

# LABOUR FOCUS ON EASTERN EUROPE

A Socialist Defence Bulletin on  
Eastern Europe and the USSR

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## LABOUR SAYS:

## FREE SABATA



Photo: Palach Press Ltd.

Marta Kubisova, former Charter 77 spokesperson and Dr Jaroslav Sabata, current spokesperson in jail for 9 months.

# Contents

## STATEMENT OF AIMS

A growing number of socialists and communists are taking a stand against the suppression of democratic rights in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The labour movement has international responsibilities in this field as well as in the field of solidarity action with those struggling against oppression in Chile or Southern Africa or Northern Ireland.

But up to now socialists have lacked a source of frequent and reliable information about events in Eastern Europe. Coverage in the papers of the Left remains scanty, while reports in the bourgeois press are selective and slanted. The first aim of **Labour Focus on Eastern Europe** is to help fill this gap by providing a more comprehensive and regular source of information about events in that part of the world.

The mass media give ample space to Tory politicians and to some from the Labour Party who seek to use protests against repression in Eastern Europe as a cover for their own support for social inequality in Britain and for witch-hunts against those who oppose it. At the same time campaigns run by socialists in the labour and trade union movement for many years concerning victims of repression in Eastern Europe are largely ignored by the media. The second aim of this bulletin therefore is to provide comprehensive information about the activities of socialists and labour movement organisations that are taking up this issue.

**Labour Focus** is a completely independent bulletin whose editorial collective includes various trends of socialist and Marxist opinion. It is not a bulletin for debate on the nature of the East European states, nor is its purpose to recommend a strategy for socialists in Eastern Europe: there are other journals on the Left that take up these questions. Our purpose is to provide a comprehensive coverage of these societies with a special emphasis on significant currents campaigning for working class, democratic and national rights.

Whenever possible we will quote the sources of our information. Unless otherwise stated, all the material in **Labour Focus** may be reproduced, with acknowledgement. Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the editorial collective.

In these ways we hope to strengthen campaigns to mobilise the considerable influence that the British labour movement can have in the struggles to end repression in the USSR and Eastern Europe.

**SPONSORS:** Tariq Ali, Edmund Baluka, Vladimir Derer, Ivan Hartel, Jan Kavan, Nicholas Krasso, Leonid Plyushch, Hillel Ticktin.

**EDITORS:** Vladimir Derer, Quintin Hoare, Jan Kavan, Oliver MacDonald, Anna Paczuska, Claude Vancour.

**MANAGING EDITOR:** Oliver MacDonald

**EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE:** Barbara Brown, Patrick Camiller, Susannah Fry, Ivan Hartel, Victor Haynes, Alex Holt, Mark Jackson, Helen Jamieson, Pawel Jankowski, Michele Lee, Anca Mihailescu, Günter Minnerup, Laura Strong.

Parts of this issue were prepared by the Committee in Defense of Soviet Political Prisoners, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

All correspondence to:

**LABOUR FOCUS ON EASTERN EUROPE**

Bottom Flat, 116 Cazenove Rd., London N.16.

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## EDITORIAL

Bahro Should be Allowed to Come to the West. .... 1

## EAST GERMANY

Document:

Bahro's Second Letter from Prison ..... 1  
"An Active Intelligence Agent" — Official! ..... 2  
Government Retreats on Military Education --  
by Günter Minnerup ..... 3

## CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Charter 77 Renews its Leadership -- by Jan Kavan ..... 4  
The Sabata Case:

1. Speech from the Dock (Document) ..... 4  
2. Sabata's Lawyer Threatened (Document) ..... 5  
3. Interview with Sabata's Son ..... 5

Document:

Czechoslovakia's Outcast 2% ..... 6

## POLAND

Worker Activist's Trial Becomes Test Case -- by Peter Green ... 9

Documents from the Peasant Movement:

1. Rzeszów Peasants Organise ..... 9  
2. Self-Defence Committee in Rzeszów  
Outlines Immediate Tasks ..... 10  
3. Activities of the Self-Defence Committee  
in the Grojec region ..... 10  
4. Village Life since the War --  
Letter to the Local Party Secretary ..... 11  
5. Self-Defence Committee Raises Social Problems ..... 12

## ROMANIA

New Trade Union Committee Gets Big Response from  
Hungarian Workers -- by Patrick Camiller ..... 12  
Document:

Founding Declaration of Romanian Trade Union Committee 13  
The Hungarian Minority in Transylvania -- by Mihaly Vajda ... 14

## SOVIET UNION

200 Protest Arrest of Left Oppositionists in Leningrad --

by John Scobie and Helen Jamieson ..... 17

Document:

Declaration by Trade Union Group ..... 17  
Executions in Moscow -- by Ustym Tsyhanenko ..... 18  
Medvedev, Agapova Seek to Stand in Elections ..... 18  
Ukrainian Oppositionists Under Attack ..... 18  
Old' Bolshevik Dies ..... 19  
News in Brief ..... 19

## LABOUR MOVEMENT

Labour Leaders in New Bahro Appeal ..... 19

New Moves in Klebanov Affair ..... 19

Sabata Protests ..... 19

## REVIEWS

Marc Rakovski, 'Towards an East European Marxism' --  
by Wlodzimierz Brus ..... 20

## LETTERS

Debate on Boycotting Soviet Union

Tamara Deutscher ..... 22  
Ken Coates ..... 23  
Günter Minnerup ..... 25

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# EDITORIAL

## BAHRO SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO COME TO THE WEST

Rudolf Bahro's second letter from an East German prison, published in this issue of Labour Focus, indicates that he is now willing to be deported to West Germany. The East German Marxist, who has already served more than 18 months of an 8 year prison sentence, had hitherto rejected suggestions from the police authorities that he should voluntarily go to the West. It appears that the East German party leadership would have preferred such voluntary exile which would have enabled them to discredit him as a renegade from the German Democratic Republic seeking fame and fortune in the capitalist world. But Bahro courageously faced a long prison sentence in order to defend his right to express his criticisms of the existing system in Eastern Europe. He thereby forced the East German party leadership to choose between taking a real step towards allowing socialist criticism by releasing Bahro or reverting to the most primitive form of Stalinism.

The resulting jailing of Bahro for treasonable espionage last June put the East German authorities in an exposed position. It involved the government in breaking ranks vis-a-vis its neighbours, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and even the Soviet Union in various respects. In the first place, it is no longer normal practice in a number of East European countries for authors to be jailed for publishing books under their real names in the West. In Poland and Hungary it is almost a commonplace for socialist critics of the regime to publish their views in the West. And this effective right has also been won by writers in the USSR and Czechoslovakia. Even in East Germany, Robert Havemann has been able to publish books in the West without being jailed for it. By jailing Bahro for writing *The Alternative* the SED leadership reverted to the sort of policies prevalent in the mid-1960s in Eastern Europe.

But an even more blatant form of recidivism was shown in the judicial method involved in jailing Bahro. During the period of detente since the beginning of the 1970s, the Soviet leadership has attempted to ensure that repression of political opponents in Eastern Europe would proceed according to the letter of the law. Brezhnev has sought to shift judicial principles away from the old Stalinist line of 'class' justice whereby anybody held to be hostile to official policy could be dubbed 'objectively' counter-revolutionary regardless of any reference to the facts of a case. Instead, judicial repression was to follow the objective test of evidence, however flimsy, and the letter of the legal code was to be applied.

