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South Africa : New challenges for the left



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"Free at last!"

"You have shown such a calm, patient determination to reclaim this country as your own and joy that you can proclaim from the rooftops: 'Free at last!'"

Nelson Mandela in optimistic mood following the results of the election

PATRICK BOND*
Johannesburg, 28 May 1994

In the heady days following the election, few African National Congress (ANC) militants worried about the semi-liberated nature of the Government of National Unity (GNU), with its plethora of opposition figures in important ministerial positions — Home Affairs, Finance, and the Reserve Bank. Nor would they have worried about Nelson Mandela's extraordinary admission that he was greatly relieved that the ANC had not reached sixty-seven percent of the vote, considering the fears which had been generated over re-writing the conservative Constitution.

Nor about ANC-condoned ballot fraud and traded votes which brought them down from the two-thirds mark to sixty-three percent. Nor the moderate slant of the ANC Ministers. Nor the persistence of apartheid State bureaucrats (under the provisions of the Sunset Clauses) until at least 1999. Nor the federal-style provincial system (contrary to the call for a "unitary state" when the ANC was in exile). Nor even the heavily White-weighted local government elections still to come.

THE recent elections in South Africa were a victory for the Black working class and its allies. Of that, there should be no doubt. But the new "post-apartheid" South Africa has not emerged according to the best-laid plans of the Left; neither those of the left of the ANC-Alliance (principally the SACP and the trade union federation, COSATU), nor of the smaller revolutionary left. It would be foolish for anyone to close their eyes and imagine this is not the case, or to pretend that very little, in reality, has changed — that the democratic gains which have been won, even if limited, are of no real consequence.

As our articles in this issue reveal, there is no time for wish-fulfilment; rather, there are more urgent tasks to be undertaken.

The economist, **Patrick Bond**, opens our dossier by identifying the central themes and issues which will, rightly, preoccupy the Left for the immediate future. In a second article he explores in greater detail both the contradictions of the ANC-approved Reconstruction and Development Programme (a document which, while suffused throughout with neo-liberal premises, contains an important radical component), and its centrality for the Left (the necessity to push the programme's radical component to its limits).

The article by **Carl Brecker** is based upon a document which, during the election itself, was widely distributed on the South African Left by a number of individual revolutionary socialist militants. The document has already met with real interest, and, from some quarters, a genuinely positive response. Faced with a class-collaborationist government, Brecker argues, the over-riding task for the Left is to regroup its scattered forces (the critical left in the ANC, SACP and COSATU being of particular importance) if it is to meet the new challenges with as united a response as possible. Brecker takes issue with those who, while their intentions may be honourable, believe that a new mass workers' party can be built by proclamation. Rather, a new party will be built through the process of regroupment and by demonstrating to those forces who would have to be won away from the ANC-Alliance, that concrete alternatives not only exist but are also realisable.

For many years the land question and the need for radical reform were central demands of the national liberation movement. However, as **Brian Ashley** explains, it is only recently that a comprehensive programme for reform has begun to be spelt out. It is a political terrain which could quickly see a new rise in militancy in the rural areas. Indeed, many activists have already warned the ANC that they expect significant change within the next five years — and no later.

Finally, two sets of interviews return us to many of the themes elaborated by Bond and Brecker. **Langa Zita**, a metal workers organiser and leader of the SACP left, looks forward to the Conference of the Left later this year, saying that it is not only an opportunity to re-affirm the necessity (and desirability) of the struggle for socialism, but to also prepare the ground for greater Left unity. In our second interview militants from the **Cape Town Executive of the SACP** agree that the battle for the life and soul of the ANC has begun and explain the relevance of their Party's debates for the wider mass movement.

In South Africa today the Left has no time to take breath. It must make a balance of its history and past expectations at the same time as it prepares for the new struggles ahead. *International Viewpoint* and our supporters in South Africa will keep you informed. **Roland Wood** ✪

Ultra-right in disarray

THE ultra-right is in near-complete disarray as a social force. But the many tens of thousands of committed, militarily-trained Whites can easily form small cells and continue sporadic bombing and assassination campaigns. Nevertheless, Whites in the nearly two-hundred small Platteland towns under the leadership of the far right Conservative Party (CP) split over whether to participate in the election. Right-wing "citizens' councils" were meant to formally replace existing CP local governments. But more than a dozen important CP councils balked and instead joined Freedom Front (VF) leader, Gen. Constand Viljoen, in his attempt, through the election, to prove that there was White support for a "Volkstaat".

The VF strategy was attacked by CP leader Ferdi Hartzenburg, and by Eugene Terre'blanche of the neo-Nazi Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB). (At the last-minute the CP attempted to rejoin forces with Viljoen, but were rebuffed.) The VF, ANC and the outgoing government consequently signed an agreement setting out a process which could conceivably lead to a Volkstaat.

However, many on the far right are convinced that the ANC will never grant an Afrikaner homeland, and they view Viljoen as naive — even a traitor — for attempting to negotiate. On the other hand VF supporters point to the futility of the AWB's military approach, citing the damage caused to the right's cause in Bophuthatswana in late March, when AWB troops were forced to retreat from what appeared to many observers as a "kaffir-killing" expedition. ❖

There is, however, a residue of ill-will in KwaZulu/Natal following egregious logistical break-downs in the electoral machinery. The Independent Electoral Commission looked the fool in the eyes of the even the most uncritical observers, thanks to its inability to contain widespread fraud, mismanagement, evasiveness, constant rule-changes and overall incompetence.

More worrying still are looming confrontations with Inkatha — not only in KwaZulu but also on the violent East Rand (outside Johannesburg) — and with Afrikaner "volkstaat" supporters, who fell far short of the 800 thousand votes they sought. Only a few dozen of the far right were temporarily locked up, with another round of bombings, sabotage and assassinations expected if wrangling over the existence, boundaries and powers of a volkstaat gets out of hand.

And confusion reigned in Cape Town's new National Assembly and in the nine provincial legislatures, as many of the new parliamentarians appeared more concerned with salaries and perks than with taking the struggle forward. President Mandela's after-tax income was pegged at R400 thousand per year (US\$111 thousand), with Ministers pulling in R300 thousand. Petty-bourgeois class formation was already well underway during the campaign, barely dented by valiant efforts to cut the salaries.

No matter about such strife, which no doubt will be resolved in the muddling-through manner which emerged as mutually agreeable during four long years of negotiations.

What, though, of the more durable problems of economy, class, gender and ethnic relations which bedeviled every victorious nationalist movement in Africa? What concrete policies are on offer from what must be the most generously-supported liberation force in history? Is there in South Africa a more general set of lessons for Left strategy and tactics?

"We have emerged as the majority party on the basis of the programme which is contained in the Reconstruction and Development (Programme)", Mandela attested on that splendid night of celebration. "That is going to be the cornerstone, the foundation, upon which the GNU is going to be based. I appeal to all leaders who are going to serve in this government to honour this programme."

The hundred and forty-seven page Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), much commented upon in the press, is actually relatively unknown in detail and implication. The Economist, for instance, noted with glee that minimum wages were left out and that RDP financing will occur through "drawing on World Bank loans." Form even a cursory reading it would become obvious that neither is correct. Mandela himself told the press immediately after

the election that there "was not a single word about nationalisation" in the RDP (another mistake) and that "no Marxist ideology" had penetrated the document (many would disagree).

For some in the Communist Party (SACP), Mandela's harsh and probably unnecessary words came as a surprise blow. Langa Zita, a leading young intellectual on the left of the SACP, reacted thus: "With those words Mandela is chopping out a huge section of the ANC constituency."

Red-baiting

The red-baiting also reflected, perhaps, election-eve efforts to halt a spate of wildcat strikes, land invasions and other forms of mass action — this time it was not the iron fist of the security forces, but rather the feeble pleas of SACP chair, Joe Slovo, former mineworker's leader Cyril Ramaphosa, and the transitional pre-election government administration. Predictably, attempts to splash cold water on the hot emotions failed. The public sector and the giant mining houses remained targets in late April and early May, with civil servants demanding immediate pension pay-outs, and Goldfields under strike by 10 thousand mineworkers following a walkout by 8 thousand Rusplats platinum miners. Industrial relations consultants predicted a six-month period of heightened working class activity.

As was demonstrated by Mandela's call for a fourteen-year old voting age, which the ANC National Executive Committee rejected last year, the new President's erratic streak — one day "no compromise" on meeting basic needs, the next, a fan of World Bank intervention — does not really affect the underlying struggles within the struggle. Indeed in many respects the Left views government and a repositioned civil society with more grounds for optimism than the ANC moderates. True, there are continual reversals of progressive thinking by the pragmatic Trevor Manuel (now Trade and Industry Minister) and Tito Mboweni (Labour Minister) of the Department of Economic Planning, and also by Deputy President Thabo Mbeki and Ramaphosa at the highest echelons of the ANC.

Nevertheless the ANC Left can claim within the party's top twenty Members of Parliament (MPs) at least three independent voices: the intellectual publicity secretary, Pallo Jordan, former COSATU general secretary, Jay Naidoo (now Minister with responsibility for the RDP),

and former metalworker and community leader Moses Mayekiso. Other MPs in the top ranks of the SACP — who number sixteen of the top fifty ANC deputies — including Slovo (now Minister of Housing and Welfare), Party stalwarts Blade Nzimande and Tenjiwe Mthintso, and trade unionists Sidney Mufamadi (now Police Minister) and Chris Dlamini.

How left, though, is the ANC Left? Slovo, author of the Sunset Clause compromise, which in late 1992 signalled the end of mass action politics and entrenched the White male bureaucracy, further unveiled his moderate philosophical stripes by redefining “revolution” on a television election debate as “something which goes from the past to the future.” Another indicator: even COSATU’s long-serving Jeremy Baskin, head of its research think-tank and author of the union history, *Striking Back* (Verso, London, 1991), today promotes “corporatism” and simply laments that capital is not sufficiently organised to do the deals required.

Social democratic

The shift to a decidedly right wing social democratic posture by a declining fraction of the SACP — sterile Stalinists and a grouping of overly-intellectual “workerists” (as the COSATU trade unionists were known a decade ago) — bumps rather uneasily against the tougher, street-smart radicalism of advanced shop-stewards and the trade union Left. One point of contention was a lock-out clause in the constitution, for which Slovo apologised to a mass demonstration of workers outside the multi-party negotiations last November: “When you wear a suit, comrades, you sometimes change your ideology.”

And the COSATU strategy of “post-fordism” promoted by former workerists — characterised by faster integration into the world economy, niche markets, Japanised shop-floor relations, social contracts and so forth — is being rejected in important sectors (for example, auto, metals and paper products) by workers themselves.

Instead, one current of Left thinking with the ANC-Alliance has sought, in more nuanced form, what John Saul in *New Left Review* has termed “structural reforms”. In the upcoming *Socialist Register*, Saul cites metalworker’s leader Enoch Godongwana’s approach to “restructuring which is informed by a socialist perspective and which is characterised by working class politics and

democratic practice and accountability of leadership.” Thus, rather than accepting the logic of capital — leading COSATU post-fordist David Lewis even attempts to impose the logic of capital on racial, backward South African business! — the increasingly influential Zita seeks to “transfer certain areas of economic activity away from the mediation of the market to society.” Likewise, in the words of the most vocal leftist amongst the COSATU MPs, former health workers general secretary, Philip Dexter: “We need to find ways to ensure alternatives to capitalist markets; for example, by decommodifying certain resources and services.”

Fruitful

This is likely to be a relatively fruitful search, as unions and the civic associations of thousands of townships and villages gain sustenance from the RDP’s explicitly non-capitalist logic within the realm of housing: “Mechanisms (such as time limits on resale, or compulsory repayment of subsidies upon transfer of property) must be introduced to prevent speculation and downward raiding.” Thus, Dexter proposes “communal access to economic resources. Housing, for example, could be provided through associations, and be offered as non-sellable property rather than rented or privately-owned units.” Zita calls for land trusts and people’s development banks. Civic movement intellectual Mzwanele Mayekiso advocates a “socialist seed-bed” of community development initiatives located squarely within “working class civil society”, which is Mayekiso’s characterisation of popular organisations quite distinct from the mushy liberal notion more common an anti-statist centres such as the US State Department.

This approach, according to leading SACP ideologue, Jeremy Cronin, sits quite comfortably within the RDP itself. Cronin’s own role in the RDP was substantial, and his contributions to the chapter “Democratising State and Society”, allows civil society radicals to “engage, as socialists, in the RDP” by

first gaining access to resources. The RDP promises: “Social movements and Community-Based Organisations are a major asset in the effort to democratise and develop our society. Attention must be given to enhancing the capacity of such formations to adapt to partially changed roles. Attention must also be given to extending social-movement and CBO structures into areas and sectors where they are weak or non-existent.”

As Moses Mayekiso tells his supporters in the South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO), “We have the right to expect funding for our basic organisations work. Of course, we must ensure that this does not lead to dependency and machine-politics.” Indeed, notwithstanding a history of intense tactics, such as the feared home mortgage “bond boycott” (entire communities refusing to pay the bank for defective homes), SANCO sometimes displays the

“We need to find ways to ensure alternatives to capitalist markets; for example, by decommodifying certain resources and services.”

same corporatist orientation which appeared so attractive to many COSATU staff during a recent period of severe recession in which just surviving was an accomplishment for many mass formations.

Like urban social movements in many semi-peripheral societies, SANCO could be different, however, because it acts as a representative of a fairly consistent community-based phenomenon sitting squarely across the great divide of urban workers, and the urban and rural poor. Throughout the world, this structural location is proving to be the most vigorous site of opposition to the neo-liberalism of World Bank/IMF structural adjustment programmes. ★

* Patrick Bond, author of *Commanding Heights and Community Control: New Economics for a New South Africa* (Ravan 1991), works with community groups and trade unions in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Left faces new challenge

DOSSIER

THE South African Left must regroup its scattered forces if it is to meet the many new challenges which lie ahead. Carl Brecker, exiled for many years, explains why, and identifies the issues and debates which will become central if a resurgent Left is to emerge.

CARL BRECKER

THE birth-pangs of democracy have always been difficult. When this is combined, as is the case with South Africa, with the death agonies of a social system (apartheid), the horrific events which result serve to obscure the underlying political processes. It is time to stand back and take another look.

Revolution deflected?

The Left expected the democratisation of South Africa to be the result of a revolution, including an armed uprising, against an intransigent apartheid regime. Our politics were geared to this end. But, despite the long years of struggle, sacrifice, and (too) many deaths, it did not happen this way.

What seemed impossible a few years ago has come to pass: the African National Congress (ANC) and the National Party (NP) are forming a government of national unity.

Everyone was given a nominally equal vote and were free to vote for whosoever they chose. Democracy, long enjoyed by "Whites Only", has arrived for the Black majority, but it did not arrive by the path which had been mapped out by the Left — neither in the form or content we expected.

Our vision of a revolutionary democracy — a new state shaped by, and in the image of the working

class and poor, which would be participatory, ensuring popular involvement in all decision-making structures, and with the right to recall elected representatives — is not what has arrived in South Africa.

Imperfect democracy

What has arrived instead is bourgeois democracy based on the separation of politics from economics. Although the boss and worker now have one vote each, there is nothing else about them which is equal. The Constitution and the way in which parliament will function excludes the possibility of voting to transfer ownership and control over the economy from the bosses to the workers.

The central issue which de Klerk would not concede during the negotiations was the checks and balances which ensure that the ANC cannot tamper with the sanctity of private property. Once de Klerk, who is acting on behalf of big business, was assured that the ANC-Alliance had accepted the terms of the new Constitution he could be generous in all other matters — he could grant a Volkstaat, a Zulu Kingdom, or greater regional powers. He gave a mile to the Right but not an inch to the Left.

The reality of this election is that the social character of the new government will not reflect the votes cast by the vast majority of the Black working class and poor. The government of national unity will be shaped by the political deals struck during the negotiations, in which minority parties (probably the NP, PAC, DP, VF) are even guaranteed seats in the cabinet.

We characterise the new government as class collaborationist because the NP/DP-bloc represents big business and the middle classes, while the ANC/SACP/COSATU-bloc represents the Black majority — the workers, poor and a small Black middle class as well. The fact that the ANC will hold the majority of seats in parliament will not alter the reality that the bourgeois alliance (NP/DP/VF) remains the dominant class power.

...important abbreviations

- ANC — African National Congress
- SACP — South African Communist Party
- COSATU — Congress of South African Trade Unions
- MDM — Mass Democratic Movement
- UDF — United Democratic Front
- PAC — Pan-African Congress

- NP — National Party
- DP — Democratic Party
- VF — Freedom Front

- WOSA/WLP — Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action/Workers' List Party
- GNU — Government of National Unity
- RDP — Reconstruction and Development Programme

Secondly, the form of regional government gives undue weight to the old ruling class parties (Inkatha in Natal, Holomisa in Transkei, NP in Western Cape), which again robs the actual vote of its class content. Thirdly, all the pre-conditions which limit the powers of the constituent assembly to amend the constitutional guide-lines, also limit the democratic process.

The Black majority is expecting the ANC to act in their interests not knowing that political deals have tied the hands of Congress to the interests of capital. It is an urgent task for the Left to expose the Government of National Unity (GNU) as a government of class collaboration, but how we do this will determine the success or failure of our ventures in this new historical period.

The measure of democracy

The democratic gains won are a very far cry from the demands contained in the Freedom Charter. Nonetheless, inadequate as South Africa's form of bourgeois democracy will be, the Left would do well to recognise the political space it provides, and indeed defend it against destabilisation from the Right.

The Left must not underestimate the scale of changes made — the end to White-minority rule, the lifting of all apartheid laws, the agreement on a bill of rights — and what effect this has had on the consciousness of the masses. To ridicule these gains as being against the historical interests of the Black majority, is absurdly dogmatic.

The Left should seize, by whatever means necessary, every opportunity to consolidate and extend these democratic gains. Primarily this should take the form of direct mass action to achieve material gains in every social field — for example, jobs, wages, land, and housing. This is especially important at a time when parliament will increasingly become the focus of change, now that the liberation struggle has formally ended.

