

INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS

combined
with **inprecor**

Vol. 23, No. 9

May 13, 1985

USA \$1.25 UK £0.65

Protests Hit U.S. War Against Central America



Demonstration April 20 in Washington, D.C. 125,000 took part in protests in U.S. and Canadian cities.

Ernest Harsch/IP

**Sudan: Why Nimeiry
Was Overthrown**

**Cuba's New
Housing Law**

Congress debate prepares step-up of Nicaragua war

By Will Reissner

"Let us have no illusions. The war has not ended. The war continues. The CIA is still directing the mercenaries and seeking other ways of funding [them]." That was the response of Nicaragua's foreign minister, Miguel D'Escoto, after the U.S. House of Representatives failed to approve a \$14 million package of aid for the counterrevolutionaries (*contras*) waging Washington's war against Nicaragua.

The debate in Congress over funding for the mercenaries took place in the context of a series of military defeats inflicted on them by Nicaraguan troops, and growing defections from the *contras*' ranks, including some top officers. While pushing the mercenaries back on the military front, the Nicaraguan workers and peasants government scored some important victories diplomatically, including a series of successful trips throughout Latin America by Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega and new peace proposals further exposing Washington's war aims.

The Reagan administration's campaign for increased funding for the *contras* was part of a larger political drive aimed at countering the Sandinistas' initiatives and wearing down public opinion in the United States to get working people there more used to the idea of war against Nicaragua. By getting bipartisan approval for aid to the *contras*, the White House hoped to increase its authority for waging the war.

Goal: 35,000 *contra* soldiers

A White House document sent to two Congressional committees before the vote on the \$14 million for the *contras* outlined some of the Reagan administration's goals. The White House wants enough funds to "increase the size and effectiveness" of the *contra* forces, with the goal being 25,000 armed *contras* based in Honduras and 10,000 more operating from Costa Rica.

The report, entitled "U.S. Support for the Democratic Resistance Movement in Nicaragua," stated that "CIA advisers outside Nicaragua" will "provide intelligence, limited tactical advice based on that intelligence and logistical guidance" to the *contra* troops.

The CIA would also make "maximum" use of "cooperative arrangements with third countries" in order to keep its own profile as low as possible.

While the document ruled out "direct application of U.S. military force" for now, it warned that use of U.S. troops "must realistically be recognized as an eventual option, given our stakes in the region, if other policy alternatives fail."

Earlier, Reagan had demanded that the Sandinistas negotiate with the *contras*. If they did so, the president said, he would be willing to limit aid to the mercenaries to funds for "non-military" purposes. The White House then announced that this "peace proposal" was supported by the heads of many Latin American governments.

That announcement backfired. Colombian president Belisario Betancur declared that linking negotiations to continued aid to the *contras* was "no longer a peace proposal, but a preparation for war." Mexican officials also protested the suggestion that they supported the plan.

Even Pope John Paul II dissociated himself from White House reports that he backed *contra* aid. According to a Vatican embassy statement, the pope said he excluded "the possibility of his support or endorsement of any concrete plan dealing in particular with military aspects."

Objections of liberal Democrats

Reagan's inability to muster support in Latin America for his plans made liberal Democrats and Republicans in Congress more reluctant to approve aid to the *contras*.

Most complained that the *contra* war has simply not been effective, noting the international protests of the *contras*' methods of torture, rape, kidnapping, and murder. Some argued that the *contra* aggression has united Nicaraguans more firmly behind the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) and deepened their opposition to the U.S. government.

Among those opposing the *contra* aid was Stansfield Turner, former head of the CIA. He proposed that Congress not approve aid yet, but urge Reagan to go back to negotiations with the Nicaraguans. If the talks lead to no agreement, he explained, Congress can pass the aid later. "I'm not supporting the Sandinistas," Turner said. "I think they are terrible, but the question is how do we get rid of them."

Democratic Congressman James Jones from Oklahoma called for a "middle course" that would "move diplomatic pressure for peace to the front burner and move military pressure to the back burner, but keep both on the stove."

Jones emphasized that the Democrats agree with Reagan on the goal of rolling back the Nicaraguan revolution. Echoing the White House laundry list of slanders against Nicaragua, Jones said, "Let there be no mistake. We Democrats oppose the Sandinista government's repression of freedom, its military ties with Cuba and the Soviet Union, and its effort to export war to its neighbors."

Michael Barnes, a liberal Democrat from

Maryland, joined with Jones in introducing an alternative proposal to grant "humanitarian" aid to the mercenaries. Barnes said, "If the vote were on whether you liked the Sandinistas, it'd be 20-to-1 for the *contras*. But that's not the issue."

Finally, on April 24, the House rejected all aid proposals, unable to come to any agreement on how to pursue the war.

This was a setback for the Reagan administration, but the U.S. war continues to escalate. In April U.S. troops in Honduras carried out the largest military maneuvers yet in the four-year war. U.S. battleships menace Nicaraguan shores. Washington continues to exert pressure to deny the Nicaraguans needed international loans and aid, exacerbating the economic problems the country has.

The *contra* war itself will continue, with or without official Congressional support.

Washington has, in fact, many ways to fund the *contras* despite the House vote. In some cases, U.S. military aid is given to allies such as Israel and Honduras, who then provide a similar amount of "their own" aid to the *contras*. Through its perpetual military exercises in Honduras, the U.S. Army funnels weapons directly to the *contras*. And CIA personnel continue to direct the mercenaries' work.

CIA-funded foundations and institutions also make "private" grants to the *contras*' political and military forces. Take the case of Arturo Cruz, the Reagan administration's favorite Nicaraguan "democrat." His withdrawal from Nicaragua's presidential election in 1984 has been repeatedly cited to bolster Reagan's claim that the election was a sham.

Recently Cruz has publicly allied himself with the *contras* and admitted that he was receiving a "retainer" from a CIA-financed "foundation."

Nor has Washington given up on getting *direct* funding for the counterrevolutionary military forces. The Reagan administration has included a request for \$28 million in funds for the mercenaries in the budget for fiscal year 1986, which begins Sept. 30, 1985.

Full speed ahead

Two days after the House voted down the \$14 million for the *contras*, White House spokesman Larry Speakes announced that "over the next several days, the Administration will be reviewing the full family of measures that can be taken to influence the situation in Nicaragua."

While refusing to specify what measures are being studied, Speakes acknowledged that "the options under consideration . . . do include political, economic and other measures."

According to *New York Times* reporter Gerald M. Boyd, "officials have said privately that trade sanctions are virtually certain." Trade with the United States accounts for some 20 percent of Nicaragua's imports and 18 percent of its exports.

It was Democratic members of the House and Senate who originally proposed economic sanctions and the political isolation of Nicaragua.

gua as an alternative to funding the contras.

Senator Sam Nunn, a Democrat from Georgia, proposed applying "maximum economic pressure on the Sandinista Government" as a different way of making the Nicaraguan people "cry uncle."

Claude Pepper, a liberal Democrat from Florida, wrote to President Reagan urging him to involve the Organization of American States in the fight against the Nicaraguan government.

But if that effort fails, Pepper added, U.S. policy should consist of "breaking off recognition of Nicaragua, boycott, blockade or whatever else we might think the situation requires."

Reagan's propaganda campaign

For months, the Reagan administration's propaganda war against the Nicaraguan revolution has been in full gear. No charge — including claims of drug dealing — has been too wild for Reagan to level at the Sandinista government.

Even though this campaign did not result in a majority vote for the \$14 million of aid for the contras, it succeeded in setting the framework of the debate in Congress on Reagan's terms.

The day after the vote in the House, Joanne Omang and Don Oberdorfer noted in the April 26 *Washington Post* that "virtually no member of the House or Senate defended Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government during the debate." They added that "it is significant for the future that most Democrats probably would agree with [Secretary of State George] Shultz's goals for Central America."

Secretary of State Shultz himself has publicly gloated about the hostility in Congress to the Sandinistas. In an interview with the *New York Post* on April 17, Shultz stated:

"It's interesting to me that in arguing with members of Congress today and remembering what we argued about six or eight months ago — when people were saying: 'You know that the Nicaraguan government isn't that bad and are you sure they're trying to subvert El Salvador and so on.'

"Now you go there and our opponents will say: 'We agree that this government is bad news and that they're trying to subvert their neighbors. We agree that something ought to be done about it. The question is what?'"

Shultz is getting lots of advice on that question from the big-business press. After the defeat of funding for the contras, the *Washington Post* editorialized on April 26 that Washington has other means to bring to bear against the Nicaraguan government. "The instruments should include a further economic squeeze," wrote the *Post's* editors. "Its effect could be substantial since the United States is Nicaragua's No. 1 trading partner."

The editorial added that the administration should "enlist other Latins in economic sanctions and in political pressures," which "could include condemnation and diplomatic isolation."

Holding out an olive branch to the White House, the editorial stated: "The Reagan administration is stung by the defeat of its military option in Congress. But a new American consensus is there waiting to be formed, if it will take a hand."

Jim Hampton, editor of the *Miami Herald*, wrote of his conversion to the contra cause in an April 7 column: "Eight months ago I wouldn't have dreamed of suggesting that Congress give the contras a dime." Now, he writes, "the Sandinistas are following the path that Fidel Castro trod after leading Cuba's revolution 25 years ago."

Therefore, writes Hampton, "it is impera-

tive that the United States thwart that progression. If peaceable means will suffice, then by all means every avenue of negotiation and conciliation should — must — be pursued.

"If peaceable means fail, then armed conflict involving U.S. forces is all but inevitable," Hampton concluded.

The April 20 demonstrations in the United States and Canada against U.S. intervention in Central America show that many people are not buying the administration's propaganda. These actions help lay the basis for building a massive international protest movement when Washington begins waging the war with U.S. troops. □

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Intercontinental Press specializes in political analysis and interpretation of events of particular interest to the labor, socialist, colonial independence, Black, and women's liberation movements.

Signed articles represent the views of the authors, which may not necessarily coincide with those of Intercontinental Press. Insofar as it reflects editorial opinion, unsigned material stands on the program of the Fourth International.

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INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS (ISSN 0162-5594) is published biweekly except for one issue in January and one issue in August for \$30 per year by Intercontinental Press, 410 West Street, New York, NY 10014. Second-class postage paid at New York, NY. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS, 410 West St., New York, NY 10014.

Intercontinental Press is indexed by the Alternative Press Index, P.O. Box 7229, Baltimore, MD 21218; tel.: (301) 243-2471.

To Subscribe: For one-year subscriptions in the U.S. or Canada send US\$30.00. Subscription correspondence should be addressed to: Intercontinental Press, 410 West Street, New York, N.Y. 10014. Telephone: (212) 929-6933.

For airmail subscriptions to Britain, Ireland, and continental Europe send US\$40.00 for one year; US\$20.00 for six months. Write for subscription rates to all other countries.

For air-speeded subscriptions to Australia: Write to New International Publications, P.O. Box 37, Leichhardt, N.S.W. 2040. In New Zealand: Write to Socialist Books, P.O. Box 8852, Auckland.

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Please allow five weeks for change of address. Include your old address, and, if possible, an address label from a recent issue.

Intercontinental Press is published by the 408 Printing and Publishing Corporation, 408 West Street, New York, N.Y. 10014. Offices at 408 West Street, New York, N.Y.

Protests hit Washington's war policies

Oppose aggression in Central America, U.S. support for apartheid

By Steve Craine

Four days of demonstrations April 19–22 in several U.S. and Canadian cities sent an unmistakable message to America's ruling families that U.S. intervention in Central America and support for the racist regime in South Africa will face a growing movement of opposition.

In the United States, the April Actions for Peace, Jobs, and Justice brought out some of the largest crowds of antiwar protesters in recent years in Washington, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, Denver, and Houston. An important demonstration in Toronto was held in coordination with the U.S. protests (see accompanying article). Altogether about 125,000 people took part in these actions to denounce U.S. imperialism's actions at home and abroad. A large portion were young people.

The central demands of the protesters were reflected in chants and placards at the demonstrations. "USA, CIA out of Nicaragua" and "Hey, hey, ho, ho, apartheid has got to go" were popular in Washington. In Seattle, the 4,000 marchers chanted "Hey South Africa, isn't it clear? Seattle doesn't want your consulate here!" and "Hey, hey, Uncle Sam, we remember Vietnam."

Many hand-made signs and banners referred to Reagan's embracing of the Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries (the *contras*). "The *contras* are not my brothers," said one carried in the Washington march. Another read, "Did George Washington rape children? The *contras* do."

The demonstrators were not taken in by the maneuvering in Congress over giving "humanitarian" versus military aid to the *contras*. Their stand was expressed clearly by one of the banners carried at the front of the march to the national Capitol: "No aid to the *contras* in any form."



Ernest Harsch/IP

Nor did the demonstrators have any doubts about Washington's deep complicity with apartheid, despite the State Department's decision to take a more critical tone in response to the rising groundswell of anti-apartheid protests.

Broad endorsement

More than 90 organizations were national endorsers of the April actions and many more participated. Important endorsements came from eight national trade unions and most of the major national organizations against U.S. intervention in Central America and against nuclear weapons. Among the other endorsers were the North American Farm Alliance, the United States Student Association, League of United Latin American Citizens, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Operation PUSH, and the National Congress of Puerto Rican Rights.

A few prominent politicians from the Democratic Party participated on April 20, most notably former presidential candidate Jesse

Jackson and congressmen John Conyers and Ron Dellums.

Marchers were of many nationalities — U.S. Blacks, Chicanos, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Costa Ricans, Hondurans, Uruguayans, Canadians, Chinese, Vietnamese, Lebanese, and many others. A contingent of the Union of Democratic Filipinos in the Washington march called for an end to U.S. backing for the Marcos dictatorship, and Young Koreans United carried a sign demanding, "Troops and nukes out of South Korea."

Contingents from the National Black Independent Political Party, a small but important force in the Black movement that calls for Blacks to break with the Democrats and Republicans, marched in the Washington and Los Angeles demonstrations.

Participation of unionists

The official endorsement of eight national unions and many other local trade union bodies and leaders provided an opening for antiwar

Marchers receptive to socialist ideas

Members of the Socialist Workers Party and Young Socialist Alliance helped build the April 20 antiwar actions in the cities where they were held. On the day of the actions the socialist activists concentrated on reaching the thousands of demonstrators with newspapers, books, and pamphlets explaining the socialist view of how to fight U.S. imperialism.

In the six demonstrations together, more than 3,000 single copies of the socialist weekly *Militant* were sold, along with 200 copies of its Spanish-language sister publication, *Perspectiva Mundial*. Demonstrators bought 222 subscriptions to the two papers and hundreds more copies of the YSA's bimonthly *Young Socialist*.

Another important part of the socialist propaganda effort on April 20 was getting out the new book *Nicaragua: The Sandinista People's Revolution*. The speeches of leaders of the Nicaraguan revolution contained in this book provide the best answer to the lies of the Reagan administration. All available copies of the book — more than 550 — were sold. Socialist literature tables sold more than \$5,000 worth of books and pamphlets.

Following the Washington demonstra-

tion, about 400 marchers attended a socialist open house to continue the political discussions of the day. Addressing the gathering were Andrea González, the SWP candidate for mayor of New York City, and Göte Kildén, a Swedish socialist and union activist on a speaking tour in the United States. Kildén said the success of the day's action would have a big impact in Europe, where there is already significant opposition to the U.S. war in Central America.

A number of people at the open house were new members of the SWP or YSA. One, a Black auto worker from Detroit, explained that many of his first conversations with socialist coworkers were about the campaign of Jesse Jackson for the Democratic Party presidential nomination in 1984.

"At first I was attracted to the Jackson campaign," he said. "It was the first of its kind for a Black man. And he was talking about building a rainbow coalition."

"I finally began to see that the main thrust of the rainbow coalition wasn't to build a separate movement, but to register Blacks as Democratic voters and, in the end, back Mondale for president."

Not long after that he joined the SWP.



Ernest Harsch/IP

Eight national unions endorsed march.

activists to build the marches among workers. In most cities labor had a noticeable presence, in union contingents as well as generally throughout the crowds.

In San Francisco, workers in their union jackets and hats filled an entire side street as they lined up to join in the march of 50,000, the largest antiwar march in that city in a decade. The San Francisco labor contingent carried a huge banner reading, "An injury to one is an injury to all." Behind it were banners from every central labor council in the Bay Area, all of which had voted to endorse the demonstration.

In Washington, the chant of "Hey, hey, ho, ho, union-busting has got to go" begun by an all-Black delegation of hospital workers from New York City became a popular one in the union contingent. Other union groups marching in the capital included about 100 members of the United Electrical Workers from several different cities; a group of machinists from Baltimore; several groups of auto workers from plants in the Midwest, some from as far away as Kansas City, Missouri; steelworkers from Pittsburgh, Chicago, and Baltimore; garment workers, most of them Chinese and Latinas, from New York; and many others.

Contingents from the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and the Coalition of Labor Union Women also carried their banners.

In Denver, the rally of 1,200 was addressed by Richard Bensinger, manager of the Rocky Mountain District Joint Board of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU). He had recently returned from a trip to Guatemala where he met with striking Coca-Cola workers. Another ACTWU official, who had recently completed a fact-finding tour in Nicaragua, spoke to the Seattle rally.

Farm workers organized by the United Farm Workers Union marched in San Francisco. In Washington the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) brought farm workers from Florida and Ohio. FLOC is engaged in a struggle against Campbell, a major U.S. food processor that also has investments in South Africa.

FLOC president Baldemar Velásquez, who led the contingent, recently visited Nicaragua along with other FLOC members. There they met with Nicaraguan farm workers. Velásquez said he felt at home with the Nicaraguan farm workers. "The people look and talk the same" as us, he said.

Some of the demonstrations also saw participation from farmers and farm organizations. Slogans like "Grain silos, not missile silos" and "Feed the world, not the contras" were common. A California farmer used his tractor to pull a float carrying Nicaraguan musicians and dancers in the San Francisco march.

The importance of labor's participation was underlined in a speech by Anthony Luddy, secretary-treasurer of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, one of the largest unions in the United States and an official endorser of the April actions. "Our goals are peace, jobs, and justice," he told the 65,000 demonstrators in Washington. "No one will give them to us on a silver platter — not the Democratic Party, not Congress, and certainly not Ronald Reagan."

"We have to organize," he continued. "I'm talking about power, the power to change things, to take power away from those who have it. We need the unions here. We have to have them."

Support anti-apartheid students

Support for the struggle of the Black majority in South Africa to end the brutal apartheid system was prominent in all the April 20 demonstrations. The recent wave of student protests at universities throughout the country demanding an end to investments in South Africa and a well-publicized series of demonstrations at the South African embassy over the last few months put this issue in the forefront for many participants.

Speaking to the San Francisco rally, James Herman, president of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, reported how two days earlier his union's convention had recessed so the delegates could

1,000 march in Toronto

TORONTO — More than 1,000 antiwar protesters turned out in Toronto on April 20 to demand self-determination for the people of Central America and an end to Canada's complicity with U.S. imperialism in its military and economic intervention there.

The demonstration, organized to coincide with protest actions in six U.S. cities, was initiated by the Toronto Anti-intervention Coalition and culminated a week of activities throughout the city dealing with Central America and the Caribbean.

A spirited and youthful march was greeted by many onlookers as it proceeded down Toronto's main street to a rally at City Hall. Speakers there included John Donaldson, executive vice-president of the Ontario Federation of Labor; Dan Heap, a New Democratic Party (NDP — Canada's labor party) member of the federal parliament; and John Rodríguez, an NDP member of the Ontario provincial parliament.

The action had been endorsed by the Metropolitan Toronto Labour Council and several NDP riding (constituency) associations, as well as religious and peace groups.

The official demands of the march also included calls on the Canadian government to cut off aid to the repressive governments of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala and increase its aid to Nicaragua. They demanded that Ottawa stop testing and producing weapons for Washington's war machine.

Banners were carried by the High Park New Democratic Party and a local of iron workers, among others. Nicaragua was clearly the most important issue in the minds of most demonstrators.

Another antiwar march was scheduled for the Pacific coast city of Vancouver one week later. It is an annual event of some years' standing.

"go over and join hands with the students at Berkeley against the demented government of South Africa." University of California students at Berkeley have been conducting a sit-in to demand that the university withdraw about \$1.7 billion it has invested in companies that do business in South Africa.

In Washington one of the four days of protest, April 19, was devoted to action against apartheid. Despite attempts by the police to intimidate protesters, about 500 people picketed the South African embassy that day. This demonstration included members of the International Association of Machinists, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, and the Service Employees International Union.

Sylvia Hill of the South Africa Support Project told the April 19 embassy demonstrators,

"Each protest against apartheid is also a protest against U.S. intervention in Central America."