By jailing Bahro for 8 years for espionage and treason, the SED leadership was reverting to the old 1930s method, since no serious

evidence could be produced to prove that Bahro was a spy. The only form of justification for the sentence was that Bahro was 'objectively a counter-revolutionary spy', 'objectively' assisting the military lobbies in the capitalist world.

Such a stand is a potential source of political embarrassment for the governments of Eastern Europe. The treatment of Bahro has put the East German authorities out on a limb. For they have gone against the Soviet leadership's line for dealing with Western criticisms of repression in Eastern Europe. The Soviet leadership declares that there are laws in the USSR against such things as 'anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda' and that those in the West who criticise the use of these laws against people who break them are interfering in the internal affairs of the Warsaw Pact countries. But it is not possible for the East German authorities to declare that there are laws against spies which can be used against people who are not remotely involved in spying.

By reverting to these methods in the case of a man who is evidently a convinced communist, the East German authorities have shocked labour movement opinion in the West profoundly. The jailing of Rudolf Bahro has done enormous damage to the SED's great efforts to win supporters in the labour movements of Western Europe, and to present itself as a modern, sophisticated, socialist leadership.

Up to now it has been prepared to pay this price for keeping Rudolf Bahro in jail. It has done so for domestic political reasons. While open opposition groups of all sorts in a country like the USSR present at best a marginal threat to the Soviet leadership, the East German leaders felt, probably correctly, that behind Bahro lay powerful forces in the German Democratic Republic ready to come forward openly for socialist and democratic change. Since the expulsion of Wolf Biermann in the autumn of 1976 there had been growing ferment and signs of a strong undercurrent of socialist opposition inside and outside the ruling party. By taking massive retaliatory action against Rudolf Bahro the party leadership hoped to put a stop to that ferment.

This nervous and repressive response will not solve any problems in the long term. By stepping up the campaign for Bahro's release, the labour movements in the West can make the price of his further imprisonment more than the East German authorities feel able to pay. And now that Bahro has indicated his readiness to suffer expulsion to West Germany, socialists here should demand that he should be allowed to go to the West.

# EAST GERMANY

## Bahro's Second Letter from Prison

[Rudolf Bahro, the jailed East German Marxist, has sent a second letter from prison to the West. (For the text of his first letter, see Labour Focus, Vol.2. No.5). We print the full text of this letter below.

Bahro is currently serving an 8 year prison sentence in East Germany on a charge of high treason involving the betrayal of state secrets. In reality his imprisonment in August 1977 was a response to the publication of his analysis of "existing socialism", *The Alternative*, a work of Marxist theory which has been widely acclaimed by socialists and communists in the West.

The present letter from Bahro for the first time lifts the cloak of official, East German secrecy around his trial last June and refutes the slanderous attack on him by the East German press agency ADN in its report of his conviction (see inset for the full text of the ADN report.)

The letter is translated for Labour Focus by Paul Edmondson from the West German magazine *Der Spiegel*.]

The following facts about my trial must be stated and ought to reach the public as soon as possible:

1. The charge of high treason, in accordance with Paragraph 98<sup>1</sup>, referred exclusively to the contents of my book, **The Alternative**, and to my dissertation which remains, unpublished, at the West Berlin VSA (Publishers for the Study of the Labour Movement) and which, like the book, takes the form of a theoretical study.

Both of these works were described as 'collections of information'. Yet at no stage was the information contained in them alleged to be of a secret nature. For example, a passing remark about the concealment of facts about productive capacity by factory planners and reporters was treated as 'information about concealed capacity'. All my observations of reality during the last ten years were interpreted de facto as the collection of information.

Since it is impossible to write a social criticism without referring to the bare facts of social existence, it means that it is illegal to undertake a critical analysis of the reality in East Germany and to publish one's findings.

2. The trial was based on the allegation that, from 1975-1976 onwards, i.e. from the time when I decided to publish the book in West Germany, I had collected 'information suitable for assisting institutions whose activities are directed against the German Democratic Republic', and that I had collected it for such institutions and had transmitted it to them by handing over the book.

Since neither the EVA [The European Publishing Company, Bahro's publishers in Cologne] nor the VSA ought to be described as institutions of that kind, Paragraph 98 had to be interpreted extensively in the sense of 'indirect transmission'. Since the dissertation had already been completed in 1975 and was not published, the allegation of 'collecting for' could not be applied here, and an action could only be brought on the grounds of 'attempted transmission'. Therefore the public prosecutor's application for a total of nine years' imprisonment, a year more than both courts later confirmed, was clearly levelled against the published book.

This legal construction, in itself grotesque, was furthermore inconsistent, to the extent that during 1976-1977 I did not introduce any new material, but tightened up and enlarged on mainly the theoretical-conceptual aspects of the first draft of the manuscript, which had been in existence since 1973. Therefore, just as in contesting the aforementioned wide interpretation of the term 'transmission', my chosen defence lawyer, Dr. Gysi, demanded acquittal in respect of Paragraph 98.

3. My so-called betrayal of state secrets in respect of Paragraph 245.<sup>1</sup> (minor offence) was not connected with any transmission of information abroad. It consisted in the fact that I left several copies of the appendix to my dissertation, which remained in East Germany, with friends and did not surrender them when this appendix had been declared a state secret.

I considered myself obliged to remain silent about these copies, since otherwise I would have had to reveal my circle of friends, which was something I had to avoid in view of my subsequent appearance in public.

4. The ADN report, for whose content the public prosecutor and a journalist bear much personal responsibility, does not even respect the relatively more objective manner in which the trial and the passing of sentence were conducted:

a) In judging my real motivation the court completely waived the allegation that my motive was self-enrichment. It merely established that there was a remunerative contract with the publishers. The state prosecutor relied for his numerical data on a report in *Stern* [a West German weekly magazine] of February 1978, according to which there were already 80,000 copies of my book on the market.



East German Party leader Honecker (right) offering something to a reluctant West German Chancellor Schmidt. Will he be prepared to offer Schmidt Bahro?

## “An Intelligence Agent” Official!

On 30 June 1978, the official East German news agency ADN circulated the following report on the sentence passed on Rudolf Bahro:

'Before the First Criminal Court in Berlin, Rudolf Bahro had to answer to charges of high treason relating to the collection of information and the betrayal of state secrets.

As a result of statements made by the accused and numerous witnesses, and on the basis of documentary evidence and expert opinion, it was proved in the course of the main trial that Bahro had been an active intelligence agent. Over a long period of time Bahro collected news and information for transmission to hostile forces in West Germany. In addition, the accused repeatedly betrayed secret factual information in contravention of the responsibilities invested in him by the state. The particularly reprehensible nature of the criminal activities engaged in by Bahro and directed against the German Democratic Republic is characterised by the fact that he attempted to disguise his hostile activities by using intelligence service methods.

It was established beyond doubt that the treacherous activities of the accused included the supplying of deliberately fabricated and false information, gross misrepresentations and untrue allegations to circles of people actively hostile to the GDR, by using the sufficiently well-known conspiratorial means, methods and channels employed by intelligence services. He co-operated intensively in this with correspondents from the West German mass media. He established particularly close links with Ulrich Schwarz, formerly the accredited *Spiegel* correspondent in the GDR, who was prepared to abuse his position as a journalist to become, among other things, a courier of information. Other West German correspondents, who are active intelligence agents, also co-operated with Bahro.

