

By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

IN SPAIN, PEACE ACTIVISTS RELEASED DOVES TO celebrate the historic Reagan-Gorbachov agreement to scrap intermediate range nuclear missiles. The doves were gray, symbolizing uncertainty.

Although the December 8 Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) agreement concerned primarily the arms race in Europe, Europeans were uncertain what it meant, partly because it was made without their involvement. This fact was felt most acutely among leaders who had just been unable to agree on the budget of the European Economic Community, which enters 1988 unfunded. Except for British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, ecstatic at having been brought into the act by Mikhail Gorbachov's stopover in London, Western European leaders seemed to be feeling uncomfortably insignificant.

Both NATO officials who had fought for the Euromissiles and some peace activists who had spent years protesting seemed wary that this was a trap to disarm them prematurely.

Austrian writer Robert Jungk, a leading figure in the German peace movement for his warnings against "the nuclear state," called the Reagan-Gorbachov summit "the beginning of an alliance of two technocratic superpowers." Comparing this to the 1915 "Holy Alliance" of Europe's big powers against the ideas of the French revolution, Jungk said the "Technocrats' Alliance" could not stop the advance of liberation among peoples of the Third World.

The mood of the NATO establishment was typified by the Netherlands' prime minister, Ruud Lubbers. A couple of years ago Lubbers got parliamentary approval of cruise missile deployment by promising to phase out Dutch "nuclear tasks"—missions using nuclear weapons—within NATO. He said then that the Dutch would discontinue operations with nuclear-armed F-16 fighter planes and Orion sea patrol aircraft armed with nuclear depth charges.

But the very day Reagan and Gorbachov signed the INF treaty, Lubbers was back promising that the Netherlands would continue all its "nuclear tasks."

The NATO establishment was focused on "filling the hole" in Western defenses that will supposedly be opened by removal of Pershing II and cruise missiles.

Interpretations differed depending on whether focus was on counting missiles or on sensing the historic turning point.

Italian enthusiasms: Nowhere are people more sensitive to historic changes in the wind than in Italy. And nowhere was the Reagan-Gorbachov summit and the signing of the INF treaty greeted with such exuberant celebration as the start of a new era.

Italians, who have long since been fed up with the Cold War, love Gorbachov for being smart and tenacious enough to have brought reality and common sense into Ronald Reagan's fantasy world.

Italian television gave the summit constant coverage, with link-up to the Sicilian town of Comiso whose inhabitants didn't get the prosperity promised from the missile base built there. Comiso celebrated with fireworks and sent Reagan and Gorbachov the message "Comiso peace prizes."

Yet there were some sour notes. The secretary of Italy's Christian Democratic party, Ciriaco De Mita, was darkly reminded of "Munich." His gloom was understandable. A new era of detente could reduce the power of his party quite considerably.



Many Italians greeted the Reagan-Gorbachov summit as the start of a new era.

Europe reacts to INF treaty with uncertainty

As Reagan was getting ready to greet Gorbachov, the Socialist mayor of Milan, Paolo Pillitteri, pulled off a political switch that may well be symptomatic of rapid Italian adaptation to the new age—especially since Pillitteri is the brother-in-law of Italian Socialist Party leader Bettino Craxi. Pillitteri abruptly announced that he was abandoning the Christian Democrats, with whom he has been governing Italy's economic capital for four years, in order to form a new coalition with the Communists and the Greens. The new "red-green" city hall will emphasize improving Milan's urban environment.

The Italian Communist Party's (PCI) new leader, Achille Occhetto, had previously announced that the PCI was following the Socialists in giving priority to institutional reform and in adopting a similar swing attitude toward coalition alliances. That is, the Communists will consider entering alliances with either the Socialists or the Christian Democrats.

The polarization of the Reagan era seems to be giving way to the pragmatism and *perestroika* of the Gorbachov era.

German concerns: In West Germany the INF's "double zero" option was desired by an overwhelming majority of the population. But there is unfinished business: the thousands of short-range "battlefield" nuclear missiles left on German soil—East and West—that, if used, would destroy Germany. From left to right, with a few exceptions, Germans want a "third zero option" to get rid of all nuclear weapons on German soil.

