time and about 100 council seats.

Moreover, McAnulty stressed, many Northern nationalists still have illusions in the so-called New Ireland Forum promoted by the Dublin government as a scheme for "solving" the Northern problem. A broad campaign is necessary to expose it more effectively.

This was an unusually quiet election. But at the same time there were signs of deepening reflection on the part of the anti-imperialist vanguard. For example, for the first time a significant amount of the campaign material was in the Irish language — indicating the growing affect of the massive nationalist cultural movement set in motion by the H-Block campaign.

Historically, the Irish-language movement has been associated with an aspiration for a radical reorientation of Irish society. Its new growth indicates that a massive vanguard has rededicated itself to working for a new Ireland, and their thinking can certainly move on to a fuller range of political and social questions, as did that of the Gaelic enthusiasts who built the movement that dealt British imperialism its first major defeat in Ireland in 1916-21. ■