Furthermore, it was established during the trial that in order to satisfy his lust for money Bahro accepted a sum of 200,000 Marks from his paymasters for this anti-socialist and subversive activity.

On 30 June 1978 Bahro was sentenced to eight years' detention for crimes relating to Paragraphs 98 and 245 of the State Penal Code.'

b) The court did not even level an allegation of falsification against a single sentence in either of the two works. It merely called into question my method in general. In reply to the relevant question I did indeed concede the 'tendentiousness' of my representation, in the very same sense that Marx and Engels considered their writings to be tendentious and partisan.

c) I made use of so-called 'conspiratorial methods' for the sole purpose of protecting myself against premature discovery, against the loss of the manuscript, and being prevented from publishing. There was no foreign influence whatsoever on my book of which the EVA obtained only the final draft. The relatively trivial arrangements I had to make in order to realise my plans are characteristic not of me, but of the circumstances in which I had to operate.

d) I had neither direct nor indirect contacts in the West other than those with the two publishers and with those sections of the West German mass media which are accredited in East Germany. When *Unsere Zeit* [the daily paper of the West German

Communist Party] refers to me as being an agent, they might like to ask the East German Ministry for State Security why the original charge under Paragraph 100 (subversive communications) was dropped even before the trial.

During the trial evidence was submitted that the *Spiegel* collaborates intensively with intelligence services, and it was subsequently alleged that this was also true of 'several' of the journalists I met at my own request. Even if this really was the case, I did not have recourse to them in this capacity, either subjectively or objectively, since it was irrelevant for my publicity purposes.

5. Despite a few arbitrary restrictions and manipulations during my remand in Berlin—Hohenschönhausen, I was, in the main, formally correctly treated within the framework of the East German laws on criminal trials and the execution of sentence, and was, measured against the averaged conditions in East German prisons, well taken care of and accommodated. I am physically and mentally in good shape.

Throughout the proceedings I defended my appearance in print to the hilt with factual arguments. At the end of the trial I stated before the court that: the leadership of the Socialist Unity Party, which arranged for my arrest and which determined the course of the investigation and the outcome of the trial, used its security organs, its courts and its prisons as substitutes for ideological debate.

6. I am now by and large acquainted with the response to my stand and the publication of my book, and am especially pleased about the solidarity of those circles which collectively take a

progressive stance, and which also protest against the often much more severe injustices perpetrated or covered up by the dominant powers in the Western world.

7. Since the proceedings against me have now been carried through in the familiar fashion, I am thinking of leaving East Germany, but without any feelings of hostility. I am thereby reacting to the political situation which has arisen around my case. If I stayed without having been completely rehabilitated in the matter of alleged high treason, my existence here would in all probability attract the constant attention of those forces which, each for their own different motives, promote the cold war across the border separating the two power blocs.

I want to prevent the real problems at stake from being covered over, and would much prefer to develop my political position still further. I am also convinced that there is a task for Marxists and Communists of my persuasion in Western Europe and especially in West Germany.

#### Footnotes.

1. Paragraph 98 of the East German Penal Code relates to the 'collection of information' and reads as follows:

"i. Whosoever collects or transmits information which is suited to assisting organisations, institutions or groups whose activities are directed against the German Democratic Republic or any other peace-loving nation, will be sentenced to a period of detention of between two and twelve years.

ii. Preparation and attempt are punishable offences."

2. "Whosoever allows unauthorised persons access to secret documents or material or allows such documents or material to be mislaid or in any other way discloses secret facts, in contravention of responsibilities explicitly conferred on him by law, contract of employment or by a State or economic body, will be sentenced to a maximum of two years' imprisonment, put on probation, or publicly censured."

## Government Retreats on Military Education

When the synod of the Evangelical Church in the GDR held its annual meeting last September in East Berlin, it could look back on the outcome of its latest test of strength with the Honecker regime with some satisfaction. It had once again proved that the churches remain the only social organisation in the German Democratic Republic with an appreciable measure of political independence from the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED), and shown its ability to wrest political concessions from the government through open and organised protests.

The contentious issue was the planned introduction of compulsory military education in GDR schools from 1 September 1978. Widely considered a state response to the growing shortage of recruits for long-term careers in the National People's Army, the measure met with immediate and widespread indignation among young people and parents alike, expressed in a number of spontaneous protests: the Ministry of Education had to print a standard letter of reply to individual complaints, in which the petitioners were advised 'to obtain further information' from their headmaster! But most significantly, the hierarchy of the Evangelical Church decided to take the matter up officially. In letters dated 5 May and again 14 June it demanded the withdrawal of the military education decree, and, if that was not possible, at least its modification by making participation voluntary and stressing a moral commitment to the peaceful

resolution of conflicts. Kurt Domsch, president of the Evangelical Church in Dresden, openly admitted on West German radio that 'there exists a definite difference of opinion between the church and the state'.

Most active, however, were the Protestant student groups. In Naumburg an Open Letter to all other Protestant students was published, seventy people signed an appeal to the Bishop of Dresden. Church services on the military education decree attracted unusually large congregations, and at some of these military toys and war books were symbolically banished. Some of these activities were not without consequences: on 16 August Renate and Harry Pohl were arrested in East Berlin for speaking out against military education in a protest letter to their district council, and in December Uwe Reimann, a church volunteer worker who had distributed self-made leaflets against military education in August, was sentenced to two years and three months jail after two copies of the 'Manifesto of the GDR Opposition' (published by the West German magazine *Der Spiegel*) were found in his flat.

The role of the Protestant churches, particularly its student and youth centres, as relatively autonomous focal points for social and political dissent, is not new. Wolf Biermann's last semi-public appearance in the GDR prior to his expulsion in November 1976—and his first since 1964—took place in early 1976 in the Evangelical Church of Prenzlau. Many

young people, including those with little or no religious inclinations, prefer the church youth clubs to the activities organised by the Free German Youth (FDJ, the SED's youth front).

Also, on 17 September 1978 41-year-old pastor Rolf Gunther burnt himself to death during a service in his church in Falkenstein, following the example of pastor Brusewitz two years earlier. Although the motives for the self-immolations are far from clear, they focussed publicity once again on dissent in the church.

Faced with all these problems, the government decided to make certain concessions on the issue of military education: although it was finally introduced last September, it was stated that children not participating would not be discriminated against, that first aid and disaster training would be on the syllabus during the first half-year term, and that training camps with target practice would not start until the summer of 1979 at the earliest.

The churches, however, remain in principled opposition to any such plans. The official report at the synod reaffirmed, 'the unalienable task of the church .. to publicly articulate its opinions even when these are not in accordance with the government or public opinion'.

by **Günter Minnerup**

# CZECHOSLOVAKIA

## Charter 77 Renews its Leadership — by Jan Kavan

On 8 February, following the imprisonment of Charter spokesperson Jaroslav Sabata, a number of new Charter representatives were announced in Prague.

Zdena Tominova took the place of Marta Kubisova who had resigned as a spokesperson on 6 November on the advice of her doctor: Marta Kubisova is pregnant and had suffered a miscarriage 8 years ago. Ms. Tominova had been designated as Ms. Kubisova's replacement in November, but because she had been unable to assume the very arduous job immediately, Vaclav Havel had been made a temporary spokesperson.