One of the rare West German fans of nuclear weapons is Defense Minister Manfred Wörner, who persists in advocating "modernization" of nuclear weapons as well as a conventional buildup. Wörner has just been picked to succeed Lord Carrington as secretary general of NATO. Does this mean his hard line will prevail? The Social Democratic Party's foreign policy spokesman Karsten Voigt, asked this question by an Italian daily, retorted that Chancellor Helmut Kohl had "sent Wörner to Brussels to get rid of him."

This leaves unsettled the question of how West German anti-nuclear feelings will manage to influence NATO, where the U.S. and

Britain reject a "third zero option" and insist that the next disarmament steps must concern intercontinental missiles and Warsaw Pact conventional forces.

Protesters continued to bear witness outside the Pershing II base at Mutlangen in southern Germany. Mutlangen's Mayor Peter Seyfried said, "We will not be relieved until the missiles are really gone, in two or three years." Local people are still afraid of an accident during transfer of the nuclear missiles through narrow village streets.

Longtime peace activist and former Green Bundestag member Roland Vogt called the INF accord a "success of the peace movement and mankind as well. If it is actually carried out, it will be the first time in history that disarmament is the result of negotiations and not of war."

Vogt noted that it was not right to belittle the agreement by saying that it removed only 3 or 4 percent of nuclear weapons worldwide. "It's not the quantity but the quality that counts," said Vogt. "That is what we in the peace movement said, when we opposed the Pershing II missiles as potential first-strike weapons. It is not fair now to say, well, they are only 3 or 4 percent."

The next challenge to the peace move-

Most European leaders seemed to be feeling uncomfortably insignificant.

ment will be the projects for autonomous West European armament. A group in Britain has been studying the idea of a "European corps" that would go beyond the projected "Franco-German brigade" to bring other European NATO allies into a common force, outside NATO but under the Western European Union (WEU). This WEU force would have its own Rapid Deployment Force to protect European interests in the Third World.

The problem that needs to be studied, according to Vogt, is that the dynamic of disarmament between the two big powers feeds

the impulse for armament in Europe. This has to do with the arms industry, he observed. Can the armament fraction be isolated in capitalism, he asks. Vogt sees the need for a new discussion of conversion from militarism to what he likes to call "civilianism."

In his own state of Rhineland Palatinate, the economy is very dependent on U.S. military bases. People hate the noise of low-flying planes, but need the jobs. "People are natural allies of a European army to replace the U.S. soldiers that will be withdrawn, unless we prepare a program of regional conversion," Vogt said. "We need a new civilian *perestroika*."

French grumbling: From the French media, it was hard to feel what was happening. French conservative editorialists compared the Reagan-Gorbachov agreement to "Yalta" and "Munich." To comment on the signing, the main French TV channel TF1 invited a former president of the World Anti-Communist League, retired Belgian Gen. Robert Close.

Naturally, Close stressed that the accord strips NATO of "the only weapons that served deterrence" and leaves Europe practically defenseless in the face of the "enormous" superiority of the Soviet Union. Gen. Close was voicing the line of the right that, stripped naked by the INF agreement, Western Europe must build up its own forces. But even this ardent anti-communist seemed to perceive a trend toward disarmament. He noted that population decline, financial constraints and anti-nuclear public opinion all posed obstacles to a European military buildup.

Therefore, he concluded, "we are on the eve of another double decision" whereby NATO will both decide to strengthen its conventional forces and negotiate with the Soviets.

The French establishment fears, rightly enough, that the French nuclear deterrence force risks losing its value (essentially political) in an ongoing process of nuclear disarmament. But France cannot stand against the general trend, if that is what it is.