This link was pointed out in all the demonstrations the next day. In Houston a local anti-apartheid leader told the 800 demonstrators who came out in spite of heavy rains, "The same people who are oppressing people in Central America are oppressing people in South Africa."

A National Student Anti-apartheid Protest Day, scheduled for April 24, was announced at the April 20 actions.

The keynote speaker at the Washington rally was Rev. Jesse Jackson. The crowd responded enthusiastically to many of the points made by the candidate for the Democratic Party presidential nomination last year. His support for the struggles of working farmers and for student protests against apartheid were well received. He denounced U.S. aid to the Nicaraguan contras as "madness," and endorsed the National Student Anti-apartheid Day.

The main focus of his talk, however, was on his political strategy of turning the movement against U.S. intervention toward capitalist electoral politics. "We'll translate protest into politics," he told the audience, "increase voter registration, and organize enough votes in 1986 [the next congressional election year] to defeat the MX missile."

Jackson identified the demonstration itself as part of his "rainbow coalition" — the slogan he used in the 1984 campaign to designate the coalition of Blacks, Latinos, and working people he sought to build as a bloc within the framework of the Democratic Party. "Today I see a rainbow coalition," he said, looking out on the crowd. "The rainbow campaign of 1984 will become the rainbow organization of 1985 and 1986 and 1987 and 1988."

Orienting the antiwar movement toward these elections and the Democratic Party that supports war, racism, and union-busting would undermine the militancy and independence evident in the April 20 actions.

Most of the six rallies heard from representatives of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) of El Salvador and from the revolutionary government of Nicaragua. In Washington FMLN speaker Guadalupe González told the rally, "Everything you do helps the people of Central America. We've been fighting for peace for many years — now is the time for the people of the United States to fight for peace."

The Washington rally also heard from Abdeen Jabara, of the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, and a representative of Dessima Williams, former ambassador to the Organization of American States from the revolutionary Grenadian government of Maurice Bishop.

Neo Mnumzana of the African National Congress mission to the United Nations said, "I speak for the people of South Africa, the only country in the world where racism has the force of law. I also speak for the people of Nic-

aragua fighting the contras and for the people of El Salvador fighting fascism. I speak for everyone who is seeking to end the exploitation of man by man."

Sergio Sarmiento, representing the National Union of Nicaraguan Students, was greeted with wild applause when he announced he was bringing "affectionate and appreciative greetings from the heroic people of Nicaragua" to

the Washington rally.

Sarmiento continued: "We believe that the example that Nicaragua represents for oppressed people all over the world merits all the support and solidarity you can give. We, the people of Nicaragua, will do all that must be done in defense of our country. Together with the people of the United States we will say, 'No pasarán!'" □

New Zealand

Rugby tour protested

Thousands oppose sports links with South Africa

By Joan Browning

[The following article is scheduled to appear in the April 26 issue of *Socialist Action*, a fortnightly newspaper published in Auckland, New Zealand, that reflects the views of the Socialist Action League, New Zealand section of the Fourth International.]

* * *

AUCKLAND — The chant "No Tour — Call It Off!" rang through Queen Street on the evening of Friday, April 19 — two days after the New Zealand Rugby Union announced that it would proceed with the planned tour of South Africa.

Estimates of the size of the demonstration ranged from 20,000 to 30,000. The overwhelming majority of marchers were young, including many high school students carrying homemade banners and placards.

Among the organised contingents of the march were Maori students, members of the Seamen's Union, workers from the Otahuhu railway workshops, and Auckland Gay Task Force activists. A sizeable Samoan contingent also carried their own banners and chanted in Samoan.

Speaking at the rally held at the end of the march, Black South African student Makgolo Makgolo declared: "The New Zealand Rugby Union has declared war against our people." Pointing to the large turnout on the demonstration, he went on to say, "No other evidence is needed to see that the majority of New Zealanders oppose the tour."

Workers' tour

Other speakers at the rally were Hone Harawira, from the Waitangi Action Committee, and a representative from the Gay Task Force.

An announcement made by a member of a group organising a workers' fact-finding tour to Nicaragua later this year also attracted interest from many. "Imagine a South Africa where the Makgolo Makgolos are in the parliament and not the prisons," he said. "Imagine a South Africa where the Black majority stand in their rightful place at the head of their nation.

"That was Nicaragua in 1979.

"Now imagine a liberated South Africa under siege from the most powerful military machine in the world.

"That's Nicaragua in 1985.

"The death toll in those six years from US-backed attacks is 7,500. Nicaragua urgently needs the sort of solidarity we see here in the streets," he continued. "But to build solidarity we need information. So a labour movement tour is being organised for later this year."

Wellington protests

In Wellington on April 18 about 1,000 people demonstrated outside the Hotel St. George — the venue of the rugby union's annual general meeting. Included in the protest was a contingent of about 700 students who had marched from Victoria University at lunchtime. Staff at the hotel also showed their opposition to the decision to proceed with the tour by staging a 24-hour strike.

Several hundred people also protested outside the rugby union's national council meeting a day earlier. Included in the protest rally was a spirited contingent of about 30 young women from Wellington High School, who chanted "Tahi, rua, toru, wha — Don't go to South Africa."

Racism in New Zealand

The largest anti-tour protest in Wellington to date was a march of about 4,000 people on April 12. One noticeable feature was the relatively large numbers of young Maoris and Pacific Islanders on the march. The links between the fight against apartheid in South Africa and racism in New Zealand were drawn in speeches at the rally following the march by a Samoan community worker and a local trade unionist and Maori activist, Heta Te Hemara.

Other speakers on the march included FOL [Federation of Labour] vice-president Sonja Davies, Labour MP Bill Jeffries, and Maxwell Nemaadzhivanani, the Australian representative of the Pan Africanist Congress.

In Christchurch, about 500 people held a midday rally in front of the steps of Christchurch Cathedral on April 18. □

Behind overthrow of dictator Nimeiry

A century of popular revolt against imperialist domination

By Ernest Harsch

As the news of President Gaafar al-Nimeiry's ouster on April 6 spread, hundreds of thousands of jubilant Sudanese poured into the streets of Khartoum to celebrate.

Although Nimeiry was overthrown in a coup by the military hierarchy, the masses knew that the downfall of his 16-year-old regime was the outcome of their own struggles. For nearly two weeks they had demonstrated in Khartoum and the neighboring city of Omdurman to protest higher food prices and to demand Nimeiry's resignation. A general strike by trade unions and professional associations virtually paralyzed all economic life. In the south, a large-scale guerrilla struggle continued to tie down a quarter of the entire army.

It was in this context that the generals finally decided to act, for fear of even greater social explosions.

The popular response to Nimeiry's overthrow reflected the depth of the masses' hatred of his U.S.-backed dictatorship.

"Down, down, USA!" the demonstrators shouted. Thousands of unionists marched to the army headquarters to demand a restoration of civilian rule. Hundreds of people stormed Kober prison and freed political prisoners. Soldiers joined the jubilant crowds.

According to a report in the April 9 Paris daily *Le Monde*, people "pulled down and burned the national flag of the fallen regime, as well as portraits of Marshal Nimeiry. The demonstrators shouted slogans for the restoration of democracy, the freedom of all political prisoners, a break in diplomatic relations with the United States, and the extradition of former President Nimeiry, who is now in Cairo, so that he can be tried."

The crowd chanted, "The people are hungry. We want revolution. We are not afraid of bullets. A million martyrs for a new era."

Concern in Washington

Meanwhile, in Washington and other imperialist capitals, government officials expressed concern about Sudan's future following the downfall of one of their closest allies in the region.

Though Sudan is very poor, the imperialists have long considered it strategically important for their interests. It is geographically the largest country in Africa, bordering on eight others and with a population of 22 million. Socially, it encompasses Arabic-speaking peoples in the north as well as Black African societies in the south. Events in Sudan can thus have a direct impact not only in the rest of Africa, but also in the Middle East; Saudi Arabia



Demonstrators in Khartoum celebrate overthrow of Nimeiry.

lies about 100 miles away, across the Red Sea.

For the moment, the new junta headed by Gen. Siwar el-Dahab has succeeded in maintaining close ties with Washington. Through a combination of concessions and threats of repression, it has also been able to get the unions and professional associations to call off their strike.

But the difficulties facing the generals in Khartoum are great. In addition to Sudan's enormous social and economic problems, they now face a rebellious people whose expectations of change have been greatly aroused by Nimeiry's downfall.

It is also a people with one of the richest experiences of popular rebellion in all of Africa.

Revolution and conquest

For centuries, the various societies of what is today Sudan were independent. But in the 1820s they were overrun by armies of the Turkish empire that swept down from Egypt, then a Turkish colony. The conquerors seized huge estates, imposed semifeudal agrarian relations in some regions, and sold many Sudanese peasants into slavery. European and U.S. adventurers also imposed their rule over parts of Sudan.

In the last quarter of the 19th century, the European colonialists launched their final scramble for Africa. The British imperialists

succeeded in weakening the Turkish hold over Egypt, transforming it into a virtual British colony. They then looked southward and in 1877 had the Egyptian khedive (ruler) appoint Gen. Charles Gordon as Sudan's governor.

But in 1881 a revolution erupted in Sudan, led by Mohammed Ahmed, a political-religious leader known as the Mahdi. The Mahdist forces were supported by peasants, nomads, slaves, artisans, and defectors from the Egyptian army. The revolution finally triumphed in 1885 with the liberation of Khartoum — and General Gordon's death.

The victorious Mahdist forces, who were based largely in the Arabic-speaking north, then cemented alliances with many of the more than 500 national groupings in the south, thus forging the modern Sudanese state.

For 14 years, Sudan remained independent. But it was an embattled country. Britain and Egypt imposed a trade embargo. Turkish, Egyptian, Italian, and Belgian troops (often backed by Britain) repeatedly attacked it.

Within Sudan itself, powerful feudal lords and rich slave traders blocked efforts by the Mahdist leaders to abolish slavery and free the peasants from feudal ties. This undermined the Mahdists' support and left them more vulnerable to outside attack.

In 1896, combined British and Egyptian armies attacked in force and finally overthrew the Mahdist government in 1899. Sudan became a direct British colony in all but name.

Yet it took two more decades for the new colonial administration to successfully "pacify" Sudan. Until 1914, hardly a year went by without a new Mahdist uprising. Resistance in the south lasted longer, including an armed uprising by the Dinka people in 1919.

Under the British boot

British colonial rule brought much misery. Heavy taxes were imposed. Forced labor was requisitioned to build railways and dams. Private property in land was instituted by law, overturning the previous system of communal land ownership. Tens of thousands of peasants were forced to grow cotton for export to Britain, and a new Sudanese landlord class was consciously fostered. At the same time, very little industry was allowed to develop.

Besides direct repression, British rule rested on shifting alliances with various sectors of the Sudanese landlord class, merchants, and emerging commercial bourgeoisie, which were represented largely by the two main Islamic currents, the Khatmia and the Sannaniyah (which was closest to the Mahdist movement).

In 1924, the British instituted their "south-

ern policy," a conscious effort to pit the Muslim and Arabic-speaking northern peoples against those in the south, who speak more than 100 African languages and who are mostly Christians or followers of local African religions. Relations between the north and south were severed to prevent the spread of anti-imperialist ideas from the north. According to an official 1924 report, the southern policy aimed at "teaching these savages the elements of common sense, good behaviour, and obedience to government authority."

Despite the repression, the first modern nationalist groups were formed in the north in the 1930s and 1940s and began to press for Sudan's independence.

Also in the 1940s, the small working class, based largely in transport and communications, began to organize its first trade unions. In 1946 the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP), which had a strong influence within the labor movement, was founded as well.

The Sudanese unions carried out numerous strikes for higher wages and better working conditions. In 1951, the Sudan Workers Trade Union Federation took a clear stance for independence. It forged an alliance with several political parties and organizations of tenant farmers, students, and women to fight for an end to British colonial rule.

Neocolonial regime

Considering independence unavoidable, the British authorities prepared for the installation of a neocolonial regime by favoring those political parties based on Sudanese bourgeois and landlord circles. In December 1955 the Sudanese parliament, dominated by these parties, proclaimed Sudan's independence. British rule formally ended on Jan. 1, 1956.

Even before independence, however, a major rebellion began in the south. It was fueled by the antagonisms that had previously been fostered by the British, as well as by the southerners' opposition to the discrimination practiced against them by the Muslim and Arabic-dominated regime in Khartoum. While all of Sudan is poor, the south is even worse off.

The southern rebels called themselves Anyanya (a snake venom). Some fought for regional autonomy and others for the establishment of a separate state. The fighting eventually escalated into a full-scale civil war that claimed up to half a million lives, most of them southerners.

The masses in the rest of the country also suffered from continued imperialist domination. Their living standards remained low, and education, health care, and other services were minimal.

Opposition to the regime soon emerged. There were actions in 1958 to protest the U.S. invasion of Lebanon and to oppose the signing of a U.S. aid agreement. Workers, students, and farmers agitated for agrarian reform.

In November 1958, the military, led by Gen. Ibrahim Abboud, seized power from the civilian regime. It banned demonstrations and

strikes and outlawed the Sudan Workers Trade Union Federation. In the south, it stepped up the efforts to militarily crush the Anyanya guerrillas and carried out numerous massacres of villagers.

It was this war that provided the immediate impetus to Abboud's downfall.

The 'October Revolution'

In October 1964, students at the University of Khartoum organized a meeting to discuss the situation in the south. The police attacked, killing one student.

Demonstrators took to the streets. A hastily formed coalition of labor unions, student groups, tenant farmers associations, and organizations of professionals called a general strike to demand the government's resignation. The country was paralyzed. When junior officers and troops joined the rebellion, Abboud was toppled and the military junta fell apart.

The October Revolution, as it was called, placed into power a government dominated by leaders of the Communist Party, the unions, and the tenant farmers associations, although it also included representatives of the bourgeois parties. Freedom of the press was instituted and the ban on parties was lifted. New unions were allowed to organize. The government took an anti-imperialist stance and supported various liberation movements.

The government also immediately declared a general amnesty in the south and opened talks with the Anyanya rebels. But these efforts to end the war were complicated by imperialist interference. The Anyanya guerrillas received U.S. and Israeli military aid, and in return were encouraged to adopt an anticommunist stance.

In the north, the rightist parties, alarmed by the new government's course, formed a front to oppose it. The Umma Party, which was based largely on the landlord class, brought its armed Ansar militia into Khartoum, forcing the government to resign in February 1965.

Elections were held soon afterward, favoring the bourgeois and landlord parties. The SCP was banned and the new regime launched major military reprisals against the peoples of the south.

Nimeiry's coup

In May 1969, another coup took place, carried out by a group of radical nationalist officers led by Col. Gaafar al-Nimeiry. Gigantic support demonstrations marched through Khartoum, and Nimeiry won the support of the Communist Party, the trade unions, and other organizations.

A military National Revolutionary Council was established that included several Communist Party supporters. The 21-member cabinet also included a number of SCP leaders and supporters, as well as two prominent southerners (one of them an SCP leader). All parties were banned, except for the SCP. It quickly grew into the largest Communist Party in the Arab world.

While momentarily allied with the SCP,

Nimeiry drew his political inspiration from the Nasser government in Egypt.

During its first year and a half, the Nimeiry government nationalized foreign banks and trading firms, which had controlled 70 percent of Sudan's banking and foreign trade, crushed the Umma Party's Ansar militia when it began to organize opposition, and established political and economic ties with the Soviet Union and other workers states.

As happened after the October 1964 upsurge, the imperialists again stepped up their pressure. A virtual Western economic embargo was imposed. CIA and Israeli aid to the Anyanya guerrillas mounted. This blocked the opening of serious negotiations, despite the government's granting of regional autonomy to the south a month after it came to power.

This imperialist drive succeeded. Without a perspective of effectively organizing and mobilizing the Sudanese masses to stand up to imperialism, Nimeiry's government soon buckled to the pressures.

An early sign of this was Nimeiry's increasing attacks on the unions and the SCP. In late 1970 the SCP supporters in the governing council were removed. Early the next year Nimeiry called for the SCP's dissolution and announced the abolition of all independent mass organizations. Instead, Nimeiry insisted that all political activity be channeled through a single party, the Sudanese Socialist Union (SSU), which was tightly controlled by his own supporters.

Nimeiry also reestablished ties with some of the more proimperialist Arab regimes and opened talks with the British conglomerate Lonrho on possible joint investment ventures.

In reaction to this shift, a small group of left-wing officers attempted a coup in July 1971. Though the coup was not initiated by the SCP, the party supported it.

The rebels held power in Khartoum for several days. But Nimeiry was able to regain control and rounded up the rebel officers, as well as much of the SCP and union leadership. A massive crackdown followed. The entire central SCP leadership was executed, as was the head of the main union federation, rebel officers, and other left-wing activists. (The government of Muammar el-Qaddafi in Libya, which supported Nimeiry at the time, seized two of the rebel officers and turned them over to Nimeiry, who promptly hanged them.)

Thousands of SCP and union activists were arrested, and many were dismissed from their jobs. The army itself was thoroughly purged of all suspected critics of Nimeiry. Most ties with the workers states were cut (while those with China improved thanks to Peking's support for the crackdown on the SCP, which was politically allied with Moscow).

Pleased with the turn of events in Khartoum, the imperialists suspended their campaign of pressure and offered economic aid and trade deals. Nimeiry eventually became the second largest recipient of U.S. military and economic aid in Africa.

The imperialists also stopped encouraging

the Anyanya rebels. This paved the way for an agreement ending the civil war in 1972. It brought Anyanya leaders into the government and army leadership and recognized regional autonomy for the south.

Compared with previous periods in Sudan's history, the years that followed were marked by relative political stability — an enforced stability maintained by Nimeiry's ruthless crushing of all dissent.

In foreign policy, Nimeiry followed Washington's lead. He supported the Egyptian regime's signing of the Camp David accord with Israel. He provided aid to opponents of various governments that were in conflict with imperialism, such as those in Libya, South Yemen, and Ethiopia. The current proimperialist president of Chad, Hissène Habré, came to power with U.S. and Sudanese backing.

Economic decline

Under Nimeiry, Sudan was thrown open even further to U.S. and Western European corporations, which were given especially favorable terms. Large loans were taken out from imperialist banks. Many development projects were mismanaged, and they provided army officers and government bureaucrats with opportunities to enrich themselves through corruption.

Sudan remained highly underdeveloped. The little industry that existed was often dependent on imports of raw materials. The British-built railway fell into disuse. Only 1,200 miles of paved roads existed, and only another 1,200 miles of dirt or gravel ones.

Some 80 percent of the population was engaged in agriculture, much of it on a subsistence basis. But little was done to improve agricultural productivity. Although Sudan can potentially grow enough food to feed much of Arab world, only 8 percent of its arable land area is under cultivation. Cotton continues to account for 70 percent of export earnings, leaving Sudan vulnerable to the decline in world cotton prices.

By the early 1980s, Sudan was in the grip of a severe economic crisis. Its foreign debt climbed to \$9 billion while the interest alone amounted to \$1 billion a year — twice the country's total export earnings. The Sudanese pound was repeatedly devalued. Between 1982 and 1984, the price of doura — a millet flour used for bread — rose 30 times. While the overall inflation rate was around 50 percent a year, wages remained stagnant.

Mounting opposition

Even more seriously, the drought that has affected much of Africa hit Sudan as well. By late 1984, it was estimated that some 6 million Sudanese were living in famine conditions, especially in the provinces of Darfour and Kordofan. But the government tried to cover up the seriousness of the famine, thus hindering timely relief efforts.

As discontent with Nimeiry's rule deepened, tensions and conflicts emerged within



the ruling circles, leaving Nimeiry more isolated. He responded with stepped-up repression, hitting even the main bourgeois parties that had earlier supported him. In an effort to give some religious cover to this political crackdown, Nimeiry imposed his own extreme version of *sharia* (Islamic law), providing for amputations and hanging for a variety of "crimes." This spurred wide opposition, including among the main organized Islamic currents.

The imposition of *sharia* was especially resented among the non-Muslim peoples of the south. This came on top of Nimeiry's decision to politically weaken the south by dividing it into three new provinces — in violation of the 1972 pact ending the civil war — and the scrapping of several important development projects in the region.

In 1983, the southern peoples again took up arms against the Khartoum regime. The initial guerrilla groups called themselves Anyanya II, harking back to the original southern rebel forces.

But a more progressive current also emerged, called the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). Its armed wing, the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA), soon absorbed most of the Anyanya II fighters. By early 1985, Sudanese army officials were estimating its strength at around 10,000 armed guerrillas. Much of the countryside in the south came under the SPLA's control, and the Sudanese army was confined to the few main towns.