Who rules, who reigns

After the elections, it's back to business as usual for capitalism. Whilst they will have lost the extra-economic controls over the work-force which were provided by apartheid laws, business is looking forward to better times. They

expect that Mandela in power will be good for business. What then can the poor expect from the ANC in government?

Given that the ANC has agreed to share even cabinet control, Mandela will be left with little more than the power to enact laws which influence how tax revenue, from the profits of business and the wages of workers, can be redistributed to pay for the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). They can also borrow money to carry out their plans, but only after they achieve consensus in the cabinet (decisions are not by majority vote). Effectively the NP/DP-bloc hold a veto.

Saying all this is one thing. Only experience will shatter the popular belief that the ANC can freely decide on economic policy. To paraphrase Finance Minister, Derek Keys: the decisions which will determine economic growth are not taken by government. Rather, they are taken in the board rooms of businesses around the country. The ANC will find it cannot rule without the consent of those who reign.

Mandela will be free to pass laws which stimulate the the economy in ways which make business more profitable. But the ANC will be opposed whenever the bourgeoisie considers that their policies are bad for business. Notice how keen ANC spokespersons are to re-assure investors that much of the money for new budgetary priorities (education) will be found by re-arranging former spending patterns — in this case, by reducing military spending. Plans for growth will not include expropriation, and only as a last resort will it involve deficit financing.

This is why capitalists have already made it clear they have no fundamental

problem with the RDP, except those aspects which may limit their profit margins. After all, the basic purpose of the RDP is to stimulate the economy and that is always good for business. Already foreign investors, local business, as well as the IMF/World Bank, have been assured that an ANC government will not undermine the health of the economy.

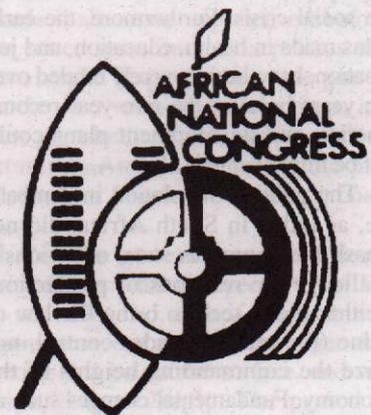
There is however, a contradiction: the ANC will find that it cannot keep both the capitalists and the workers happy at the same time. They will move to equalise spending on education and health for Whites and Blacks, move to stimulate house construction, and create work programmes to build a new social infrastructure — all of which is necessary and important, but it does not conflict with capitalism. And that is an important point, because it implies that a central component of the Left's strategy will be to push this contradiction to breaking point.

Class encounters of special kind

The ANC is about to receive lessons in how bourgeois democracy works. There will be great verbal battles in parliament between those who speak for capital and those for labour. Yet the real struggles will take place elsewhere. The movement will learn that what is achieved in parliament will first have to be won on the streets!

The ANC in government will steadily erode the ability of Congress structures to lead mass struggles. Hundreds of ANC activists will be absorbed into the State's structures. A new leadership capable of filling this political vacuum

Off the streets and into parliament...



needs to be constructed. How the Left positions itself in relation to the mass movement will directly effect the ability of the ANC centre-right to curtail mass action.

Now more than ever, these extra-parliamentary mass struggles need to be connected in ways which build class understanding among the workers and poor about the limits of bourgeois democracy. This will require exposure of the practical ways in which class collaboration works against the interests of the majority and in the service of the bourgeoisie. The Left cannot become ascendant until the class-collaborationist character of the government of national unity has become popularly understood.

...this first democratic election, despite all its shortcomings, represents the virtual completion of the bourgeois democratic revolution in South Africa

The lessons of Zimbabwe are telling. There, the self-styled marxist-leninist government of Robert Mugabe had overall political control from day one, including control over the army and police. But the government did not control the economy and could not therefore solve the social crisis. Furthermore, the early gains made in health, education, and job creation, have been severely eroded over the years because the five-year reconstruction and development plans could not be implemented.

The political revolution in Zimbabwe, as today in South Africa, did not smash the bourgeois state, or seriously challenge the relations of production. Neither did it seek to bring the law of value (the market) under control, nor seize the commanding heights of the economy. Fundamental changes such as these, as Zimbabwe has taught us, cannot be achieved by incremental reforms or by the passage of law.

They are the substance of an anti-capitalist revolution, a task still waiting to be completed in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Without revolutionising the way in which society produces, distributes and consumes the wealth it creates, in ways totally different to the drive for profit, no radical government will be able to solve the social crisis.

Yet, to simply say that the overall task of the Left is to continue the struggle against capitalism in South Africa, is banal in the extreme. What every leadership has to say is how they see this task being undertaken in the new South Africa. If a new political period has opened up what are the strategic implications for the Left?

Revisiting old doctrines

Until recently, Left activists fell into two main ideological camps and were sustained by the theoretical certainties of their own particular group. Today those certainties are challenged by the ascendant ideologies of neo-liberalism of the NP/DP and the reformism of the ANC-Alliance, both of which are local expressions of the ideological changes which have occurred internationally.

Of the two revolutionary camps, one envisaged the overthrow of the apartheid system by a broad coalition of democratic forces — a process which would replace apartheid with a radical democratic regime (stage one). Economically this meant that, except for changes to the power of monopolies, the capitalist system would remain largely intact. However, the radical regime would open the road to socialism (stage two), allowing fundamental change to be achieved through cumulative reforms, thus making a second revolution unnecessary.

Clearly this is not what happened with the negotiations process. These changes, led from above by the bourgeoisie, cannot be equated with the national democratic revolution driven from below by the masses in struggle (although the Slovo/Cronin axis in the SACP seems to have difficulty remembering this).

The other camp saw apartheid and capitalism as symbiotic and almost inseparable. They envisaged the overthrow of apartheid-capitalism by the organised working class and its democratic allies, at the head of which stood a revolutionary party. They hoped to combine, in an uninterrupted way, the smashing of the

bourgeois State with the take-over of the commanding heights of the economy and the socialisation of the means of production. A new workers' state, based on democratic socialism, would guide the transition through socialism toward the future classless society of communism.

The Left has had difficulty coming to grips with the fact that none of this happened. Their perspectives were further confused by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Together these historic events produced a certain dislocation on the Left, exposing some of its worst dogmatism, and producing a surge of ultra-leftism amongst those who began to scream because they felt history was passing them by. Groups split everywhere as they struggled to overcome their strategic paralysis.

A period of regroupment has begun on the Left among those who have survived. As yet however, the Left has neither gathered its scattered forces nor formulated a way forward in order to respond strategically to this new consolidation of bourgeois rule. A balance sheet is urgently required. How we proceed depends on how we see the tasks. And that depends on how we read history.

In our view, this first democratic election, despite all its shortcomings, represents the virtual completion of the bourgeois democratic revolution in South Africa. This process was stunted by the racist Act of Union of 1910 and further hindered by apartheid laws. Nevertheless, the process became increasingly unavoidable as the industrial economy expanded through the years.

The process of reform which has led toward democratisation was steered from above by a combination of bourgeois forces over a period going back to before the Weihahn Commission of 1980. The process inevitably zig-zagged, stopped and started, and retreated (especially in the face of mounting mass struggle) until it finally got into the home-strait with de Klerk's palace coup.

The events of 1976/1984-6 had convinced the ruling class that the mass movement could not be defeated. They could not risk the further radicalisation of the proletarian forces (that is, organised labour in solidarity with the urban and rural poor) who were increasingly identifying the capitalist system as their enemy.

A reluctant bourgeoisie had finally to recognise that racial capitalism's once lucrative period of growth had run into a

structural impasse. The malformations which apartheid bred in the economy, the rise of a strong union movement and the mounting mass struggles — when coupled with changes in the international division of labour — forced the ruling class to “adapt or die”.

The task of removing the apartheid incrustation in order to restructure the capitalist economy was a complex and risky process of political engineering, involving such difficult tasks as changing the composition of the ruling bloc, changing the forms of work, the shape of the industrial work-force and the face of industrial relations.

To achieve these changes in the economy meant haste in making the relevant changes in the political domain. The NP government, acting in the interests of financial and industrial capital, had to ditch the traditional white-worker/white-farmer electoral base (causing the right-wing backlash) in exchange for a new social contract with the moderate leadership of the ANC and the Black middle classes.

This process was fraught with danger and the outcome could not be foretold. It is not surprising then that it came after the defeat of the 1983/6 uprisings, when the ANC and the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) had “given its best shot”: achieving a level of ungovernability, but failing to topple the regime. The negotiations began when neither side could be wholly defeated.

Still, the bourgeoisie would not have achieved the same degree of success with negotiations if it were not for the retreat of the intellectuals who dominated the leaderships of the ANC, COSATU, and the SACP. This paralleled a retreat among the intelligentsia world-wide as the international bourgeoisie went on its free market offensive against the crumbling economies of Eastern Europe. Dressed in a variety of post-modernist clothes, the intellectuals abandoned the uncertainty of revolution for the measured steps of reformism.

It was never possible by this negotiated route to achieve the Freedom Charter, a reality understood by the leaderships on both sides of the negotiating table.

Acknowledging the retreat

To achieve the Freedom Charter would have required a political revolution of a different kind: namely, a process of change which was driven from



Can Black workers break through capitalism too?

below, involving an armed struggle which resulted in the defeat of the White regime, and its replacement with a radical alternative. This is what thousands of cadre sacrificed everything for, and what the ideologues called the national democratic revolution.

The aim of the bourgeoisie was clearly to cut off the possibility of revolution from below, a precondition for continuing with the urgent task of restructuring the economy, and this in itself needed a certain collaboration between State, capital and labour. The shift towards corporate unionism by the COSATU leadership coincided perfectly with the interests of the bourgeoisie.

However, getting the struggle off the streets was not a straight-forward process. It involved depoliticising the mass organic structures of organisation (not too difficult in a downturn), disempowering the shopfloor (by shifting power to the union structures) and restraining the effervescent mass struggles. The muffling of union struggles against mass redundancies, the shift from mass action to harmless forms of protest in the face of Boipatong, Bisho, Hani and the Inkatha massacres, and so forth, were all part of the retreat.

This was further aided and abetted by the exile leadership as well as sections of the internal leadership of COSATU and the UDF/MDM. Today the grave danger exists of serious demoralisation among the Left in the ANC-Alliance as they realise that the negotiated settlement they have supported has effectively secured the rule of capitalism in southern Africa for a whole period.

We must move swiftly to undo the damage. The Left in the ANC-Alliance, especially those in the SACP, cannot avoid a balance sheet of their behaviour: did they do enough to warn the class militants and explain what was happening? And what next, now that the Alliance/SACP is in power and shares responsibility for the State?

What are the current balance of forces

We recognise the current downturn in struggle and the weakness of working class leadership and of organisation generally. We can also see that the balance of forces internationally are not favourable. Yet we do not believe that the movement feels defeated or demoralised. What has sapped organisational strength, and disorientated people generally, is the on-going violence which is designed to stop or derail the process of democratisation.

Last year saw the largest mass demonstrations and general strikes ever, as well as a series of civic struggles and public service strikes, most of which were political in character. These struggles remain as turbulent and effervescent as ever. What has changed is the strength of mass organisation compared with the uprisings of 1984/6, or of union meetings in the early 1980s. Yet this is only one yardstick. Another, equally telling one, is the millions who turned out for election rallies.

The feverish election campaign, itself a new experience and on a propaganda scale never experienced before, has raised mass interest in politics to a new height. Expectations were pinned on the ANC winning the elections, and now on whether it will implement its promises. And this is where the problems start. People are expecting change.

Can the government of national unity deliver what is expected of it? We do not believe so, even if everyone who aspires to rule is aware of the anger simmering just below the surface, and will respond accordingly. The period of grace which the mass movement will grant the new government, in order to get its act together, cannot be guessed at.

We do not expect, in the short to medium term at least, to see large scale rebellion from the Black masses with the intention of bringing down the new central government. Hopefully struggles will be mounted which force a divide between the Alliance and the NP-bloc over material issues, thus breaking up the government of national unity. But this will not be easy.

It would take a high level of mobilisation to force the ANC-Alliance to break the constitutional deals, confront the bourgeoisie and initiate elections for a majority government. It is more likely that the initial social struggles will be directed by the unions against the bosses over wages and working conditions, and by Civic organisations against the new local and provincial governments. How the Left positions itself in relation to these struggles, and the ANC in government, is crucial.

The negotiated end to apartheid rule has thrown everything into flux. Old class alliances are disintegrating within both the White and Black body-politic as a new social compact (based on evolving forms of political, economic and social regulation) slowly takes shape. This cannot be a process free of conflict. What is certain is that the government of national unity will be very unstable.

However, overall, the bourgeoisie has not done badly at all. The new constitution not only enshrines private property, but it also protects existing property rights, and curbs the powers of parliament to make changes in this regard. They have retained the loyalty of the army, police and part of the security forces, and have won the voluntary integration (neutralisation) of yesterday's armed liberation forces.

The ANC is off the streets and into parliament with joint responsibility for running the bourgeois State and reconstructing the economy. But whether they can do so in ways which redress the imbalances of apartheid without destabilising capitalist investment, profit margins and market interests, is unlikely.

As we explained above, the over-riding task of the Left is to expose the class-collaborationist character of this government to the working class and poor, by subjecting its policies and prac-

tices to systematic criticism, but also by posing clear class alternatives. No group on the Left is capable of doing this alone, which makes regroupment quite urgent if ultra-left sloganeering is to be replaced with real alternatives.

An unstable interregnum

If our assessment is correct then it means that after the elections South Africa will experience an unstable democratic interregnum of unspecified duration. Unstable, because we expect the unions, civic organisations, and other mass formations to act to fulfil their expectations — workers wanting jobs and higher pay, the rural poor wanting land and infrastructural development, and everyone wanting houses, health and education. Interregnum, because we do not believe that capitalism can provide sufficient relief to the social crisis to avoid a new rise in anti-capitalist struggles.

In the White-bloc the racial privileges which linked White labour to capital no longer has legitimacy. However, concessions to the White civil servants in the form of guaranteed jobs and pensions (Sunset Clauses), along with concessions which allow for a Volkstaat and Inkatha's regionalism, may yet prove insufficient to avoid sabotage and violence.

The danger is that these concessions, rather than pacifying these forces, will tend to strengthen their will to oppose democratisation. Sporadic right-wing terror, secessionist moves from Inkatha and the Volkstaaters, as well as sabotage by right-wing civil servants is not excluded. They are already bombing the industrial heartland of the PWV region.

The most stable group is the NP/DP-bloc who represent the general interests of financial, commercial and industrial capital. They fought the elections on the promise that they will protect market interests, private property and individual rights. Their economic model (which put profits first) will come into general conflict with the intentions of the ANC as expressed in the RDP (which seeks to put people before profit).

The ANC-Alliance are also new to government. They are unschooled in the art of ruling, lack historical ties with the State, and have no economic base. They hang suspended between the anvil of the bourgeoisie and the hammer of the proletariat. They were elected to parliament in order to represent the interests of the

Black majority, who, by demanding fulfilment of election promises, should make sure they never forget it.

With this range of class interests represented it is still unknown quite how the cabinet will function. One prediction of the Left, stated with the certainty of dogma, is that bourgeois democracy with its market economy is incapable of resolving South Africa's extreme social contradictions. The slogan: "forward to socialism" is like a cry in the dark. It provides not a single clue to the complexity of social forces at work.

Problems of strategic orientation

We prefer to argue that there are limits to capitalist reform under conditions of capitalist crisis, and whereas the reformist GNU will be able to deliver a measure of reform in the short-term the crisis will determine that this is insufficient and short-lived, giving rise to new struggles.

Rather than proclaim our certainties we should try to position ourselves in relation to the mass movement so that we will be heard when we raise our transitional demands and, therefore, be in a better position to benefit from the rise in struggles tomorrow.

The reformist challenge, as we see it, is to achieve a certain redistribution of social wealth, a level of job creation with equal opportunities and pay, some redistribution of land, some provision of housing, health and education, as well as improving the unequal infrastructural provision that was entrenched under apartheid.

Undoubtedly some of this will be achieved — unless exogenous events catapult us into an early crisis of such proportions that only revolution can resolve it. However, if moves toward a social rupture happen before a socialist leadership capable of giving direction has emerged, we fear that it would flounder and dissipate. Hence our sense of urgency regarding Left regroupment.

What we have to recognise is that reformism will attempt to respond on an acceptable level to social demands. By involving large numbers of people through the programs of the RDP they could create a sufficient sense that change is in motion. To paraphrase the ANC election message: We may not give you everything at once, we may not give you all that you demand, but we certainly will give you more than you have now.

The alternative, the reformists say to their critics, is to return to the armed struggle which, they add, is impossible given the fall of the Soviet-bloc, the international balance of forces (which favours imperialism) and the legitimacy of South Africa's first democratically elected government. We do not accept their arguments. However, we do believe that the Left faces new challenges.

Under the over-arching struggle to defend and extend democratic demands, a crucial task for the Left is to get COSATU and the mass movement to launch struggles which force the government to implement the radical aspects of the RDP. Such an approach will run into resistance from the ANC parliamentary mainstream and will certainly clash head-on with the rest of the GNU. However, it is essential that the class collaborationist character of the GNU becomes popularly understood. The best way to expose them is through forms of direct action.

Winning the full RDP would not make it a socialist programme, far from it. But the struggle to achieve it will help push bourgeois democracy to its economic limits. And that is where we can try to rebuild the anti-capitalist revolution. Failure to win radical reforms gives COSATU good reason to break away from the ANC-Alliance. This could also pull the SACP out of the honeymoon bed, although it would probably not wreck its shameful marriage with the bourgeoisie.

The Left must recognise that yesterday's political formulas are inadequate for today's strategic problems. A new strategic line of march and new forms of struggle need to be developed; struggles which relate to the form of the new democratic State (with its national, provincial and local government structures), and which reckons with the evolving post-apartheid social relationships.