President François Mitterrand seems to have decided to sail with the prevailing winds. Amid the chorus of conservative wailing, Mitterrand said that the choice was between disarmament and over-armament, and came out for pursuing the process of disarmament. There are signs that French Socialist leaders are beginning to see disarmament as an issue they could use against the right in next spring's presidential elections. □

By Arthur R. Kroeber

BHOPAL, INDIA

BEBI IS 18 YEARS OLD, AND SHE LIVES WITH her mother, six brothers and two sisters in two rooms with mud-plastered brick walls and a leaky roof. Bebi's family has always been poor, but until three years ago they managed to make ends meet with the daily wages her father, two elder brothers and husband earned as laborers.

Then, on the night of Dec. 3, 1984, terror visited their crowded slum in the form of a

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cloud of deadly methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas that leaked from the Union Carbide pesticide plant a little over a mile away. People rushed blindly out of their houses—"It was like having hot pepper in your eyes," said one of Bebi's neighbors—and ran as far away from the gas as they could get.

When Bebi and her neighbors returned to their homes a few days later, their lives had changed forever. Bebi's father was sick: He had a burning cough and had trouble breathing, and he couldn't work. He remained bedridden for two years, then died.

The children were all sick; Bebi herself lost weight, also experienced breathing problems, and could work for only an hour or two at a time. Her husband, displeased by her deteriorating health, moved out and divorced her.

A few months ago Bebi's eldest brother, who is 24, was diagnosed as having tuberculosis; he can no longer work. The family of 10 must now make do on her other elder brother's wages of 80 cents a day and the little money her mother makes by working in a government handicrafts program.

A legacy of terror: Like some lingering disease, the Bhopal gas leak continues to torment its victims after three years, and doctors and activists in this city of 400,000 fear that the effects of the world's worst industrial accident will continue for years to come. About 1,700 people died immediately after the leak, and 1,000 more have died of MIC-related illnesses since. Many families have lost their main wage-earners, and many others have seen their incomes cut by half.

As the incident's third anniversary drew near, hopes grew that a settlement would be reached in the 32-month legal wrangle between the Union Carbide Corporation of Danbury, Conn., and the Indian government, which is representing the victims. There was talk of Union Carbide paying out between \$500 and \$650 million. Although this figure was far short of the \$3 billion claimed by India, it would provide much-needed medicines, hospital beds and job training for the estimated 69,000 severely affected victims.

But on November 18 lawyers for the two sides told M.W. Deo, the Bhopal judge hearing the case, that negotiations had broken down and there would be no settlement.

Last week, however, Judge Deo, saying that "attempts at an overall settlement appear to have bogged down," ordered Union Carbide to pay \$270 million in interim relief to Bhopal victims within two months. Earlier in the week lawyers for lobbying groups representing the victims had demanded \$770 million in interim payments. Nevertheless, Vepa Sarthy, the Indian government's attorney, called Deo's decision an "excellent judgment."

Indian intellectuals and activists had been calling for some type of interim payments as the first part of a suggested three-step

गैस दुर्घटना में लापता मृतक



More than 2,700 have died as a result of the poison gas leak.

For Bhopal's victims the agony continues

resolution of the lawsuit. In an open letter last month, 40 prominent figures said the second step should be for the Bhopal court to decide the question of liability, independent of the damage claim. Only then should the court take the final step of fixing the amount of damages.

"This litigation is crucial not only for the Indian government but for the entire Third World," argued one of the signatories, Upendra Baxi, a professor at the Indian Law Institute in New Delhi.

"For the first time the Indian government is pursuing the question of the liability of the multinationals who engaged knowingly in hazardous activities," said Baxi, arguing that an immediate settlement would be a sell-out of India's responsibility to hang the legal liability for the accident on Union Carbide.

The question of liability is not just a technicality, Baxi insisted, because "we are all potential victims of industrial accidents." A finding against Union Carbide might encourage other Third World countries to be more hard-nosed in negotiating contracts with multinationals, and those corporations might use stricter safety standards if they knew they could be held liable for accidents.

Proponents of an immediate settlement, however, point to the suffering of families like Bebi's and say it has gone on long enough. Although the national and local governments have spent more than \$110 million on medical relief and employment programs in the last three years, even government officials concede it has not been enough.

Bhopal's nine government-run hospitals and dispensaries in gas-affected areas treat 4,800 patients daily; another 1,000-1,200 visit four Red Cross dispensaries set up in 1985.