On the same day, the Charter movement announced the replacement of Dr L. Hejdanek by Dr Vaclav Bende, a former mathematician now working as a stoker, who is one of the most active members of VONS, the Committee in Defence of Unjustly Prosecuted Persons. Like Dr



Jiri Dienstbier, new Charter 77 spokesperson (right) with Frantisek Kriegl

Hejdanek, he is known for his Christian beliefs.

While remaining an official spokesperson, Dr Sabata is at present in jail and is therefore unable to effectively perform his duties, so the number of spokespersons has been extended to four, with the appointment of Jiri Dienstbier, a former Communist Party member and well-known radio journalist as a 'new spokesman. Before Dr Sabata's arrest, he had selected Jiri Dienstbier as one of two men to represent him in meetings in Prague whenever he was unable to travel from Brno.

The current rotation of Charter 77 posts is in line with the statement issued by the Charter movement in September 1977 indicating that spokespersons would be changed periodically. Both Dr Hejdanek and Vaclav Havel have indicated their readiness to help the new representatives and their willingness, if asked in the future, to again stand in as spokespersons if necessary.

## The Sabata Case

[On January 11th, Charter 77 spokesperson Jaroslav Sabata was sentenced to 9 months imprisonment by a court in Trutnov, on the Czech-Polish border. He was charged with insulting a policeman. We publish here a transcript of Sabata's speech at his trial.

Jaroslav Sabata was arrested in October 1978 while attempting with other Charter 77 representatives to meet a delegation from the Polish opposition group KDS-KOR. The meeting which was perfectly open and legal was broken up by the Polish and Czech police and while Sabata was being held illegally at the Trutnov police station he responded to the police's brutal treatment in the way he describes below.

Sabata, a leader of the Communist Party in 1968, has been one of the most vigorous and consistent leaders of the socialist opposition to the regime of Gustav Husak installed after the Soviet invasion of August 1968. He served 5 years of a 6½ year sentence for oppositional activities between 1971 and 1976 [see the interview with Sabata's son Vaclav Sabata below] and the authorities have still to decide whether to impose the remaining 1½ years of that

sentence in addition to his current prison term. Opposition circles in Prague believe the regime may try political blackmail on Sabata, threatening him with the 1½ years in jail unless he resigns as a Charter 77 spokesperson and gives up political activity. In such an attempt the police would have the benefit of Sabata's very poor health. He suffered a very severe heart attack during his earlier period in jail, he has an ulcer condition which was made worse by his being denied a proper diet, and he has spine trouble resulting from the lack of chairs with backs on them during his 5 year jail term.

A disturbing feature of Sabata's trial was the threat against his defence lawyer, Dr. Danisz of expulsion from the legal profession. We publish a statement by Anna Sabatova, daughter of Jaroslav Sabata, exposing this threat against her father's lawyer.

Both the transcript of Sabata's speech and Anna Sabatova's statement were made available by Palach Press. Translation of the speech for Labour Focus is by Mark Jackson.]

### 1. Speech from the Dock

Every state must defend its organs, as Mr Prosecutor has said, but every state must also defend its citizens. If a citizen is forced into obedience by harsh means, or even by violence, he has to defend himself. Man is not a dog, Mr Prosecutor, and he has the right to be treated as a free human being even if he may not be a free citizen.

I allegedly committed a criminal act by insulting a policeman, Radis Stojkovic, by using a vulgar expression and slapping his face. I categorically deny that I used the expression, 'You shit of a policeman'. Never in my life have I used the word, 'shit', not even when I heard it regularly used in an environment where it is a common expletive — whether during slave-labour in Germany during the war, or in prison, or elsewhere. I have never used this word—not even as an expletive—and I could submit plenty of evidence to prove this. I did slap the policeman, Stojkovic, Mr Chairman, but I acted in the total conviction that Stojkovic had overstepped the rights of a public official and therefore did not

enjoy legal protection. The incident took place when Stojkovic, after practically completing a personal search, to which I submitted without protest, began to shout, 'Why are you sitting down, I haven't finished with you yet!' He pushed me from the sofa, where I was putting on my shoes, shoved me into the middle of the room and began pushing me around. He ordered me to stand upright with my hands by my sides as if I were in a concentration camp — that is in a situation where I was abused and my human dignity humiliated. Besides that I was justly afraid that his shouts and inexplicably rough treatment indicated that he would continue to use violence, as he had earlier in the toilet and in the corridor, where he hit me and banged my head against the wall.

Obviously I objected to this treatment and I asked, 'Why am I here — am I summoned, detained or accused and what am I accused of?' When Stojkovic began to shake me, I, with understandable indignation, slapped his face. I definitely did not

'grossly insult the policeman, Stojkovic, during the exercise of his right as an official, or because of the exercise of this right.' If I admit now that I am not exactly pleased that I acted in this way, I must stress at the same time that I definitely do not feel guilty as charged. I know why the aforementioned vulgar expression is ascribed to me: it is so that I may be labelled an 'ordinary criminal' or 'inferior citizen' so that articles will be written about me in those terms.

At this point it is necessary to mention the wider circumstances of the incident which have an unmistakably political character. I will not discuss them in detail because Mr Chairman would certainly not encourage me, to say the least. My past conviction has been referred to here, as well as my conditional release in 1976, and the

fact that my conviction was of a political nature. Mr Prosecutor has said that I did not draw a lesson from my punishment, as is clear from my behaviour which he says must be seen today as particularly dangerous to society. Indeed, I did not draw any lesson in that sense — I regarded, and still regard, my conviction in 1972 for alleged subversion of the Republic as unjust. I also rejected the court's ruling on my conditional release in December 1976, stating that I would insist on full rehabilitation. What I did take a real lesson from was the historical experience of the whole workers' movement. It is with this lesson in mind that I repeat before this court that every state must maintain and defend the rights of its citizens and it is with this lesson in mind that I will speak before any other eventual court. That is all I wanted to say.

## 2. Sabata's Lawyer Threatened

JUDR Josef Danisz, member of the Legal Advice Bureau no.5, Vaclavske namesti 41, Praha 1. said today that he was afraid he might be prevented from continuing with the defence of my father, Jaroslav Sabata, who is to be tried by the District Court in Trutnov on 11 January. He told me it was possible that I might have in the next few days to find another defence counsel for my father. I believe that this situation is due to the fact that in the past year Dr Danisz has taken over the defence of several Charter 77 signatories, namely the writer Jiri Grusa, Ing. Pavel Roubal, Jaroslav Kukal, Tomas Petrivy, and he appeared in court to defend Jiri Chmel. His conduct of these cases, under the conditions in which Czech lawyers have to work, has been a unique example of courage and professional ethics. Yesterday, three days before the court hearing of my father's case, the 'Vybor mestskeho sdruzeni advokatu v Praze' (Committee of the City Association of Lawyers in Prague) decided to request the local

trade union committee to give preliminary agreement to terminate Dr Danisz's membership of the legal profession. The Committee gave as its reason that at the trial of Jiri Chmel Dr Danisz referred to the trials of the 1950s and, on another occasion, mentioned a case of physical violence against one of the Charter 77 signatories. The true reason for this action is, however, that the organ of state power fears an uncompromising defence at my father's trial. I am convinced that this unlawful discrimination by an official body against a lawyer who strives for observance of the law and its action in preventing my father from receiving an effective defence will attract the attention of the public and of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers.