Unlike the Anyanya, the SPLM does not define itself as a *southern* organization, but as an all-Sudanese group. It explicitly rejects the call for a separate southern state. Most of its fighters are southerners, but it also has members — including in the top leadership — who are from the north.

In a March 24 broadcast over the SPLA radio, SPLM chairman John Garang (a former Sudanese army colonel) declared:

The SPLM is determined to fight for a democratic and socialist Sudan where social justice, freedom, and human dignity flourish. We fight for a socialist

and democratic Sudan in which the nationality question . . . is solved. We fight for a Sudan in which the problem of uneven development is solved so that all the regions, especially the most neglected regions, receive a fair and accelerated socioeconomic development — a Sudan free from racism, a Sudan in which power is vested in the masses, exercised by them and in their interests, a Sudan in which there is no monopoly of power by any ethnic, religious, or regional group.

Garang rejected an offer from Nimeiry to negotiate, noting Nimeiry's long record of broken agreements. "We are committed to wrest power from the minority clique in Khartoum," Garang declared.

Coincidentally, just two days after Garang's broadcast, the mass upsurge in Khartoum began.

It had a number of underlying causes: The unpopularity of the war in the south, discontent over the abysmal living conditions and famine, hatred of the regime's repressive policies, and opposition to its subordination to U.S. and other imperialist powers.

Nimeiry's decision to raise food prices — in response to demands by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank — provided the immediate impetus to the initial demonstrations on March 26, which began around the same time that he left for a visit to Washington. Virtually all sectors of the population were drawn into the actions, from workers and peasants to businessmen and traders. While they had different grievances and interests, they all agreed that it was time for Nimeiry to go.

Ferment in the streets

While the military hierarchy's decision to oust Nimeiry solves none of Sudan's basic economic and social problems, it has opened up a new political situation. The various political forces that had been driven underground have now been able to resurface. Political exiles are returning.

The new junta is not now strong enough to bring this upsurge under firm control. While rejecting the popular call for a civilian regime and insisting that some of the IMF austerity measures would continue, the generals have conceded many other demands. They have freed many political prisoners, and arrested Nimeiry's top collaborators. Nimeiry's party, the SSU, has been dissolved. So has the hated internal security police.

The junta has appointed a new predominantly civilian cabinet, incorporating some of the leaders of the professional associations.

General Dahab appealed to the SPLA guerrillas in the south to begin talks, and even offered them a representative in the cabinet. But thus far the guerrillas have said no. According to Garang, the army has "stolen victory from the masses" and the new government represents "Nimeiryism without Nimeiry."

The Sudanese army itself may not be very stable. During the anti-Nimeiry demonstrations, many soldiers were reluctant to fire on the crowds. Unnamed U.S. officials in Wash-

ington, quoted in the April 9 *New York Times*, concluded that General Dahab's takeover was a preemptive move to head off a coup by more junior officers. "This raises an important question," one U.S. official said. "If General Dahab only ousted Nimeiry before other military men would oust him, how strong is his base of power?"

Although the ban on political parties has not been formally lifted, all of them (except for the SSU) are now functioning openly. These include the old bourgeois parties, the SCP, and some 40 new parties that have declared their

existence. The University of Khartoum is inundated with manifestoes, leaflets, banners, and posters. Public meetings are held daily, some of up to 20,000 people.

On April 21, the Union of Sudanese Women held its first rally in 14 years. It was addressed by Fatima Ibrahim, the widow of the secretary general of the Sudan Workers Trade Union Federation executed in 1971.

Journalists have occupied the offices of the main newspapers, expelled the former directors, and elected provisional management committees to run the papers.

In the factories, union militants, who had largely been functioning clandestinely, are holding public meetings to elect new union leaderships. The Sudan Workers Trade Union Federation itself is planning a conference for May 8 to choose new leadership bodies. Plans are underway to hold a major demonstration on May Day.

More than anything else, it is this massive political ferment in the streets, workplaces, schools, and countryside that will influence the course of events in Sudan in the coming weeks and months. □

Burkina

CDRs: The revolution's mass base

Thousands of Committees for the Defense of the Revolution formed

By Ernest Harsch

OUAGADOUGOU — On the eastern edge of this city, Sector 28 is in many ways as much like a rural village as it is like part of Burkina's capital. It is one of the larger and more dispersed of Ouagadougou's 30 sectors, and a majority of its 4,000 inhabitants are illiterate and make their living from agriculture.

As in the rest of the country, activists of the local Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) are working hard to organize and mobilize the population. They are seeking to deepen support for the revolutionary process that has been unleashed in Burkina, a country of 7 million people, since a mass anti-imperialist upsurge brought into power the National Council of the Revolution (CNR) in August 1983.

Sector 28, like the country as a whole, is very poor. Before the election of the current CDR leadership in September 1984, it had only one public primary school, three private schools, a pharmacy run by a religious order that was only open one day a week, and a National Grain Board storehouse.

Since then, however, the local CDR has succeeded in expanding the sector's amenities, largely by mobilizing residents for voluntary labor on weekends. The CDR has prepared a number of housing sites, built a child-care center for 50 children, constructed an office for the local mayor (who has yet to be elected), and dug several wells with the assistance of the local Baptist mission. Markets, roads, and small parks have been upgraded, and bricks have been made for the construction of a new school. Other plans include the building of more classrooms, a community center, public toilets, and a state-run general store.

Likewise, the CDR activists have organized discussions, evening classes, and information meetings, all conducted in Moré (the language of the Mossi people, who predominate in the region around Ouagadougou). Special em-



Women CDR members demonstrate use of weapons.

phasis has been placed on drawing women into political and community work; so far, some 70 percent of the women in the sector have been involved in one way or another.

This includes in military activities. Sixty-six CDR members, both men and women, have already received military training. With the aid of regular troops who live in the sector, they conduct day and night patrols, maintain the weapons, and carry out other tasks. The CDR headquarters also runs its own training program for those who have not yet been instructed in weapons use by the national police.

Those CDR activists responsible for security matters meet each Sunday morning, to organize not only the sector's military defense, but also their own participation in voluntary labor activities. In Burkina today, there is no sharp distinction between production and defense.

The CDR in Ouagadougou's Sector 28 is

just one of thousands that exist in Burkina today.

The call for the formation of the CDRs was among the National Council of the Revolution's first acts after seizing power on Aug. 4, 1983. Responding to a radio appeal by President Thomas Sankara, people in Ouagadougou's poorer neighborhoods set up their initial CDRs on an ad hoc basis within just a few days.

Within several months, CDRs had spread throughout the country, including into most of Burkina's approximately 7,000 villages.

In a major programmatic speech given on Oct. 2, 1983, (known as the Discourse on Political Orientation), Sankara affirmed that "for this revolution to be genuinely popular it must lead to the destruction of the neocolonial state machinery and the organization of a new machinery capable of guaranteeing the people's sovereignty." The CDRs, Sankara stressed, would serve to overcome the resistance of "the reactionary social classes and layers" and would provide the basis for mobilizing the people to carry through the revolution's varied tasks, from production and education to military defense.*

The first CDRs sometimes functioned rather chaotically. Without any national guidelines and without enough experienced cadres, their leadership, level of organization, and degree of popular participation was quite uneven from one part of the country to another. In some regions, the leaderships were initially captured by supporters of the outlawed bourgeois political parties or of traditional tribal chiefs.

But by May 1984, the CNR had drawn up statutes for the CDRs, in consultation with CDR activists. The purpose of the statutes was to more clearly define the roles of the CDRs and to systematize their functioning and

*For the text of this speech by President Sankara, see the Jan. 21, 1985, *Intercontinental Press*.

leadership selection procedures.

According to the preamble of the statutes, "The Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, which are an extension of the National Council of the Revolution, are the people's authentic organizations in the exercise of revolutionary power. They are the instrument that the people have themselves forged in order to become the sovereign masters of their own destiny. They are not a party. They are a mass movement to which people belong on the basis of the anti-imperialist platform outlined in the Discourse on Political Orientation of Oct. 2, 1983."

According to the statutes, and to the practice that has generally been followed since their publication, the CDRs are open to everyone who agrees with the basic course of the revolution. This includes all Burkinabè citizens, whether they are now living within Burkina or abroad. (Some 2 million Burkinabè live in the Ivory Coast and other neighboring countries, primarily as migrant workers.)

The CDRs are also open to citizens of other countries living in Burkina. According to Pierre Ouédraogo, the CDRs' national secretary general, this particularly involves citizens of Ghana, where a significant anti-imperialist upsurge is also under way and whose government has close ties with the Burkinabè leaders.

There are several different kinds of CDRs. The most numerous are those based on geographic region: either a rural village or an urban neighborhood. The latter are also part of larger citywide committees.

Each trade, factory, office, school, or marketplace also has a CDR, grouping members on the basis of their occupation. These are called "service" CDRs.

In the workplaces, the CDRs have served as vehicles to advance workers' rights and to deepen the workers' consciousness. Even where unions have existed in the past, the CDRs have often been more militant. In a few cases, they have taken the initiative in ousting corrupt or inefficient managers (as in the state-run electricity enterprise).

Each military corps or unit likewise has its own CDR. The military CDRs in a particular installation or camp then form coordinating bodies called garrison committees.

While the army chain of command still applies in military matters and the orders of officers are expected to be obeyed, the existence of these CDRs means that the rank-and-file soldiers have a much greater say than before in discussing and deciding on how best to implement the tasks assigned to their unit. They also help advance the political consciousness of the soldiers (through political and literacy classes), involve them in productive activities, and serve as a check against the emergence of corrupt or right-wing currents within the officer corps. (Many of the top officers of the old neo-colonial army have already been purged.)

Election of leaderships

In all CDRs, the basic decision-making body is the general assembly — a regular

meeting of CDR members to discuss and decide on whatever key questions come up. Decisions are taken by majority vote, and those who hold minority positions are obliged to follow whatever decision has been made.

Each CDR has a nine-member executive body called a bureau. The members of the bureau are elected for two-year terms by the general assembly as a whole.

"Usually, there are many, many candidates for the CDR bureaus," Aristide Compaoré, the 23-year-old CDR high commissioner for Kadiogo Province (the province around Ouagadougou), told me.

To counteract the problem that came up in the early days of the CDRs — when some CDR bureaus came under the domination of tribal chiefs, dignitaries, businessmen, or figures from the old bourgeois parties — there are some restrictions on who may run. Those barred from election to a CDR bureau include all leaders of outlawed reactionary parties, all those considered part of the "state or comprador bourgeoisie" or of the "backward forces" in the countryside based on the traditional tribal structures, and anyone found guilty of theft, embezzlement, diversion of money or goods, or illegal trade.

The CDR bureaus are responsible for the day-to-day work of the CDRs, for convening meetings, for explaining decisions that have been made by the national leaders, and for passing on proposals raised during the general assemblies.

According to the CDR statutes, the local CDRs form the base of a pyramid of CDR bodies that wield progressively higher levels of authority.

In each of Burkina's 250 geographic departments, there is to be a departmental committee on which all the local CDRs are represented, as well as the garrison committees and the coordinating committees of the service CDRs.

At the next higher level, there is to be a provincial CDR council in each of the country's 30 provinces. These councils are composed of the elected bureaus of the departmental committees, the garrison committees, and the service coordination committees. The councils then in turn elect provincial governing bodies

(which are headed, however, by appointed high commissioners).

Finally, every two years a national CDR congress is to be held, with delegates coming from the provincial and departmental CDRs, as well as from the national women's and students' organizations.

Today, however, much of this is still in the preparatory stage. Some of the departmental committees have been set up, but the elections in the service CDRs have not been completed and the provincial councils do not yet function. In the absence of these structures, there are no concrete plans for holding a national CDR congress.

CDR activities are now coordinated on a national scale by the CDRs' National Secretariat, whose key officials have been appointed by the National Council of the Revolution.

Problems and accomplishments

In addition to the unfinished nature of the CDR structures, the local CDRs have numerous difficulties in their day-to-day functioning.

In the more remote regions of the country, the problems of insufficient information and material resources are especially great. It may take weeks before an official in Ouagadougou or one of the provincial capitals even considers a request from a village CDR for construction materials or other supplies; and once an allocation has been made it may take some time before transportation can be arranged to get the supplies to the village.

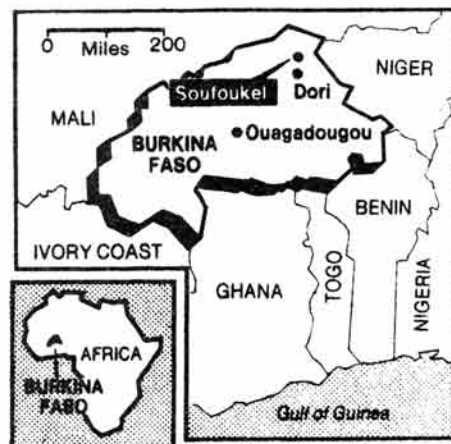
Often village delegates do not have radios, one of the main means of communication in the countryside. So it is sometimes difficult to learn about what is happening in the rest of the country.

The existence of some 60 national languages in Burkina further complicates communication and exchanges of information — although there are a few languages (such as Moré and Dioula) that are spoken or understood in much of the country. In any case, there is little written political material in those languages; most is in French, which is understood by barely 10 percent of the total population. Even if there were more materials in the national languages, more than 90 percent of all Burkinabè cannot read or write in any language.

This high illiteracy rate makes it more difficult (but not impossible) to draw peasants and other working people into active leadership roles in the CDRs. There is also a great unevenness in the level of participation in the CDRs' regular activities, such as the general assemblies and the communal labor projects.

The CDRs continue to face political opposition as well. This comes from supporters of the dissolved bourgeois parties and members of the traditional tribal structures who are resentful of their loss of privileges and authority.

The March 15 weekly *Carrefour Africain* ran a report on the activities of the CDRs in the department of Yaba, some 150 kilometers northwest of the capital. In some villages in the department, youth groups and other rural organizations established by the previous gov-



ernments are refusing to collaborate with the CDRs or to make their funds available for development projects.

In a few cases, CDR members have abused the authority of the CDRs to extort money from villagers or to settle personal scores. Whenever such cases have come to light, those responsible have been quickly punished.

Despite these numerous difficulties, the CDRs have already scored significant accomplishments.

Through the CDRs, many thousands of Burkinabè have learned how to use arms. People's Vigilance Brigades (the local militia units) have been set up in villages, workplaces,

schools, and urban neighborhoods throughout the country.

CDR activists play key roles in the management of state-run enterprises. They help distribute food and other consumer goods in the villages through the state distribution agency, Faso Yaar. They have helped improve conditions in the countryside through the construction of hundreds of new dams, schools, grain stores, roads, wells, health clinics, meeting halls, and other facilities.

On the national level, two projects in particular would not have been possible without the massive participation of volunteers organized by the CDRs. In the Sourou Valley, a major irrigation canal was built within a few

months thanks to hundreds of CDR activists who provided the labor and transported the stones, sand, and gravel needed to build the dam. On February 1, the "Battle of the Rail" was formally launched to build a new railway from Ouagadougou to Tambao, in the far north. Although initially only 150 people were needed to work on it each day, from 800 to 1,000 volunteered.

Above all, the CDRs have begun to draw Burkina's laboring masses into organized political life. Despite the CDRs' weaknesses and difficulties, they provide the peasants and other working people with a weapon in their struggle to advance their interests and to throw off the yoke of imperialist domination. □

The role of Burkina's defense committees

Interview with CDR National Secretary-General Pierre Ouédraogo

[The following is an interview with Capt. Pierre Ouédraogo, the national secretary-general of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs). It was obtained by Ernest Harsch on March 15 in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina. Originally given in French, the interview has been translated by *Intercontinental Press*.]

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Question. I'll start with a very general question. What is the basic role and function of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution in the revolutionary process here? In what areas of work are they the most active?

Answer. The CDRs are the spearheads of the revolution. They are the pillars on which the revolution supports itself today.

In the absence of a vanguard party that could have channelled the energies of the popular masses, utilized their revolutionary enthusiasm to build a new kind of society, it was necessary to call on the masses to organize themselves into Committees for the Defense of the Revolution. They are active in four basic areas.

On the political level, the CDRs carry out propaganda. They explain the revolution's aims and bring some understanding to those who have been misled by the propaganda of the reactionary regimes, so that they realize their own interests and become conscious of their oppression, and thus rally massively to the revolution. They also carry out propaganda among those who have already rallied to the revolution on a subjective basis, to now do so on an objective basis, so that they will understand the strategic objectives of the revolution and that the revolution is made by and for them.

Secondly, in the socioeconomic sphere, we have put forward the concept of relying on our own forces. Today, it's the CDRs everywhere, in the villages or the cities, that are concretely applying this concept.



Ernest Harsch/IP

PIERRE OUÉDRAOGO

The successful achievement of the People's Development Program (PPD), which is an intermediate, 15-month economic program that will allow us to draw up the first five-year plan beginning in 1986, is being carried out in actuality by the CDRs.

Within the framework of their CDRs, the popular masses throughout Burkina are carrying out the goals that they themselves have identified as priorities within the PPD, goals that have been discussed at the grassroots, in the villages.

In order to build a school, for example, they themselves determine the construction costs and their participation: the assessment they levy, the number of bricks and bricklayers, etc. Once that happens, the state participates by sending technicians or certain materials that

are not available locally.

Thus in the socioeconomic arena, there is a new dynamism, a dynamism that might surprise people. Before, under the neocolonial regimes, you saw people with folded arms. The state was supposed to do everything. There was total resignation. The people were in despair, seeing how the bourgeoisie enriched itself more and more.

But today the revolution has come, and these people, who seemed to be asleep, have awakened and are themselves taking everything in hand. Development is no longer something that solely concerns the regime in power. It's the concern of every revolutionary, of every member of the popular masses.

We think that this is extremely important, especially since the revolution aims to transform the material conditions above all. The growth of the productive forces is what will make possible a genuine, substantial, and visible improvement in the living conditions of the masses.

In the area of culture and sports, a renaissance is also taking place. Every year, there is now a National Cultural Week in which all regions participate. This makes possible a real renaissance of culture.

Our culture had been practically buried under colonialism, which wanted us to believe that all our traditions were barbaric and that we had to give them up in order to copy what was happening in the West. The result was deculturation, eradication of our cultural roots.

That's why in every CDR bureau someone is in charge of cultural and sports activities. Little by little, they're reviving.

Finally, there's the military sphere, the CDRs' military tasks. We say that a conscious people must take responsibility for its own defense. A conscious people cannot turn over its defense to a small group of men, one that will someday inevitably monopolize power. So within this framework the call was made for generalized military training. In every CDR,



Ernest Harsch/IP

Headquarters of one of Ougadougou's local Committees for the Defense of the Revolution.

therefore, militants are training regularly in military camps. As a result, today in Burkina Faso we have hundreds of thousands of people who know how to use arms.

By giving our units adequate military training, they can draw from their high level of consciousness the strength needed to stand up to all the difficulties they may face in the future. Someone who is militarily well trained but lacks conviction will disappear as soon as things aren't going well or heat up a little. On the other hand, those who have conviction will

Development is the concern of every revolutionary . . .

not give up their position, even if things are not going well.

This strength is intended solely to first of all dissuade any imperialist attack on our country, or, if that doesn't work, to annihilate the enemy forces that try to install themselves here. And if they do succeed in installing themselves, to turn the country into another Vietnam for them. Once you have a situation where many people know how to use arms and where the masses no longer accept the installation of invading troops, the invaders will face constant insecurity, even if they stay 10 or 15 years. They will thus have to leave some day. This is the spirit we're training our militants in.

Our aim is not aggression against neighboring countries or to place our forces at the disposal of some country for aggression against

others. We think that those who say this do so only to slander the revolution, to prepare international public opinion for future actions that they are contemplating against Burkina Faso, as was the case with Grenada.

Q. In the work that the CDRs do today, how much of the initiative comes from the national leadership and how much comes from below, from the CDRs themselves?

A. This question is extremely important, because it's often said that the CNR [National Council of the Revolution] dictates everything to the CDRs, that the CDRs have no autonomy. That's false.

The CDRs must of course function within the framework of the Discourse on Political Orientation, which they have accepted and adopted as their guide to action. And obviously certain decisions can only be taken by the leadership. No one questions that, since a revolution without political leadership in practice amounts to political anarchy. But this leadership must be very close to the masses and among the masses, so that all its decisions conform to the will of the rank and file.

But I can assure you that a lot of proposals come from the ranks. For example, in order to name managers and other officials, the proposals of the CDRs are asked for. These proposals are then examined by the Council of Ministers and adopted if the people nominated are competent and qualified.