Steps on a new line of march

The Left cannot be seen to reject reforms, no matter how limited, not when every reform will bring needed relief to mass suffering. We need a dual strategy which recognises improvements yet pushes for more; which exposes shortcomings yet does so by presenting viable alternatives; which watches every parliamentary manoeuvre yet relies upon direct mass action; which seeks the widest range of allies yet represents a

clear programme of demands; which always strikes together yet marches separately.

The Left should build a strategic response which says to the masses: "Take every reform, fight all reformism". If reformism is the belief that fundamental social change, including the final eradication of capitalist crisis — hunger, poverty, and mass unemployment — can be achieved over time by small incremental improvements (reforms), the tension in the formula is obvious.

The tactical problem is how to position ourselves in relation to both the mass movement and the ANC in power. To simply condemn the ANC as class traitors will not dent their hegemony, and will not break away their mass support. The Left has to develop a critique of reformism based on its ability to propose alternative economic and social policies capable of addressing mass needs.

The purpose of such a critique is not propagandistic in that it seeks to expose the illusory nature of incremental reforms (an impossible task in this form). Rather it is that demands should be pushed to their limit, exposing capitalism's reluctance to deliver anything which eats into its profit margins. We will seek to establish confidence in our socialist programme by building an anti-capitalist momentum.

Our programme thus becomes the summation of our anti-capitalist proposals and builds upon the work of comrades in different areas. It becomes a guide to mass action because the strategy we propose builds on the class instincts of the masses, sharpening and extending them in ways which strengthens leadership and organisational autonomy.

Our programme becomes transitional, not because of ideological incantation, but because it starts from the level of mass consciousness, relies on a real balance of forces, posits demands which extend the system to breaking point, and builds the necessary organisational forms and class consciousness which emboldens the masses to act in their social interests; so that, at the time of rupture, the people are able to build a society in their own image.

With this orientation we will show that we have no interests over and above those of the working people and can join hands with all class struggle militants in a non-sectarian way. When this has proceeded to the point where hegemony can be broken we can talk about a mass workers party.

What attitude to the Mass Workers Party

An independent class organisation which protects working class interests is long overdue. To simply return to the Workers Charter would be insufficient. Now the Charter has to be linked to a comprehensive political programme intended to counter the ANC-Alliance in power. This will push the need for an independent workers party into the centre of debate in the unions. Yet the outcome is far from certain. Similar debates have raged before.

A Mass Workers Party (MWP) is not an alternative to union activity, nor is it an insurrectionist vanguard party. It is a broad based political organisation of the working class which contests for state power by entering elections. It may have a radical programme but it is not, per se, a revolutionary organisation. To get workers to vote for it requires a political reciprocity between unions and party, much as COSATU has with the ANC.

The British Labour Party, while it still has the backing of the union movement, is today a bourgeois party of the working class. It is not revolutionary and when in power it rules in the interests of capital, although it does so in the name of the workers. By way of contrast the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT) is this year hoping to get elected on a broad anti-capitalist platform although it has not yet experienced government power. It too has the support of the unions but it will be unable to break the rule of capital without a revolutionary rupture. The PT in power could soon end-up like the Labour Party.

Every mass party contains a wide variety of political opinions. It may or may not permit the existence of various political tendencies within its ranks (the PT does, the Labour Party does not). A mass party displays all the cultural and ideological unevenness which characterises the majority of working people. A MWP does not replace the need for other more revolutionary forms of organisation. To imagine that the MWP is an ideological home in the same way that programmatic groupings are, is to confuse a "broad church" with a far left group.

To call for the formation of a mass workers party, as WOSA/WLP has done, before winning the support of several big battalions of the unions is putting the cart before the horse. A mass workers party is not built through individual

recruitment. It involves shifting both union and political loyalties on a grand scale, something which happens only rarely around major class events.

How the Left conducts itself is therefore of crucial importance. The Union leaderships, as well as large numbers of shop stewards, still see their current political allegiances as sufficient to protect their class interests. Only experience will break this illusion. Until then, clarion calls to build a mass workers party will fall largely on deaf ears. The Left will have to demonstrate that an independent workers party can include workers from all political camps by uniting them around a programme of clear class demands. It would have to win mass confidence in its ability, once elected to power, to deliver the goods which the ANC failed to do.

The ANC in power will enjoy a certain honeymoon period despite all the displeasure individual workers may express toward its politics. Therefore, if we want to shift the consciousness of the majority of workers, we must act in ways which capture their attention. To reject the RDP out of hand by asserting that "it must fail because only socialism can solve our problems", will not help to win the support we need from COSATU unions to build a MWP. Although this assertion about socialism might be true in the final analysis, life is not lived in that mystical place.

Far better to extend the proposals of the RDP to a point where the bourgeoisie refuses to support them, better to demand fulfilment of electoral promises, and to support union efforts to win these demands through direct action. Such an approach is far more likely to win union support for a radical programme of political demands. Unionists will only support a MWP once they have broken their allegiance from the ANC-Alliance.

To break the hegemony of the ANC is easier said than done. The SACP could agree to fight the NP/DP-bloc to extend the RDP but probably would not agree to challenge the ANC for power, not unless they break ranks or the ANC splits. This is no more likely than a split in the SACP. Again, unless COSATU breaks from the Alliance the chances of rebuilding a radical shop-steward movement are poor.

Without such a radical layer the chances of a mass shift toward a workers party are slim. It is incumbent on the Left to help pry COSATU loose from the Alliance around a demand for class independence based on its members interests. But to appear willing to split

COSATU in an endeavour to build a mass party would be politically counter-productive. Interest in a MWP will have to be demonstrated through careful criticism of the policies of the Alliance in power.

Despite the government of national unity, the unions will continue to build militancy around wage demands and the Left should continue to support every wage struggle. We do this because there is no better way to build a general strike movement directed against government policies. We build in this way because the ultimate solution which socialism poses, namely the eradication of the capitalist wage system, can never be achieved otherwise. Only the foolish stand aside from union struggles to preach the socialist goal from their pulpits.

Some perspectives

The socialist project is in grave danger not only from the ideological onslaught of neo-liberalism and reformism, but also from its own inability to present a programme and strategy to the unions and other mass formations which can win the support of the leading militants. Without their active involvement we cannot win mass support.

Radical working class consciousness will need to grow through a series of struggles which seek to extend strikes to work-ins, occupations to take-overs under workers control, and eventually to transform nationalisation into socialisation of the means of production. This is a daunting, but unavoidable set of tasks for the Left. It is impossible to guess at what tempo or in which order this process will occur.

In periods of downturn the tasks we foresee may seem enormous and impossible. Yet in periods of upturn, general working class consciousness can leap forward in great bounds. It is impossible to predict what sort of social event could trigger a major upturn in struggle. Who could have guessed that the Bophuthatswana rebellion would happen the way it did?

During upturns those mass actions which appear so spontaneous are really the harvest of patient agitation and propaganda work done by the Left over time. This is the work waiting to be done.

There is an urgent need in South Africa today to move from the politics of national liberation to the politics and struggle of class-against-class. Of course there have always been elements of both

present, but the shift needed today is definitive. This is necessary if we are to break the hegemony of nationalism, as expressed by the ANC, PAC, an so forth. The Left has a huge task in trying to refocus popular perceptions and sharpen general demands by linking it to class alternatives exemplified in our transitional programme.

Equally urgent is the task of building a new national, class conscious leadership rooted in the unions and mass formations. This is difficult given the enormous social weight of ANC and cannot be built by ignoring that organisations leftward-moving militants. Finding the political language with which to talk with these militants is a long overdue task.

The tiny far left groups, for their part, still show little appreciation of the problems obstructing regroupment. Many still think regroupment is about mergers or agreeing on precise texts, rather than about a common orientation which allows many flowers to bloom. They still argue abstractly about the quality of different swimming strokes when, in fact, they have yet to get in the water and learn the basics.

The fight for Left politics will be uphill for a whole period. Several waves of struggle, those around land, around housing, around every social need, will have to build and coalesce into a new revolutionary rise. To be part of this new upturn and to be capable of giving it useful support is a huge responsibility for the Left. To prepare ourselves for these tasks is today's priority.

The Left's task is to build a mass consciousness which involves a critique of bourgeois society — both its democracy and economy. Only when the working majority are prepared to act in their own class interests, and have built the organisations with which to do this, will they be able to overthrow capitalism and build socialism.

We all need to draw a balance sheet of our theory and practice if we want to be capable of defining a strategic line of march which is relevant to the new historical period our country has entered.

We have no interests over and above those of the working classes. Where they are we must do our work, and this will give new meaning to our general understanding that the socialist revolution will begin with the democratic struggle. It will involve presenting transitional demands as the radical alternative to reformism, so that socialist forces are built on the basis of real anti-capitalist struggles. ★

Contradictions suspended

LANGA ZITA is an organiser for the metalworkers union, NUMSA, in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging (PWV) region, and has been described as the South African Communist Party's (SACP) leading young left-wing intellectual. *International Viewpoint* spoke with him following the ANC election victory.

INTERVIEW

A *S part of the tripartite alliance, COSATU supported the ANC's election campaign. With that support they have managed to get a number of COSATU nominated leaders elected to the National Assembly, some even in ministerial positions (Sydney Mafumadi as Minister of Police, and Jay Naidoo) in addition to getting the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) accepted by the ANC as its plan to be implemented as government. How will COSATU have influence over their elected representatives and what will COSATU's role be in the implementation process of the RDP?*

"There have been some debates but not very formal as to what relationship will exist between our elected worker leaders and the federation. In general the traditional approach is being followed when people leave the union to work for a political party — they operate under the mandate of the political organisation, in this case the ANC. An idea has been put forward that COSATU would provide on-going support and information to these Members of Parliament (MPs) and in this way it would put these MPs in a position to articulate the approach of COSATU on a number of issues. In the Johannesburg region of COSATU we have opened this discussion and have put forward the idea that there should be structures set up where formal meetings

are held with these comrades to get reports and to forward our concerns. Some of those who are new to the ANC will continue to look to COSATU for support because they do not feel too comfortable in the ANC.

"The critical aspect of the RDP is the proposals around the democratisation of State structures and which outline the need for the participation of popular forces such as trade unions, civics in the conception and implementation of policy. Again in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging (PWV) region we have a structure, the Transitional Task Team where COSATU, the South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO) and the SACP oversee the implementation of the RDP. It plays a monitoring and watch-dog role.

"Where we feel in COSATU that the RDP is not being implemented and that the measures taken in terms of the RDP are not in our members' interests we reserve the right to take independent action to oppose such measures. As a trade union we have specific sectional interests (ie. organised workers) which must be defended and that must be understood by all.

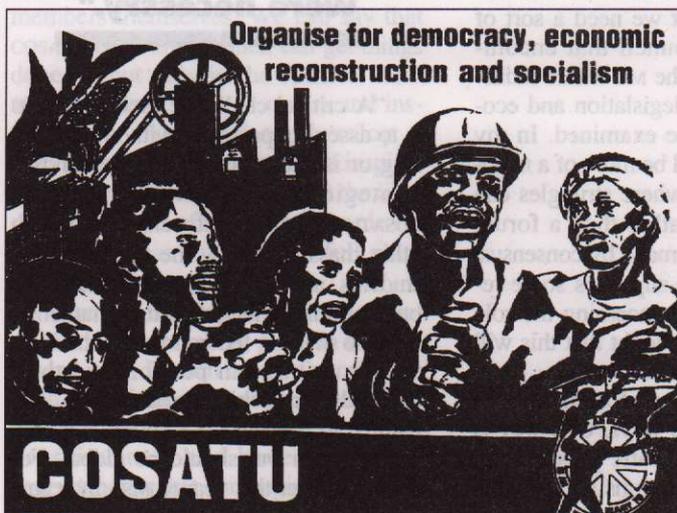
"There are two processes driving the RDP. On the one hand, there is the budgetary aspect which allocates specific resources for the delivery of necessities such as housing, electrification, clinics, and so forth. On the other hand, there are measures which are aimed at restructuring the economy, industry, and so on. With regard to the latter, all sorts of

struggles could emerge where sections of capital refuse to implement the proposals, for example in relation to training programmes, the refinement of raw materials, and so on."

With the ANC in government and committed to carrying out the RDP do you believe that the unions will feel constrained in asserting their independence? In other words, will COSATU be independent in name only? In which areas will COSATU assert its independence?

"This question highlights a problem. The ANC is not an organic movement of the left as it was before 1990 — before it decided to begin the negotiations. In the light of the question we need a dual approach. First, left forces inside the ANC continue to pursue a left project in the ANC. Second, the popular mass forces constantly assert their members' interests and demands as a way of backing up those left forces in the ANC. Therefore, in terms of this approach, COSATU must vigorously assert its independence."

Much has changed since the heady days of the mid-1980s. Is socialism still on the COSATU agenda?



What potential exists for conflict with the ANC-led Government of National Unity (GNU) over economic policy, Sunset Clauses, wage policy, and so forth?

"As far as the GNU is concerned, a number of comrades on the left both inside and outside of parliament took a very critical position towards this idea. I took a different position. We were not able to overcome the ruling class compromises. Though painful, these were necessary. A "managed transition", so long as its effect is not to prevent or limit future struggle, was a necessity. I believe it is possible, depending on the balance of forces, to offset its effect as the transition unfolds. It does not cancel the contradictions in society, it only suspends them.

"With regards to the deal with civil servants, it is important to remember that it only guarantees their jobs, and not the office they presently hold. This gives us some room for manoeuvre.

"The task we face on the left is to mobilise civil society to disturb the guarantees given, so that the social cost of maintaining them becomes too great and they are overturned."

What role do you see the National Economic Forum (NEF) and the Manpower Commission (MC) playing? Are there forums where COSATU endorses class collaborationist policies?

"The MC has a critical role to play but it must be restructured and as part of that restructuring it must be re-staffed. There is a debate on the role of the NEF. There is a view that we need a sort of socio-economic council that encompasses the NEF and the MC where industrial policy, labour legislation and economic policy can be examined. In my view that role should be more of a negotiation-type forum where struggles can break deadlocks, rather than a forum where decisions are made by consensus. This conception pre-supposes some re-thinking in COSATU concerning the role of these structures. I doubt that this will happen in the short-term.

"One can approach forums of this type in two possible ways. One way is from a social democratic perspective, where we enter the forums and are part of the process, and accept the underlying

assumptions of the labour market and the mechanism for regulating labour.

"Another possible approach is that of entering such a forum to highlight the contradictions of the system. It gives us the opportunity also to put forward proposals that go beyond the confines of capitalism. For example, when dealing with the issue of unemployment one can put forward policies that are clearly directed towards ending the labour market as such."

In the last few days of the TEC a call was made for a moratorium on strikes. COSATU rejected this but nevertheless was reported to be trying to rein in the public sector strikes in various ex-homelands and independent States. Do you think that now that the ANC has won the election so convincingly that a renewed request on its part for a period of social peace would receive a more favourable response from COSATU, in the interests of implementing the RDP?

"While this call was not formally discussed in COSATU, a lot of workers were alarmed by it and were critical. In NUMSA, we were critical of this call. We saw no connection between the election and the need for a moratorium on strikes.

"We were not able to overcome the ruling class compromises. Though painful, these were necessary."

"A critical challenge facing COSATU is to assert its positions without ghettoising or isolating itself. This demands a strategic approach where, for one, COSATU consolidates its relationship with other mass forces — the civics, youth, students, and so on. Moreover, it has to broaden this to include left parliamentarians so that the federation and the individual unions can put forward their demands and mobilise around them. The nature of these demands should not only be particular but should be global. For example, later this year NUMSA may strike on wages but it will be linked to the

demand for retraining which is necessary to develop the skills base of the work force."

At its special congress last year, COSATU passed a resolution calling for a conference of the left. Where did the call originate? Is it related to the need for a reassessment of socialism in the light of the failure of the post-capitalist States in Eastern Europe, or to something more than this?

"The call originates in the discomfort of union and other working class activists with political developments after 1990 — the start of the negotiations and the compromises this entailed — and our concern in general for socialism in the country and internationally. The ANC's shift from radical solutions and from the goal of fundamental transformation has raised concerns among activists. For example, the ANC abandoned its commitment to nationalisation, a policy which came to symbolise anti-capitalist sentiment.

"A secondary concern for some activists might have been the role of the SACP and the issue of the political organisation of the working class."

What do you see as the main objectives of this conference?

"At present there is no clarity in COSATU on the conference's objectives. I believe that the conference should attempt to be more than a platform but not seek to form a new party. It is necessary to create something like the Sao Paulo Forum which seeks to assert the relevance of socialism and seeks to offer a re-thinking of what socialism could mean. But it should also go beyond such a forum by creating greater left unity on immediate issues facing us in the country where the coordination of left forces can take place.

"It should be some form of front with a socialist character but which would also include radical democratic forces that are not necessarily socialist. This front could come together to ensure the implementation of the RDP on a radical basis, to develop radical positions around land distribution and so on. We should not just come together to counterpose socialist demands to the present but to develop concrete alternatives which can be raised and popularised."

The NUMSA conference passed a resolution calling on COSATU to end the alliance once the ANC was in government and calling for the formation of a working class party. What does the future hold for this resolution?

"The Alliance is in a debate as to whether it is in the best interests of the working class to break the alliance with the ANC.

"I think that if we had broken the alliance we would have given the ANC a blank cheque to make deals that would have been against the interests of the working class. Today the ANC is forced to consult COSATU on almost all issues. The position of the ANC on mining and mineral rights is taken almost entirely from the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Its manufacturing policy has been taken from NUMSA.

"I would argue that this issue also depends on progress with the unity talks with the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) and the Federation of South African Labour (FEDSAL). We would have to tackle this issue sensitively. We might have to redefine the alliance to accommodate these federations.

"But ultimately the future of the Alliance will be determined by events. If the situation develops where we come into increasing confrontation with the ANC then maybe we might have to end the Alliance. Or as I said earlier, if unity with other major trade unions demands that the Alliance be broken then we would have to seriously consider it.