Anna Sabatova, Anglicka 8, Praha 2.  
9 January 1979

## 3. Interview with Sabata's Son

*[Following Dr Sabata's trial Labour Focus spoke to his son, Vaclav Sabata, now living in Vienna. Vaclav Sabata spoke to Joe Singlewood about the case and about his father's earlier sentence in 1972.]*

**Your father was imprisoned again last week for his activities in opposition to the regime in Czechoslovakia. What would you say are the main ideas that motivate your father?**

The main political idea of my father is that the masses of the people must be active. The problems that must be solved are not just problems for the members or leaders of the Communist Party, but are the problems that concern the mass of the people themselves. All the CP politicians work on the basis of the very old tradition that things are done and issues decided behind closed doors. It is only after the problems are solved that the ordinary people are informed. The solutions are served up to them ready-made. This tradition still survives even among the ex-communist opposition. Sabata, my father, was one of the few who refused to accept this tradition. He tried to do everything openly, to involve the people in the decisions that affect them.

**In 1971 your father and your family were involved in activities in Brno around the elections that were being held at that time. Jaroslav Sabata is now threatened with a further 18 months in jail to complete a six and a half year sentence for his part in that electoral campaign. What was actually done in Brno at election time?**

It was essentially a leafletting action around

the first elections to be held after the Soviet invasion and occupation in 1968. In Brno my brother, Jan, was the main organizer of this action. But it was connected with similar events in Prague as well. We were over 20 people who took an active part in distributing the leaflets. We were all young, mostly friends and mates from the school. We put the leaflets through the doors. In the leaflet we spoke against the Russian occupation. We encouraged people who didn't agree with the official candidates to write in their own candidates on the ballot. The Czech Constitution says that every citizen has the right to do this. We pointed out that citizens have the right not to vote and we condemned the 'compulsory' voting practice. I'll give you an example of what I mean. In Mikolov, a town with a population of about 10,000 people, the election lasted two days and at the end of the second day a public broadcast system set up in the town centre, read out the names of three people who hadn't yet voted and told them to come at once to the town hall and vote. In Blansko there was another election two years ago in which the official candidate, a woman, was very unpopular. She was regarded as a real swine and the Party knew this. Nobody would vote for her. So just before the election was over the Party sent to Brno, 50 km away, and had three bus-loads of soldiers sent down to vote for the official candidate. You see, soldiers can vote anywhere, and in this way they saved the candidate and the official propaganda could record the usual high turn-out and so on.

The arrests began on 9 November and continued until February 1972. Of the group of young people in Brno, 16 were arrested in

the first week. In the summer of 1972 the trials began. We were divided up into smaller groups and the trials were spread out. The young people from Brno were the first to be tried and six of us were sent to prison. There were three other groups, one group included my father, my sister Anna was part of another group with Mrs. Tesarova, and there was a group of ex-members of the Socialist Party. After those people had gone to jail there wasn't much activity for a while because the most active people had been put away. But as they were gradually released from prison they resumed their activities again and every since 1973 there has been more or less continuous oppositional activity in Brno. Documents were written, letters were sent abroad. Ideological groupings were formed, but they were not connected. The first really common action after this was the Charter 77. From the initial group of young people involved in the leafletting in 1971 about 4 or 5 have signed the Charter.

**Do you think there is much support for people like your father among the workers and youth in Czechoslovakia?**

From my own experience working in Brno, in various different types of jobs, everyone is in opposition to the regime **privately**, but of course they are afraid to be so publicly. The fear that you can be axed from your job, that your children won't be allowed to study at university, and so on, is a very real fear.

**Footnote.**

1. None of us were members of the Communist Party.

## Czechoslovakia's Outcast 2%

### Charter Document on Gypsies

*[The harassment and mistreatment of Britain's Romany population has not become a major social or political issue here because of the small size of the Romany community. But in Czechoslovakia the Romanies make up about two per cent of the total population and constitute an ethnic minority of a size equivalent to that of Britain's black community. And some of the problems faced by these two minorities are similar.]*

*As the document which we publish below makes clear, the Romanies in Czechoslovakia are being used as a surplus labour force that is kept in a permanent state of insecurity through legal discrimination. It is also subject to hostility from the majority population.*

#### INTRODUCTION

The position of Gypsies/Romanies in Czechoslovakia is not a subject which has attracted general attention, and the majority of people know almost nothing about this most under-privileged minority. This ignorance is the result of a deliberate policy of concealing all the basic facts about the Gypsies/Romanies. Things have now reached the point, however, where a protest must be made.

The attitude of the general public oscillates between indifference and racism. Manifestations of racism and segregationism have been multiplying and will continue to do so. The gypsies/Romanies, who are the most legally deprived group in Czechoslovakia, are not generally included when people talk about the victims of illegality; such concern is reserved for 'respectable people'. If the silence on this question continues, then one can see a tragic and paradoxical situation arising: the Gypsies/Romanies will be associated with anti-social behaviour in the minds not only of the general public of indifferent consumers, but also of those who are concerned about legality and anti-social behaviour; and it will be the repressive organs, carrying the chief blame for the conditions in which Gypsies/Romanies now live, who will have to protect them from people who now denounce these same organs in the name of legality and humanity. And the Gypsies will act out the role of the Jews all over again: in fact this has already begun.

The problem of minorities has affected the Republic ever since the foundation of the Czechoslovak state, playing a fundamental part in the Munich crisis and the catastrophe which followed. There has not however been any serious analysis of the minorities policy of the pre-war Republic, and since the war there has been no attempt to develop such a policy. Living on Czechoslovak soil are a whole series of more or less numerous national and ethnic groups about whose problems the majority of the population knows nothing. The minority question is becoming more serious in our country because the territory of the Republic is among the most thickly populated and there are no empty spaces. This geographical/demographic feature has always influenced the tradition of Czech nationalism and its attitude to minorities. For this reason also, neglect of the minority question and suppression of information about it are especially dangerous and irresponsible. The specific situation in Czechoslovakia demands an all the more perspicacious and tolerant policy, founded on a

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**A 20 MIN. COLOUR VIDEO FILM ENTITLED 'THE INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA' IS AVAILABLE FROM THE COMMITTEE IN DEFENSE OF SOVIET POLITICAL PRISONERS, P.O. BOX 6574, STATION 'C', EDMONTON, ALBERTA, T5B 4M4, CANADA. RENTAL FEE IS \$7.00 (Can.) PLUS POSTAGE.**

rational desire for co-existence, rather than a conservative and restrictive policy expressing a desire to oppress and wipe out the Gypsies socially and culturally.

The Gypsies/Romanies differ from other minority groups in that they are a developing culture in the middle of European cultures. They are the second largest, or according to some estimates the largest minority in Czechoslovakia. The traditional name 'Gypsy' is loaded with pejorative overtones which have developed over centuries of prejudice and have nothing to do with the original name of this ethnic group. For this reason we will use the term 'Romanies' — one which is in accord both with the language and feelings of the Romanies themselves, and with the international trend towards replacing old names for ethnic and national groups with those used by the groups to refer to themselves.