In the villages, the administrative power that was in the hands of the traditional chiefs has

passed into the hands of the CDRs, acting through the intermediary of their bureaus, which implement the plans of action drawn up by the general assemblies.

We have now completed the elections in the local CDRs, based on geographic regions, and they are in the process of setting up District Coordination Bureaus and of nominating mayors.

So the ranks have real powers. But this can only be a gradual process, because it would not be right to say that all power belongs to the

A conscious people must take responsibility for its own defense . . .

people right away. That would even be irresponsible on our part, considering that we know that there is no vanguard party capable of giving leadership and merging with the masses, capable of showing the way whenever and wherever it must.

It would therefore be extremely dangerous to give all the power to the masses right away, when some of them do not even understand what the revolution was. They simply had had enough of the neocolonial regimes and wanted a change, a new society. But they don't really know what this new society is, how to get to it, even the tactics of the political struggle. However, they are ready to do everything just on the basis of their good faith.

The aim of the revolution isn't simply to destroy, but also to transform people and their outlooks, to allow people to free their creative geniuses, to free popular initiative in order to free Burkina Faso, to lay down the material foundations on which the new society will be built, a society of tomorrow where the exploitation of man by man and all other forms of domination will be eliminated.

Q. What has been the impact of the CDRs in the countryside, in the villages. How do they function there? The government has abolished the privileges of the traditional chiefs; how do the CDRs implement that?

A. In the villages there have been problems applying this measure, because there are people who never thought that it was possible to get rid of the chief who was oppressing them and to put something else in his place. So there was a moment of surprise that created some hesitation.

So we are trying to raise the population's level of consciousness. This is done centrally, using the radio, in the national languages, to explain to the people about the revolution and the role of the CDRs in the villages. People listen to these broadcasts regularly.

In the villages themselves, the CDRs must make sure that general assemblies are held regularly to discuss all the questions that concern the village. For instance, if a trader charges illegal prices, measures must be taken, and if necessary the license to trade must be taken

away from him and given to another trader who will serve the people.

The nurse who doesn't care for the sick but passes his time sleeping or going to bars to get drunk because he's far from the control of the central administration, the teacher who's absent without permission and leaves his pupils all alone — the CDR has the duty to look into all these things. So in the villages, the CDRs exercise power over all these people. No one is free any longer to do as they please. What the masses want is what is done.

If someone needs land to cultivate, and there is some opposition, the question is taken before the general assembly. We stress in particular that all the problems that come up in the villages should be clarified in the general assemblies, so that the CDR bureaus avoid becoming new feudal chiefdoms.

Q. In the workplaces and enterprises, what is the relationship between the CDRs and the management personnel?

A. In the trades and factories, the managers must work closely with the CDRs, which are there to urge the workers to do more to benefit the popular masses. So if the manager or the officials are won to the cause of the revolution, there should be no contradiction between them and the CDRs.

In fact, the manager will have greater control. Although he may have some good ideas about how to improve the enterprise, he can't be everywhere and behind every worker. The CDR militants, however, are in every job. If they are convinced about and accept the guidelines, then a decision taken at the top will be implemented to the fullest extent from below. So we think the presence of the CDRs in the trades or factories is an additional advantage management has to achieve the objectives assigned to them by the National Council of the Revolution.

It goes without saying that if the manager is serving the counterrevolution, if he doesn't support the revolutionary process, he will be exposed and fought by the CDR.

I should also point out that the CDRs are now participating in the management councils. At least 25 percent of the members of a management council are from the CDR and 25 percent from the unions. In a workplace where there is no union, the CDRs constitute half of the council.

From top to bottom, the CDRs participate in the management of the revolution. This is a gauge of the success in revolutionizing all the enterprises and trades.

Q. There have been some conflicts between the CDRs and some of the old trade union leaderships, which seem to see the CDRs as a challenge to their position. What's the basis of this conflict?

A. There are some unions that have always fought against the coming of the revolution to Burkina Faso. We can't expect them to look favorably on the presence of the CDRs in the

workplaces. That's asking too much of them.

This created problems before, but not now. Why? Because these unions can no longer mobilize anyone. When they convene a general assembly, hardly anyone comes. And when people do come, they can't convince them to go against the revolution, because their own members are also activists in the revolutionary bodies.

The 1985 budget reduced the privileges of those who were the best paid (but not those at the bottom) in order to allow the state to overcome the budget deficit and to concretely intervene to benefit the disinherited masses, the peasants, whom no one was ever concerned

The aim of the revolution is to transform people and their outlooks . . .

about before. These reactionary unions tried to rouse the people in revolt against the budget. But why didn't they go on strike? Because they knew that if they struck they would only have a few people with them and not the masses.

Q. To what extent are women actively involved in the CDRs?

A. In the 7,000 geographic CDR bureaus, there must be at least two women in each one. The number two person must be a woman.

That's because we noticed that at first women didn't attain these posts because they didn't put themselves forward at the meetings. The men, who already had a long tradition of political struggle, were the most numerous in the general assemblies, and the women didn't end up running. So we insist that a woman be the deputy leader of a CDR, and another be in charge of the mobilization of women.

Now, since the reelection of the CDR bureaus, there are some sectors where the top leaders are women. But those are still exceptional cases.

We think that now the strongest support, the most certain support is found among women, and we hope to finish setting up their organization next year. As the most oppressed social layer, suffering from the dual oppression of imperialism and of centuries-old traditions, women will be the most formidable revolutionary force, the one that national and international reaction will have to fear once they are organized.

All these women have understood that only the revolution can solve their problems and that the bourgeois regimes only deceived them with decrees that didn't help them at all. Officially, forced marriage was abolished here in 1940, under colonial rule. And yet it still continues.

But if all women become conscious, if they know that any woman who is forced into marriage can refuse and that the revolution can create the conditions that will allow each woman to find a job and be economically independent, then forced marriage will disappear

by itself. The objective conditions must be changed.

In the history of Burkina Faso, women participated actively in the struggle against colonialism. We think that women today can do more because they are living in a revolutionary context.

We also explain to them that women's liberation doesn't mean struggling against men, but against a system in which the man himself is a victim. The man who beats his wife isn't a happy man, unless he's a sadist. A man who insists on finding his happiness through his domination of a woman is deformed, an invalid of neocolonial society who must be cured of this spirit of domination. The task of the revolution will be to go to the bottom and destroy all these ideas.

Q. A little while ago, some representatives of the Cuban CDRs visited here and had discussions with you. Has there been any direct influence from the example and experience of the Cuban CDRs? Do you see any similarities?

A. Personally, I've read many works on Cuba and on Che Guevara. But we say here that the CDRs have been imposed by necessity. There was no vanguard party, so a mass organization to support the revolution was necessary. What was its task? To defend the revolution. That's why we called them the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution. So the similarity in names is just a coincidence.

For example, I had discussions with some Cuban comrades, some Cuban CDR members who came here. In Cuba, there are no CDRs in the trades or in the military units, while here we have them everywhere. So they're not totally identical.

They're not exactly the same because the historical context and the people are different, so the tasks of these organizations are necessarily different as well. It goes without saying that the strategic aims can be the same, because the aim is to build a new society where the exploitation of man by man is eliminated and where every member of society is guaranteed a minimum well-being.

We can achieve the same result even if we don't follow the same road. Obviously, if errors were committed in Cuba, we can always see what difficulties they encountered, analyze them concretely, and see what we can learn from them, what can be useful to us.

Our understanding of the revolution is that the revolution came to Burkina Faso not because there were revolutionaries who wanted to make a revolution, but rather because it was a response to a historical necessity. The revolution follows certain scientific laws.

The revolution is the work of the popular masses, and not of a group of individuals. □

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Independence struggle seeks support

Interview with Fretilin's United Nations representative

By Neil Jarden

[The following article and interview are reprinted from the April 12 issue of *Socialist Action*, a fortnightly newspaper published in Auckland, New Zealand, that reflects the views of the Socialist Action League, New Zealand section of the Fourth International.]

* * *

Jose Ramos Horta, the United Nations representative of Fretilin (Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor), visited New Zealand in late March. *Socialist Action* interviewed him the day before he sought to arrange an interview with the Minister of Foreign Affairs [and Prime Minister] (David Lange). Lange (and Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Frank O'Flynn) refused to meet Horta, in a move which reflects the government's hostility towards Timor's struggle for independence.

On this occasion Horta had been invited to New Zealand by Corso [an independent agency that organizes aid for the South Pacific] and the National Council of Churches. This was the first visit he had made here since the 1975 Indonesian invasion of East Timor which overthrew the Fretilin government that had just come to power.

In 1976, the [Robert] Muldoon [National Party] government refused Horta a visa to come to New Zealand, but later offered him one provided he did not talk about East Timor.

Last September's Labour Party conference adopted remits recognising Fretilin as the representative of the East Timorese people, and calling for an end to New Zealand military aid for Indonesia. Part of the motion adopted read:

"That on becoming the government the Labour Party support United Nations resolutions calling for the people of East Timor to be given the right of self-determination free from coercion from any foreign power, and that while oppression and slaughter of East Timorese by Indonesian forces continues, New Zealand aid to Indonesia in the form of training Indonesian pilots and any form of military co-operation be suspended."

In contrast to this, Frank O'Flynn has stated (*New Outlook*, Nov.-Dec. 1984) that he does not think the "nine-year-old corpse of East Timor can be revived," and that the Indonesians "would be absolutely furious if we suddenly began to say, nine years after the event, what we could and should have said in 1975."

Similarly David Lange said on March 28 that while he did not condone the methods used by the Indonesians to incorporate East Timor into Indonesia, "there is no point in pretending that the process could be reversed." Lange echoed the views of New Zealand's ambas-



sador to Indonesia, who after visiting Timor in mid-1983 declared that "90 percent of the Timorese are better off under the Indonesians than they were under [former colonial rulers] the Portuguese."

Socialist Action spoke to Jose Ramos Horta in Auckland.

* * *

Question. What is the official Indonesian position on Timor today?

Answer. That everything is settled; that East Timor is the 27th province of Indonesia; that it is an internal affair; that there is some sporadic fighting but it is only a "nuisance."

But, for example, in [Indonesian armed forces chief] Benny Murdani's interview with the Reuters press agency last December, he himself admitted that there are up to 700 Fretilin guerrillas. This is quite a change because for years they said there were only 50 to 100 in Fretilin. And of course he would still be minimising the figure, by 50 percent or more.

Indonesia maintains 20 battalions of troops in East Timor, with an average strength of 750 men each. They occupy all the towns in the country.

In the capital, Dili [which has 30-40,000 people], they don't occupy the central city but are camped in the area just outside the town. This is why when foreigners such as that idiot New Zealand ambassador from Jakarta visit the city briefly they can say they see little evidence of troops. Meanwhile, journalists and other foreigners are simply not allowed to visit the countryside in East Timor.

There are three liberated areas in the country; in the Eastern sector, in the Central Highlands, and near the border region. There we have an active administration going on, with schools, literacy programmes, agricultural co-operatives, and military training. We also have health facilities, but they are very poor, using largely traditional medicine.

The very fact that Indonesia maintains 20,000 troops in East Timor, plus its planes and helicopters, dismisses what the New Zea-

land ambassador says.

In his interview Murdani admitted that they carry out bombing. There are eight or nine combat helicopters based in Dili alone, on active service every day.

In the second largest town, Baucau, where there is an international airport, that airport has been closed to civilian planes. There are six planes based there, flying missions every day.

Q. What can working people in New Zealand do to support the people of East Timor?

A. One thing people here could do is to get the aid agencies to help. Why not send a mercy ship to East Timor?

If in fact the situation is so stable, why doesn't the Indonesian government allow the aid agencies to go there to distribute aid freely to the people? Since 1975 not a single aid organization has been allowed to freely go to East Timor, other than the Indonesian Red Cross which is no more than a military intelligence organisation. The International Red Cross has only been allowed in on brief occasions, and only to visit certain prisons.

Only one church aid organisation is allowed to operate in East Timor: the U.S. Catholic Relief Services, which is very much a political body, funded by the U.S. State Department. And they don't actually have a permanent presence in East Timor, but work through the Indonesian government.

Therefore we think the New Zealand prime minister should say that he wants to help the East Timor people, working through Corso, and the Timorese Catholic church. And if Indonesia says "No" to that, we would like to see what the New Zealand prime minister would do then.

Racism is one element in the aggression by Indonesia against East Timor. To give an example, the Indonesian Foreign Minister himself recently made a statement that "West Irian [West Papua] is like a human zoo." That's the typical racial superiority attitude fostered amongst Javanese towards the Melanesian groups. They regard West Papuans and East Timorese as of inferior race.

Their strategy is to liquidate the indigenous peoples; you can't understand the massive killings in East Timor and West Papua any other way. Thousands upon thousands have been murdered, and on top of that you have the "transmigration" policies, under which hundreds of thousands of Javanese have been sent from Java to West Papua. They are beginning to do the same in East Timor, which has been declared a transmigration zone, although because of the military situation not many have

arrived there yet.

This is what is so outrageous and disturbing when the New Zealand prime minister says that the situation is improving.

There are just over 500,000 East Timorese today, compared with 700,000 before the Indonesian invasion. Most of the 200,000 were killed from 1976 to 1981, about half from military massacres and bombings, the rest from starvation. Many families were destroyed completely, and dozens of villages were wiped off the map.

Before 1975, although East Timor was poor and neglected by the Portuguese, there was never any serious starvation. The terrain is so fertile that more than 90 percent of the people live in the hills and cultivate their own land. Only the capital used to import food to feed the Portuguese officials and community.

But today it is a land of starvation.

About 15,000 refugees fled from East Timor, most of them have gone to Australia. They had to bribe their way out; it is 360 miles from East Timor to Darwin [Australia] by sea, and people could not escape by boat.

The New Zealand and Australian news media deliberately downplay East Timor. If Indonesia had a Marxist regime that invaded East Timor, they would be all over the place making a fuss about it!

Q. Who are Indonesia's main backers internationally?

A. The United States is the main supplier of weaponry to Indonesia. Eighty percent of what they are using in East Timor, where most of their active armed forces are involved, is American-supplied. This includes planes, helicopters, and napalm, which has been used against civilians on a number of occasions.

France is also a major weapons supplier, particularly of the Alouette and Puma helicopters. The Alouette is also used by the South African army, by the way.

Israel also supplies arms to Indonesia (although it is the largest Moslem country in the world). General Murdani has made public statements about how he is a great admirer of Israel. They have Israeli aircraft, and Fretilin has captured a lot of Israeli Uzi machine guns in East Timor.

Unfortunately most of the Arab countries support Indonesia on the issue of East Timor. Especially Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt, which also happen to be the countries supporting South Africa in its efforts to destabilise Angola and Mozambique.

The new government of Iran supports us (for example in the United Nations), in contrast to the Shah of Iran's policy.

Sections of the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organisation] support us also; I would mention George Habash in particular. But Yasser Arafat does not support our struggle.

The Indonesian regime makes appeals to "Islamic solidarity" against us, but it is not at all a religious struggle. The majority of East Timorese are Catholics, but so are most of the leaders of the Indonesian military, including

Benny Murdani himself.

Fretilin is recognised by a number of African and Latin American countries, and also by Portugal and Vanuatu.

Q. Has there been any change in New Zealand's stance since the Labour government was elected?

A. The bureaucrats in Foreign Affairs here constitute a powerful pro-Indonesia lobby. The previous government voted against every resolution supporting East Timor in the United Nations since 1977. New Zealand's record on East Timor in the UN has been a disgrace.

There have been no UN votes on East Timor since the new government came in here, but the issue was considered at the UN Human Rights Commission recently in Geneva. At the time Prime Minister Lange made statements on the East Timor issue which were quite negative, and destructive as far as we were concerned. His statements contributed to the defeat of the motion on East Timor in the Human Rights Commission at Geneva, in view of Mr.

10 AND 20 YEARS AGO



May 12, 1975

Three and a half hours after the last American marines were lifted from the roof of the U.S. embassy in Saigon by helicopter April 30, the liberation forces marched into the city in triumph.

They were greeted by cheers and applause from the populace. Western correspondents in Saigon reported an overwhelming feeling of relief there that the long struggle was over. The first of the liberation forces to enter the center of Saigon was a jeepload of barefoot teenagers. Soon others were parading through the streets on tanks and captured American jeeps, cheering and waving flags. Laughing soldiers riding the tanks shouted "Hello, comrades" to bystanders and reporters.

As an unarmed member of Thieu's forces struggled to open the gates of the presidential palace, one tank, disregarding his efforts, simply smashed through one of the supporting pillars. At 12:15 p.m. the flag of the National Liberation Front was raised over the palace.

The Provisional Revolutionary Government announced that Saigon would be renamed Ho Chi Minh City in honor of the "father of the Vietnamese nation." . . .

On the day Saigon was liberated, representatives of the PRG in Paris issued a statement hailing it as "a victory of historic significance." The statement said the new government would follow a foreign policy of "peace and nonalignment," and gave assurances that the lives and property of foreigners would be protected.

Lange's sudden pre-eminence in view of the nuclear controversy.* His statements are widely read and taken seriously.

He said that there is some evidence of a growing confidence among East Timorese that the Indonesian government is going to deliver what they promised. But the result of what they promised is that 200,000 East Timorese have died!

He said that the human rights situation is being dealt with by court processes. This is quite misleading as there have been no such court processes. The only court proceedings that have taken place are military hearings. To talk about "court proceedings" in Indonesia is like talking about court proceedings in South Africa or Chile.

The New Zealand Labour Party adopted a reasonable resolution at its conference late last year, but apparently the government has decided not to implement it. □

* A reference to the Labour government's ban on visits to New Zealand ports by U.S. nuclear-armed or -powered warships.—IP

WORLD OUTLOOK

PERSPECTIVE MONDIALE

(Predecessor of Intercontinental Press)

May 7, 1965

With his "measured escalation" of the war in Vietnam proceeding according to Pentagon blueprints, Johnson turned towards the rebellious-looking expanse of Latin America and on April 28 opened a second front in Santo Domingo. Within a few days some 19,000 Marines and paratroopers, with a fantastic amount of military equipment had occupied the tiny country.

Johnson's first excuse for ordering American troops to occupy the Dominican Republic was the hoary one of "protecting American lives and property." This was not believed by anyone anywhere since not a single American civilian had been killed or even wounded and no one had threatened to expropriate any of Wall Street's sacred holdings on the island.

On May 2, Johnson hastily switched his public excuse. He said he had sent the Marines and paratroopers to "prevent another Communist state in this hemisphere."

In opening his second front, Johnson tore up a solemn international agreement as casually as either Hitler or the Kaiser before him. Article 15 of the Charter of the Organization of American States reads specifically: "No state or group of states has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other state."

The real reason for Johnson's move was no secret. The May 3 *New York Times* summarized it in a single brief front-page headline: "U.S. Steps Were Inspired by Fear of Another Cuba."

Workers win strike in Isfahan

Defeat government plan to lay off 15,000 in steel plant

By Ali Sahand

Fifteen thousand construction workers at the big steel plant in Isfahan went on strike a few months ago. They succeeded in stopping a government plan to lay them off. To understand how the events unfolded and the reasons for this victory, it is necessary to first look at the context in which the fight took place.

Working-class center

Isfahan, with a population of about 1.3 million, is the only Iranian city where a solid majority of the population is working-class.

The Isfahan steel plant, employing 40,000 workers, is one of the most important in Iran. The oil refinery in the city is also one of the most important in the country, especially since the refinery further south was bombed and partly destroyed by the imperialist-inspired Iraqi war.

Tens of thousands of Isfahan residents work in textile plants. The textile workers are predominantly women, young, and have a very low standard of living. Under the shah's regime they were brutally suppressed. Many of the women remember their noses bleeding from beatings they received if they had not produced enough by the end of the day.

With this kind of experience, it is no wonder that Isfahan is known as the "City of Martyrs." The working people of the city were in the forefront of the revolution that overthrew the shah in 1979, and they have also played a very important role in defending Iran from the imperialist-backed Iraqi invasion that began in 1980. Isfahan has provided the largest contingents for the *basesej*, the volunteer military corps in the war, and for the Revolutionary Guards, who make up many of the troops.

Along with workers in Tehran, Isfahan workers were the most active in the 1982 protests against the draft labor law proposed by then-Labor Minister Ahmad Tavakoli.

There are close links between the peasantry around Isfahan and the city's workers. The biggest land seizures by peasants since the 1979 revolution have taken place in this region.

Isfahan has been a stronghold of the radical wing of the government. This wing did not run on a joint ticket with the ruling Islamic Republican Party in the 1984 elections. The election results of the city were nullified.

Background to strike

About three years ago, the management of the Isfahan steel plant, which is government-owned, decided to lay off 25 percent of the factory's 20,000 construction workers. The government and the plant management offered to

set up a cooperative for the laid-off workers in which they would work for themselves. The workers were given about 500,000 rials [U.S.\$1,000] each.