"It is true that the alliance, as it is structured today, runs the risk of becoming a transmission belt for government policy. To avoid this it is vital that we develop ideas, positions and policies on all issues that affect the working class. If we do not have ideas we will be in trouble. A critical challenge that we face is to raise the capacity inside the unions and inside COSATU to develop policy. Also it is good to note that there is a growing understanding in the ANC of the importance for COSATU of remaining independent and of the dangers of creating transmission belts."

With the tremendous organisational growth of the trade union movement there has been a growth of bureaucratic trends while the shop floor structures have been weakened.

What initiatives do you think are necessary to reverse this tendency?

The present stage of COSATU's evolution reflects this tendency towards bureaucratisation. The critical question that we face, and it is a question of time, is that of finding a way to strengthen mass movements like COSATU while at the same time undermining this tendency.

"In a certain sense, one thing we should attempt to do is to recreate the culture of the 1980s of organisational initiative of the ranks themselves — shop floor democracy, accountability and campaigns of mobilisation.

"But it is also important to not overstate this tendency. Sam Shilowa, the COSATU General Secretary, would not dare make decisions without consulting the unions. Bureaucratic tendencies may be reflected in the fact consultations are made primarily with those unions and structures that are more supportive of a particular position than others.

"COSATU is facing a number of problems which aggravate the situation. Many of COSATU's best leaders have gone into parliament and government, and this will undermine the strategic depth of the union movement. We have failed to develop the critical challenges into concrete challenges that are understood and taken up by the members themselves. We can say that COSATU is an army which can get things done — but only in the spirit of how armies operate, through orders and instructions. We need to develop a consciousness which seizes and inspires the masses in the same way that the liberation struggle affected our people — we need what I would call full class consciousness.

"I see the development of a shop steward movement taking place in the following way. In each of our factories we need a critical core of members who have gone beyond a trade union consciousness and have a political understanding that can begin to challenge relations at the factory. There is some

truth in the statement that we have emphasised issues of control and ownership at the expense of power. If workers are powerfully organised at the plants, they can exercise an influence over society as a whole. They can influence and change policy on a number of issues, for example on investment questions and so forth. If it is possible to do this, we will be able to make real progress in developing full class consciousness with the consequent impact on bureaucratisation."

Do you think the ban on organised currents in the unions has stifled political pluralism in the unions and has contributed to bureaucratic tendencies?

"It would be incorrect to attribute bureaucratisation in COSATU to the ban on organised tendencies. The situation is that different platforms do exist and there is often a fruitful cross-pollination between them." ★

"... the future of the Alliance will be determined by events. If the situation develops where we come into increasing confrontation with the ANC ... or if unity with other major trade unions demands that the Alliance be broken then we would have to seriously consider it."

DOSSIER

RDP versus World Bank

THE Reconstruction and Development

Programme is set to become a pre-occupation for the South African Left. It is a programme with its own unique contradictions. On the one hand it is suffused with neo-liberal premises, and on the other, it has an important radical component. It is the latter which must be pushed to its limits.

PATRICK BOND

AS South Africa's warm summer breezes swirled through Johannesburg's financial district last December, local critics of the Bretton Woods institutions shivered with fear. The reason was simple: the first act of South Africa's interim multi-party government — the Transitional Executive Council (TEC) — was an application for a US\$850 million IMF loan, purportedly for drought relief but in reality aimed at servicing the apartheid foreign commercial bank debt, which was renegotiated on dreadfully onerous terms two months before.

The terms of the IMF deal, which were secret until leaked to the press in late March, include the rapid removal of import surcharges (potentially catastrophic for many local industries), a reduction in the government deficit/GDP ratio from 6.85 percent to around 6 percent, alongside the demand for a reduction not only in public sector pay (by about 6 percent), but also a reduction in pay across the board.

It was not long, however, before a backlash emerged. Earlier this year the ANC issued its governmental document, the Reconstruction and Development

Programme (RDP), which had been drawn-up with the support of COSATU, ANC-orientated social movements, and NGOs. The document's guiding principles appeared to stymie the World Bank's ambitious loan-selling operation in the infrastructure, health, education and various other fields (see box 1).

Box 1

"THE RDP must use foreign debt financing only for those elements of the programme that can potentially increase our capacity for earning foreign exchange. Relationships with international financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund must be conducted in such a way as to protect the integrity of domestic policy formulation and promote the interests of the South African population and the economy. Above all, we must pursue policies that enhance national self-sufficiency and enable us to reduce dependence on international financial institutions."

Innovative

The documents innovative principle led Oxford University historian, RW Johnson, to natter (in the *London Times*) that IMF economists believe the ANC is "living in fairyland" for attempting to finance the ambitious RDP from domestic resources. Johnson, a sophisticated red-baiter, attributes substantial blame for the "no foreign loans" clause to Ben Turok of the Institute for African Alternatives — "the ANC's most extreme opponent of the World Bank and the IMF, who is to be the economic supremo of the Johannesburg region" — as well as to "the strength of the South African Communist Party (SACP) within the ANC and the tendency of many in the ANC to see the (World) Bank and IMF as part of a global capitalist conspiracy."

Nevertheless, the financing principle of the RDP did win praise in other quarters. *Business Day* labelled it "wise", and *Finance Week* asked: "Well now, is the view that IMF (and other) foreign borrowing should essentially only be used where it helps to create self-financing export-based, or genuinely internationally competitive import replacement

capacity in any way 'fairyland'? Absolutely not, the reverse in fact." *Finance Week* quoted Nedbank economist Edward Osborn: "What has to be eschewed is borrowing abroad for borrowing's sake, especially with a likely continuing decline in the value of the rand."

More rigidly orthodox mouthpieces such as the *Economist* (5 February) or South Africa's ambassador to the USA, Harry Schwarz, remain insistent that the ANC take foreign loans. As Schwarz intoned: "I disagree that, by taking IMF and World Bank facilities, African countries have lost their sovereignty... Until now, certainly in respect of the US\$850 million loan from the IMF, it cannot be said that there has been any endeavour to encroach upon sovereignty."

In reality, the IMF was cited, accurately, as having put intense pressure on the ANC to re-appoint the sado-monetarist Reserve Bank governor, Chris Stals. Nationalisation of industry was nixed by the IMF, according to the pragmatic new ANC Labour Minister, Tito Mboweni. And "economic populism" as a general philosophy is out of the question because, says leading ANC tax specialist, Denis Davis, "significant international [influence] had been brought to bear through the IMF and World Bank." Even Nelson Mandela periodically cites the Bretton Woods institutions as potential funders, as a means of assuaging a nervous business audience.

All predictable enough. After all, while the RDP could be described as broadly social-democratic it is also suffused with neo-liberal premises. The Programme's fiscal policy (strict limits on government spending), monetary policy (relatively tight control of interest rates and money supply by an independent central bank), and trade policy (export-led manufacturing growth) are all acceptable to the likes of the IMF. In the most important areas of economic management, it is clear that conservative principles prevailed in the drafting of the RDP.

But anti-World Bank sentiment is alive and well, as reflected in the April comment by the new ANC Minister of Trade and Industry, Trevor Manuel, that there was not likely to be any borro-

wing from the World bank for at least the first two years of ANC rule.

Thus, whatever influence Washington may have had in toning down the rhetoric of the 1955 Freedom Charter — “the banks and the monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole” — the broader ANC left is satisfied with the RDP. In no small part this reflects its origins in COSATU which was, until quite recently, led by Jay Naidoo, now an ANC Minister (without portfolio) with primary responsibility for the RDP and its implementation, particularly its left-wing objectives (see box 2).

Box 2

RDP objectives

- Strong commitment to basic needs, goals, and mechanisms (such as electricity and clean water for all, housing as a right, massive land reform, women's reproductive rights, affordable health care, full education...)
- Suggestions for “decommodifying” goods such as housing by rejecting the individual ownership model and market rules, in favour of “social housing” and a socialised subsidy
- A tough environmental critique
- Several substantive interventions in corporate ownership and financial markets, and;
- The promise that organisations of civil society will be empowered to take control over relevant aspects of the programme rather than leaving it all to a potentially corrupt, lethargic bureaucracy which by virtue of last year's compromise constitutional settlement will retain strong residues of apartheid administration at least until 1999. ☼

Warning

The RDP also includes the warning that Southern African countries “were pressured into implementing [IMF and World Bank] programmes with adverse effects on employment and standards of living. It is essential that we combine to develop effective strategies for all Southern African countries.” Taken together, this is as powerful an anti-imperialist sentiment from an official source as you will find in 1994.

Moreover, at the grass-roots level the RDP is winning support, as communities are encouraged (with capacity-building funds from government) to begin assessing their own needs and solutions. In the Johannesburg area, Ben Turok, responsible for the co-ordination of the RDP in the province, has the support of the local Metalworkers union (NUMSA) organiser, Langa Zita, and urban community leader Mzwanele Mayekiso, both outspoken critics of World Bank policies.

In April, the World Bank's first resident official, Isaac Sam, ventured into the cauldron of South African politics. At about the same time, the Bank's president, Lewis Preston, announced to a Development Committee meeting that “the Bank has dealt transparently and impartially across political boundaries and has placed great emphasis on South African participation in its work.”

Popular protest

However, Sam faced problems early on, as the Bank quickly limited its urban staff to non-township visits, due to the danger of violence and crime. The danger of direct popular protest against both the Bank and the IMF also appeared on the horizon, as the “South-South-North Network” — a coalition founded by more than a dozen Southern African and Brazilian popular education and research groups, catalysed by the “Toronto Committee for Links between Southern Africa and Canada” — prepared to contribute to the fiftieth anniversary pressure.¹

An indication of the conflict ahead could be found in a commentary by Business Day's leading finance writer: “The ANC wants to create an almost utopian society, described in the Reconstruction and Development Programme. But it has to build that society while keeping its promises to the IMF and its own commitment to ‘macro-economic balance’. The RDP and the TEC statement of policies to the IMF are arguably the two most important clues on future economic policy... The IMF has subsequently argued a drop in real wages will go some way towards solving South Africa's unemployment problem. This view is absent from the RDP, which ‘makes a decisive break with the exploitative cheap labour policies of apartheid’.”

1. The “Bretton Woods agreement”, which set-up the World Bank and IMF, was signed fifty years ago this year.

Perhaps South Africa's new policy-makers are beginning to get the message that this also requires making a decisive break with the exploitative cheap labour policies of the IMF and World Bank. But whether they ultimately agree, or not, depends to a large extent upon whether popular pressure can be mobilised over the next months and years. ★

...at the grass roots level, the RDP is winning support, as communities are encouraged to begin assessing their own needs and solutions

Focus for new struggles

"OF ALL the processes which have brought about the inequitable distribution of power and wealth that characterises present-day South Africa, perhaps none has been more decisive and of more immediate importance to most black communities than the dispossession of land. Agrarian communities in Africa, as elsewhere, have, by definition, tended to base not only their economic but also their social structure on the distribution of land. This has made dispossession an act akin to national destruction."

M de Klerk: Harvest of Discontent, IDASA 1991

BRIAN ASHLEY
Cape Town

IT IS one of the ironies of the South African political struggle that while the question of the return of the land has been central to the organisations of the national liberation movement, until recently none of these organisations has been able to spell out a comprehensive programme of land reform and rural reconstruction. This stands in sharp contrast to the important role that the national liberation struggle has played in the urban centres, where its strategies have intersected with and reinforced the struggles of urban workers around trade union and civic issues.

This is in spite of the fact that racial inequality is most manifest in the way the land has been monopolised by a white minority. As such the ANC-led Government of National Unity (GNU)

faces its greatest and most difficult challenge in redressing this legacy of white minority rule.

Land distribution in South Africa is one of the most skewed in the world, and is summed up in the well-known ratio whereby 87 percent of the land has come to be concentrated in the hands of just 13 percent of the population (White) while the remaining 87 percent of the population (Black) was forced to reside on just 13 percent of the land.

This unequal distribution of land was the result, initially, of colonial conquest, however it was later cemented in law by the 1913 Land Act, segregation and apartheid.

The dispossession of Black people, their confinement to the homelands and their denial of citizenship in South Africa, and the resulting cheap migrant labour system were the foundation stones on which the apartheid system was built. They have given the land question in South Africa a specific meaning.

White farms

These measures brought into being two categories of rural land. The first category consists of the so-called White farms. Here massively subsidised White commercial farmers own huge tracts of land and employ 1.2 million farm workers under a system of harsh repression and brutality that has guaranteed their total subservience and a source of cheap labour for the farms. About 90 percent of South African agricultural productivity comes from the white farming community, which occupies 85 percent of the agricultural land and represents just 0.17 percent of the total South African population.

The second category consists of land that is largely owned and controlled by the State: the ex-homelands. These house just about 50 percent of South Africa's population, of which the vast majority constitute a rural landless poor living in squalor and depending on wages and pensions from the cities. A large proportion of those living in the homelands are people pushed off the White farms, expelled from their own freehold farms, driven from the cities or concentrated in rural slums as a result of

forced removals from "black spots". Because of overpopulation of the "reserves" and lack of development in these areas an environmental disaster has been created which has left large tracts of land unsuitable for agricultural production.

The underdevelopment of the homelands is manifested in the extreme poverty, the lack of infrastructure and the virtual absence of social welfare services in these areas. The rate of illiteracy stands out as a terrible testimony to this. According to recent estimates the illiteracy rate amongst rural people in the homelands and other rural areas of the country is 67 percent, while eight out of ten farm workers are unable to read and write.

Only a tiny proportion of Black people retain direct access to land as peasants or small producers, and only a handful, numbering in the hundreds, are commercial farmers. Their land-holding is concentrated in the homelands and in the few remaining areas of Black-owned land on the so-called white platteland. In the homelands currently there are 0.16 hectares per person and this will drop to 0.1 by the year 2000. There is a general absence of the means of subsistence, a lack of resources with either minimal or no State-support, and the abuse of power by State officials.

Homelands

The essence of the land problem in South Africa arises from the fact that the homelands were intended to soak up the Black population so that the white farm lands and urban areas could avoid having to bear the social and economic costs of supporting a large Black working class. As agricultural production declined and land-hunger and landlessness became more generalised, the homelands became almost entirely an instrument for the apartheid government to politically and socially control the millions of Black people who, if allowed to urbanise, would have threatened the stability of the apartheid system. Instead of being developed as viable, productive agricultural regions, they were used in a literal sense as "dumping grounds" for the Black people that the government wanted to move from the urban areas.

How people survived once they had been abandoned in the homelands was a question with which the government chose not to concern itself.

The demand for the return of the land has become central not only because of its implications for the large numbers of people who presently live under the most extreme forms of poverty, deprivation, backwardness and powerlessness in the rural areas but because the resolution of the land question will also profoundly affect the lives of the most urbanised, industrialised communities in South Africa. This is because the land question concerns the millions of Black people who are still nominally migrant workers living in mining compounds and hostels in or near the urban centres. It equally has to do with millions more who fled the poverty of the homelands to seek work in the cities. Because of the government's lack of housing provision and urban planning millions of Black people are condemned to squat in shacks on open land around the town and city centres. For this reason the land question touches almost all strands of Black society both rural and urban.

Hence, in the consciousness of Black people, the land question is inseparable from the issue of national oppression, of colonial conquest and dispossession by the whites. The solution of the land question and the future of the rural population are bound up with the demand for political rights, for land on which to live and land on which to work. For this reason the ANC was quick to indicate that they intended to undertake a programme of land redistribution almost immediately, particularly as it became clear that they had won a clear majority.

However, the protection in the new constitution of private property and the existing property rights will have a crippling effect on any serious land reform programme. Although the new constitution makes provision for expropriation of property it can only take place on the basis of compensation and only for "public purposes". Public purpose refers to the cases when property must be expropriated to make way for the building of public roads, building, and so forth.

In this case land redistribution will only be possible with State land and private land obtained on a "willing seller, willing buyer" basis.

Although the constitution does make provision for the right to restoration to those who lost land and property as a result of apartheid measures it is restric-

ted to such cases that occurred after June 1913 and where the State "certifies that it is feasible"!

Now that the transition to a post-apartheid society is taking place, increasing interest and attention are being focused on the issues of land reform and rural development by formations of the mass democratic movement and progressive NGOs. This has resulted in mobilisation of particularly dispossessed communities for the return of their land and a number of these communities have been successful. It has also spawned a number of incidents where people have gone onto their former land and occupied it in a kind of land-grab movement.

Demands

A very significant National Conference was held earlier this year. Hundreds of rural communities came together to formulate their demands for land reform. The mood was very militant. Delegates challenged the constitution saying that they demand the right to reclaim land from 1652 onwards (when the first white settlers came to South Africa) and not only from 1913 onwards. In response to the Constitution which requires people to come to a court to make their claim, one delegate, rejecting this as a suitable mechanism, said: "You don't take the victims to court, you take the thieves." Delegates at the Conference warned the ANC that while they will support them in the coming election they are giving them five years within which to make progress in returning the land or they will face their opposition.

The land question touches on another aspect central to the struggle for freedom, namely that of women's emancipation. Black women are the most disadvantaged in rural society. Although the majority of farm workers are women, few are employed full-time. Most women who work on the farms are employed as casual and seasonal workers, and compete with children. While black women represent the backbone of small-scale agricultural production in the reserves, their link to the land is totally dependent on men through whom their access to land is rooted both in the formal legal system and in indigenous

law. The Conference saw a heated debate where women demanded the right to own land in their own right and an end to the practices of polygamy. These issues could not be settled at the Conference because of the opposition of traditional chiefs and has been referred back to regions for further discussion.

To show their seriousness, shortly after the conference delegates marched on the Transitional Executive Council (TEC) and presented their demands.

In the coming months the contradiction and pressures around land reform will confront the new government. They will be faced with the contradiction of having to satisfy the demands of the people for redress on the one hand, and on the other with ensuring the continuity of food production which is undertaken primarily on the White commercial farms.

The resolve of the ANC to continue to be a popular movement of the people will be severely tested. How responsive the ANC will be to the demands for large-scale land redistribution remains to be seen. One possibility for land redistribution lies in obtaining the land of White farmers heavily in debt. It is estimated that White farmers have incurred about R17 billion in debts. If the banks were to insist on repayment, about 40 percent of the 67 thousand white farmers would be immediately liquidated and their land could be made available by government by acquiring it from the bank.