#### THE ROMANY POPULATION

There are about 300,000 Romanies in Czechoslovakia. The official figures diminish this number, because, among other reasons, the recording of national affiliation has often been subject to the arbitrary will of census officials, and because some Romanies are reluctant to admit their ethnic origin. Estimates of their share in the population vary between 1.6 and 2.9%. But since official ethnic totals are usually drawn from the lowest estimates, other social statistics expressed in percentages appear higher. Thus, figures relating to Romany criminality and poverty become higher, and these figures are interpreted in official circles as proving something about the Romanies themselves, rather than about the society in which they have to live. More than a quarter of Romanies live in the Czech lands, into which they have emigrated from Slovakia since the war. Of the original 10,000 Czech and Moravian Romanies who experienced Nazism only a few hundred survived. The rest died in concentration camps, mainly in gas chambers. The fertility of the Romanies is three times that of the rest of the population; child mortality is twice as high; and their health is incomparably worse than that of the rest of the population.

In the past, social ostracism of Romanies was basically rooted in racial differences, their extreme poverty and differences in ways of life. Today the chief obstacle to solving the 'Gypsy problem' in Czechoslovakia is the disorganisation of the dominant society. The so-called 'Gypsy problem' is so acute because of the growing problems of the economy, the continuing bureaucratisation of the system, the dysfunction in communication in the spheres of ideas and information, and the growing brutalisation and disrespect for the law shown by the repressive institutions. The 'Gypsy problem' thus reveals deeper and more general social problems. It exposes how the politico-legal stereotypes drawn from old ideological theses give rise to projected solutions and trumpeting of alleged successes in a situation where the structure of the problem remains completely unchanged, and where all the proclamations serve only to cover over the actual problem.

#### THE OFFICIAL 'SOLUTION'

The real and the legal situations of Romanies are full of contradictions. The constitution and many laws, including international pacts, guarantee full rights not only to the individual but also to groups, including the right to language, culture and defence of specific interests. However, in reality, these rights are denied to the Romanies in Czechoslovakia. The policy of laying unwarranted emphasis on the distinction between ethnic and national minorities, and then stressing that the Romanies are an ethnic group, was dictated by the desire of the ruling powers to reduce the size of the minority problem, and to subordinate its handling to the alleged interests of the whole of

society. In reality the official approach to the 'Gypsy problem' stems from the old Stalinist ideas on the national question. This means that Romanies are faced with the choice of destroying their specific identity by becoming either Czechs or Slovaks. Legally the Romanies do not exist, while government, regional and district offices have been created which put them all on files and then categorise them according to absurd criteria. Special schools have been created which suppress rather than help to develop their culture; and orders are issued calling for the solution of the 'Gypsy problem' on the part of the regional offices. In official documents they are marked down only as 'citizens of gypsy origin' or perhaps simply as 'less well integrated inhabitants'.

The so-called 'solution of the Gypsy problem' normally amounts to nationwide campaigns of repressive measures about which the majority of the population is not informed. The first such nationwide measure was the 'list of nomadic and semi-nomadic persons' — in effect, a pogrom, based on law 74 of 1958, which took place over the whole territory of Czechoslovakia between March and June 1959. Law 74 of 1958 says: 'Anyone who persists in a nomadic way of life although offered permanent residence will be punished for criminal activity by between 6 months and 3 years imprisonment.' This law, which is unconstitutional, served also for attacking some social groups within the majority population, for example travelling showpeople and tinkers. But its main target was Romanies who were neither nomads nor semi-nomads. The Romanies of Czechoslovakia are made up of three sub-ethnic groups, two of which, comprising some 90 to 95% of the Romany population, have been settled for at least two centuries. The third sub-ethnic group—the Olach Romanies—comprising the remaining 5 to 10%, have remained travellers to this day. Law 74 of 1958 was directly employed only in an insignificant number of cases; however both in 1959 and later, in connection with the 'list of nomadic and semi-nomadic persons', it served as a pretext for racist repression. This law remains in force and also threatens Romanies who, while not nomads, are forced to migrate on account of living conditions not of their own making.

Instructions for applying the 'list of nomadic and semi-nomadic persons' were worked out months before in complete secrecy and down to the last detail, including the equipping of localities where the list had to be implemented, how to take fingerprints for the records, etc. Romanies who had a permanent residence and work were to be entered on the list if, allegedly, they sent their wives or companions to solicit or work as prostitutes. The orders did not demand any proof of soliciting or prostitution. Many Romanies with permanent residences and jobs who had nothing to do with a nomadic way of life found their way onto the list, because between 3 and 6 February 1959 they happened to have gone somewhere by train, and on their return had been arrested at the station and marked down as 'nomadic persons'. Once on the list they were to be offered a residence and sent to work 'at a definite place, according to the plan of work classification'. If Romanies did not stay in the residence and place of work to which they were assigned during the pogrom, even if they already had employment and a place to live, then they would be accused of 'drifting', and this would be considered as a concealed form of 'vagrancy'. If they wanted to give up a job even many years after the 'list', they would generally have to seek permission from the national committee, only to be often refused. If they should want to visit even near relations in an adjacent district, they would have to get permission from both the national committee of the district in which they were resident and the district which they intended to visit. Normally such permission would not be granted, even if the motive for this 'migration' was serious illness or disability. Thus, without a proper legal decision their place of residence was prescribed for them. For several years after the implementation of the 'list', Romanies who had never been 'vagrants' were putting in requests to be removed from the list. These requests were normally dealt with by several members of the national committee and a representative of the VB (regular police). Just as with the implementation of the list in 1959, the chief role on these commissions was played by the VB representatives, whose opinions carried more weight than those



Romany children making fun of authority in Slovakia ...

of the other members. Some requests were turned down even when all the other members of the commission agreed that a petitioner did not belong on the list. This happened when the VB representative insisted that their inclusion in the list was 'lawful', or asserted that the petitioner allowed people of gypsy origin from other districts to come and stay overnight, or that one of their children had been playing truant.

### THE 'DISPERSAL PROGRAMME'

Another way of attempting 'to solve the gypsy problem' was the 'compulsory dispersal' or liquidation of 'undesirable concentrations of the gypsy population'. This was meant to take place on the basis of government resolution no. 502 of 1965, although it proved impossible to implement and was later repealed. The Romany minority, however, feels its effect to this day. At the time when the compulsory dispersal programme was to be carried out, there were 14,000 Romany families living in Eastern Slovakia in 1,318 settlements (more precisely ghettos) — of which half were without electricity, the majority without drainage, and which had no roads leading to them and were several kilometres from the nearest shops. As for drinking water, many settlements had only one hydrant to 500 or even more people, and some had nothing more than a stream. Quite a few of the houses were made of mud. In some places things have not improved to this day. The instructions for carrying out the dispersal, however, were predominantly aimed at getting rid of 'gypsy concentrations' in places where foreign tourists might come, as well as the settlement of Velka Ida, which 'threatened the health of the workers of the East Slovak ironworks'. The social conditions and health of those who lived in the 'undesirable gypsy concentrations' was not one of the main concerns of the dispersal — as a matter of fact, it was in practice not taken into account at all. The instructions also stated that inhabitants 'of gypsy settlements, streets and quarters' etc. must move to strictly defined places. A Czechoslovak citizen 'of gypsy origin' living in a particular district was required by some instruction, simply on account of his racial origin, to move to an allotted district or region, and nowhere else. Because a particular area was designated, some would be unable to move where they might have relatives, children, friends, job opportunities, and so on. One of the most characteristic features of the government resolution about 'the liquidation of undesirable gypsy concentrations', and of the relevant instructions connected with it, was that the dispersal had to be at once compulsory and voluntary. This kind of judicial alibi is displayed in almost all the documents concerning the 'gypsy problem', especially those from the '70s, in a far more blatant form than in relation to the majority population.