The construction workers opposed the move but were unsuccessful in blocking the layoff of 5,000. The reasons they lost the fight were:

- The layoff did not affect all construction workers, thus promoting division among them.
- The production workers in the plant did not support the fight against layoffs.
- The Islamic Association¹ in the plant backed the government layoff plan. Islamic Associations in other factories also supported the government and slandered the construction workers as "U.S. agents" when they threatened to strike.

• Management argued that in a time of war, any kind of labor opposition is treason.

So the laid-off workers were isolated and defeated. No cooperative was formed, and no other jobs were provided to them.

1984 layoff plan

The layoff question came up again in November 1984. The steel plant management, with the support of the government, announced that "another cooperative" was going to be organized and 15,000 of the construction workers would have to join it.

In the intervening three years, many of the steel plant construction workers had been put to work on other types of state-owned construction in Isfahan, as well as rebuilding cities hit by the war. Many had served in factory units of the *basesej*, and dozens had been killed, as had their sons, fighting the Iraqi occupation. Thus the construction workers felt they were doing their share to rebuild the country.

So when management announced another cooperative, the 15,000 construction workers affected by the plan rejected it, calling it a cover-up for laying them off. They immediately put down their tools and went out on strike.

The striking workers made two demands: that their contract at the steel plant be changed from a temporary contract to a permanent one with the state, and that their medical insurance, which provided partial coverage, be expanded to full coverage.

Full medical coverage was a demand of the plant's production workers as well, although they had not raised it independently. So they were sympathetic with the strike.

1. Islamic Associations have been set up in many workplaces by the government, in an effort to replace the *shoras* (elected factory committees) that arose during the 1979 revolution. — IP

The construction workers elected a 12-member strike steering committee. One of the members was a woman, and all 12 had long records of fighting against the shah and in defense of the revolution.

Sympathy for the strike was widespread in the city. This time, because of strong sentiment from the production workers, the steel plant's Islamic Association put out a statement supporting the strikers. Unlike the struggle three years earlier, workers in other plants did not oppose the strike but rather supported it. Although no organized solidarity action was seen in other plants, workers were not afraid to show their sympathy.

Troops sent against strikers

The strikers met with the plant manager, who basically said he took his orders from the state, and that they would have to join a cooperative. The meeting turned into a demonstration, with the workers demanding that government authorities meet with them.

The local government responded by ordering troops from the regular army at a nearby fort to occupy the plant. When they did so, strikers explained their demands to the soldiers, gaining their sympathy.

The governor of Isfahan came to the plant and threatened that if the strikers did not go back to work, the "*hezbollah* masses"² would be asked to crush them.

The 12 members of the strike steering committee were arrested in the middle of the night and beaten up very brutally by a special unit of the Revolutionary Guards. They were released after two days' detention.

Faced with these attacks, the workers took the following actions to defend themselves:

• They occupied the highway to the plant so that no one could pass without the permission of the strikers.

• The strikers asked the production workers not to strike until they were asked. The production workers responded that if a single bullet were fired they would strike immediately.

• Women workers in the plant organized a march and joined the strikers, who welcomed them enthusiastically.

• Those strikers whose family members had been killed in the war met with the governor to

2. *Hezbollah* means "party of God." Since the 1979 revolution, "*hezbollah*" demonstrations have been organized by supporters of the government to harass or physically attack Iranians protesting some aspect of official policy. Those mobilized for "*hezbollah*" actions are usually unemployed youth or semi-proletarians, many of whom support the revolution. — IP

explain their demands. The meeting was broadcast on local television.

The governor said the workers would be rehired under permanent contracts, but again he asked the "hezbollah masses" to back him in stopping the strike if necessary.

The next day, many Islamic Associations of workers put out statements saying, "We give the governor our full support in rehiring the striking workers." These statements were also announced on local television.

- Truck drivers bringing coal from the city of Kerman told the strikers that the miners who produce coal for the steel plant were decreasing production and threatening to strike too.

There was one exception to this solidarity — high school and university Islamic Associations condemned the strikers.

On December 7, Ayatollah Taheri, the leader of Friday prayers in Isfahan, gave a speech. Taheri had been in Tehran when the strike broke out. He said that Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had asked him to return to Isfahan and "solve the problem."

Taheri said he told Khomeini there were two ways to do this: fire all the striking workers or accept their demands. Taheri said the first solution was "not Islamic" and the second would cost the government too much money.

Taheri also charged that some "suspicious hands" — meaning counterrevolutionaries — were behind the strike and that imperialist radio stations claimed the strike was the beginning of the formation of a new government that would be led by the Fedayeen, a centrist organization that is split into three factions.

Taheri asked the strikers to immediately return to work so that those in their ranks who were "conspiring" against the government and the revolution could be isolated and recognized.

The strikers responded that they simply wanted to get their jobs back and reiterated their other demands. They said they would return to work if they got a written statement explaining that they were not laid off.

The governor drafted such a statement, stating that the workers were employees of the

steel plant, and the strike was ended.

News blacked out

The news of this important battle was not heard by workers in other cities as long as the strike remained unsettled. The national radio, television, and newspapers never carried a word about the dispute. Nor did proimperialist radio stations broadcasting from outside Iran. They all helped the government efforts to isolate the strikers and black out the news. They had no interest in spreading the news for fear labor solidarity would spread nationally.

Some left organizations who later on did spread the news distorted it, saying that the members of the strike steering committee were executed and picturing the event as a brutally suppressed defeat. This may have added some flavor to their spicy "the revolution is dead" dish, but it certainly did not encourage other workers nationally.

Once again the workers showed that they can fight the imperialists and, if they feel the necessity, defend their own rights. □

Mexico

Washington launches racist campaign

Death of U.S. drug agent used as pretext

By Leslie Serna

[The following article is taken from the March 25–31 issue of *Bandera Socialista*, weekly newspaper of the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), Mexican section of the Fourth International. The translation is by *Intercontinental Press*.]

* * *

TIJUANA, Baja California — The kidnapping of U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agent Enrique Camarena Salazar, which took place February 7 in Guadalajara, and the subsequent confirmation of his murder, have set the stage for the sharpening of a fierce racist campaign in the United States and for a series of attacks against our country.

The Mexican government's powerlessness to confront this has been exposed, as has the corruption and participation by police in illegal activities such as drug trafficking.

U.S. launches Operation Interception

Several days after the kidnapping, the so-called Operation Interception began, which involved minutely inspecting automobiles and individuals crossing the border. They were supposedly trying to find clues in the Camarena case. But it was obvious that this measure was aimed at applying pressure and was coercion.

Operation Interception, which lasted about one week and still has not been completely terminated, was a clear attack against our people,

particularly affecting the thousands who live along the border.

Commercial activities were severely harmed according to the statements of the chambers of commerce themselves. Above all, the measure affected the thousands of workers who cross the border each day to work in the United States. According to a March 20 report in the daily *Uno más Uno*, the Ciudad Juárez Chamber of Commerce reports losses of more than \$2 million per week and points to a 90 percent drop in tourism along the entire border area.

The measures have also affected other segments of the economy. The National Chamber of the Textile Industry and the National Union of Vegetable Producers report that their exports have dropped 25 percent and 30 percent respectively.

The *sanctions* imposed by the United States will have a grave effect on the national economy.

Further aggravating this affair is the political climate that this campaign is creating in the United States against our country.

Adding to these measures were the statements made by Francis Mullen, [then] director of the DEA, and by John Gavin, United States ambassador in Mexico, pointing to the government as protecting the Mafia and announcing that they had information regarding officials involved in the drug trade.

These official statements buttress the news media's campaign in the United States con-

cerning the corruption of the Mexican government. In the realm of political and diplomatic relations these statements become more than a simple accusation.

In addition, Gavin attacked the Mexican police as ineffective and reported that the U.S. police were intervening in the case. He stressed that it is dangerous to visit Mexico, especially Guadalajara and Puerto Vallarta.

A police problem has turned into a political problem further complicating the already tense relations between Mexico and the United States. U.S. officials have demanded economic measures to pressure the Mexican government to solve the Camarena case, thereby creating an adverse opinion of the Mexican people.

Some months before the kidnapping of Camarena, a propaganda campaign was carried out in the cities of San Ysidro and San Diego [California], supposedly alerting residents of the dangers they run if they visit Tijuana. They even went so far as to prohibit the U.S. Marines stationed at their naval base in San Diego from visiting Tijuana on grounds that it was too risky.

By their very nature these campaigns are attacks against our country. They have an impact on the flow of tourists, and worse yet, affect the consciousness of people in the United States and create a racist climate.

Immediately after the incident, billboards began to appear along the border warning that it is dangerous to come to Mexico. Other

billboards have called for a halt to the "invasion of the illegals."

The idea being spread against Mexico deepens the campaign aimed at convincing people that undocumented Mexicans take jobs from Americans.

Once this idea is planted in the minds of the American masses, especially in the border states, it makes it easier to gain support for unilateral migration laws and stepping up the activities of the Border Patrol.

The newspaper *El Día* reported in its March 1 issue that a Foundation for the Control of Undocumented was set up in the state of California. It wants to go door to door calling on residents to stop the "invasion of illegals" and to create a financial fund to help arm the Border Patrol.

On March 7, five undocumented Mexicans were brutally tortured near New Braunfels, Texas, by a new racist group called Supreme Force. Two of them have already died as a result of the tortures, and the other three are in very serious condition.

What does the Mexican government say?

But the Mexican government has not said one word about these murders or the many others that have taken place in the past.

Nor did it say anything about the terrible massacre that took place last July when an individual murdered about 20 people in a restaurant located yards from the Tijuana-San Ysidro border.

Speaking of police efficiency, on that occasion the murderer fired for more than one hour at children and adults, and various U.S. police allowed all that time to pass before stopping the massacre. The majority of the victims: Latinos, some Mexicans.

On this occasion, when the attacks have been direct, the government has been hesitant, tolerant, and even complicit. It made only a few wishy-washy statements suggesting that measures like Operation Interception were excessive and unilateral. But days later, nine more border crossings were closed by joint agreement between the two governments!

There has been not one word regarding the aggressive and overbearing statements by Gavin. Gavin has revealed that the government and its police work in conjunction with the U.S. police. He clearly stated that there are agreements between the two countries under which their police forces carry out activities here against the narcotics trade. This participation is clearly illegal, and officially the Mexican government has neither denied nor clarified what Gavin said.

If we were to count up all the Mexicans killed in the United States, there would be no comparison with what is provoking the U.S. indignation.

You would not be going out on a limb to suppose that just as U.S. police work here with the supposed aim of stopping the drug traffic, they also work on other kinds of questions that are more closely related to political activities.

In any case, the publicized activities of the



Police in Texas round up undocumented Mexican workers. Racist propaganda campaign aims to strengthen U.S. border police.

30 DEA agents who, according to Mullen, are working in the country, run absolutely counter to the constitution.

It is clear that this PRI [Institutional Revolutionary Party] government, which demagogically blasts the National Action Party (PAN) for selling out to the United States, is no better than the PAN itself and is incapable of defending the nation against imperialism's attacks.

This has become clear as the attacks on the undocumented have intensified. Instead of demanding respect for the Mexican workers who are exploited in the fields of the United States, they give concessions to the U.S.-owned assembly plants [along the border] and help the U.S. immigration service catch Central Americans and South Americans who reach the northern part of our country intending to cross the border. A sad role for the government and its police.

Police corruption and complicity

From early on, the individuals detained as possibly responsible for the kidnapping and murder of Camarena have been people from the police, the Federal Security Directorate, the Federal Judicial Police, and the Judiciary of the state of Jalisco. One of the first people detained was Tomás Morlett, former commander of the Federal Security Directorate, who had even been in charge of the security of the Shah of Iran and Henry Kissinger.

Under pressure from the statements by Gavin and Mullen, the Federal Judicial Police were obliged to acknowledge that [Rafael] Caro Quintero, one of the main narcotics traffickers and suspects, left the state of Jalisco

without any difficulty.

All of those detained had been freed for lack of evidence. Now seven judicial police officers have been indicted.

The connection between the police and the narcotics traffickers is crystal clear. But it would be naive to think that the traffickers are in bed only with low-ranking police.

No one could believe that the cultivation of marijuana involving 10,000 laborers or the tons of coca that are transported to the United States pass unnoticed by high Mexican authorities.

The police are complicit with the narcotics traffickers, who have developed their empire with police protection. These bodies are corrupt to the core. Of course, sometimes they can be victims of their own methods, as in the case of the agent who died in an interrogation.

Due to the pressure exerted by the United States, they are cutting out some minor organs, but they are not touching the head. The narcotics traffic will not stop, nor will the police protection. But in order to placate the Mafia it will mean new increases in the price of drugs.

The workers movement must respond

The only way to counteract the imperialist attacks against the nation is with a firm attitude from the workers movement and the mass movement. This does not mean "closing ranks" alongside President [Miguel] De la Madrid, or defending Mexico's reputation, meaning by this the reputation of the police forces.

The Mexican government is not responding and will not respond effectively. The response is in our hands. We Mexicans must prepare a massive response against the imperialist attacks and against the murder of Mexicans in the United States.

Some union leaders have already come out against the attacks. Various unions such as the Union of Workers at the Autonomous National University of Mexico (STUNAM) are preparing to mobilize, and groups like the democratic journalists have already done so.

It is imperative that the big union federations take a position. They should go beyond words and anti-imperialist speeches. They should forcefully demand in every possible way the expulsion of the foreign police corps that operate in the country, the immediate regularization of the border flow, bilateral negotiations of the question of the undocumented workers, a halt to the racist campaign against Mexico, an end to the persecution of the undocumented, dissolution of the anti-constitutional police corps, and a public investigation of the ties of police and officials with the Mafia. □

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French politics after March elections

Interview with Revolutionary Communist League leader Alain Krivine

[On March 10 and 17, elections were held in French cantons for representatives to provincial assemblies. The Socialist Party of President François Mitterrand received 24.25 percent of the vote, down from the 29.8 percent it won in the last cantonal elections, in 1982. In June 1984 the SP vote had reached its lowest point since 1973, attracting only 20.9 percent in the election for European parliament.

[Rightist parties received nearly 58 percent of the vote in March, with the extreme-right National Front (FN) led by Jean-Marie Le Pen accounting for 8.6 percent of the total. The FN had polled 11 percent in the European parliament elections last year.

[In the following interview, Alain Krivine, a leader of the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), French section of the Fourth International, explains the views of the LCR on these elections results. The interview appeared in the April 8 issue of *International Viewpoint*, a fortnightly review published in Paris under the auspices of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International.]

* * *

Question. Was the scale of the defeat suffered by the parties of the left in the cantonal elections expected?

Answer. There are two ballots involved in the cantonal elections.* The first ballot is perhaps more important in that half the French electorate cast a vote. In the first round all the parties of the left taken together got 42 percent of the vote. The parties of the right, including the far right, got 58 percent.

The rate of abstention was 2 percent less than in the elections to the European parliament last year. There is still a high rate of "left abstention." In some workers' areas there was an abstention rate of up to 40 percent, in the bourgeois areas it was much smaller. But even taking this into account we have to say that there has been a small shift to the right since the Euro-elections.

In both the ballots, but especially in the second ballot, you have a very small remobilization of the left, in the sense that the left got 1 percent more than in the European elections and in the second ballot 2 percent more than in the first ballot. This is due to the fear of victory for the right and especially the development of the fascist right. You have what Lionel Jospin, a leader of the Socialist Party, called a small "shudder." It was therefore not a movement

for the government, but *against* the fascist right.

Q. About the fascist right. Does Le Pen's score mark a stabilization of the vote of the National Front (FN)?

A. Before the victory of the left in 1981 Le Pen got less votes than that of the far left, Lutte Ouvrière [Workers Struggle] and the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), a very small vote in other words. Today their vote is 10 to 11 percent, the same as during the Euro-elections. Officially, Le Pen received 8 percent, but he did not put forward candidates throughout the whole country. There were 600 areas where there were no FN candidates, but where they supported the official candidates of the right. So the fact is today you have 10 percent of the French electorate voting for racist candidates.

Perhaps even more significant is that this support comes from the towns, not the country. In fact, in the country there has been a small decline in FN support. But in the big towns and in those workers' suburbs where there are a lot of immigrants and which are traditionally strong Communist areas, Le Pen got a lot of votes. For example, in both Montreuil and St. Denis on the outskirts of Paris, Le Pen got 17 percent of the vote. This is a change from the right-wing populism of the 1950s, which was called Poujadism. Poujadism was the reaction of one section of the population — shopkeepers and small business people.

But with Le Pen you have, in embryo, much of the traditional content of a fascist movement in a period of crisis. Of course, Le Pen has a traditional base of support amongst the *pieds noirs*, those who left Algeria after independence, especially in Marseille where he got 25 percent and sometimes 30 percent of the vote. And on the national level the main layers supporting him are amongst the middle classes, amongst small business people and the liberal professions.

But the new and disquieting thing is that he got small but significant support from among the popular classes, who are completely disillusioned by unemployment and the incapacity of the left to solve this burning problem.

Q. The right failed to get a majority on the first ballot without Le Pen. Does this mean they will make some kind of rapprochement with him in the lead up to the legislative elections in 1986?

A. The right on the first ballot got 49 percent without Le Pen. This heightened the debate amongst them about whether or not to

make agreements with him. Of course, the Mitterrand government used this card to make further divisions among the right, asking if they were really prepared to make alliances with fascists. After much hesitation and discussion, the main leaders decided not to make any official agreement, even if there was an unofficial agreement. At the last minute Le Pen decided to withdraw his candidates where this would prevent a victory for the left. Officially this was a unilateral move by Le Pen, but there were many local leaders of the right who did come to some agreement with the FN.

It is interesting to note that all those who voted for the FN on the first round voted for the official right-wing candidates on the second round. But in the areas where Le Pen retained his candidates the supporters of the right-wing party either abstained or cast their votes for the SP candidates, which is an indication that the majority of people who voted for the right wing are not willing to vote for fascist candidates.

Q. So how are the right forming themselves up for the 1986 legislative elections?

A. There are three main figures who are fighting for the leadership of the right wing as a whole, Jacques Chirac, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, and Raymond Barre. This shows that even if the right has a majority electorally in France today there are big divisions concerning tactics and strategy toward the left.

Their really major problem is that they do not have an alternative economic strategy to offer to that of the government. Chirac and Giscard are fighting on behalf of their respective parties, the Assembly for the Republic (RPR) and the Union for French Democracy (UDF) to lead the right in the legislative elections. The other, Barre, who has his eye on the presidential elections in 1988, is playing a sort of Bonapartist game, keeping out of the official right parties.

In any event, they will try to make a common agreement for 1986, but it's not guaranteed. The major problem they will face will be the decision of Mitterrand on a proposed new electoral law. This law will introduce a small measure of proportional representation. The present system always favors the majority. Given that the left are in the minority today, they have an interest in changing it.

But the official right parties say if there is a move towards proportional representation they will make a fantastic fight. Mitterrand will then hesitate, as he hesitated over the reform of the educational system in the face of a determined right-wing offensive. Mitterrand is frightened of this type of showdown with the

* If no candidate receives an absolute majority of the vote on the first round, a second ballot is held a week later between the top two contenders. — IP

right. So he will probably introduce a law at the last minute. But it will fall short of a system completely based on proportional representation.

The LCR is in favor of a complete reform of the electoral system based on proportional representation, so we have participated in a campaign along with other forces such as the United Socialist Party (PSU), the Greens, and others to launch a national petition to demand this.

Q. The project of a "republican front" government, which would include a section of the right, has been floated by some Socialist Party leaders. What is the idea behind this?

A. For twenty years Mitterrand has had a very definite and intelligent strategy which I think we can now see clearly. After 1968 Mitterrand responded to the hope for unity and change of the population with the Common Program with the French Communist Party (PCF). That was the way he chose to reinforce and strengthen the SP which was possible only on the basis of the unity of the left organizations.

The second step was the taking of governmental power. The third step was to limit the PCF in this alliance, because obviously it was not possible for two large reformist parties to coexist within such an alliance. The more credible of the two parties was the SP. The final step was to move towards an alliance with a section of the bourgeoisie, what we call in France a government of the "left-center." That is Mitterrand's project today. Not only because he wants to stay in power, that's true, but that's a conjunctural problem, strategically a "left-center" government has been his aim for a long time.

His main weapon in bringing this about is to propose unity of all those who are against the National Front and the extreme right. In this way Mitterrand can avoid speaking about austerity and the real responsibility of the Socialist government for the rise of the right. So the SP is making a very big campaign on the question of Le Pen, because he is rather useful to them. That's why Le Pen is allowed to appear so much on the television. They need him to provide a motive for a "republican front" government which extends from the SP to the "republican" right-wing parties.