The protection of private property and existing rights will have a crippling effect on any serious land reform programme

With the support of the PAC and other smaller parties, the ANC may be able to muster the necessary two thirds majority to change the constitution and ensure greater flexibility to make available land for redistribution sooner than later. But it is doubtful that they would do this given that it would create considerable tension in the GNU.

Ultimately, however, the nature and strength of rural organisation will be critical determinants of the shape of any programme of land reform and of a range of material resources that will be needed for rural reconstruction. One thing is clear: the land question will not disappear and it could become a focus for new struggles and organisation. ★

Battle for ANC begins

FAREED ABDULLAH, Lucky Montana, and Duncan Sebifelo are members of the Cape Town Executive of the South African Communist Party (SACP). They spoke to *International Viewpoint* about their Party's current debates.

INTERVIEW

What are the main issues presently being discussed inside the SACP now that the ANC is leading the Government of National Unity?

FA; LM; DS: Firstly, there is a discussion on the role of the SACP in the implementation of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). We see the adoption of the RDP by the ANC as policy as a victory for the Left. This is in spite of the fact that the RDP had been watered down prior to its final adoption.

Secondly, what is our attitude to the ANC in the new situation? Jeremy Cronin (an influential member of the Party's Political Bureau) is reported to have said that the battle for the life and soul of the ANC began on 29 April (the day following the elections). This is correct.

The issue we have to confront is how do we combine institutional and non-institutional means of struggle for socialism. This is about defining the role of the SACP in the transition to socialism. Linked to all of this is the we need to do in developing the policy of the SACP on a range of current issues, work which has been neglected of late. One such policy is what attitude do we take in regard to the World Bank and the IMF.

Another issue which is being looked at is how do we hold the SACP members of parliament accountable which is important in determining the character of the ANC in government. In COSATU a debate has begun about forming a left parliamentary caucus.

In terms of being active in the Government of National Unity and having to support the immediate needs of national reconciliation, peace, development, and so forth, do you not see the danger of being locked in a process where you will objectively be strengthening the restructuring of capitalism?

FA; LM; DS: Reconciliation can mean different things to different social forces. We certainly would welcome the reconciliation between Inkatha hostel residents and township resident on the East Rand. Also, in terms of the level of violence, a peace movement is important and should not be rejected as some liberal initiative. Racial reconciliation is not something we should be opposed to. Reconciliation is contradictory. It is not class free as the National Party and others would have us believe. Reconciliation is not going to be able to overcome the sharp class divisions of our society. Of course what we opposed to is where reconciliation is intended to reconcile the oppressed masses to a neo-liberal order.

How to avoid getting involved in a process where we strengthen capitalism by supporting peace, development, and so forth? This is a difficult question. We in the SACP do not have a ready-made blueprint and would be an important task of the Conference of the Left to say something in this regard. Of course, there will be calls for social peace from inside the government. We believe that it is important to strengthen the mass organisations and to put forward the interests of their members in an unequivocal way.

It is crucial to build on the tradition of the mass movement and to secure the

role of the masses in the process of transition. The RDP cannot in our view be fulfilled within the current patterns of ownership, that is to say capitalism, and therefore struggling around the implementation of the RDP offers opportunities to challenge the current balance of forces.

What attitude do you take towards the Government of National Unity?

FA; LM; DS: This is a central question facing the SACP. Although the ANC is a multi-class organisation it was voted into power by the working class. This is an objective factor that opens opportunities for the struggle to shape the ANC. The ANC will be obliged to pay attention to this constituency. However, the Government of National Unity does not offer the ANC free reign to rule.

There will be opportunities for new elites to emerge in the civil service and in industry. They will find common cause with the current strata in those areas. This is why some of us have been arguing for the need to develop a left counter-balance. The ANC could otherwise quite easily be turned into a representative of, to a degree if not entirely, the interests of capital. Because of this danger and the need for a counter-weight outside of parliament, we see the

Conference of the Left as being very important.

It is important not to make the mistake of dismissing the significance of the ANC victory in the elections.

How do we combine institutional and non-institutional means in the struggle for socialism?

What do you see as the future of the tripartite alliance?

FA; LM; DS: The Alliance should not be broken in the current period. COSATU and the SACP are well represented in government and they should

contribute to ANC policy as part of the Alliance. For the trade union movement it is important for COSATU to clarify its relationship to the new government. This will become urgent because we can expect a strong contradiction between the public sector unions and the new government.

The future of the Alliance depends on whether the left is able to win the heart and soul of the ANC. If it does, there will be good arguments for maintaining the Alliance. However, if and when contradictions emerge between, for example, COSATU and the government, this will certainly have an impact on the Alliance. This issue is a prisoner of time. There are some people in the SACP who are saying that the Party must become independent and develop its own programme.

The reality of the situation is that the RDP will hold the Alliance together for some time.

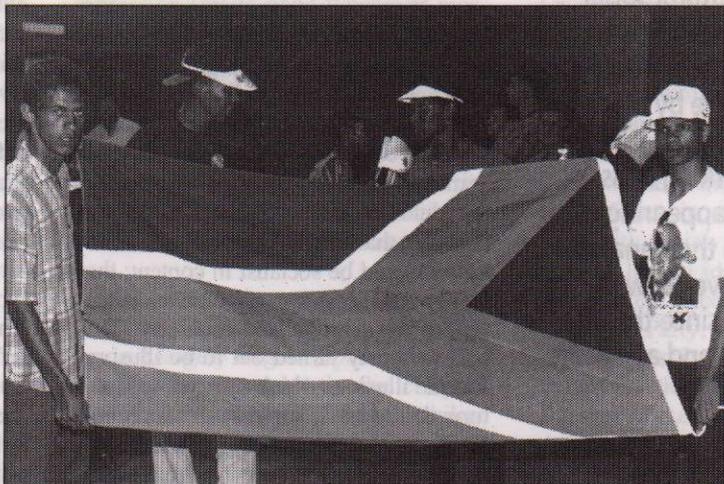
What we are not saying is that to influence the ANC from a left direction you have to be in the ANC. This is a classical entryist position. This is why we have put forward the need for a left counter-balance outside of the Alliance. There would be very few people in the Party that would argue against the need for working inside the mass movement in order to shape the direction of the ANC.

What is the attitude of the SACP to the Conference of the Left and what do you see as its main objectives?

FA; LM; DS: The main objective of the Conference is to begin a discussion on the road to socialism in South Africa. The question of socialism will be the main agenda item. The document released by the Conference steering committee suggests that the Conference should not be reduced to a talking-shop. We want a programme of action based on a joint declaration which reaffirms the relevance of socialism. This Conference should be seen as an initial one which would then re-occur every one or two years.

At this conference it will be important for the left to spell out its attitude to the ANC-led Government of National Unity. In a context in which capitalist forces are on the offensive, and socialists on the retreat, it is necessary for us to spell out an anti-neo-liberal perspectives.

Another important task is to redefine the character and nature of the mass movement in the light of the fact that the period of the anti-apartheid struggle is over. The Conference must therefore draw in other radical and democratic sectors such as youth and students that can be won to a socialist approach and ensure that the working class is not isolated.



Room enough for a hammer and sickle in the new flag?

For the conference to be a success there will have to be the broadest possible participation of all left political formations and working class organisations who are united by their committed to radical transformation and socialism. ★

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This edition of *International Marxist Review* will be the last in its current format. A discussion has begun, the aim of which will be to decide on a better format for the presentation of the Fourth International's theoretical views. Details will be published here in *International Viewpoint*.

Movement in retreat

THE democratic left in Russia has, to date, failed to win mass support, particularly amongst the working class, its natural social base. In the first of two articles our correspondents begin an analysis of this failure by examining the social and political situation in the working class. In the second article (appearing in July) they continue their analysis with an historical overview of the left's development since the last days of Gorbachev, and ask what the future holds.

POUL FUNDER LARSEN & DAVID MANDEL

WE should start with some definitions. By "working class" we mean those that depend mainly on wages or salaries for their subsistence and do not hold managerial positions. We also include the "intelligentsia" (that is, people in non-managerial positions which normally require higher education qualifications), although on occasion we will refer to the latter as a separate group. While the social structure of Russia is in rapid flux, the working class and their dependents (with or without the intelligentsia) still constitute the overwhelming majority of the population.

A definition of the "left" however, is more difficult. Strictly speaking, these are the democratic socialists, that is, anti-capitalist currents striving for the maximum extension of democracy (in the literal sense of popular power), not only in the narrowly defined political sphere but also — and perhaps especially — in economic and social life. This consistently democratic left objectively reflects the interests of the working class.

But there are also those anti-capitalist currents who refer to themselves as socialist or communist, and while their practice and real programmes may have little to do with the extension of demo-

cracy, we will expand our definition to include these currents. For want of a better term we will refer to these groups as the "nostalgic left".¹

Working class emerges from bureaucratic rule

Until the late 1980s, there was a widespread assumption among the democratic left, both inside and outside the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), that the anti-bureaucratic revolution would be socialist in content; that is, it would lead to a genuine socialisation of the nationalised economy. This has obviously turned out to be illusory. But the illusion (which may yet be overturned) did have some basis in reality. Workers played a leading and independent role in all the anti-bureaucratic movements in Eastern Europe following World War II. These movements almost always gave rise to workers' councils and to demands for self-management, and their participants often displayed remarkable solidarity and organisation. Even in the USSR disillusionment with de-Stalinisation in the early 1960s provoked a significant protest movement among workers, which was severely repressed.

The basic thrust of the labour movement since the very origins of modern capitalism has been to subordinate the market to social needs, when it was not to completely replace the market with a planned economy based upon production for use. It seemed reasonable to assume that workers in the bureaucratic states would oppose attempts to restore capitalism.

That capitalism is now being restored, albeit in a confused and incomplete manner, is primarily the result of the weakness of the working class as it emerged from decades of bureaucratic dictatorship. However, the extent of this weakness was not immediately evident in the USSR. In particular, Perestroika, initiated from above under the banner of a return to socialist principles (a banner that soon proved false), gave rise to a growing, but uneven, mobilisation in the working class.

Nonetheless, this activity played an important role in the gradual expansion of political freedoms under Perestroika

which finally led to the fall of the bureaucratic regime. But the fruits of this mobilisation were harvested with relative ease by liberal forces (in and outside the bureaucracy) hostile to the workers' interests. Despite their promises of democracy and Western-style living standards, the policies of the new/old elite have left workers worse off both economically and politically than under Perestroika. In many respects, they are worse off than under the pre-Perestroika regime.

In retrospect, the weakness of the working class is not difficult to explain. The rapid collapse of bureaucratic rule left in its wake an atomised society. The bureaucracy had for over sixty years prevented independent collective activity and organisation. The relative ease with which some workers were able to mount collective actions during Perestroika was largely due to the fact that the state itself provided a ready organisational framework for mobilisation: the party-state bureaucracy organised society in order to control and administer it. When repression was relaxed in the first years of Perestroika, these structures — especially the state enterprises and their centralised ministries — were still in tact, and economic protests quickly became politicised. The centralised, authoritarian state was the natural target of discontent. The goal — popular control — was self-evident.

The high point of this popular mobilisation was reached in 1990, with the election of many liberals, running under democratic, anti-bureaucratic banners, to local and republican soviets. After that, activism steadily declined.² In August 1991, the liberal forces around Yeltsin were able to defeat the attempted putsch by conservative forces with minimal popular mobilisation. This development opened the way for a time to the unlimited dominance of the liberals and the launching of "shock therapy": a massive assault on popular living standards and social and political rights.

1. Their social and economic programmes tend toward social democracy, while the parties which actually describe themselves as social democratic tend toward neo-liberalism.

2. There were some, admittedly weak, signs of a resurgence towards the end of 1993 before Yeltsin's tanks gutted the Supreme Soviet.

BY then, much of the old state structure had already been dismantled, especially in the economic sphere, and it no longer served as a focus for popular discontent. In particular, enterprises, though still state-owned, had won their autonomy. The atomisation which resulted was reflected in the union movement, where decentralisation was carried to the extreme. The national unions and federations lost their former dictatorial powers and most of their budgets to the factory-level unions and saw their role reduced to mere co-ordinators and political lobbyists. In most of industry, collective agreements became almost irrelevant; it was increasingly "every plant for itself". There is some reaction against this today, but the absence of solidarity in the union movement remains very striking.

At the same time, once democracy had been won — or, at least, appeared to have been won — and once the grandiose promises associated with market reform (which had been sold to the populace as the opposite of bureaucratic centralisation, and so the natural economic counterpart of political democracy) had proved empty, it became much harder for workers to find positive common goals which could unite their opposition to the policies of the new/old liberal/bureaucratic regime.

Another factor was that socialism had been discredited by the old regime, making it difficult to conceive a coherent, working class alternative. However, this problem played a more central role in the final period of Perestroika, when people still took the promises of the market reformers seriously. Today, the majority of workers look back fondly at their economic security and living standards under the old system. Despite the government's continued propaganda, "socialism", at least as an idea, no longer provokes negative reactions in most people.

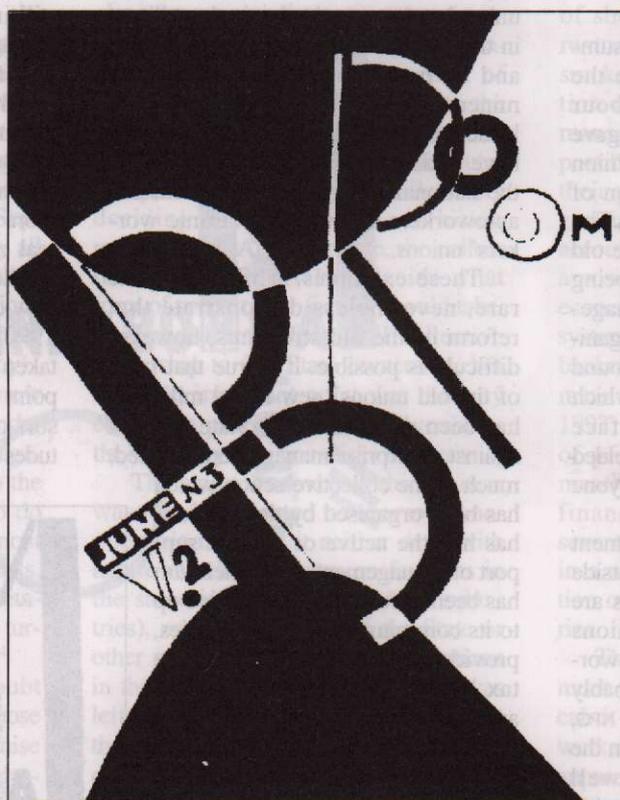
Today the basic obstacle to the emergence of a working class alternative to capitalist restoration is the social and political demoralization of the working class against a background of unprecedented peacetime economic crisis.

In brief, Russian workers today find themselves in an entirely new situation of economic insecurity which is increa-

singly resembling the situation in Third World countries. The reactions to this social earthquake among workers, the great majority of whom have no experience of collective action, has been to retreat into the private struggle for survival, while clinging to the hope that somehow management and/or the State will defend them. This attitude comes naturally as a legacy of the past: though ultimately backed up by the threat of repression (made good whenever workers openly clashed with their masters), the relationship of management and the political authorities to workers, was, for several decades, one of more-or-less benevolent paternalism. Today, in conditions of rapidly deepening crisis, few workers have any faith in their own collective ability to defend themselves.

Trotsky

In a largely forgotten passage of *The Revolution Betrayed*, in the chapter significantly entitled "The Inevitability of a New Revolution", Trotsky, writing



in the mid 1930s, said that the fate of the October Revolution was inextricably tied to the fate of Europe and of the whole world and that if no revolution were victorious in the developed capitalist countries then bourgeois counter-revolution rather than an uprising of the workers against the bureaucracy would be the most likely outcome. However,

Trotsky concluded that: "If, in spite of the united sabotage of reformists and 'Communist' leaders, the [western European working class] finds the road to power, a new chapter will open in the history of the Soviet Union. The first victory of a revolution in Europe would pass like an electric shock through the Soviet masses, straighten them up, raise their spirit of independence, [and] awaken the traditions of 1905 and 1917... Only in that way can the first Workers' State be saved for the socialist future."³

Not only has there been no successful revolution, the collapse of the bureaucratic regimes occurred at a very low point in the fortunes of the international workers' movement, a not insignificant factor in explaining the relative ease with which Russian workers fell prey to liberal ideology. Today, with, perhaps, the exception of the Brazilian Workers' Party, there is no mass party which fights for and believes socialism to be a practical and realisable objective. Russian workers were constantly reminded that "the whole world has embraced the market". Ideological, economic and political pressure from abroad played a key role in directing the anti-bureaucratic revolution onto a capitalist path.

Now, more than two years into "shock therapy", Russian workers have been immunised against the siren songs of the liberals, but they still cannot conceive of a practical alternative to capitalist restoration. It is on this background of demobilisation and despair that fascism in Russia can become a real potential (Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's electoral support is evidence of this).

Indeed, if one considers the international context of the collapse of the bureaucratic regime (and it was more collapse than overthrow, the elite of the ruling caste itself having lost confidence in its system), the turn which events have taken no longer seems quite so predestined. If, for example, the collapse had occurred in 1968 (it was in progress in Czechoslovakia before the Soviet tanks rolled in), it is not hard to imagine the ensuing transformation taking an entirely different direction. This is not to deny that the crisis of the

3. *The Revolution Betrayed — What is the Soviet Union and where is it going?*, p. 290, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1972.

labour and socialist movements in the capitalist world and the collapse of the bureaucratic regimes are linked. But that link is much less direct than the coincidence of the two crises might lead one to think.

Russian labour and the old regimes' collapse

So what was the response of the main workers' organisations to the collapse of the bureaucratic system and the process, still far from complete, of capitalist restoration. Perestroika gave rise to many new organizations, but most remained small and were short-lived. The three types of organization that displayed some staying power and have retained significant membership are the new trade unions, the work-collective councils (STKs) and their associations, and finally the old trade unions. We will examine them in that order, since that is how they made themselves felt on the political scene.