It is clear that this measure, restricting as it does the right to freedom of residence and choice of employment, was also unconstitutional.

The lack of sufficient housing and organisational confusion meant that only a fraction of the families caught up in the compulsory dispersal programme were finally settled on new sites. The solution, however, also talked about the need to restrict

the 'undesirable' migration of gypsy inhabitants. While the dispersal involved forced migration, any unplanned migration with the aim of getting better employment, accommodation or a higher social position' was undesirable, and was treated as such. Government resolution No. 502 of 1965 may have been repealed, but the formula which it contained about 'undesirable migration of gypsy inhabitants' continues to be applied to this day, and a significant part of the Romany population lives under constant threat of being affected by it. In the identity card of a Romany who has moved residence in order to find a job, the entry which refers to permanent or temporary place of residence cannot be changed without special ratification by the national committee, though such ratification is not required of other citizens. Thus, the Romany concerned will not have the possibility of taking a job, and nor will he have the right to health care, the benefits offered by the trade unions, child care provisions, etc.

Under such conditions, the simplest official business is made all the more complicated by the fact that channels of communication do not normally exist between national committees at the lowest level in the Czech lands or Slovakia. For the average Romany coming from Slovakia to find work in the Czech Lands, this means interminable and futile travel from one end of the state to the other. The national committee at the place where he has found work does not recognise him as a citizen of the locality, while the national committee in the place where he has come from refuses to have anything to do with him, and will not meet any of his needs because he has left the area.

'The restriction of arbitrary migration' leads to interference in the most private spheres of life. Family loyalty is a particular feature of the Romany community. Members of Romany families often visit one another, and according to traditional Romany norms hospitality is never refused. If one family member finds better living conditions, he will offer hospitality to relatives looking for better conditions. This feature of the Romany character and ethics has ancient roots. Similar habits continue to be found among a whole number of races with highly developed cultural traditions who have inhabited the same territory for thousands of years — as, for example, the Chinese. If a Romany who is registered in one place spends several nights elsewhere with a relative, he can be 'transferred' by the VB on the grounds that he is involved in 'arbitrary migration'.

### THE ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

The dispersal programme also had an economic background. In the briefing presented to assemblies of workers having to implement law 502, stress was laid on the lack of labour-power in the Czech Lands and its overabundance—i.e. unemployment—in East Slovakia. In the first half of the '60s, when the dispersal was to be started, it was expected that this labour-supply situation would persist for several years. In fact it is still with us today. Demand for unskilled labour is growing, and in recent years foreign workers—'Gastarbeiter'—have been brought in.

In particular, the great engineering concerns in the Czech Lands get Romanies from Slovakia to work for them by means of dishonest promises. Quite often, their ignorance and illiteracy are exploited when the work contracts are made; in some cases the contracts are not even written down. Some of these Romany workers are housed in barracks which completely fail to meet any acceptable standards of hygiene; many of them are forced to move into the already overcrowded homes of relatives or workmates. The workers' family situation is not taken into account when they are recruited. Because the concerns involved are prioritised, the Romanies work under the control of the concerns themselves, and this practice is not affected by inspections.

The dispersal policy was thus part of a solution to the shortage of unskilled labour in one part of the Republic, and to unemployment in another. The proposed solution to this problem—forced transfer of a minority without legal rights—is



A Romany family on the move on the Soviet-Czechoslovak border

as symbolic of the general situation as the reasons for its failure: namely, organisational incompetence and lack of buildings. Moreover, the failures in housing construction are one of the reasons why 'uncontrolled migration' of Romanies works to the advantage of the majority population and the powers that be. Romanies 'capriciously' leave places where there is no work for them and move to Bohemian or Moravian industrial centres. There they take on, usually in the engineering sector, unskilled jobs for which they are irreplaceable; they live in hostels or with relatives or, by squatting, get often unhealthy accommodation of the lowest category. 'Uncontrolled migration' is here disguised by the fact that the state and the economy derive profit from it; the Romanies therefore find themselves in an ambiguous situation typical of the Czechoslovak legal code which, in a lesser form, is well known to the majority population as well. On the one hand 'uncontrolled migration' is tolerated, but on the other it is used as an excuse for repression of the most diverse kinds: ranging from unjustified harassment to forced eviction from accommodation, expropriation of houses, restriction of domicile, and so on.

In fact it is in the sphere of accommodation that the consequences of the official attitude to 'uncontrolled migration' are felt most strongly. One of the verbal instructions issued in connection with the dispersal programme went as follows: 'in no case may a national committee allow a gypsy to settle in its region unless accommodation has already been found'. This directive—in its negative effects—is still in force to this day. The enterprises need Romany workers but the national committees do not find them accommodation. The standard of housing of Romany families is a fundamental obstacle to their cultural development, and condemns them for the foreseeable future to their old role of providing an unskilled labour force. The vast majority of Romany families have at their disposal a unit of accommodation consisting of one room or a kitchen and one other room. The number of people per unit of accommodation is some two times as high as among the majority population, the number per room nearly three times as high. Most of the buildings are overcrowded, dark and damp and lacking in basic hygienic facilities.

**END OF PART ONE — To be continued.**

(Document made available by Palach Press. Translation by Mark Jackson.)

# POLAND

## Worker Activist's Trial Becomes Test Case

A court case against a working class activist from Katowice is becoming a test of the Polish government's entire attitude towards civil rights. The case involves Kazimierz Switon, a founder of the unofficial trade union group that has been active in the industrial region of Upper Silesia since last February.

Switon has been in jail for four months pending the completion of a police investigation against him. He is expected to go on trial in early March on a charge of assaulting a policeman. Switon has strongly repudiated the charge as a complete fabrication, and his case has been supported by protests from hundreds of people.

Since the formation of the trade union committee in Katowice last February, Switon has been arrested no less than 12 times and held for periods of 48 hours without charges being brought against him. Police harassment was intensified last autumn when he was jailed for 5 weeks for

failing to renew a licence for an air-gun. Then in October of last year he was arrested at a bus stop outside his local church and sent to prison for 2 months for 'causing a crowd to gather'.

Immediately after his arrest in October, Switon accused the police of assaulting him and threatened to bring a charge to this effect against them. In response, the police have accused Switon of the assault, though they mentioned no such assault when he was being jailed for 'causing a crowd to gather'.

Switon's case is one of many examples of the extremely harsh police drive to crush all attempts to organise an autonomous working class movement in Poland. While tolerating within certain limits opposition movements among students and intellectuals the Polish Party leadership has been set on eliminating the networks of working class activists that have grown up in Upper Silesia, in the Baltic ports and around the newspaper *Robotnik* (The Worker). Even

here they have preferred to use systematic harassment of individuals rather than well-publicised court cases and long jail sentences. But since harassment has failed to intimidate Switon, the authorities have brought charges that could result in an 8 year jail sentence.

5 leading Polish intellectuals including Professor Edward Lipinski and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the editor of the officially recognised Catholic monthly *Wież*, have urged the Chairman of the Council of State to order Switon's release. This appeal has been immediately backed up in writing by 302 other citizens. The Social Self-Defence Committee (KSS-KOR) has organised a leafletting campaign on Switon's behalf in Upper Silesia and in the Dabrowa basin, one of the oldest working class centres in Poland. Appeals have also been made for protests by the international working class movement on behalf of Kazimierz Switon.