So far they have not succeeded with this campaign. But some significant bourgeois figures, ex-ministers like Olivier Stirn, have declared themselves ready to support such a project. But it won't happen before 1986 because the main leaders of the bourgeois parties want to pay back Mitterrand for his victory in 1981. They might respond after that on the condition that the SP gets a high score, say 30 percent. Under those conditions the SP would be useful for the bourgeoisie. If not, if the SP gets a small vote, the bourgeois parties will take the power directly for themselves.

There is also a debate within the SP on the



French right-wing leader Jean-Marie Le Pen.

role of the PCF. For some figures like the education minister, Jean Pierre Chevenement, the PCF should be included in a "republican front" government. Of course, Mitterrand is completely opposed to such a suggestion. He is joined by the press, which tries to present the question as the French people rejecting two extremes — on the one hand the extreme right of Le Pen, on the other hand the extreme left, which for them is the PCF.

Q. What is the line of the PCF following their departure from the government and the holding of their 25th congress?

A. To a certain extent we can say that the PCF lacks any line. After they left the government they began to attack the SP verbally, in practice they didn't do anything. But it's different from 1978 when there was a rupture with the Common Program. There is still a big sentiment for unity in the working class. The cantonal elections provided some proof of this. In the second round 90 percent of those who voted for the PCF voted for the Socialist candidate when that was the only left candidate. Secondly, the PCF leaders withdrew their candidates on the second ballot at the last moment to prevent victories from the right.

This is because they have no alternative. After breaking with the Union of the Left and leaving the government they developed what they call the "Rassemblement Populaire" [People's Assembly]. This is very typical of the PCF when they are in a sectarian phase. They say that they are in favor of unity, not with the SP, but with the "people." This in fact means unity with themselves.

Even this is a problem given the divisions within the party today. This party has changed its policy five times in five years, unity-rupture-

unity-rupture and so on. It's really a question of credibility. This is really a historic crisis of the Communist Party, with a fantastic debate inside the party.

Q. The far left in Europe finds itself in a complicated situation today. What is the position of the French far left? Has there been some discussion about the possibility of a Green-type development in French politics?

A. It's true that the situation today for us is very difficult. Amongst the working class there has been a climate of demoralization and passivity because they did not see any credible alternative, politically or organizationally, to the left of the left. But for some months now there has started to be a shift among trade unionists and among the youth, especially against Le Pen.

There is also a shift amongst members of the SP and the PCF. Some middle ranking leaders of the PCF, even some elected councillors, come to discuss with us. Some have even applied to join us. It's a small thing, but it's an indication of the way things are going.

In the trade unions there is a great debate. To give an example of the change which is going on, there was a Paris conference of the second-largest trade union confederation, the CFTD (French Democratic Confederation of Labor), representing some 80,000 members in the Paris region. The left got the majority. They removed the leadership of the region and elected a three-person secretariat, one of whom is a member of the LCR.

This was widely reported in the press and seen as an indication of the move to the left that exists amongst a minority in the working class, a significant minority. Given that shift to the left we have to make every effort to organize an anticapitalist united front for the elections.

Our hope is to be able to organize a coalition which includes forces ranging from the Greens over to the extreme left. We call this an "anticapitalist alternative," but we want this alternative to be very broad, to try to get an agreement on some fundamental points, not on the whole program. This would include being against austerity, against the right, against racism, against colonialism. These points would provide a common rubric for all the organizations, while each would retain its own separate identity. We would aim for this coalition to have committees at the local level and to try to present a united list in all areas in France in 1986.

This would correspond to the hope of many people today who prefer to abstain rather than vote for one of the two, three, or four lists of the far left organizations. They are ready to be remobilized within that type of united framework.

We are pushing this idea forward, having discussions with many people on a national level. On a local level there are a number of public calls initiated by ecologists, the far left, peasant leaders, and so on. The response of the

ecologists nationally to this type of appeal is complicated. They represent perhaps 5 to 6 percent electorally speaking. But you have very different sorts of ecologists, some are anticapitalists, some are nothing.

We have a Green party. They wanted to copy the German Greens, but they only have 300 members nationally. But they could get a lot of votes. They want to keep their identity, and up to now they have refused any agreement on the national level with the organized far left. But all the other tendencies locally are making a campaign to convince them that they have to make this coalition with the revolutionary left.

Locally some of them have agreed. For example in the cantonal elections we presented very few candidates, because we are conserving our forces for 1986. We stood in about 15 towns and we got a very small vote, about 1 percent. But there were some exceptions. In some areas we were able to organize the beginning of small coalitions, where very often, although the candidate was a member of the League, the coalition was larger. In these cases we sometimes got up to 5 or 6 percent and in one exceptional case 16 percent, where the local SP voted for us.

But this is some indication that when you have even the beginning of a regroupment it totally changes the type of support that you get. So that will be the main project of the LCR in the coming year to try to build the "anticapitalist left," the "anticapitalist alternative," "a left which refuses to capitulate" — the name is not important, but we have launched the idea publicly and today it's getting discussed amongst a broad layer of people.

Q. What is the place of youth in this alternative? There have been some very important mobilizations against Le Pen and racism.

A. The biggest demonstrations have been organized by the immigrant youth themselves. It was a product of their self organization supported by a lot of left and far left organizations. In many French cities today you have coalitions of all the anti-racist organizations who organize demonstrations when Le Pen comes.

But the big problem is that with all these demonstrations you have a mass of young people, but very few organized workers. So you have a separation between the organized working class, which is anti-Le Pen, but is not mobilized, and this new generation of people coming out onto the street who are not demoralized and who want to fight against racism. It's from this point of view that we can understand the success of the campaign "SOS-racism."

This campaign was initiated by some people in the SP who produced this badge "Touche pas a mon pote" (Hands off my mate). More and more people are wearing this badge. People wear it on the Metro in Paris, even some TV announcers have taken to wearing it.

Q. Has the campaign in defense of the

Kanaks in New Caledonia found an echo in this movement?

A. Yes. The meetings organized in defense of the Kanaks have probably been the most important since 1981. Not only because people are in solidarity with the fight of a small people and so on. It's also a way for a lot of people to get back into activity against the policy of the government, against Le Pen, and so on.

In this question of New Caledonia you are confronted with all the problems of French politics: the capitulation of the SP, the left language of the PCF who do nothing for the Kanaks, the role of the fascists and the right who mobilize to defend what they call French New Caledonia.

When Jean-Marie Tjibaou, the Kanak leader, came to Paris there was an enormous meeting of 5,000 people. Nobody expected such a turnout. It was an incredibly spirited and enthusiastic response. We have helped to build a national campaign with local committees in solidarity with the Kanaks which has been able to regroup part of the far left, the ecologists, some individual trade union leaders around this issue. Everybody knows we play a big role in this campaign, but nevertheless the PCF and the trade unions are forced to recognize this campaign as the authoritative one. It's the only committee recognized by the FLNKS [Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front] themselves.

We are organizing a big demonstration on April 20 on the international day of solidarity called by the FLNKS, and we hope that in all the other European countries, even if they are not as involved as us, they could organize pickets and delegations to French embassies on that day.

Q. So how would you summarize the prospects up to 1986 and beyond for the working-class struggle against austerity? Will the retreat continue or will there be a rallying against these attacks?

A. Today locally you either get no resistance at all, or when you do get resistance it

tends to be very strong and very prolonged. The trouble is, however, you have no such movement on the national scale. The struggles are totally fragmented. The more they are fragmented, the more people are demoralized, because they realize that without national organization there can be no victory.

That was one of the lessons drawn here from the miners' strike in Britain. The strike has been widely discussed, partly because the CGT (General Confederation of Labor), the largest union confederation, organized a very big campaign of propaganda and solidarity.

But the balance sheet is contradictory. On the one hand it showed that it is possible to fight, that the miners fought a tremendous battle, and that we should have such unions in France. All that was progressive. What was negative was, of course, their defeat. The balance sheet that was drawn was that, even given such an exemplary struggle, without the support of the rest of the working class, the struggle will fail.

The leader of the CGT, Henri Krasucki, has now been talking about a general strike against austerity for the last six months. Only speaking about it of course, but nevertheless it is a sign that people are beginning to understand the need for that sort of response.

But having said that, the record of the left parties has had a disastrous effect on the level of consciousness and organization of the working class, the weakening of trade unionism, the fact that more and more people are leaving the PCF and SP. The combination of that and the impact of austerity in terms of the structural division of the working class between the employed and the unemployed, with migrants, women, and so on contributes towards certain elements of disintegration of working-class consciousness.

So this results in a contradictory process; a very bad impact on the majority of the working class, but at the same time a big politicization of a significant fraction of the working class. The result is that we can organize and develop the activity of this minority on the basis of all the experiences they have had up to this point. That's our aim. □

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FMLN-FDR view of elections

Call for continuation of 'dialogue process'

[The following communiqué, addressed to the people of El Salvador, was issued by the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR) on April 3 in El Salvador.]

[In the March 31 elections to the National Assembly and the municipal councils, President José Napoleón Duarte's Christian Democratic Party (PDC) received about 54 percent of the votes cast. The PDC's two main capitalist opponents — the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA), headed by rightist death-squad leader Roberto D'Aubuisson, and the National Conciliation Party (PCN) — ran together in an electoral bloc. After the election, they called for throwing out the results, citing PDC and army fraud.

[The electoral commission rejected this demand following an announcement on April 3 by the armed forces high command urging respect for "the sovereign will expressed at the polls."

[This English-language version is from a release by the FDR Solidarity Information Office in New York City.]

* * *

The Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR) is addressing the Salvadoran people to bring the following to their attention:

After four electoral events and hundreds of speeches about the purported democratic process, our people will once again be witness to an electoral outcome where the votes of the citizens count the least.

This outcome is again being negotiated between two rightist and anti-popular blocs of power, their real difference being the strategy employed by both to defeat the forces of the people represented by our fronts.

The difference is that some want to defend their interests by waging war along with a lot of demagoguery and make-believe reforms, whereas the other faction only wants to wage war.

Within this strife there are three concrete and real forces of power. On the one hand, there are the North American interests represented by Duarte and the Christian Democrats, which is the key for the U.S. in order to continue corrupting and denationalizing the Salvadoran Army. On the other hand, there is the internal economic power wielded by the oligarchical groups represented by ARENA and the PCN. Finally, you have the Army which represents the military power now managed by the U.S. for the military ruling clique.

It's clear that the best solution is to guarantee U.S. aid to survive, continue waging the

war and lining their pockets, but taking great care not to widen the conflict between the parties because this weakens them vis-à-vis the people's forces.

Our people are asking, then, what did the voting accomplish if it was done under pressure, fear, confusion, or deception?

If the real factors of power, represented by political and economic forces, are not rebuilt or there is no dignified and sovereign opposition to the interventionist policies of the Reagan Administration, there will be no peace nor free elections in our country.

It remains clear, then, for our people the real factors (or instruments) of power are not elections or votes but by the army of the workers and the organizational and combative spirit of the popular movement represented by the FMLN/FDR. As a result, the people put all their energy and effort to strengthen and make these two sectors grow.

Now that another political ploy by the U.S. has failed, it is the proper moment for Salvadorans who love peace and justice to think (whatever their political persuasion) about the necessity of our forces to continue defeating each proposal, each plan, each political or military idea which comes out of the minds of the warmongers of Washington so that we can sit down and search for a just and reasonable solution.

Do the Armed Forces really believe that it is possible to defeat our forces in a war that spreads each day and that in a short time engulfs all the territory involved and that hits decisively all of the economic and political bases of its military apparatus?

What will be the cost of the new projects, new ideas when the current ones fail? How many more lives of soldiers and young officers will the new ideas of Washington and the new plans cost? Do the generals really believe that they will stop the people's rage triggered by hunger and unemployment that will combine with the power of our weapons, that are not carried anymore by inexperienced guerrilla fighters but experienced combatants determined to overcome or die? Do the factions advocating war and a military solution really believe that they will be able to stop a war that is starting to arrive at the gardens of the houses of the oligarchs and generals?

Within this framework we reassert:

1. Our firm conviction that the struggle for improvement in living conditions and the popular organization are true instruments of our people's struggle, and, therefore, we support and encourage the popular sectors not to be disheartened and to deepen the fair and legitimate struggle.

2. Our firm conviction to conquer a truly

popular and national political solution for which our weapons are the true guarantee for a peace with justice.

3. Because we love peace, because peace is a fair national and international demand, and because the dialogue has turned into a popular demand on the path to the negotiated political solution that has all our support and sincere will, we reaffirm the decision of taking concrete steps towards its continuity.

4. It is in this sense that officially and formally and on behalf of our Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front and the Revolutionary Democratic Front, we propose the immediate continuation of the dialogue process, holding a meeting at the highest level on April 21 in Morazan province.

It is urgent to give a response to the just pressure exerted by our people for a peace with justice. It is necessary to rescue the agreements of La Palma and Ayagualo. It is urgent to obtain agreements on the humanization of the conflict, and among them, one on the respect for the treatment and exchange of prisoners. It is necessary to organize the participation and input of all the nation's sectors in the process of dialogue.

It is necessary that we include a real Mixed Work Commission to execute both parties' proposals.

It is necessary not to invalidate the role of the intermediary who is looking for a real dialogue.

To our people, who are fairly demanding dialogue and peace with justice, we reiterate they must have full confidence that our Fronts have a sincere and honest policy of peace.

United until final victory!

Revolution or death, we shall overcome!

General Command of the FMLN and
Executive Committee of the FDR

FMLN leader contradicts press reports of his 'death'

Joaquín Villalobos, commander of the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP — component of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front [FMLN] of El Salvador) met for three hours April 13 with a delegation from the United States. A week before the meeting, the Salvadoran army boasted, as it has done before, that it had killed or seriously wounded Villalobos.

In reporting on the alleged killing, the *New York Times* referred to the comment of a "Western official" that the army's report "appeared more reliable than past assertions by the army."

Villalobos told the U.S. delegation, organized by the Commission on U.S.-Central American Relations, that a cease-fire could be negotiated if Washington ended all its aid to the Salvadoran military.

He also emphasized that he and all other leaders of the FMLN and the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR) agree on the need to resume negotiations with the Duarte regime.

APRA candidate wins election

García faces confrontation with IMF on debt

By Will Reissner

With the Peruvian economy in a staggering crisis, voters dealt the governing party a stunning setback in the April 14 presidential election. The candidate of incumbent President Fernando Belaúnde Terry's Popular Action Party polled just 6 percent of the vote, as urban workers, peasants, and middle-class voters registered their opposition to continued austerity programs.

The two leading vote-getters were Alán García Pérez of the American People's Revolutionary Alliance (APRA), who got an estimated 48 percent of the vote, and Lima mayor Alfonso Barrantes Lingán of the United Left (IU) coalition, who received about one-quarter of the votes, according to preliminary results reported in the Peruvian news media.

The United Left is a coalition of left-wing parties and individuals. It includes the Peruvian Communist Party, the Democratic People's Unity (UDP), the Revolutionary Left Union (UNIR), and other organizations. The Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), Peruvian section of the Fourth International, supported the IU campaign and had a parliamentary candidate on the IU slate in Cusco.

Although García did not win the 50 percent needed for a first-round victory, the United Left coalition conceded the election to García on April 25, thereby eliminating the need for a second round. García will take office July 28.

After visiting García following the election, Barrantes called the results "a popular triumph." He added, "the right has been erased from the scene in this country."

For decades APRA has been Peru's largest political formation. It was founded in 1930 by Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, who remained a dominant figure in Peruvian politics until his death in 1979.

Haya de la Torre organized APRA as a pan-Latin American party that combined verbal anti-imperialism and calls for land reform with a strong defense of the capitalist system. In Haya de la Torre's view, Latin America was held back by an alliance of foreign capitalists and local landlords and that alliance was preventing the development of modern capitalism in the region.

APRA's calls for controls on foreign investment and sweeping land reform made it the target of massive repression by the Peruvian ruling class and military. Haya de la Torre himself spent years in forced exile or jail and in 1962 was prevented by the military from assuming the presidency.

Although APRA long ago abandoned any pretense of being a revolutionary party, it continues to receive support from sectors of the

workers and peasants, particularly in northern Peru, because of its history of being subjected to military repression and its vague, populist calls for reforms and social justice.

Ruling class turns to APRA

The fact that APRA is the only pro-capitalist party that retains a base of support among Peru's impoverished workers and peasants has led the ruling class and the military to view the party as the only hope for establishing a viable capitalist government in the midst of the present economic crisis.

The generals, who were in power from 1968 to 1980, and capitalists hope that APRA can contain the working-class struggles that are likely to deepen as living standards continue to plunge as a result of the implementation of austerity policies demanded by the imperialist banks.

In the weeks leading up to the election, the streets of the capital were filled by repeated mass demonstrations by state employees who waged a 22-day general strike against government austerity policies.

Virtually all workers in the ministries of transportation, education, and the economy were out on strike in mid-March, as were nearly half of all postal workers, one-third of industrial workers in state enterprises, and one-quarter of state agricultural workers. Numerous demonstrations of strikers were met by police repression.

Explosive economic situation

When a new government is installed in July, it will face an explosive economic situation. Prices are rising at an annual rate of 130 percent. Unemployment and underemployment affect 65 percent of the population.

Peru's foreign debt stands at \$13.9 billion, and the country is already \$600 million in arrears just on interest payments. It would take 55 percent of Peru's foreign currency earnings just to pay the interest falling due in 1985, leaving the country unable to pay for vital imports needed to keep the economy running.

In 1984 the economy grew slightly, following a contraction of 12 percent the previous year. Per capita income has fallen to the level of 1965.

Meanwhile, southern Peru is the scene of a guerrilla struggle organized by the Stalinist Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) organization.

The most immediate and pressing problem the new government will face is the foreign debt.

During the election campaign, the United Left had proposed a five-year moratorium on debt repayment and the holding of a plebiscite to determine "the priority between paying the debt and people's survival."

APRA's Alán García offered no specific program on the debt, except to indicate that he would seek a radical revision of the terms of debt repayment.

The imperialist bankers are demanding that García work out a repayment plan with the International Monetary Fund before there can be any change in the structure and terms of the present debt.

The IMF's prescriptions usually involve enforced reductions in the living standards of working people, devaluation of the currency, a boost in exports and reduction of imports as well as sharp cuts in government spending for social services and economic development. The aim of these IMF policies is to divert maximum resources away from internal consumption and investment and toward debt repayment.

Going around IMF?

But the APRA leader has initially rejected cooperation with the IMF. García has stated he will raise tariffs to protect local industry, slow the rate of devaluation of Peru's currency, and focus resources on development of food production and agriculture rather than export industries.

Shortly after the voting, García stated, "The fact is that Latin America cannot pay and it cannot continue postponing its development."

He added, "we will try to go over the heads of the IMF and deal directly with the creditors, if this is possible."

Manuel Moreyra, an economist close to García, argued that the "rules of the game of the international financial system" are "completely unjust."

Moreyra predicted that "there are not going to be any negotiations with the IMF because the IMF has shown that it is technically incompetent and its programs do not work. If this means an interruption of international payments, it doesn't matter."

The strategy of trying to go around the IMF has already been attempted by other recently elected capitalist politicians in Latin America such as President Raúl Alfonsín of Argentina.

But the imperialist banks gave a cold shoulder to Alfonsín's argument that Argentina's internal stability requires a period of economic growth and that growth will be impossible if the banks insist on imposition of IMF-mandated austerity programs.

The bankers responded that unless Alfon-

sín's government works out an austerity plan with the IMF, no new funds will be forthcoming.

Regarding Peru, one foreign banker commented: "It's very difficult to know whether Alán García is still engaging in campaign rhetoric or whether he thinks he can succeed where Alfonsín failed."

But the banker doubted García can go over the head of the IMF, noting that "commercial banks like the security of an IMF program before rescheduling debts, particularly in the case of countries like Peru that also need new money."

Another banker, quoted in the April 22 *New York Times*, expressed confidence that García can be forced to back down, as Alfonsín did. Any strategy of economic revival, the banker argued, will require new foreign borrowing by the Peruvian government. But "the only places where it can get funds are the IMF and the banks, so it's going to have to come to terms with us sooner or later."

According to the April 16 *Washington Post*, some economists close to García have indicated that the new APRA government will try

to carry out a hybrid policy of further domestic belt-tightening combined with negotiations with the individual banks.

Manuel Moreyra acknowledges that "with the type of situation we are inheriting, standards of living are going to keep on falling in Peru for six to 18 months. We can't expect a real improvement for at least two years."