● **New or alternative trade unions**

With their general strike in the summer of 1989, the miners became the vanguard for renewal of the labour movement. That strike eventually gave rise to the Independent Miners' Union (NPG), the rival to the old Union of Employees of the Coal Industry. The founders of the NPG reproached the old union, among other things, with being conciliationist and including management in its ranks. They set out to organise a union exclusively of underground coal workers, unlike the old union which also included thousands of surface employees. (The NPG eventually yielded on this point, but it still excludes anyone above the rank of foreman).

Overall, the new union movement has made rather limited progress outside of the coal sector. Exact numbers are hard to come by, but the old unions organise around 90 percent of all workers. Even among coalminers, probably less than ten per cent belong to the NPG, though the latter's influence, now on the decline, has in the past gone well beyond its formal membership. Outside of coal, the new movement has met with some success mainly in the transport sector (aside from the relatively small number of new unions in scattered industries and factories elsewhere): among air-traffic controllers, pilots, train drivers, port workers, city transport drivers. These are strategic economic positions which give these relatively small

groups of workers exceptional leverage.

The decision to form new unions was based on the belief that the old structures were unreformable. The obstacles to reform in 1990, when the NPG was founded, must indeed have seemed formidable. Even today, more than three years later, the main problems — the absence of democratic accountability of union leaders and their subordination to enterprise management — are still far from being resolved in the majority of enterprise-level unions, where the real power now lies.

While progress is being made, albeit at a pace which is slow and uneven and from a starting position which was already weak, it may prove insufficient to save the organised labour movement from a definitive defeat by the forces of capitalist restoration. One example of reform at the national level is the old coal employees' union itself, which has no doubt benefitted from the competition provided by the rival NPG. Under a young president who rose from the ranks (rather than coming from the party apparatus, as was the tradition), this union has become increasingly militant in the defence of its members' interests, and its president's authority among miners today far surpasses that of the leaders of the NPG. Other unions which have undergone far-reaching reform at the national level are the Byelorussian autoworkers and radio-electronic workers' unions.

These examples, while still quite rare, nevertheless demonstrate that reform of the old structures, however difficult, is possible. It is true that most of the old unions' new-found militancy has been directed at the State and not against enterprise management. Indeed, much of the collective action which has been organised by these unions has had the active or passive support of management, since their aim has been to force the state to live up to its commitment to pay subsidies, provide credits, and to lighten the tax burden on enterprises. These and similar issues, upon which the very survival of a factory can hang, represent interests which are still shared in common by workers and a number of managers. Privatisation, at least in the large factories, has, in most cases, not significantly affected worker-management relations, which retain much of their old paternalistic character.

Thus, if union reform has not gone very far at the level of the factory committees, it would be wrong

to attribute this merely to corruption or to the allegedly unreformable nature of the old unions. There remains an objective basis for the close collaboration between management and the union. The problem is not the co-operation itself, but that the union rarely takes part in it as an equal and independent partner. Then again, there are examples of old unions, at the level of the factory-floor, which have become accountable to the membership and independent of management. This has occurred when rank-and-file union members themselves have mobilised against management to elect democratic leaders prepared to adopt independent positions.

That this is still rare is certainly in part due to managerial repression of union activists, often with the co-operation of old union leaders. But, as we argued above, the main reason is the prevailing demoralisation and demobilisation among the rank and file. The strategy adopted by some activists to form new unions alongside the old ones is, at least in part, a way of avoiding the difficult task of mobilising the majority of still inert workers for union reform by concentrating efforts on the minority, who for one reason or another, are prepared to support more independent and accountable union organisations.

But if in the early stages of the new union movement, its activists adopted more solidary positions and made some real effort to reach the broader layer of workers (for example, by founding the now defunct Confederation of Labour in 1990), this movement has increasingly taken on a narrow craft character, to the point where sectors of it have become a sort of labour aristocracy in their attitudes and practice.



THE "aristocratic" outlook of the leaders of the npg came to the fore in the spring of 1992, when they refused to support the strike movement — some even condemned it — among the health and education workers, the lowest paid workers in Russia, whose wages remain well below the poverty line. (The old miners' union supported this movement, although its support rarely went much further than declarations.) The npg has also come out in support of individual social security and health insurance accounts.

"Golden tap"

The support for Yeltsin and his neo-liberal policies among almost all of the new unions is closely linked to this aristocratic outlook. On the one hand, the strategic economic positions of their members (as one old union activist put it: "They sit on the golden tap") have allowed them to fare better than other workers under the liberal reforms. On the other, these unions try to compensate for their political isolation from the broader mass of workers by developing a special relationship with the government: their political loyalty has won them a certain degree of favoured treatment. All the major new unions supported Yeltsin to the hilt in his bloody confrontation with parliament in September-October 1993, while virtually all the old unions, to one degree or another, supported the parliament (whose majority had been shifting to the left (or rather centre) against Yeltsin's shock therapy).

So, the paradox is this: the new unions generally adopt militant, independent positions toward local management but display touching loyalty to the government; the old unions tend to do the opposite. Consequently, the most active elements of the working class, those in the new unions, have been detached from, and to some degree even turned against, the majority of workers.⁴

Despite all this, one has to doubt whether these new unions (at least, those of them that are real unions and organise the workers in entire factories and industries) can long maintain their aristocratic orientation. In Russian conditions, to say that the material situation of these workers is privileged is only to say that they are not quite as poor as the rest. In addition, the special relationship with the government is anything but secure and is certainly no protection against periodic efforts on the part of factory management at the State level to break these

unions through strong-arm tactics.

● STKs and self-management

The STKs (work-collective councils) were created by order from above on the basis of Gorbachev's 1987 Law on the State Enterprise (factory), adopted when Perestroika still paraded under the banner of a return to socialist ideals. Largely because of these origins and because little else had yet changed in economic relations, the great majority of stks remained subordinate to the factory administration. The STK movement as such only began to take off after the first miners' strike in 1989, and especially when Perestroika began to shift to an openly restorationist course. The new 1990 Enterprise Law, which virtually abolished the STKs, provided the major impulse for the creation of national and regional STK unions, with the first national congress taking place in Moscow at the end of 1990. Even so, the activists of this movement came disproportionately from the factory intelligentsia.

At its high point, this current came closest to a socialist programme in its demands for reform of property relations, calling for the full transfer of management of the State sector to the workplace collectives. This meant that the factory would have economic autonomy, with the employees collectively deciding its basic policy and hiring management. At a later date, the collectives would themselves decide what form of property the factory should take. This could range from full collective ownership to full State ownership, but the most important point was that any change in property relations would be the voluntary decision of the collective.

The major weakness of this position was that it presented no macro-economic vision, in that it neither dealt with nature of relations between factories in the same industry (or between industries), nor with the role of the State or other political and collective institutions in the economy. This critical issue was left open because of a reaction against the old centralised, bureaucratic system of management and the influence of liberal ideology, which painted any direct State role in economic management as totalitarian (whether the State was democratic or not was irrelevant to the liberals).

Nevertheless, the STKs' position was anathema to the reform-minded section of the nomenklatura, originally Gorbachev's main political base, which by this time was fast abandoning its attachment

to "socialism", hoping itself to appropriate the best parts of the nationalised economy. The STKs' demands were also strongly opposed by the liberal forces that dominated the elite intelligentsia and by their political allies abroad in the imf and World Bank. They constantly cited the Yugoslav example as proof that self-management does not work. But, in fact, they saw self-management and worker ownership as a major obstacle to rapid capitalist restoration.

Explicit

This opposition to the STK movement was well-founded. It is true that the absence of an explicit macro-economic conception of reform, at least among the majority of activists, implied an essentially market-dominated view of the future economy. Nevertheless, worker self-management would have put a break on rapid privatisation (primitive accumulation), which (along with the creation of favourable conditions for foreign investment and trade — in practice, outright plundering) is the real goal of shock therapy (all the talk about restructuring and efficiency being a smoke screen to hide the rapid formation of a bourgeoisie). Worker self-management would have left open the possibility that workers would be led by their practical experience to see that a genuinely democratic State and other accountable collective institutions have a positive and necessary role to play in economic organisation, since a market system of self-management would spell bankruptcy for many factories and entail mass unemployment. In the summer of 1993, for example, after getting a taste of privatisation in practice, despite a massive propaganda campaign (largely financed by the U.S. government), seventy-two per cent of the respondents in a national survey opposed privatisation of large-scale industries and factories.

The major weakness of the movement was more political than ideological: it failed to mobilise the support of workers. The great majority of workers apparently did not see the practical relevance of the property question for themselves. Back in 1990 and even 1991,

4. This, of course, is not unrelated to the ties that the AFL-CIO's U.S. government-funded Russo-American Foundation have managed to develop with these new unions. This foundation openly professes a liberal ideology and supports the pro-Yeltsin forces, while decisively refusing any contact with the former Communist organisations belonging to the old union federation.

few understood that privatisation would eventually put an end to the prevailing paternalistic practices of management and the State, or that it threatened workers with the loss of important social benefits and, especially, with mass unemployment. Russian workers had no direct experience of capitalism and they typically reacted with disbelief when told that in capitalist economies productive, disciplined workers are regularly fired when their labour can no longer make a profit for the owners. On the contrary, many workers believed that a "real owner" (the liberals insisted that under the old system "no one" owned the factories) would introduce the latest technology and eliminate the semi-organised anarchy that characterised Soviet factories.

Worker indifference and even distrust toward the stks was bolstered by their official origins and their widespread subordination to the plant administration. This problem was compounded by the tacit and often open hostility of most unions to the stks. Union leaders tended to see them as rival organizations. Many believed that self-management and/or collective ownership would lead to the elimination of trade-unions as unnecessary. Rather belatedly, toward the end of 1991, both the new and the old trade unions, at least formally, finally came around to supporting the original demands of the STK movement. Nevertheless, both union movements consistently refer to their main task as defending "hired labour", a phrase that would seem to imply that they have, in fact, given up on defending the workers' claim as collective owners of the nationalised economy, built by their labour and that of previous generations.

But part of the responsibility for the failure of the movement lies with its lea-

dership, who did little to mobilise workers around the movement's demands. Instead, they concentrated their efforts on political lobbying in the corridors of power. This choice of tactic was probably related, at least in part, to the predominance of the "factory intelligentsia" among the movement's activists. They tended to be less confrontational and

more trusting of authorities than workers. In Russia, the national stk movement's leaders cast their lot with Yeltsin and his push for Russian sovereignty (this was at a time when the ussr still existed). No sooner had Yeltsin and his liberal supporters acquired the power they coveted than they openly turned against the self-management movement. (K r a v c h u k repeated the same trick on the Ukrainian movement.)

Under tremendous ideological and political pressure from above, and with little active support from below, the STK movement gradually retreated from its original

demands and began to defend the workers' right to at least some share of the nationalised property. But the choices offered by Yeltsin's Law on Privatisation included neither self-management nor collective worker ownership. Today, few STKs still exist, but despite the official self-congratulation on the progress of privatisation, the issue of property is a long way from being resolved. As we have noted, worker-management relations in most of the factories which have formally been privatised have yet to change fundamentally. In some factories where conflicts over property have become acute, and in the absence of stks, the trade unions and other ad-hoc

organisations have taken up the battle for the workers. In a number of cases, workers have tried to circumvent the law by pooling individually-held shares. In a few instances, workers have openly revolted and de facto annulled the privatisation of their factory, once they had understood what it meant in practice.

The real change in property relations in Russia will be marked by mass dismissals. It is difficult to predict how workers will react to that. A major labour upsurge would surely spell the end to the neo-liberal reforms. So far, there are few signs of such mobilisation, but the contradictions — and the anger — are mounting.

The old unions

THE miners' strike in 1989, which saw the old miners' union sitting beside government representatives across the table from the strikers, provided the first real impetus for change, albeit slow and tortuous, in the old unions. But probably more decisive than the competition from new workers' organisations was the shift in government attitude toward the old unions. With the change in State policy to a liberal course, the old unions lost their status as junior, subordinate partners and became the object of open government hostility.

The onslaught caught the old unions quite by surprise: they had done next to nothing to win the confidence of their members.

Between 1989 and Yeltsin's coup d'etat coup in September-October 1993, the old unions gradually shifted to a position of open opposition to the government. But this evolution was halting and contradictory. They continued — and continue today — to embrace the slogan of "social partnership", even though the government consistently violates its signed agreements. At the same time, the old unions mounted, or tried to mount, campaigns to force the government to live up to its commitments and to change an economic policy ruinous for their members. One such campaign was building up, with somewhat more success than usual, in the weeks preceding Yeltsin's decree that abolished the constitution and shut down the parliament. (Most of the new unions also embrace the slogan of "social partnership", which is being pushed vigorously by the International Labour Organisation and the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organisation.)



In conditions of a collapsing economy, unions can achieve relatively little for their members through traditional trade-union activity. To be effective in Russia today, the main struggle has to be conducted on the political level. To a degree, this is understood in the old unions, since most of their militant actions have, as noted, been directed at the State. But the political action of the old unions suffers from two major and related weaknesses.

One of these is the failure of the plant unions clearly to demarcate themselves from management. This, of course, does not rule out co-operation when it is in the workers' interests, but it must be from an independent position. Unless unions can demonstrate to their members that they are something more than the tail of the administration; unless they clearly take up the defence of the workers' interests and gain at least some small, but real, victories; they have little hope of leading them into political action against the State. Today most workers do not even understand why they need a union (and most local union officers do not understand why they need an active, conscious rank and file).

Inconsistency

The other major weakness of the old unions' political action has been its inconsistency. This, too, is related to the unions' refusal to assert their independence from management. The Federation of Independent Russian Trade Unions (FNPR) and its affiliates support a "centrist" position on economic reform in a tacit alliance with the so-called "directors' corps", that is, those directors who have remained more-or-less "red", in so far as they have not totally given up on saving their factory and its work force. This position (which also characterised the majority of the old parliament in its latter days) accepts the inevitability of capitalist restoration, but calls for a socially-oriented market — a regulated transition to a capitalism oriented to national needs, with a strong state sector and social-welfare safety net: in other words — capitalism with a human face. But one has to seriously doubt the realism of such a programme, given the current crisis and restructuring of world capitalism and the subordinate place the Russian economy would inevitably occupy in it.

In this sense, the liberals' criticism of the centrist programme as inconsistent has some merit. In effect, the old unions' want it both ways: they accept

capitalist restoration but reject its consequences. They are not opposed to privatisation but it should be carried out "in the interests of the work collectives", a vague and meaningless phrase. If they are serious about defending their members' interests, they have to opt for a clean break with the the government and the directors' corps (that is, abandon social partnership) and come out with a clear workers' alternative to capitalist restoration. In private conversations, many union leaders appear to understand that the defense of workers' interest in current conditions has to assume an anti-capitalist character, but most refuse to adopt that position in practice.

Labour party

In the past, the old unions have toyed with the idea of forming their own labour party but have never decided to do it. (In Byelorussia, the autoworkers' and radio-electronics workers' unions created such a party at the end of 1993.) The idea is still in the air, but the new leadership that was elected to the FNPR after the October 1993 crisis has so far shown itself even more timid than the old.

This is partly a response to government repression: the unions lost their control of social security benefits at the end of September 1993 (a few days after the FNPR executive condemned Yeltsin's coup), and the government made clear that if they are disloyal, they stand to lose their automatic dues check-off and their property, if not worse. At the same time, since the defeat of pro-shock forces in the December 1993 elections, there seems to have been some shift in government economic policy toward a more centrist position. This has created an expectant mood among some of the union leaders.

But probably as important is the old union leaders' sense of isolation from their millions of members, who are not ready to support them in a confrontation with the government. This is a vicious circle that can only be broken by a labour upsurge from below or by the adoption by the union leadership of an independent, far-sighted, and consistent strategy that their members can begin to believe in. Ideally, it would be a combination of both. Whether any of these eventualities will happen, and when, is anyone's guess. The only thing that is sure at this point is that the immediate future is not bright for workers and the labour movement. ★

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Safety valve set to burst

WE squatted cross-legged on the rooftop of a huge white house in the El Helmeya El Guedida district of Cairo. All around us we could glimpse rows of faces, their features barely revealed in the flickering torch light, young and bearded, or veiled, looking upwards in rapt attention at the Supreme Guide Hassan El Banna as he went on speaking in his quite rhetorical, sometimes rambling, style. Others seemed lost in thought, their heads down cast, their eyes brooding with the distant vacuous look common in people who spend their lives in prayer and in muttering verses about God.

It was a clear night in the summer of 1945, sometime during the middle of the fasting month of Ramadan. Hassan El Banna, a short man, dressed in a suit, wearing a squat red fez on his head with prayer beads dangling in one hand, stood in front. That was the period when the Muslim Brothers began to have a visible influence on the lives of Egyptians.

NAWAL EL SAADAWI & SHERIF HETATA

THE Muslim Brothers organisation was founded in 1928 by the school teacher Hassan El Banna. He started his da'wa, or preachings, in the city of Ismaileya, bastion of the Suez Canal Company and advanced command of the British occupational forces. It was started in the very arms of the "enemy" so to speak, a detail perhaps worthy of attention.

After the Second World War, the Muslim Brotherhood grew rapidly, encouraged at a distance by the British and King Farouk to become a force which could oppose, or deviate the movement for national independence led by the Party of the Wafd, and to channel its energies into other paths.

At the University and schools, the Brothers countered the slogans raised for national independence and democracy with other slogans against drinking alcohol, for "moral" rectitude and the need to obey the ruler (King Farouk) and worship Allah. "God is Great" was their battle cry and to impress this on our minds they beat students up with iron chains or stabbed them in the flesh with long curved knives if they happened to belong to the Wafd, to a nationalist group, or to the left.

Coalition

Together with the semi-fascist Misr El Fatta (Young Egypt) and the reactionary political group Ghabhat Mist (Front of Egypt) led by Ali Maher Pacha, who was known for his close links with the Palace, the Brothers formed a coalition against the Wafd and other national democratic or left-wing movements.

