

International VIEWPOINT

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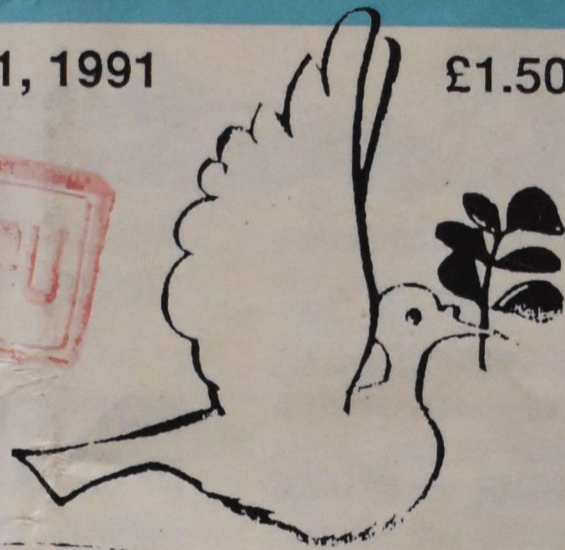
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Shamir's bluff

EDWIN MADUNACU



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The press has republished Cedras' denunciations of a "dictatorship under popular pressure" and imaginary human rights violations. In one of his declarations, Cedras unveiled one of the fundamental reasons for the coup; president Aristide had committed the crime of weakening some of the pillars of the Haitian state. A fault which, beyond even the immediate economic interests of the various parties to the coup, was unacceptable as much for the army as for the Haitian bourgeoisie and for imperialism. And it is true that in retiring certain officers and changing others, Aristide and Préval challenged the power of the military hierarchy.

By encouraging the people, in some cases, to close the tribunals which had functioned against the popular interests, Aristide inspired fear in the wealthy whose power has been defended for generations by a corrupt judicial apparatus. In refusing to disown demonstrators who brought pressure on the parliamentarians, Aristide indicated clearly that he placed the authority of the people above that of the deputies and the senators.

While wishing to modify the balance of forces, put the president back on the right track and reaffirm the authority of the army, it is not certain that Cedras wanted to go as far as the overthrow of Aristide. On the contrary, it is now obvious that he began in the first hours of the coup to lose control of a good part of the army. Since then, his deputy, Colonel Silva, has even sought refuge in the United States (perhaps to hold himself in reserve). Cedras must now act under the control of the Duvalierists and the most extreme elements of the army rank-and-file. These latter wanted to physically eliminate Aristide on the day of the coup, and they are now blocking any possibility of negotiating with him.

Some elements of the bourgeoisie are beginning to regret launching this adventure. For, making up for the time lost under Aristide, military commandos are devoting themselves with less and less restraint to extortion from car drivers, as well as the pillage of traders and strong-arm entry into the bourgeois villas.

The leaders of the political parties undoubtedly saw the coup as a means of ousting the government of René Préval, something they had not dared to do themselves a few weeks ago. In refusing to come out in favour of the unconditional return of Aristide, almost all the parliamentary deputies gave de facto support to the coup. But in doing so they played the role of sorcerer's apprentice; on October 7, the army invaded parliament and, under the threat of arms, obliged those present to unseat the prime minister and install a new president of the republic, the judge Nérette. The new self-styled prime minister, Jean-Jaques Honorat, has said that he favours negotiations. The army has already threatened to execute him. ★

Russian workers have had enough!

AS the first autumn snow fell lightly, at least ten thousand people, mostly workers, assembled on October 23 in the Manezh Square in central Moscow. They were attending the first demonstration in which large numbers of workers have confronted the government of Russian president Boris Yeltsin with its economic and social failures.

POUL FUNDER LARSEN

THE action was called by the official Moscow Federation of Trade Unions (MFP) around a series of demands, including social protection, control by the labour collectives over privatization and indexation of wages. Sizeable contingents of workers were present from key economic areas that included machine building, ship-building, communications and transport, defence industries and state administration.

While only one Russian tricolor was on display, there were many red banners. The placards brought by participants set the tone for the demonstration: The enterprises belong to the workers' collectives, not to the administration! For reforms that create jobs, not unemployment! Gorbachev-Yeltsin, feed and clothe the people! We need flats, not fairytales about privatization! Free prices equals starvation for the workers!

MFP speakers demanded that the Russian parliament immediately adopt laws pledging collective contracts in the enterprises and the indexation of wages. A shop steward from the large car plant AZLK aroused cheers when he warned of the dangers of the current "pirate privatization". But it was a woman trade unionist who drew the loudest applause when she outlined the desperate situation of women workers earning as little as 200 roubles a month (the MFP now puts the subsistence level at 510 roubles a month). She

went on to attack speculators and would-be capitalists who take advantage of the shortages, and called on working people to strike in pursuit of their demands.

This call for political strikes was endorsed by the MFP chairman in an interview with Central Television after the demonstration. Boris Yeltsin's political honeymoon is seemingly coming to an end.

An important theme in several speeches was the effort by the new rulers of Russia to create a "strong executive power". The less than democratic thrust of this government was again in evidence on the eve of the demonstration, when the protest organizers were denied access to their first choice of venue, the square in front of the Moscow Soviet building.

Another illustration of how the ruling "democrats" view the rights of other forces has been the reluctance of the Moscow City Soviet to include trade union representatives in its Committee on Privatizations. The hypocrisy of the new Russian leadership was pinpointed by Alexander Popov, a City Soviet deputy and member of the Socialist Party:

"While government leaders were paying lip service to the workers movement at the Congress of Workers Collectives on October 19 and 20" Popov told the crowd, "Yeltsin was preparing decrees on the ending of price controls — a move which will sharply reduce workers' living standards."

Some speakers retained an ambiguous attitude to the government, calling on Yeltsin and his ministers to be reasonable. But with the the social crisis growing more severe by the day, the confrontations seem certain to multiply. ★

1. On the basis of figures provided by the Moscow militia. Central Television news and leading newspapers estimated the crowd at 50,000.

ИНТЕРВЬЮ



The first issue of *Inter-viznyad* (Russian-language international edition) has just appeared on the recent World International, Environmental, and national alternatives, and a nation...