Dilemma faces all Latin America

Yet the new government will face a dilemma. With the mass of Peruvian workers and peasants already at the end of their economic ropes, further cuts in their living standards could lead to a social explosion. On the other hand, if mass pressure forces García to abandon the austerity plans, the imperialist banks might cut Peru off from any further credit.

This dilemma is by no means unique to Peru. The foreign debt of all the Latin American countries now stands at \$360 billion. Already Argentina is using 52 percent of its export earnings just to pay *interest*; Bolivia is using 57 percent of its exports, Mexico 36.5 percent, Brazil 36.5 percent, and Chile 45.5 percent.

Under these conditions, economic development becomes impossible, and any solution to the debt crisis will require joint action by all the countries of Latin America.

In a March 21 interview with the Mexico City daily *Excelsior*, which was widely publicized throughout Latin America, Cuban president Fidel Castro argued that "the economic crisis and debt will unite the Latin American countries" because a solution to those crises "is a matter of survival."

He concluded that "it is simply impossible to pay the debt. It can't be done from a practical standpoint — our economies couldn't survive it — and it could never solve the problem of development. The debt is an economic and a political impossibility."

Therefore, Castro stressed, "the Latin American debt is unpayable and should be canceled. It has been said," he added, "that failure to pay the debt would destabilize and sink the international financial system. This isn't necessarily so. I suggest that the industrialized creditor countries can and should make themselves responsible for the debts to their own banks." □

Guatemala

Government withdraws austerity plan

Protests continue against pervasive repression

By Steve Craine

Two events in mid-April underlined the dilemma facing the Guatemalan military regime of Gen. Oscar Mejía Víctores as it moves toward elections for a civilian government.

On April 12, President Mejía Víctores was forced to withdraw an austerity plan he had announced only three days earlier. The measures, supposedly designed to remedy massive unemployment, high inflation, and a mushrooming external debt, provoked widespread opposition, including from some business interests. The short-lived plan would have imposed sales taxes on nearly all goods and import tariffs as high as 50 percent.

The April 9 announcement of these new taxes was met with a wave of panic buying, protest statements from associations of capitalists, and rumors of an impending coup. At first, Mejía Víctores declared that he would not give in to this opposition. If the currency is to remain stable, he said on April 11, "there should be sacrifices by all the sectors." But on the very next day he buckled, suspending the austerity plan "to avoid a greater conflict and not affect the majority of Guatemalans." He simultaneously deposed his finance minister and canceled an overseas trip so he could keep an eye on the political situation. Ten days later, the economic minister was also dumped.

The day after the president's retreat on the economic front, more than 1,000 people marched in the streets of Guatemala City to protest the undiminished political repression of the military regime. The protest was called by the Mutual Support Group for the Return of Disappeared Family Members, which had been organized 10 months earlier.

A statement by the group noted, "Our clamour for justice has collided against walls of cold indifference." It demanded punishment of those responsible for the deaths of two leaders of the Mutual Support Group in the previous two weeks.

On March 30, the day after the group had publicly denounced threats against it, its press spokesperson, Héctor Gómez Calixto, was kidnapped. His body was discovered later. There were signs of torture, and his tongue had been cut out. A few days after that, Rosario Godoy Alfaro de Cuevas was found dead in a wrecked car along with her brother and her three-year-old son. Of the six founders of the Mutual Support Group, only two remain. Two have been killed, one is in exile, and the other left the group out of fear.

The government has denounced the Mutual Support Group as infiltrated by subversives and "funded by extremist elements." Two

members of the U.S. Congress and several U.S. human rights activists planned to take part in the April 13 march, but they received death threats and were finally forbidden by the government from participating.

Political murder and abduction have been a feature of Guatemalan life since the 1954 coup orchestrated by United Fruit Company and the U.S. CIA against the popular reformist government of Jacobo Arbenz. Since that time, tens of thousands have been killed or have disappeared. A high point was reached in 1981, when political murders averaged 500 per month.

A recent report shows such murders continue at a high rate. The Guatemalan Committee for Justice and Peace, in cooperation with the World Council of Churches, documented 799 cases of noncombatants murdered by government security forces or death squads in 11 months from November 1983 to September 1984. "Massacres are more selective," the report observed, "people are killed or abducted in small groups or one by one, thus avoiding the brutal high visibility massacres which took place under Ríos Montt." President Efraín Ríos Montt was ousted after a little more than a year in power in an August 1983 coup led by General Mejía Víctores.

The April 13 statement of the Mutual Sup-

port Group pointed out that the assassination of its members and other government violence "take place in the light of day and in the context of a misnamed 'democratic opening.'"

Under the pressure of the world economic crisis, Guatemalan business interests, with the approval of their U.S. counterparts, hope that a civilian government can more successfully diffuse mass opposition to the austerity they plan to impose. As in the case of several other Latin American countries in which military dictatorships have bowed out in recent years, this shift in tactics is being loudly proclaimed a "democratic opening."

Guatemala's economic crisis

With a decline in the world market prices of its principal export products, such as coffee, sugar, cotton, and beef, Guatemala's balance of trade deficit has been growing. Foreign debt has increased more than 10 fold since 1976, and in the last year alone it jumped from \$1.6 billion to \$2.3 billion. The government now spends 43 percent of its income on foreign debt obligations and recently supplemented that with the sale of \$30 million of the country's gold reserves. Nearly half the work force is unemployed or underemployed.

The Chamber of Free Enterprise, which represents most of Guatemala's businesses, in a March 7 report called the current situation the "greatest economic crisis in Guatemala's history" and placed the blame on corruption and mismanagement by the country's military rulers. "By 1981," the report stated, "the country's economic growth stagnated and by 1982 per capita productivity dropped and continues in the red."

The desire of the ruling class for new faces to carry out its economic offensive against working people, along with the need to improve Guatemala's image abroad in order to be eligible for more assistance, are the primary motivations for the shift to civilian rule.

Regime builds electoral facade

Elections to a powerless constituent assembly were held last July, and presidential elections are scheduled for October 27. In both elections, the parties allowed to participate include only capitalist parties, from the middle-of-the-road Christian Democrats to the extreme right. All major contenders in the presidential race recognize that the generals will retain the real power in the country even after the inauguration of a civilian president in January 1986. This kind of arrangement existed before, under the last elected president, Julio César Mendez Montenegro, who had been reduced to little more than a figurehead by the end of his term in 1970.

Immediately after last July's election, the two leading parties, the Guatemalan Christian Democracy (DCG) and the National Center Union (UCN) publicly disavowed any intentions of pressing for land reform or for bringing corrupt or brutal army officers to trial. "It



Guatemalan soldier checks Indian woman's identification papers.

would be a mistake to dig up the past," said DCG general secretary Alfonso Cabrera.

The Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG), which unites the four main guerrilla groups, issued a statement in February calling on the "truly democratic forces" in the country "not to be manipulated or used to legitimate the program of the military high command." It called on them to "denounce the character and content of the electoral project."

The "democratic opening" gambit of Mejía Víctores has already begun to pay off in the form of increased economic and political support from Washington. In 1984 the U.S. Congress approved \$157.5 million in economic aid, a 40 percent increase over the previous year. It has also taken the opportunity to resume open military aid, which had been officially suspended in 1977 in response to the undeniable brutality of the regime. (Even during the period of "suspended" military aid, Washington helped the Guatemalan army acquire weapons and advisers through Israel, Taiwan, Chile, and Argentina.) Bolstering the Guatemalan regime is an important part of Washington's long-term plans for beating back the revolutionary struggles of workers and peasants in Central America.

The Reagan administration attempts to cover up the continuing level of military terror in Guatemala in order to dress up the regime's new image. The U.S. government was one of only a dozen to vote against a United Nations resolution condemning "widespread violations of human rights in Guatemala." And although a U.S. embassy report from Guatemala City noted a *rise* in political killings and kidnap-

pings between 1983 and 1984, the State Department concluded that the "overall human rights conditions have improved in 1984."

The Mejía Víctores regime is already setting up mechanisms for maintaining military control after the transition to a civilian head of state. The continuing protests against assassinations and disappearances, along with the experience of countries like Argentina, whose civilian rulers have been forced to put a few former military chiefs on trial for their crimes, make the Guatemalan generals wary of relinquishing all their power.

In the last few years the army has succeeded in establishing direct control in much of the countryside. More and more peasants are forced to live in "model villages" based on the concept of the "strategic hamlets" set up by the U.S. forces in Vietnam in the 1960s. In these camps the population is kept under armed guard and forced to work in slave-like conditions. All men between 18 and 55 are inducted into the "civil defense patrols." Nearly 1 million Guatemalans are now under the military discipline of these patrols. (The country's entire population is less than 8 million.)

This system is directed partly against the liberation struggle led by the URNG. But since many of the peasants forced into the civil defense patrols support the guerrillas, the vast majority of the patrols are not given arms and do not participate in counterinsurgency actions. Instead, the model villages and civil defense patrols exist to terrorize and control the peasant population as a whole. This apparatus was used to coerce an unprecedented number of Guatemalans into voting in the July 1984 election.

Another method of extending the military's control, the National System of Interinstitutional Coordinators for Reconstruction and Development, was institutionalized by a decree in November 1984. This decree legitimizes military jurisdiction (through the coordinators) over many government institutions and allows considerable intervention in the private sector. The coordinators oversee the establishment of the model villages, control development planning and investment, approve programs of the National Agricultural Development Bank and other institutions, and channel international aid to projects of their choosing.

According to the March-April issue of *¡Guatemala!*, a publication of the Guatemala News and Information Bureau in Oakland, California, "The use of such 'investment programs,' combined with the counterinsurgency population control programs, is designed to achieve the objective of total control, physically, socially and economically, of the majority of the Guatemalan population."

General Mejía Víctores has asked the constituent assembly to incorporate his present counterinsurgency programs, including the civil defense patrols and the interinstitutional coordinators, into the new constitution. With this structure in place, the generals will be assured of their continuing de facto control regardless of October's election. □

New housing law to go into effect

Projects measures for relieving effects of shortage

By Doug Jenness

At its most recent meeting, held in December 1984, Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power adopted a major law on housing. The General Housing Law was one of the most important matters taken up by this session of Cuba's highest legislative body. It is the country's most far-reaching legislation pertaining to housing since the first years of the revolution.

The draft of the new law presented to the National Assembly was the result of extensive discussion in many Cuban organizations for more than two years. Representatives at the December meeting debated the proposal further and amended it before finally ratifying it.

The law grants private ownership rights to all Cubans who do not currently own their apartment or house and to all occupants of new housing as it is built. According to the law, persons now paying rent for the dwelling they occupy, who account for about half the Cuban population, will obtain legal title on July 1, 1985. They will purchase them with monthly installments set at the same rate as their current rent.

The law has other provisions, as well. Homeowners will now be able to rent out rooms at a price agreed upon with the tenant without any state approval. Apartments or homes can also be sold or exchanged by homeowners, with the approval of the pertinent provincial housing office. The latter is entitled to first option in purchasing the dwelling up for sale.

When a homeowner dies, the dwelling is transferred to whoever was living with the deceased, whether or not they are his or her heirs. The lawful heirs, however, are to be paid the price of the home if they were not living with the deceased.

The new law encourages individual home construction by authorizing sales of urban lots belonging to the state. It offers credit to homeowners for construction and repairs of their homes.

With these new measures, the government hopes to offer some immediate relief to Cuban working people in face of a still pressing housing shortage. Some pundits in the capitalist countries say that certain features of the new housing law have more in common with capitalism than with socialism. In order to evaluate what these new steps represent, it is necessary to review what has been done to provide decent, inexpensive housing since the Cuban workers and peasants took power in 1959, and where the new housing law fits into these developments.

At the time the capitalist government headed

by Fulgencio Batista was overturned, the big majority of Cubans lived in abominable conditions.

Decades of domination by U.S. corporations and landowners had left their mark — widespread disease and malnutrition, high illiteracy, and wretched housing.

Fidel Castro described the social and economic plight of the Cuban working people in his famous "History Will Absolve Me" speech, which was delivered to the court that convicted and sentenced him for the 1953 attack on the Moncada army barracks.

Regarding housing, he pointed out:

There are *two hundred thousand* huts and hovels in Cuba; *four hundred thousand families* in the countryside and in the cities live cramped in huts and tenements without even the minimum sanitary requirements; *two million two hundred thousand* of our urban population pay rents which absorb between one fifth and one third of their income; and *two million eight hundred thousand* of our rural and suburban population lack electricity. . . . If the State proposes the lowering of rents, landlords threaten to freeze all construction; if the State does not interfere, construction goes on so long as the landlords get high rents, otherwise they would not lay a single brick even though the rest of the population had to live totally exposed to the elements. The utilities monopoly is no better; they extend lines as far as it is profitable and beyond that point they don't care if the people have to live in darkness for the rest of their lives. The State sits back with its arms crossed and the people have neither homes nor electricity.¹

Workers and peasants in the countryside were the worst off. There, two-thirds lived in *bohios* (huts) with thatched roofs and dirt floors. According to the 1953 Cuban census more than one-half had no toilet facilities of any kind, not even an outdoor privy. Ninety percent had no electricity.

In the cities families paid exorbitant rents to live in slums and shantytowns. They were thrown into the streets when they could not pay. Real estate speculation was rampant, and massive fortunes were made from graft in construction contracts.

Immediate relief

Castro, in "History Will Absolve Me," stated that there were six problems that a victorious revolutionary government would take immediate steps to resolve. Among these was the housing problem. A revolutionary government, he said, would solve this problem "by cutting all rents in half, by providing tax exemptions on homes inhabited by the owners;

by tripling taxes on rented homes; by tearing down hovels and replacing them with modern apartment buildings; and by financing housing all over the island on a scale heretofore unheard of, with the criterion that, just as each rural family should possess its own tract of land, each city family should own its own home or apartment."

Less than six years later, a revolutionary government came to power following the overthrow of the U.S.-backed Batista dictatorship. One of its first acts was to reduce rents. In March 1959 rents were lowered by 50 percent for those paying below \$100 per month. This benefited the big majority of tenants. Those paying more than \$100 rent received lower reductions ranging to 30 percent on rents over \$200.

The law also decreed that no one could be evicted for nonpayment of rent. Seventy-five percent of all families in Havana at the time were tenants paying rent.

Castro recalled the impact of these measures when he addressed the United Nations General Assembly in September 1960. "When the revolutionary Government reduced the rents by 50 percent," he said, "there were those who were considerably upset. Yes; a few who owned those buildings and apartment houses felt displeasure. But the people rushed into the streets rejoicing, as they would in any country, even here in New York, if rents were reduced by 50 percent for all families."

"Then another law was passed," he added, "a law canceling the concessions which had been granted by the tyranny of Batista to the telephone company which was a United States monopoly." The government established normal prices for telephone services, he said. Then it reduced the cost of electricity "which had been one of the highest in the world."

As a result of these curbs on the utilities' price gouging, Castro pointed out, "they began to paint us as reds, simply because we had clashed head on with interests of United States monopolies."²

These immediate relief measures were designed to lessen the heavy burden that Cuban working people had been forced to bear. They came just weeks before the government launched the first agrarian reform, the most profound such reform ever carried out in Latin America.

This law smashed the plantation system,

2. Speech given to United Nations General Assembly, Sept. 26, 1960, in *Selected Speeches of Fidel Castro* (New York: Education for Socialists Bulletin, Socialist Workers Party, April 1979).

1. Fidel Castro, *History Will Absolve Me* (New York: Center for Cuban Studies, undated) p. 28.

whereby a small number of big landowners dominated the countryside.

Large estates that had previously been worked as single units were kept intact and were soon turned into state enterprises. Prior to the revolution, 85 percent of Cuba's small farmers rented rather than owned their own land and lived under constant threat of eviction. Many did not have a single acre of land to farm for their own use.

The law guaranteed each peasant family 67 acres. Every tenant, sharecropper, or squatter farming up to 165 acres was given clear title to that land.

Privately owned land could be mortgaged only to the state, which made financing available to poor peasants at favorable rates. As a protection against land falling back into the hands of exploiting profiteers, farms could not be divided and could be inherited by only one person.

The law stated that agrarian reform land grants "may not be transferred other than through inheritance, sale to the State, or exchange authorized by the authorities charged with its enforcement, nor be the subject of lease agreements, sharecropping agreements, usufruct, or mortgage."

These measures destroyed the system of rents and mortgages in the countryside that had kept the big majority of producers in a permanent position of poverty and insecurity. Land was no longer a commodity, and land speculation became a thing of the past.

The alliance of workers and exploited peasants that carried through the agrarian reform and defended it determined the dynamic of the revolution and defined the character of the new government.

In the cities the workers and farmers government broke the grip of the parasitic landlords by instituting the Urban Reform Law in October 1960. The main feature of this law was that tenants could become owners of their dwellings by making monthly payments equal to their previous rent. The period of payment was 5 to 10 years.

The revolutionary heart of this measure was that the payments be made to the state. This eliminated capitalist ownership of homes and apartment buildings and profitmaking from rents.

The danger of a new landlord class emerging was blocked by the provision that homeowners could only own the dwelling they lived in, with an exception made for a beach house or summer home used for short stays. Moreover, all renting or sales of homes except by the state were eliminated.

An added gain for homeowners and small farmers was that all real estate taxes were eliminated.

Many landlords who had lost their buildings fled the country in pursuit of more lucrative shores. However, those who remained could retain the homes they lived in. They received compensation from the government for their expropriated property. If compensation payments ran out and they had no other income,

they were eligible for life pensions up to 250 pesos per month. At the end of the 1960s about 80,000 people were receiving these compensation payments or pensions.

By eliminating capitalist rents and real estate speculation, the revolutionary government guaranteed working people relief from one of the most persistent evils of capitalist society.

New housing built

Parallel to the revolutionary transformation of property relations on the land, the government also sought to make more dwellings available and to improve the housing standards, both in the countryside and the cities.

One immediate measure was to do as other social revolutions have done: organize a survey of all vacant buildings, many of them left empty by the wealthy who fled the revolution, and allocate them for housing and other social needs.

Construction of new housing also began from the first days of the revolution. In January 1959 the National Institute of Savings and Housing (INAV) was established. In its first year INAV constructed 10,000 new homes, 2,000 more than had been built in any year under the previous regime. The funds for financing this construction came from the national lottery, which was transformed from a profitable numbers racket under Batista to a socially useful instrument.

The INAV's initial success, however, was based on the relatively easy access to building materials from the United States and the practical experience of the private construction firms that it contracted to do the work.

With the massive expropriations of U.S.-owned companies in the latter half of 1960, Washington broke relations with Cuba and instituted an economic blockade. This led to a shortage of many supplies including glass, lumber, cement, piping, wiring, and dozens of other materials needed for construction. Moreover, many architects, engineers, and skilled construction workers went to the United States.

Setting priorities

Faced with a general situation of shortages, the Cuban government had to establish priorities on what it could and could not accomplish. This matter was discussed at a National Production Conference held in August 1961, attended by 3,500 people from government agencies and mass organizations.

Addressing the conference, Castro explained that "there is simply no alternative to calculating what we have and what can be done, and then giving priority to certain things over others. . . . Priority will have to be given to factories and to other centers of production. . . . After factories come other things . . . schools, hospitals, aqueducts. . . ."

He then noted where housing fitted in. "We could produce 100,000 houses. How nice it would be . . . to give houses to all who request them, to construct houses in the country, to construct houses everywhere. This would be

very nice, but we cannot do it because then we would remain without factories and without schools. . . . The only thing we would have would be houses. And then what would we bring into the houses, what would we eat in the houses?"³

While priority in improving social conditions was given to health care and education, important gains were also registered in housing. Several major government construction projects were launched.

The greatest emphasis in new housing was placed on narrowing the gap between the conditions in the cities and the rural areas. Through its Division of Peasant Housing, the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA) constructed rural settlements that, in addition to housing, included schools, clinics, and recreational areas. Electricity and sewage facilities were provided. These communities usually have been linked to production centers, particularly sugar and cattle, but also mining and textile centers. Between 1959 and 1971, 246 new settlements were built, of which 132 contained more than 40 family units each.

Given the limits on how fast new housing could be built, steps were also taken to improve existing living conditions in the bohios. New concrete floors were provided, as well as electricity and sanitary facilities. Today, about 85 percent of the dwellings in rural areas have electricity.

In the cities several major housing construction projects were launched in the mid-1960s. In Havana two big projects were begun. Havana East, an apartment complex, was built on land assembled for speculative purposes before the revolution. Thirteen hundred of the poorest families from Havana's slums moved into it. The El Cotorro project was started in southeastern Havana to house industrial workers closer to their workplaces.

In Santiago, Cuba's second largest city, the massive Jose Martí project was built to house 40,000 people.