After the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, which enabled them to train and arm a military wing, they made a first bid for power. In the process, they assassinated Nokrachi Pasha, the prime minister, after he outlawed their movement which had started to engage in various terrorist attacks. The regime retaliated by assassinating their supreme guide, Hassan El Banna.

When the Free Officers movement challenged the rule of King Farouk in July 1952, and gradually took over the reins of power from the old ruling class, the Muslim Brothers flirted with them,

hoping to exercise a leading role and eventually complete control over the revolution. In 1954, Nasser wrested full power from Naguib, the short-lived president of the Revolutionary Council. Naguib, in an attempt to consolidate his position and his views, had conjured the support of forces within the army, of the old political parties, and of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Now that he held the reins of power firmly in hand, Nasser felt free to engage in negotiations with the British for an eventual withdrawal of their forces as part of a new agreement emphasising the independence of Egypt and the severing of its remaining links with colonialism. The Muslim Brotherhood, after some time, started parallel secret talks with the British, perhaps as a pressure game on the new regime, but also in an attempt to replace Nasser as interlocutors in this process and present themselves as an alternative force. When Nasser cracked down on their movement, they tried to assassinate him in Alexandria in the summer of 1955 while he was addressing a quarter of a million people in the huge square of El Mancheya.

All this does not mean that the Islamic political movement has no popular basis and has no potential as a liberating force. It could mean, however, that since it was founded, most, if not all, leaders of this movement have tended to use the fervor of its adherents for ends which have little to do, or more often, have nothing to do with the hopes of the majority of people in Egypt who hope for real independence, social justice, and democracy — which, when expressed in concrete measures, would lead to a better life.

It would appear that religion, especially in societies where economic, social and democratic development has been retarded by colonialism, neo-colonialism and the corrupt autocratic regimes linked to them, has been, and still can be, a suitable instrument for deluding the masses. The British colonialists, and the corrupt ruling classes which collaborated with them, therefore saw that political religious movements were a powerful force with a popular following which could be channeled to serve their purposes.

However, the leaders of this powerful and explosive movement were always tempted, whenever the occasion arose, to take over power directly and rule. It was at such moments that they clashed openly with the ruling regime.

When Sadat came to power in Egypt after Nasser's death, he quickly emerged as a ruler who had different views and represented different interests to those of Nasser and his immediate collaborators. For him, the future of Egypt lay in a complete dependence on the USA, the capitalist world power which had replaced the British and the French in the Middle East after the tripartite invasion of Egypt (Britain, France, and Israel) in October 1956.

This old new vision of things necessitated peace with Israel and a complete reversal of economic and political strategies which had attempted to chart a middle course between capitalism and socialism, between the USA and the Soviet Union, between Western democracy and an autocracy built on a one-party system and Arab unity.

For Sadat, the solution of Egypt's problems lay not in a planned economy, but in a market economy, which would give free rein to competing forces even if the result, or perhaps because the result, irrespective of official discourse, would be an ascendancy of the richest and most powerful over those who had neither money nor power, or little of either, even if it meant the big fish eating the little fish, and an increasing gap between both the rich and the poor, and between men and women. Even if it meant replacing British colonialism with the military and economic ascendancy of the United States coupled with growing dependence of Egypt on the West, more freedom for speculators and brokers at the expense of industrial and agricultural production and a foreign debt which grown by leaps and bounds. Even if it meant replacing Nasser's anti-democratic politics by other anti-democratic measures hidden behind the thin veil of a multi-party system controlled by a few, who danced to the tune of a rigged-up majority ruling party, and replacing partly-controlled corruption

by a corruption let loose. Even if it meant throwing overboard any hopes of Arab unity and therefore a more just peace with Israel for the Palestinians, the Syrians, the Jordanians, the Lebanese, the Egyptians, and the Arabs in general.

President believer

Sadat had to overcome those who opposed his views. After naming himself Al Raiss El Moumin, which means the President Believer, he reverted to the old game of reviving the Islamic political movement to use it in the struggle against the opposition composed of Nasserites, nationalists, progressives, liberals, and left-wing movements. Once again, the followers of the Islamic political movement started to become visible, the young men bearded, and the women veiled. Their slogans "God is Great" or "Islam is the solution" reappeared on the walls or were shouted down the gullets of microphones. This time, however, there were significant changes, a greater complexity, sophistication, and more violence. The movement seemed to have split. On the one hand, there were numerous radical groups, like the Jihad and Al Gam'a a El Islameya prone to terrorist teachings, methods, and attacks.

On the other, a softer "moderate" mainstream, the Muslim Brotherhood. This group, after learning from past experience, was now prepared to play the electoral game, infiltrate into professional, cultural and informational and other institutions, into the administration at all levels, central and local, and into the parliament and the judiciary.

It also set up a network of social services. Most important of all, many members of the Brotherhood who had worked in the Gulf countries and gone

into voluntary exile, had learned how to make money and had understood the importance of an economic base composed of a network of banks with Arab, Islamic and international connections. After all, way back in history, and even in more recent times, some Arabs had been wily traders.

The Islamic fundamentalists who were not worried about art or culture, or the future of our life on the planet could fit in very well with an economy built on brokerage, trade and speculation. They were at home in a world order, and a national or regional system where money was the commodity to be played with plus a sideline in drugs or in arms. Why not? "God forgives all sins except that of giving your allegiance to another God".

This way, the roles were nicely divided. The Muslim Brotherhood no longer had any need for a military wing. The other "radical terrorist Islamic groups" could throw the bombs for them. This way they were not responsible. Their role was more important and strategic. They provided the ideology and presented themselves as a moderating force to the government, and to everyone else. They alone could deal with the fanatics, and save us from them by coming to power. They would restore our lost security, our vanishing stability, and save us from chaos.

So while the radicals threw the bombs and disrupted the economy, the Muslim Brotherhood could steal to power, by gradually expanding their base in the governmental and quasi-governmental institutions, including Al Azhar.

But their plan was cut short momentarily. As they became stronger, their opposition to Sadat, who had conjured



Anwar El Sadat (right), the "President Believer", revived the Islamic movement as a weapon against his political opponents

them up, grew vociferous. The growing opposition in the country was threatening his reign. So on 5 September 1981, seized by panic he arrested all the oppositional parties and groups in one swoop. 1,352 people were rounded up in 36 hours.

"Demon"

One month later, on 6 October 1981, the Islamic "demon" let out of the flask, assassinated its master as he stood reviewing his troops. This setback was only temporary. Mubarak released all the people whom Sadat had imprisoned two months after he took over. But, as time went on, it was clear that his policies would not differ much from those of Sadat. The "liberalisation" process continued more rapidly under the watchful eye of the World Bank, and the pressures exerted by the donors. Prices continued to soar and inflation was the monster that devoured the meagre earnings of a population that was forced to import what it needed most rather than produce and work as all human beings prefer to do.

The government continued to encourage the Islamic political movement

in a multitude of ways, to knuckle down to the pressures exerted by Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf countries, especially after the Gulf War had eliminated all resistance, from Iraq or anyone else.

Oil

Perhaps the oil countries could be enticed to invest: a hope which has not materialised except to a limited extent. The governments of the big oil countries are now in debt and only private capital has the money to invest. Yet it has been quite hesitant, providing nothing that really fills the gap. Food and clothing for the rich, luxury buildings and hotels, and speculation in urban development and currency trade. All the things that make things worse, marginalise the poor and women, push them to the edge, and satisfy the rich.

Religion has been and still functions as a safety valve so the government pampered the Islamic political movement and at the same time tried to hold it back. But the government kept losing ground. The new strategies of

the fundamentalists were proving themselves. Inflation served them well and so did the policies of the capitalist West, backing Israel all along the line, knocking down the Arab countries one by one, and tightening the economic clamp.

The policies followed by the Egyptian government under Sadat and then Mubarak, have been largely supported by the US and other western powers. The Islamic political movements were utilised to fight in the Afghanistan war, supplied with money and arms through Saudi Arabia and Pakistan with technical aid from the CIA and other sources of help. Recourse was had to the most fanatic and terrorist groups such as Al Jihad and Al Gama'a El Islameya, Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman — the spiritual leader of the second group who was arrested in the USA from his home in New Jersey in connection with the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York who is known to have been involved actively in the Afghan war.

Army

Today in Egypt the Islamic political movement feels strong enough to make a decisive bid for power. Its success or failure depends on many things, not least of which is the position of the army, whose favour the present government has done a lot to woo.

On 15 June 1991, the Egyptian government closed down the Arab Women's Solidarity Association which we founded in April of 1982 along with a group of Arab women and men. This measure was the culmination of systematic attacks on the Association and its founders emanating from the different Islamic political groups, from Saudi Arabia and different governmental institutions and administrations.

Women's rights and women's movements have always been considered as anathema to these Islamic political movements and to the State religious institution of Al Azhar. Only a small minority of progressive Islamic intellectuals and thinkers had some sympathy for the efforts made by women to struggle for their rights.

One of them, the late Farag Foda, was assassinated by a terrorist group on 8 June 1992. But many other intellectuals and independent thinkers are threatened by a similar fate. Several professionals, journalists, and writers have been killed

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 Revolutionary communist review for the Arab region

Fourth Internationalists debate the PLO-Israeli Accords

- ◆ Salah Jaber for the Bureau of the Fourth International
- ◆ Sergio Yahni & Michel Warshawsky for the majority of Revolutionary Communist League, section of the Fourth International in the Israeli State
- ◆ Tikva Honig-Parnass for the minority of the section

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- ◆ Analysis of Islamic fundamentalism in Palestine

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in Algeria. The names of those under threat have figured on various death lists circulated in Arab countries such as Egypt, Yemen, Sudan, Algeria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

One of the paradoxes of this situation is that a number of them are being protected by security guards employed by the very governments which they oppose. In addition, these fundamentalists have infiltrated into many government administrations, including those responsible for security. Hardly a comfortable thought for those under guard who have the double task of opposing both the fundamentalists and the governments from whom they are deeply alienated.

The fundamentalist movement in Egypt cannot be adequately analysed or studied if we do not simultaneously consider the role of international politics and, in particular, the policies of Western powers, which have such a strong influence on the Middle East.

Power game

It is also important to remember the way in which these movements have been used as "alternative" or "pressure" groups in the power game revolving around the control of oil and the future of the Arab region. Nor should we forget how the present world order is leading to the increasing impoverishment of "Third World" countries such as Egypt, since this brings grist to the mill of those who declare that a return to God can solve all problems.

Fundamentalism cannot be properly assessed if we forget that many of the corrupt retrograde Arab regimes have remained in power with Western support, nor if we forget that many of the fundamentalist policies rampant in the State of Israel and propagated by Jewish religious-political movements contribute to the general rise of fundamentalist movements in the region. These policies have sometimes involved a direct collaboration with Islamic religious movements such as Hamas which operates in the territories occupied by Israel since the 1967 war with Egypt. This collaboration was used at one time to counter the PLO. Now Israel is eliminating Hamas since the "Peace Treaty" was signed.

Fundamentalism is clearly not only a political-religious phenomenon related to Islam and the Arabs. Today we are witnessing the growth of fundamentalist

movements using religion whether Islamic, Judaic, Christian, Hindu, or other. Religious fundamentalist movements have grown in many parts of our "post-modern" world, including Western countries of the "First World". ★

Sri Lankan Tamil intellectual murdered in Paris

SABARATNAM SABALINGHAM, a pioneer of the Sri Lankan Tamil liberation struggle, strong advocate of Tamil youth movements in the 1970s and renowned Tamil writer and publisher was brutally shot and killed on 1 May 1994 in his own home in Paris (Sarcelles), France.

He was shot at point-blank range in the presence of his wife and child. In a long personal history of political activism, Sabalingam was one of many Tamil youths arrested for "terrorism" in the 1970s by the Sri Lankan government, when they became engaged in the liberation struggle. He was placed under arrest on the charges of bombing a bridge and kept in prison from 1973 to 1975. In one of his attempts to escape from prison he was severely injured. He arrived in France soon after this.

Residing in Paris, Sabalingam was an ardent supporter of the Sri Lankan Tamils' struggle for self-determination as well as a publisher of Sri Lankan literature. Through the publishing organisation ASSEAY, he was responsible for publishing the work of contemporary Sri Lankan Tamil poets V.I.S Jeyapalan, Cheran, Arunthay, Selvam and Cholaikkli, as well as Tharahi's "Eluding Peace", a series of writings on the Tamil liberation struggle.

In addition, he undertook the republication of the history of the Puttalam Muslims ("Puthiyathor Ulagam") — which details the killings inside Sri Lankan Tamil nationalist militant movements — and Tarzie Vittachi's account of the 1958 race riots in Sri Lanka, a work currently banned in Sri Lanka. Part of his political activism abroad included regular translation into French and publication of the periodic releases of the Jaffna University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR).

There is very good reason to believe that the "Liberation Tigers" (LTTE) are responsible for this murder. The list of political killings committed by the LTTE is very long. It includes Tamil parliamentary leaders Amirthalingam and Yogeswaran, A.K Annamalai of the NSSP (Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International), A. Vijianathan of the Communist Party and Rajini Thiranyagama, co-author of the book "Broken Palmyrah".

Sabalingam, like Rajini Thiranyagama, is yet another victim in the long line of Tamil intellectuals who have been killed for linking human rights and the liberation struggle. In both cases, the universal recognition these independent activists achieved gave them a level of credibility that posed a threat to their killers.

At the time of his killing, Sabalingam was engaged in documenting the liberation struggle using hitherto unseen statements and photographs. **Ravi** ☺

"Berlusconism"

THERE can be no doubt that the elections of 27 and 28 March signalled a radical change in the framework of Italian political life. One can legitimately pose a number of questions. Primarily, what is the real significance of the right-wing victory? What are the possible dynamics? Is what has happened in Italy a prelude to similar developments in other European countries?

LIVIO MAITAN

Rome, 21 May 1994

LET us first examine the parliamentary relationship of forces. In the Senate, the right-wing holds 154 seats, the centre holds 31 and the left-wing (or progressives) has 122. In addition to these elected senators, there are 11 others — former presidents, and cultural and economic figures appointed by the head of State. In the lower house, the right-wing has 366 seats, the centre has 46 and the left-wing (progressives) 213.

On this basis, an initial remark can be made. On its own, the right-wing does not hold an absolute majority in the Senate. Indeed, the Berlusconi government could only be inaugurated following the abstention of 5 senators from the centre.

As for the lower house, the right-wing only holds a majority thanks to the new electoral law — a British-style "first past the post" system for 75% of deputies. The 25% of seats elected on a proportional basis gave 43% of votes to the right-wing, a little more than 15% to the centre and a little less than 35% to the left-wing (3.5% went to the former Radical leader Marc Pannella, who allied himself with Berlusconi).

It should be noted that on a proportional basis Berlusconi's formation

Forza Italia received 21% of votes (8.1 million votes) while the strongest left-wing party received 20.4% of votes (7.8 million). Overall, the right got 16.5 million votes (a little less than 18 million including Pannella), the centre 6 million and the progressives 13.5 million.

This is the real relationship of forces. This is not meant to minimise the impact of the new formation, Forza Italia, which was able to build itself in the space of two months, against all expectations. It is Forza Italia that played the decisive mediating and hegemonic role for the building of a coalition bringing together two previously mutually unfriendly forces, the Northern League and the neo-fascists of the Italian Social Movement (MSI).

How should one characterise the forces which currently make up the right-wing at the current stage? Care should be taken not to make overly rigid characterisations. Indeed, these are not formations whose nature is definitively established, and they could undergo significant change in the short or medium term. Moreover, the relationship of forces within each force and between the different forces is by no means stable.

Appearance

It is sufficient to recall, for example, that in Milan, following the appearance of Forza Italia, the Northern League's score went from 40% in June 1993 to 16% in the March elections. Also, a formation like the anti-mafia Rete (the Network) suffered a big defeat in Palermo only a few months after having scored a major success in municipal elections. The Communist Refoundation Party (PRC), which overtook the Party of the Democratic Left (PDS, ex-PCI) in the June 1993 municipal elections in Milan and Turin, suffered in the same cities nine months later.

This is not the place to re-state our analysis of the Northern League. Experience has shown that it was wrong to present this organisation as a fascist or fascist-type movement. It was and remains primarily a right-wing populist formation with racist hues, which calls for a federalism that protects the wealthiest regions and advocates a neo-libe-

ral anti-Statism in the economic arena — but prioritises the challenge to the existing political system.

During the campaign, its leader Umberto Bossi attacked Berlusconi on several occasions for being a monopolistic businessman, and also made aggressive denunciations of fascism and its contemporary partisans. He joined the big anti-fascist demonstration of 25 April, defying the insults and taunts of other participants.

As for the National Alliance (AN), the new incarnation of the MSI, here also overly simplistic characterisations should be avoided. No doubt, the MSI was founded to organise those nostalgic for the Mussolini regime. But for decades — while being excluded from the fraternity of parties describing themselves as "constitutional" — it systematically integrated itself into the institutions, and appeared more as right-wing or far-right conservative formation in which the weight of those nostalgic for fascism progressively diminished. Giancarlo Fini's arrival at the head of the movement was the conclusion of a rather turbulent process.

In the last two years, while not hesitating to situate itself on the right, it has considerably developed its populist features — for example, in the popular neighbourhoods of Rome and in cities in the South, where it is a major force.

It goes without saying that, if only for reasons of age, those who were active under Mussolini and the German occupation, only have a minor role in relation to the new recruits. It should be recalled, that even under the leadership of the former secretary, Almirante, an extremist opposition had developed, giving birth to separate far-right groups, some which openly show support for the Nazis and which sometimes resort to terrorist actions.¹

Finally, the AN members appointed as ministers all belong to the moderate wing, those who make a point of silencing references to fascism.

That said, there should be no minimising the significance of the change represented by the presence of the AN in

1. Recently, a court confirmed the sentences delivered to members of such groups, guilty of the massacre at the Bologna train station in the early 1980s.

the government. This event symbolises the end of the political order that emerged from the end of World War Two. It is not so much that those who made or accepted this decision have rehabilitated fascism as it is that they have placed fascism and anti-fascism on the same level — relegating both of them to a distant past.