Most patients come back month after month with the same symptoms, according

to Red Cross doctor J.P. Choudhary. These include burning in the throat and eyes, severe coughing and difficulty breathing. Many suffer from pulmonary fibrosis, an incurable and often fatal clogging of the lungs with fibrous tissue.

"People are still dying, because the gas did permanent damage to their lungs," said Choudhary. "We usually give them antibiotics, and the symptoms go away for a while, but then they reappear." Many patients will need medical care for the rest of their lives.

Aside from illnesses directly caused by MIC, doctors have to cope with a large increase in such respiratory diseases as tuberculosis and pneumonia, Dr. Choudhary said. And a recent study by a Bombay medical group found that the rate of spontaneous abortions among pregnant women in Bhopal shot up from 9 percent in 1984 to 31 percent in 1985.

The magnitude of these problems has led some to oppose a settlement on purely

The Indian government's legal strategy focuses on pinning liability on Union Carbide.

monetary grounds. Alok Pratap Singh, the leader of the main gas victim's association, has been lobbying the government for three years to provide free lifelong medical treatment for the gas-affected, employment programs for the disabled and full welfare benefits for those who are unable to work. He estimates this will ultimately cost \$7 billion. "So you can decide for yourself whether \$600 million is sufficient," Singh said.

Singh stressed that the quality of medical care is poor. "People complain of headaches,

so they give you aspirin. If someone has been continuously suffering from headaches for three years, for three years they have continuously been giving them aspirin. Is this medical treatment?"

He also criticized government job-training programs, which officials say have benefitted about 2,500 people, for leaving their participants high, dry and jobless after the three- or six-month training period.

Government takes charge: The victims have been shortchanged both because India's resources are limited and because the government's legal strategy has been focused on pinning liability on Union Carbide and resisting aid from outside. The government established itself, by an act of Parliament in 1985, as the sole representative of the gas victims (cutting out ambulance-chasing lawyers who rushed to the scene within days of the leak). Then, declining to sue merely Union Carbide's Indian subsidiary, which operated the plant, India filed suit in U.S. federal court in New York against the American parent company, which owns 50.9 percent of the shares in Union Carbide of India Ltd.

India fought to keep the case in the U.S. courts, where it felt it had a better chance of winning its \$3 billion claim. But the federal judge, John F. Keenan, ruled in May 1986 that the case should be tried in India, a decision upheld by a three-judge appeals panel and, last summer, by the U.S. Supreme Court. Negotiations for a settlement apparently began soon after the Supreme Court judgment.

Baxi and others approved of this strategy because they felt it important for the parent multinational, and not just the local subsidiary, to be held accountable. But Baxi feels that India has retreated too quickly and succumbed to pressure for immediate relief.

The Indian government's position on the question has been curious. When Judge Keenan asked Union Carbide in April 1985 to give \$5 million for immediate relief in Bhopal, Carbide agreed in two days, but it took the Indian government until November to approve the release of this money to the Indian Red Cross. A private vocational center set up in Bhopal was forced to close down last year after it was discovered that its funds came from Union Carbide. And a 21-year-old Englishman who raised \$10,000 in contributions by bicycling from Britain to Bhopal, was arrested last year and forced to leave the country after he tried to channel the money into relief work.

The reason for this attitude, said N.K. Singh, a leading Bhopal journalist, is twofold: the government fears relief might give Union Carbide help in the public-relations war, and it fears the political consequences.

"Even at the very beginning it would have been unpopular to take money from Carbide," Singh said. "Why? Because Union Carbide had destroyed our city, that's why. How can you take money from someone who's just destroyed your city? People want compensation, not charity."

Yet interviews with gas victims in Bhopal's slums suggest that what people want is money, regardless of what the label on the envelope says. But having waited so long, they are skeptical it will ever arrive.

"My mother-in-law was waiting for a claim form," related Banobi, a 50-year-old woman. "She waited a long time. Two months ago she died. Now the claim form has arrived. By the time the money comes half the people here will be dead."

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