Since 1961 rent in all government-built housing has been no higher than 10 percent of a family's income. And housing is free for those living in many rural settlements, hurricane victims, and victims of Batista violence.

The big projects begun in the 1960s, however, exceeded the capacities of the government to build new housing. The government had to slow down construction in Havana in the late 1960s. Special efforts were launched to build more plants to produce cement and prefabricated panels.

Microbrigades

By the early 1970s the output of building materials had substantially increased. However, there was a shortage of available labor to assign to construction. So, in 1971, the government initiated a new approach by calling on workers to organize what were called "micro-

3. Quoted in Edward Boorstein, *The Economic Transformation of Cuba* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968) p. 117.

brigades" to construct houses and other necessary buildings.

These brigades are each made up of 30 to 35 workers from factories and other workplaces, who continue to be paid by their work center at the same rate they received for their usual work. To keep production levels from dropping in their regular workplace, the remaining workers volunteer to do extra work for no additional pay.

When the housing is completed, a general assembly of workers at the work center decides, based on need and performance, who among them will have priority in receiving new homes. Rents are fixed at 6 percent of family income, rather than the 10 percent for state-owned housing constructed by regular construction workers. Thus the rent reflects the reduced costs realized through the voluntary extra work done in the workplace.

The microbrigades gave a big boost to housing construction and have accounted for some two-thirds of the new homes built since 1973.

One of the most impressive projects undertaken by the microbrigades was the Alamar community just outside Havana. Alamar took 10 years to build and houses 130,000 people. The community includes 32 day-care centers, 18 schools, 6 theaters, and sports and health facilities.

Cuba's new housing has to meet certain standards of quality. A New York architect who studied Cuban housing wrote in 1974, "Cuba's new housing, beyond its obvious improvements over conditions in the past, stands on its own in comparison with non-luxury new housing in the developed, industrialized nations."

He explained that each dwelling must have a bathroom with sink, toilet, and shower; a kitchen area with refrigerator and gas burner; and service patio for clothes washing and drying. No bedroom may be occupied by more than two people except for parents with a child under two years old. Minimum habitable space per person has been established.⁴

Due to limited electrical generating power, however, Cuba has not yet been able to provide hot water in homes.

In addition to the dwellings built by the microbrigades and the Ministry of Construction, a number of new homes have been built by individuals who supply their own labor. The government helps with materials and cheap loans.

In spite of all these efforts, however, new housing has not been able to keep up with population increases. Between 1959 and 1982 the Cuban population grew from 6.5 million to 9.9 million. About 100,000 new homes a year are needed just to keep up with this growth, not to speak of replacing older, less adequate housing. But in the two-year period between 1981 and 1983, 90,000 units were built —



Cuban government puts priority on building new housing in the countryside.

30,000 by the government and 60,000 by microbrigades and individuals.

"Housing construction was one of the branches of our economy with the most problems," Castro noted in his speech to the Second Congress of the Cuban Communist Party in December 1980.

There is no immediate prospect that the housing shortage can be overcome. In fact, the National Assembly of People's Power meeting this past December discussed the need to initiate a series of austerity measures in the economy as a whole. Castro explained to the meeting that "the entire 1985 plan was revamped and definitive versions of the 1986-90 plan and the long-term plan for the year 2000 are being drawn up" on the basis that savings are the most immediate source of increased earnings.⁵

Low prices for sugar, Cuba's main export and source of hard currency, mean that the country has to import less or find other sources of hard currency.

These major adjustments are a result of increased economic pressure from world capitalism. The interest rates Cuba must pay for hard-currency foreign loans have skyrocketed. The prices it must pay for imports from the world capitalist market have shot up. Yet the prices of the raw and semifinished materials it exports, particularly sugar, have plummeted.

Along with this squeeze from the world market, Cuba will receive less aid from the Soviet Union for its 1986-90 five-year plan

than it had expected. "Our expectations were for 4 billion rubles [nearly \$5 billion] in combined new and continuing projects," Cuban vice-president Carlos Rafael Rodriguez told the *Washington Post* in February. But Cuba had to reduce its requests "to more realistic amounts."

Castro explained to the National Assembly that the goal is to carry out the austerity measures "without affecting what the population already receives." Nevertheless, he said, "we must begin with what we have and not think about new increases beyond what we have, at both the personal and social levels."

"The philosophy behind our strategy involves prioritizing economic development, and not consumption," he pointed out. "Once we've prioritized the objectives and made optimal use of resources to ensure the future, what remains available will be distributed in the most appropriate and beneficial way for our people. This involves an austere, far-sighted, intelligent program that can develop under social conditions which are better than in any other Third World country and any other Latin American country."

He compared what is required on the economic front in Cuba to the decision five years ago to launch the Territorial Troop Militia to prepare for "people's war" on the military front. "This," he said, "must be the economic battle of the entire people, the economic war of the whole people."

The National Assembly decided to:

- Prioritize production for exports. This includes meeting trade commitments to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in a timely way.
- Reduce consumption of imported oil through economizing on energy use.
- Reduce other imports through substitution

4. From an article on housing in Cuba by Tony Schuman in *Cuba Review* (March 1975). *Cuba Review* is published by the Cuba Resource Center in New York.

5. Speech given to the National Assembly of People's Power, Dec. 28, 1984, printed in *Granma Weekly Review*, Jan. 13, 1985.

of domestically made products.

- Reduce the rate of increase in social spending.

Projected increases in housing and other construction for 1985, Castro reported, would be decreased by 320 million pesos (\$380 million). In spite of this, he added, 75,000 new housing units are to be built in 1985.

A few weeks earlier, in his speech to the National Forum on Energy, Castro had explained that "we really can't give priority to housing over production that generates exports for the country, that's fundamental; moreover housing always uses a bit of convertible currency and we must keep on building industrial facilities that will produce everything we now import for housing."

No immediate solution to shortage

Thus the Cuban government has no immediate possibility of resolving the continuing housing shortage by constructing enough new dwellings. Within this framework, however, it is taking decisive steps to help alleviate the problem. This is the goal of the new housing law.

In introducing the proposed law, National Assembly president Flavio Bravo explained, "We are conscious that the law, once adopted, is no immediate solution to the big housing shortage that is common on a universal scale and is one of the largest problems inherited by our society, but lays the basis for relief now and — to the extent that the country can prioritize the necessary resources — for achieving a solution in the future to this very grave problem."⁶

The government anticipates that more housing will be made available by relaxing the policy on renting out rooms and exchanging homes and by offering more incentives for individual construction of new homes. Moreover, one expected result of making tenants owners of their homes is to stimulate greater initiative in repairing and maintaining them.

The new law empowers homeowners to rent out rooms in their permanent residences or summer homes, with or without a bath, for a price agreed upon without any state approval.

Homeowners can rent out rooms to not more than two different family groups during the life of the contract. Contracts will be made for terms of not less than one week and not more than six months. They can then be renewed. If upon expiration or breach of the contract the tenant refuses to vacate the room, half of his or her salary may be withheld until government officials order them to leave.

Castro participated actively in the discussion

6. The Dec. 28, 1984, daily *Granma* published a four-page spread on the National Assembly discussion on the General Housing Law. All the quotes from the discussion are taken from this article. The discussion was also broadcast live on Cuban radio and television.

The full text of the draft of the law was published in the Nov. 9, 1984, *Bohemia*, a Cuban weekly. Summaries were published in English in the *Granma Weekly Review* (Nov. 11, 1984, and March 31, 1985).

on the law in the National Assembly. He explained that consideration had been given to having the government regulate the rents.

According to *Granma*, Castro posed the questions, "Should this be regulated? Should a price mechanism be established? 'Impossible,' he emphasized. He continued, saying that it would be a cumbersome job, a tremendous administrative job."

Castro said that he recognized that rents set according to market prices will give rise to abuses. "People are going to charge double or triple and there will be nothing to do but pay it," the Cuban leader predicted. He explained that it would be utopian to think that people will not charge too much. "We ought to be conscious of this," he said.

The next day in a major address to the Assembly, he stated,

We have introduced some elements, such as the possibility of renting a room at the going market price but this is not a departure from socialism, it will be solved by development. When we have enough homes and when any citizen can purchase an apartment at a relatively low price, there will be no need to go renting a much more expensive room.

This doesn't worry us, and development itself will eliminate this option or possibility of renting a room that would provide certain people with earnings not derived from work. There will be a certain redistribution among the people. But this won't be any kind of capitalism.

As Castro pointed out, the renting of rooms will result in inequalities among Cuban workers, but it will not lead to the reestablishment of a capitalist landlord class. The new law, in fact, upholds the principle established in the Urban Reform Law that no family can own more than one permanent home.

For this reason the lifting of restrictions on selling or transferring homes cannot result in the amassing of real estate that can be used to accumulate capital.

Discussion on inheritance

The provision in the law on inheritance of dwellings also stimulated some discussion in the National Assembly. The new law upholds the policy that homes may be transferred to whoever was living with the deceased, whether or not they are his or her legal heirs. This prevents occupants from losing their right to continue residing in their dwelling. Moreover, it curbs heirs who already have a permanent home from acquiring additional homes.

The only exception to the provision that an heir or heirs can obtain the home is if the deceased was living alone. But in this case the heirs must transfer to the state the ownership title to their previous home.

Lawful heirs, not living with the deceased and not entitled to the dwelling, however, are to be paid the price of the home.

Deputy Roberto Barberich raised in the National Assembly some concern about the possibility of a case arising where a lawful heir, without any parents or other older people to care for and unrelated by blood to the deceased, could be indemnified.

Castro agreed that in the case cited, if analyzed in the "spirit of strict justice, of ethics," the deputy would be right.

"But the problem," he said, "is that to solve this would mean eliminating inheritance, which is an established right." It would mean introducing a moral element into the inheritance laws, as well as creating exceptions to the law that would create a "mass of confusion."

He went on to explain the nature of Cuba's inheritance laws. He pointed out that they apply only to personal property. "It is not the inheritance of a factory, nor the inheritance of a farm, it is a personal inheritance that is received."

All the means of production in Cuba are state-owned and cannot be transferred through sales or inheritance. The only exception is the land and some of the machinery of small farmers that can be passed on to a single heir.

In a speech to the National Forum on Energy on Dec. 4, 1984, Castro affirmed, "Housing is not a means of production — that was made clear by the founders of socialism. It's not a factory or a work tool. It is an article for family use. The fact that a family owns their property does not contradict the principles of Marxism-Leninism in the least. . . ."

One important exception to the inheritance provisions of the housing law is that ownership titles to a home located within the borders of an agricultural cooperative will be passed on to the cooperative. The cooperative can decide to give the home to heirs who were living with the deceased or pay them the price of the housing unit. In this case, the cooperative must see to it that the heirs are given other adequate housing.

Homes linked to production centers

The issue that got the most discussion in the National Assembly was the proposed restrictions on the right to ownership of dwellings linked to production centers or military installations. When workers living in this type of dwelling transfer to other jobs, they are supposed to give up their occupancy, and the government is responsible for finding them alternative housing. The National Assembly discussion centered on what formula should be put in the law regarding the nature of this alternative housing. The draft specified that it should be "similar, acceptable" housing.

Several deputies pointed out that *similar* and *acceptable* are very ambiguous terms and could mean quite different things to the family needing new housing and the agencies attempting to find it. One deputy suggested amending it to read *similar* or *smaller* housing in order to insure that a family would not be able to get superior housing through such a change. The possible formulation of "any" alternative housing was also proposed.

Castro, who spoke several times on this point, said this question had been one of his biggest concerns when the law was being drafted. "I thought and said," he explained, "that some comrades want to be *populists* with

the law, wanted to take too generous a position, and wanted its benefits to reach everyone absolutely. They don't remember enough of the real problems that create much damage to the development and functioning of the enterprises."

He knew from his own experience, he said, of housing developments connected to sugar production, where most of the occupants were no longer working in the sugar industry. He pointed to the difficulties of getting workers to work in these enterprises if adequate housing isn't available nearby.

"I think that we are deceiving ourselves," he said, "when we believe the solution is in the wording." He noted, "We are very far from solving the problem because, although we give a body the power of transferring and looking for other housing, the reality is that none of these bodies have any possibility, any way, of obtaining housing. Where is the body going to get housing from if it doesn't have any and there's a tremendous scarcity?"

Castro emphasized that in regard to occupants whose changed job situations require them to move from the linked housing "the danger that injustices will be committed doesn't exist."

"It is difficult to throw them out," he said. "In actual practice there are no police that will throw anybody out."

Continuing, he said, "The traditions, the customs, the Revolution's respect for the people is such that there never will be even the remotest danger of abuse. And if there is an abuse there will always be many people who will help, who will protect the victim of abuse, and will protest what has happened."

To underline his point, he explained that the government has the "right by law to expropriate" people's homes to build highways, railroads, and other projects that serve the common good. "Even the capitalist states have this right. But the Revolution has never utilized the right of expropriation: I don't remember a single case in which it has been employed. Always we have had the patience to persuade the person. Never has expropriation been applied, not even to construct works of enormous social importance."

It was pointed out in the discussion that the new law states that owners of linked dwellings are permitted to own another permanent dwelling. This exception to the general rule that homeowners can only own one permanent home helps make it easier for some workers to cope with the problem of alternative housing. Connected to this is the policy of setting the price of linked dwellings at only 50 percent that of other dwellings.

The result of the discussion was to empower the newly established Institute of Housing to evaluate and resolve problems related to alternative housing as they come up.

Encouraging home construction

The new law also regulates and encourages home maintenance and construction by individuals.

Specific steps to facilitate this include: sales of urban lots in cities on which new homes can be built; permitting construction on rooftops through payment to the owners of the homes in the building in question; and authorizing the People's Savings Bank to grant low-interest loans for housing construction and maintenance.

The bank will also provide assistance in contracting for projects, acquiring technical assistance, and renting out equipment and tools to individuals building their own homes.

Homeowners, according to the law, are expected to assume responsibility for the upkeep of their dwellings. In multifamily apartment buildings, the state will assume part of the costs of expensive repairs due to deterioration.

The original draft specified that individual homes also could have costly repairs paid in part by the state. This was removed as a result of the discussion in the National Assembly.

Deputy Severin Gómez was the first to propose dropping it. He argued, "If we leave it as it is, we will take on additional responsibility that in practice we aren't going to be able to fulfill."

Castro noted that "although the law is generous, we should see that it is generous, but not ruinous. And besides, the law should be viable, should be workable."

He explained that tens of thousands of new individual homes are going to be built in the next period, and it will be an impossible situation if each of the owners expects the state to pay their maintenance and repair costs.

Regarding the buying and selling of lots in the cities, Castro explained that "we were concerned, and I expressed this, about creating the illusion among all city residents that they could buy the lot next door now, and would ask to buy it."

He pointed out that Havana and Santiago, in particular, have major renewal plans, including a rapid transit system for Havana, that will require space. Even though the resources are not available now to undertake these projects, they have to be taken into account, he said, in sales of land.

"I think that everywhere we have to work with care," he said, "but in two cities, the two most important in the country, we will have to work with special care."

No taxes

The new housing law affirms that the new owners, like those who are already homeowners, will not be subject to real estate taxes.

In his address to the Assembly, Castro used this fact to contrast the plight of individual homeowners in capitalist countries to the situation in Cuba. "There is something else which happens in capitalist countries," he said. "Taxes which homeowners must pay in Europe, the United States and other developed capitalist countries are so high that they often end up paying hundreds of dollars a month on the home they own. Our people will pay neither rent nor real estate taxes. The house will be paid for over a relatively long period of

time, people do not have to pay taxes on it to the state and I don't think they will have to in the future. With the development of many other resources, I don't think the socialist state will ever have to charge real estate taxes. This can't happen in any capitalist country; it would be absolutely impossible."

Castro in the same report pointed out that in a country where capitalism has been abolished and that is advancing toward socialism, different approaches can be taken to the question of home ownership depending on needs and circumstances.

"A socialist state can," he said, "if it so desires, set low rents, as all the socialist countries do. In the USSR rents are very low and heating and certain other items are included in rent."

Or, he stated, "A socialist state can, if it so desires, build homes, rent them, receive income and even profits, since those profits can be destined to other things which benefit the people and would be in keeping with the ethic or principles of socialism."

A socialist state also "can give homes for free."

Cuba, because of its particular situation, has chosen to eliminate rents and make everybody homeowners. "But only a socialist state can make a law like the one we have just passed which will make all citizens of this country homeowners," Castro said. "Capitalism would wish to be able to do something like this, but a society ruled by exploitation and profits can never dream of it!"

The rents and mortgages system is as much a part of capitalism as wage exploitation. It is, therefore, impossible for capitalism to guarantee homeowners the rights they enjoy in Cuba or to abolish parasitic rents. As long as land and real estate are commodities that can be bought, sold, rented, mortgaged, divided, and otherwise used as a source of profit, the vast majority of tenants and homeowners will never have security against losing their homes.

Cuba's new housing law assumes the framework of a society where the rents and mortgages system has been abolished and where capitalist ownership of land and real estate has been eliminated. □

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Mitterrand postpones referendum

Major French military base will be built on island

By Will Reissner

An April 25 meeting of the French council of ministers, chaired by President François Mitterrand, adopted a series of measures designed to maintain a French presence in the nickel-rich colony of New Caledonia, an island in the Pacific 750 miles east of Australia and 12,000 miles from France.

The package, announced in a television address the same day by Prime Minister Laurent Fabius, marks another step in the governing Socialist Party's betrayal of the promises it made before coming to power in 1981.

Fabius stated that a referendum on the status of New Caledonia, which had been slated for this year, has been postponed and "will take place by Dec. 31, 1987, at the latest."

The prime minister also announced that the colony will be divided into four separate administrative zones, each with its own legislative body.

This provision raises the specter of a permanent partition of New Caledonia. Of the 145,000 inhabitants of the island, about 62,000 are native Kanaks while 54,000 are French settlers. The French settlers are heavily concentrated in the area in and around the capital city, Nouméa, and would be assured of control over at least one of the four regions.

Fabius also announced that "in conformity with the instructions of the president of the Republic [Mitterrand], France's military presence will be reinforced at Nouméa in order to provide lasting assurance of our strategic interests in that part of the world."

The presence of a permanent French military base on New Caledonia would guarantee that the economic interests of the French settlers, who dominate the island's economic system, would be maintained despite the establishment of a nominally independent government.

French rule on the island, which is one of the leading nickel producers in the world, began in 1853. During the 19th century there were numerous uprisings by the native Kanak people as French settlers grabbed most of the land on the island's fertile west coast and forced the Kanaks into reservations. Until the end of World War II, the Kanaks were forced by law to remain on those reservations.

French colonial authorities have long fostered a policy of encouraging settlement. This has reduced the Kanak population to about 43 percent of the total. In addition to settlers from France, there are more than 12,000 people from the French Pacific colony of Wallis and Futuna, 5,570 from the French colony of Tahiti, and 1,212 from Vanuatu (the former joint French-British colony of New Hebrides).

On Nov. 18, 1984, Kanak pro-independence forces staged a boycott of elections for the local colonial assembly, demanding that only those residents with at least one parent born in New Caledonia be allowed to vote on the island's status.

Since the successful boycott, the independence struggle, led by the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS), has grown in strength. On Dec. 1, 1984, the FLNKS, a coalition of 10 organizations, established a "provisional government of Kanaky" on the island. Some 20 Kanaks have been killed in confrontations with French police and armed settlers since the vote boycott.

The FLNKS has called a conference for May 17-19 to discuss its response to the French government's latest actions.

Although before coming to power in 1981 the French Socialist Party and François Mitterrand personally were on record supporting the

independence of New Caledonia, since he became president Mitterrand has proposed that any independence be "in association with France."

Under Mitterrand's plan, the French government would retain control over New Caledonia's currency, foreign and military policy, police, and broadcasting system.

By postponing the referendum on New Caledonia's status to 1987, the Mitterrand government has raised a big question mark over whether the voting will ever take place. The SP government has shown in practice that it is no friend of the Kanak people's struggle for independence, and the right-wing opposition parties in France, which have displayed even greater hostility to the Kanak cause, could win a majority in the 1986 legislative elections. A new government formed at that time could cancel any vote on New Caledonia's future if it so chose. □

Paris march backs Kanak independence



Flouge

Nearly 6,000 people marched through Paris April 20 to support the independence of New Caledonia and the establishment of a Kanak state there.

At the head of the demonstration was Jean-Marie Tjibaou, leader of the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front, and several hundred Kanaks residing in France.

The action was called by the Association for Information on the Rights of the Kanaky People. The Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), French section of the Fourth International, and Workers Struggle (LO) were among the groups that actively built the demonstration. The Socialist Party and Communist Party, the two largest parties in the French labor movement, did not participate.