Secondly, this development will have the effect of further stimulating the spread of a conservative and reactionary ideology and cultural orientation, and aggravating an already seriously deteriorated political climate.

What is more, the legitimisation of the neo-fascist current will encourage its extremist ranks and other neo-Nazis to stage dramatic provocations of varying degrees and to brandish more openly their symbols and slogans. Indeed, immediately after the elections, the headquarters of the PRC were damaged and on 14 May a few hundred neo-Nazi youth organised a noisy demonstration in Vicenza.

The new feature since the beginning of the year was the extremely quick rise of Forza Italia, a formation of a type without precedent. All the parties of the post-war period had either established ideological and even organisational links with formations existing before fascism or active among Italian immigrants, or they were born from splits from traditional forces. Only the movement baptised "l'Uomo qualunque" (the Common Man) provided an ephemeral exception.

Initiative

Forza Italia emerged on the initiative of a big businessman who, in order to reach his goal, unscrupulously uses the structures and infrastructures of his financial kingdom and the powerful mass media that he owns. His "party" was created from above and is identified with himself personally. One could even speak of a Bonapartist undertaking, both due to the role of the decisive role of a leader considering himself to be charismatic and to the mediating and hegemonic role that this leader played from the start to provide a common basis for different sectors of the right-wing. There was a void that had to be filled. Berlusconi understood this in time, and this is the key to his success.

Berlusconi played this same role in the formation of the new government. One need only examine his inaugural speech to see this. Many criticised him for sticking to generalities. This is true, but for him the essential thing was to

present himself as the organiser of "new" forces that aim to establish a new political order. He presented himself as a leader making openings in all directions, thus placing himself in the centre and not openly on the right.

This led him, for example, to nuance some of the promises made during the campaign. In the area of employment, for example, after promising the creation of one million new jobs in a year, he stretched out the deadline to two and then to two and a half years.

At the same time, he was rather vague on the question of federalism, the cherished cause of the Northern League, and more generally on the question of reforming the constitution. This attitude led to no small amount of grinding of teeth among his own allies — especially in the League, which paid the price of a dramatic break between its leader, Bossi, and its best-known ideologue, Miglie. This is a taste of the difficulties the coalition will inevitably encounter in the future.

There seems to be a certain amount of cautiousness in the government's economic orientation. Private initiative is obviously given much attention, labour "flexibility" is put forward as a priority solution, and forms of tax-exemption are being suggested as a way to encourage investment. But globally speaking, this is a programme of continuity, of a deepening of (and not a radical break with) the orientation of the Amato and Ciampi governments — a kind of moderate Thatcherism. It is significant that, to the satisfaction of the trade union bureaucracies, Berlusconi said he would respect the tripartite government-trade union-employer accords made in July 1993 (after those of July 1992 which went in a similar direction).

Events before and after the elections displayed with greater clarity than in the past the differentiations and contradictions that affect all social layers and which, in the last analysis, are the products of the persistence of the long period of stagnation that has ravaged the world economy.

Without going to much into the social composition of the different political formations, it is nevertheless important to underline one striking feature: in the heat of the electoral campaign, the industrial and financial bourgeoisie was clearly divided between the three competing forces.

It is noteworthy that significant sectors of the ruling class supported the progressives. Clearly, they neither trusted the League nor AN and calculated

that Berlusconi's project was doomed to failure. As a result, they decided to support the progressives, all the better to shape their policies. After all, PDS leader Occhetto was hardly any more radical than Mitterrand in France or Gonzalez in Spain, and their governments certainly did not threaten the survival and "normal" functioning of the system.

The result of such an attitude was that, during the electoral campaign, Forza Italia and the other sectors of the right were supported more by middle and small industrial layers than by the major employers. This could even be seen after the elections when, for example, in an interview with the new minister of industry, a member of the Northern League, he explained that "compared to big capital, which chose the path of conservation and mediation, the entrepreneurs got moving and now lean towards the forces that make up the government."²

Petty-bourgeois

As for the more specifically petty-bourgeois layers — themselves affected by the crisis, or running the risk of being so — they opted for Forza Italia precisely because it appeared as a break with the current order. As such, Berlusconi's electorate was not fundamentally different from that of the League, with whom Berlusconi inevitably competed in the attempt to win over votes from former supporters of the Christian Democrat and other formations of the centre.

Working class and popular layers displayed a similar voting pattern. Forza Italia scored gains in the popular neighbourhoods of Milan and Turin. Another example is that of the province of Brescia, a city which was the scene of powerful working class mobilisations initiated by a rather radical labour leadership and many activists from the PRC. However, the right-wing had scored well in the region for many years. This is confirmation of the fact that the left is not credible insofar as it proves itself incapable of providing an alternative global political solution.

At the very moment that the elections results were being made public, in a context of heated polemics, a process of self-critical reflection and rectification got underway. The employers lost no time and in the space of a few days rallied behind Berlusconi under the pretext of the need for a stable government, that only the new majority could guarantee.

2. *L'Unità*, 8 May 1994.

The FIAT boss, Agnelli, gave a symbolic example. Though for the centre during the campaign, he voted for the new government in his capacity as lifetime senator, allowing it to squeak by with a majority.

On the left, it is a time of polemics and this will continue for some time. Consensus was reached around one point: the progressives were unable to present themselves as an alternative. Voters turned their backs on them, seeing them as supporters of the status quo.

Consensus ends

But as soon there is talk of what changes have to be made, this is where the consensus ends. According to the current leader of the PRC, Fausto Bertinotti, the progressive coalition's axis has to be shifted to the left, through the adoption of an attitude of radical opposition based on mass mobilisation; the reactionary character of the government should be denounced and there should be struggle against any constitutional change that limits democratic rights.

On the other hand, the PDS feels that the progressives' error was that of not making enough effort to come to an agreement with the centre — and that this agreement is now a priority for organising the opposition. The dynamic of such an approach is clear. In fact, the PDS already reached agreement with the centre — deputies from the former Christian Democracy (DC) — to run Naples, provoking a split with the PRC which could only oppose such an alliance. Similar operations are being prepared for the next municipal and provincial elections.

The parliamentary groups of the progressives do not include the PRC, which rightly wanted to defend its autonomy. Other formations from the progressive coalition — the Rete and, to a lesser degree, the Greens — are being torn apart by internal conflicts and seem to be losing steam.

There is a debate on the question of whether Italy is in the process of moving into a Second Republic or if this change has already taken place.

Such a debate has a somewhat Byzantine flavour to it. It is a fact that the government set up after the fall of fascism, after a long period of stability, has pitifully crumbled and any turning back of the clocks seems very improbable, if not totally excluded.

It remains the case that the current recomposition and reconstruction are

highly precarious and the outcome of the current process is in no way foretold. This is why it is too early to tell if this new Italian experience will spread to other European countries.

More specifically, it is by no means pre-ordained that the particular novelty of the Italian situation from a political point of view — the direct management of government by a big businessman who does not break from the powerful economic levers at his disposal — will, at this stage at any rate, spread to other countries.

Indeed, this arrangement not only is an indefensible anomaly from a democratic point of view. It also creates problems from the point of view of the internal relations of the ruling classes themselves. This is an obstacle to the generalisation of "Berlusconism" — to coin a new term — which shouldn't be underestimated. ★



Business tycoons into politicians: that's "Berlusconism"

Corrections...

Our apologies to **Erdal Tan**, the author of last month's article on Turkey, 'Wind in the Islamic sail', for two errors which crept in unexpectedly. On page 33, 2nd column, 1st paragraph, line 3: it should read that 6 DEP deputies were arrested (not 96). In the same column, 2nd paragraph, line 2: it should read that the Turkish army was responsible for the "forced removal of some 300, 000 people in the southeast of the country...", (not the "deaths" of 300, 000 people)

Our second round of apologies go the **Revolutionary Socialist Party** (PSR/RSP — section of the Fourth International in Luxembourg) who we inadvertently left out from those organisations who supported the Appeal for the European elections, 'For a Europe of solidarity', which was also published in last month's issue. ☺

World Cup in exile

EVEN *International Viewpoint* has been gripped by World Cup fever, but as American socialist David Finkel reports, fans may be in for a rude shock.

DAVID FINKEL* — Detroit, USA

As a commercial enterprise, the success of World Cup 1994 appears assured. Stands will be packed to capacity or very nearly so. Even more important is the extraction of maximum revenues from World Cup corporate sponsorships, stadium luxury boxes, broadcast fees, clothing and assorted paraphernalia, a science first developed by Peter Ueberroth for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics and brought to new heights of refinement in subsequent international sporting extravaganzas.

FIFA

Beyond the tournament's immediate profitability, of course, lies the question of a far bigger payoff: whether FIFA's gamble in bringing the 1994 World Cup to the shores of soccer Babylon will finally crack open the fantastically lucrative U.S. spectator sports market to the world's most popular game. In a country where some large cities have not one, but two radio stations dedicated to 24-hour sports talk programming, and where some basic cable television services offer up to three all-sports channels, the stakes are obviously significant.

It is undoubtedly true that preparation for this World Cup has produced the highest level of soccer interest in U.S. history. It's somewhat difficult to convey, however, just how low this level of "interest" actually has been.¹ Media coverage of the upcoming cup is minimal. Results of the U.S. team's preparatory matches are reported in the margins of newspaper sports sections. Greater interest has been stimulated by the experiment of implanting real grass into Pontiac's domed stadium for the matches to be played there. How far can

a World Cup go toward transforming mass apathy to rabid fanaticism?

The speculative answer I will offer here is (1) that while World Cup 1994 will have a modest long-term impact on the American spectator sports consumer culture, it will not make soccer more than a secondary presence here; and (2) that this fact should come as a relief to the game's billions of international fans. To explain both points leads to some considerations on spectator sports in the mass U.S. culture.

It must be stressed here that we are discussing the spectator/consumer dimension of the sport, not the participatory one. Soccer has been growing for at least two decades as a participation sport, breaking out of its historic European and Latino immigrant community base into the schools of mainstream suburbia.² (This participation base is already reflected in the fact, although few sports fans here realize it, that the United States is already a dominant power in the game — in international women's soccer.)

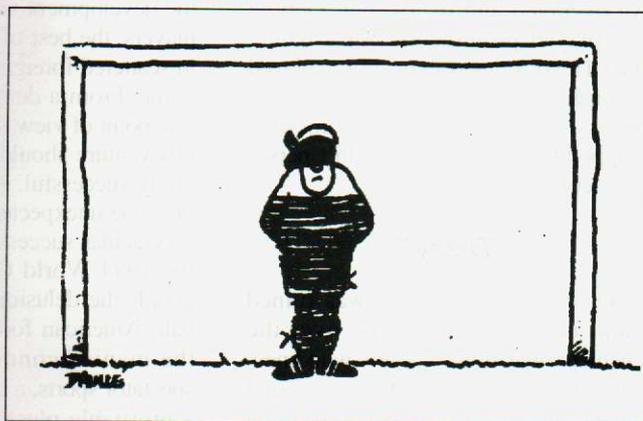
The game's growth among African Americans is much slower, the reasons for which are readily clear from a survey of the wreckage of untended inner city parks. Indeed the decline of urban facilities for youth is probably responsible for even stalling the growth of Black participation in the professional baseball leagues. Having few places to play soccer and fewer coaches available to teach it, African American athletes are unlikely to attain the dominant position they have long occupied in basketball. This fact is probably comforting to some of the promoters looking to market the sport in burgeoning suburban yuppievilles.

Only to a limited extent does participation translate to spectator consumerism. So far as World Cup 1994 is concerned, the combined spending power of suburban consumer affluence, a flood of soccer tourists and the popula-

rity of the Latin American and European sides among U.S. ethnic communities will fill enough seats. FIFA's perspective — and one of its conditions for granting the World Cup to the United States — is the formation of an ongoing professional league to make this enthusiasm a permanent institution.

Niche

Actually, professional soccer should by now have carved a successful niche as America's second spring-summer outdoor game. Soccer has no chance of displacing baseball in the United States — or in those countries and colonies where the U.S. imperial culture implanted its "national pastime", including Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican



Republic, Japan and the Philippines — where baseball has the kind of historic and mythic roots that simply can't be replicated. Nonetheless the sheer size of the market allows for cohabitation.

* The author is a member of the revolutionary socialist organisation Solidarity, and a member of the editorial board of the journal *Against the Current*.

1. A small anecdote may be illustrative here. During the final game of the 1990 World Cup, when the U.S. socialist group Solidarity was holding a national leadership meeting — a fact which readers in most countries may find incredible — this writer was the only participant who watched part of the game during a break. In any case, the only non-cable television broadcast was on a Spanish language network available in only a few cities.

2. Among newer immigrants, of course, the game's popularity remains fanatical. During qualifying for the 1990 World Cup, when a USA-El Salvador game had to be moved from El Salvador to a neutral site due to the civil war, Salvadoran officials unsuccessfully requested that the match be played in Los Angeles, calculating that the stadium there would be filled by 100,000 or so Salvadorans creating a home-crowd advantage.

Organised in 1968, by the middle 1970s the North American Soccer League was a going concern in a dozen U.S. and Canadian cities. The league's base grafted the growing participatory interest in youth soccer, as a safer and less costly alternative to American football, with the sport's traditional immigrant community base. The Chicago Sting, for example, drew upon that city's Mexican and German communities (Karl-Heinz Granitza serving as a major attraction for the latter), while the league championship one year was won by a team called Toronto Metro-Croatia. The New York Cosmos coaxed Pele out of retirement, imported Franz Beckenbauer and Giorgio Chinaglia and other internationals and for a few years regularly attracted crowds of over 50,000.

Although aesthetically marred by rather small playing surfaces, by that uniquely North American barbarism, artificial turf, and by an absurd "shootout" to resolve tied games, the NASL at its best was able to present a product that wouldn't have disgraced a lower second-division English League side. (An overaged and overweight George Best played prominently for a while; when Trevor Francis in his prime played a couple of seasons for the Detroit Express, it was considered a somewhat disappointing match if he didn't personally score twice.)

"Dizzy"

This intriguing hybrid was ruined when the league's owners, over the vehement objections of a few who knew better, became "dizzy with success" and convinced themselves that they were on the verge of surpassing the National Football League in the arena of corporate sports gigantism. From 1976-77 on, a forced-march expansion of the league and gross overspending on promotion and player imports produced a shambles of franchise shifts followed by a general implosion. By 1985 the North American Soccer League was dead.

What's remained is a variation called "indoor soccer", which has been a reasonably successful promotion on a minor-league level. This is a six-a-side game played at sprint pace with free substitution on a surface the size of an ice hockey rink (roughly 65 yards long and 30 wide). Goals count for either two points or three (if scored from further out), with typical match scores looking like 23-16. This, it is felt, appeals to the American fan's penchant for high scoring; goalless draws and 1-0 scores have

been considered the kiss of death for traditional soccer here. "Indoor soccer" is fun to play, and entertaining to watch a time or two, but lacks the texture and complexity that makes soccer itself a world game. The reestablishment of a proper professional soccer league, it's been promised, will avoid the greed-driven disasters that wrecked the old NASL. Certainly a recent U.S. sports



owners' innovation, the "salary cap" that rigidly limits budgeting for player salaries, will be employed. Franchises will not be independent entities but in essence branch offices of a single corporate enterprise. With play to begin in 1995, the league's central purported purpose is the development and promotion of U.S. players, the best of whom now compete in scattered foreign leagues instead of at home. From a demographic and economic point of view there's no reason why this venture shouldn't be at least moderately successful. Nor should it depend on some unexpected and highly unlikely spectacular success by the U.S. team in the 1994 World Cup. Provided that it avoids the delusion of surpassing baseball, American football or basketball in the manic economy of professional spectator sports, a soccer league can find a profitable place in the growing and highly elastic market.

There are, in any case, good reasons for soccer fans of the world to be grateful that their game will not become the 500-pound gorilla of the American sports market. Spectator sports in this country are undergoing a profound and unhealthy transformation. An unexpected mass success of soccer in the United States would quite likely feed back into the game's European and Latin heartlands, quite possibly damaging the game in the countries where it is central to popular culture.

It suffices to summarize a few of the features of this transformation:

1) **Detachment from community.** This process can be dated to the Brooklyn (baseball) Dodgers' desertion to Los Angeles in 1957. It has accelerated massively in the past decade, with whole

cities held to ransom by multi-millionaire franchise owners demanding publicly-built new stadia as their price for staying in town.

2) **Going upscale.** Ticket prices have escalated beyond the capacities of working class families. New facilities are constructed solely for the purpose of generating revenue from luxury boxes for the super-wealthy or for corporate purchasers who write off the expenses against taxes.

3) **Cable and pay television.** Many major sports events are going off free home television, onto cable or "pay per view" services. This trend would probably be accelerating more rapidly in football and baseball except for the fear of Congressional political intervention, e.g. the threatened removal of major league baseball's anachronistic immunity from anti-monopoly laws.

The marketing of the new U.S. professional league will be heavily tilted toward the prosperous and suburban, not toward traditional, immigrant communities that gave the game its base for half a century. Sensitive international World Cup watchers may want to be sensitive to certain early warning signs of creeping Americanization of your sport:

Do your television commentators marvel at the modernistic wonders of some of the newer U.S. stadia? Beware: Many of these are sterile monstrosities built for the convenience of broadcaster and luxury box owners rather than fans.

Do they speculate with awe on the possibilities of constructing domed facilities like the Pontiac Silverdome? Don't bite: This may be a ploy to get you to accept artificial turf, which is ruinous to the game's quality and to the players' physical health.

Do they rave about the security and the absence of "hooligans?" Remember: This may imply the elimination of seating that anyone without a corporate manager's income can purchase.

Do they comment frequently on the supposed desire of Americans for a higher-scoring game? Careful: There may be trial balloons for widening the goals, for free substitutions or for eliminating the offsides rule. Never underestimate what evil visions dollar hunger can generate. (Would you like typical scores of, say, 10-8?)

Welcome to the World Cup in exile. May it survive the experience. Enjoy the goals. And keep in mind, if you're a fan, that you may need to defend your game from impurities the way the Germans have defended their beer. ★