By PETER GREEN

## Documents from the Peasant Movement:

*In previous issues of Labour Focus we have reported on the massive resistance of Polish peasants to new pension laws introduced by the Polish government last year. These new laws amount in essence to a new tax which bears particularly heavily on the poorer peasants. According to The Times of October 5th, 1978, the number of peasants refusing to pay the new pension contributions is almost half a million.*

*At the same time, the peasant resistance has thrown up self-defence committees which have been formed in three regions of Poland, and these have taken up a whole range of issues affecting the peasantry. Here we publish documents from two of these committees. They provide amongst other things a vivid picture of aspects of life in the Polish countryside and help us to understand the roots of the discontent which has led to the present movement.*

*The organised peasant movement began with the setting up of a self-defence committee involving many villages in the Lublin voivodship (province). It spread north west to the Grojec area in Radom voivodship and south to Rzeszów voivodship. (See Labour Focus Vol.2, Nos. 4, 5 and 6.)*

*The English translation of the documents were made available by The Appeal for the Polish Workers]*

### 1. Rzeszów Peasants Organise

#### RESOLUTION

Following the example of farmers in other parts of the country, we have assembled today to discuss the problems of our region:

1. 18 months ago the commune administration in Kamiień, through its leader Józef Czubat, started to expropriate farmers in our village. The expropriation was connected with the decision to build a base of supplies of Nowy Kamiień. Since we do not accept these expropriations, the commune administration is harassing us in various ways. We are sacked from state-owned enterprises and punished with fines for farming our own land and reaping the harvest. These fines are deducted from the wages of the peasant-workers (i.e., peasants employed in factories, etc. who do not farm their own land full time but nevertheless have their



Map of Poland showing areas where peasant movement is strongest. The numbered areas are: 1. Grojec. 2. Lublin. 3. Rzeszów.

roots in the country and help out during harvesting, etc.). The commune sends out tractor-drivers to plough up our plough-fields, meadows and pastures. All the year round we have to guard the fields against the raids organised by the authorities. We have often appealed to various authorities, including central authorities, to intervene on our behalf. No one has ever intervened and nothing has been solved. The commune authorities persecute us in different ways: we get no permission to build, no materials or coal rations, etc. We can arrange nothing at the commune office, where we hear all the time: 'If you sign that you renounce your land, you'll get what you want: sign, sign, and we'll arrange all you need for you.' Bailiffs are sent to try to confiscate our belongings for the fines we have not paid. We are tricked into signing in the following way: they say — 'sign here

that you do not agree to expropriation'. Someone signs and then it turns out that it was in fact a document renouncing claims to the farm. The authorities also advise an exchange of land by suggesting we take over the fields which are in fact being farmed by other peasants. This would lead to war with our neighbours. The situation is similar in many local villages: Majdan, Sokolow, Kamień, Letownia, Wólka Letowska, Wola Zarczycka and others.

2. We do not want the pension scheme in its present form. It is unfair to us: it means obligations without benefits, and aims to enslave and take advantage of us.

3. The state of supplies of food and means of production in our district is disastrous. The shops and storehouses are completely empty.

4. Last year the parish bought an unfinished family house in order to turn it into a presbytery. We have completed the construction ourselves. The authorities imposed heavy fines on the farmer who sold the house and on the parish priest. Both were sentenced to 18 months imprisonment suspended for two years. This situation cannot be tolerated. At today's meeting we have resolved the following: 1. We will not give up our land, the land of our fathers. By defending it we are fighting for bread. We demand that the commune authorities be called to order, that they withdraw and repeal all expropriations in our district.. We demand cancellation of all illegal fines imposed on us. 2. We will not pay pension contributions in their present form and we will protest against their enforcement. 3. We demand an improvement in supplies to our area of food and means of production, especially coal. 4. We demand that the administration be instructed how to treat us, as Polish citizens with full rights. 5. We demand the repeal of the prison sentences

and fines imposed for building the presbytery.

The meeting resolved to set up the Farmers' Self-Defence Committee — Rzeszów region. Its members are: Józef Baran, Stanislaw Baran, Aniela Kida, Katarzyna Krasoń, Stanislaw Krasoń, Teofila Lyko, Józef Lyko, Stanislaw Miazga, Józef Rebisz, Maria Salega, Maria Wojdyla, Jan Wojdyla, Katarzyna Zdeb, Boleslaw Zdeb.

Furthermore, we have decided to talk to the inhabitants of the nearby villages and to propose that they join the Committee. We support the activities of other Farmers Self-Defence Committees: we join them in organising petitions for coal supplies to the villages. We instruct our Committee to contact other Farmers Self-Defence Committees. We appeal to all peasants in Poland to oppose by all means possible the systematic destruction of the peasant class and of agriculture, as well as the expropriation of our land. Our national song says: 'Do not abandon the soil of your fathers, so help us God!'

We deposit the original text and signatures of the present resolution with the priest of the Glowisko parish, Father Stanislaw Mazur. The number of signatures under the resolution will be announced in the first communiqué of the Committee.

To: 1. The Primate of Poland. 2. The Sejm of Poland. 3. The Council of State. 4. Bishop Ordinary in Przemyśl. 5. Social Self-Defence Committee—'KOR'. 6. The Movement for the Defence of Human and Civic Rights. 7. Veterans of the Peasant Movement. 8. Farmers Self-Defence Committees.

Farmers Self-Defence Committee  
Lozisk, Rzeszów region

November 1978

## 2. Self-Defence Committee in Rzeszów Outlines Immediate Tasks

### COMMUNIQUÉ NO.1

On 12 November 1978 our village set up a Farmers Self-Defence Committee in order to defend our land which is being taken away from us by the State, and to defend ourselves against the unjust pension scheme. The only answer from the authorities has so far been the sending of police and security forces to our region. They come to our homes, call us for interrogation and molest us at work. When their threats and attempts at interrogation fail, they try to bribe us with money or with promises to facilitate purchase of tractors and other machines or to give leave from work.

On 22 November the leader of the Kamień commune, Józef Czubat, ordered 20 ares of willow thicket to be ploughed.<sup>1</sup> It belonged to a member of the Committee, but the commune leader decided that it was fallow ground. In fact there was fallow ground next to it, not 20 ares but two hectares, and it belonged to the State. The owner of the willow thicket suffered a loss of at least 150,000 zlotys. Despite these reprisals—which have been going on since the time the expropriation began but have recently increased—we will defend our rights to the land and demand proper treatment by the authorities.

The resolution of 12 November has already been signed by 23 persons, representing families threatened by collectivization.

## 3. Activities of the Self-Defence Committee in the Grojec Region

### COMMUNIQUÉ NO.5

On 5 November a Committee meeting took place at which the following questions were discussed:

1. On 1 November there was a one-day farmers' warning strike in which 18 villages participated. On that day nearly all the farmers did not deliver milk. We decided to carry out the strike in connection with the docking at source of pension contributions from the wages of peasant-workers [i.e. peasants employed in factories, etc. who do not farm their own land full time but

Realizing our right to self-government, the Committee intends in future to work for improved living conditions of all the inhabitants of our village. 1. We intend to take up the question of the People's House which we built ourselves just after the War and which stands unused because the authorities were afraid it would be turned into a church. It might be used as living quarters for the teachers. They do not want to take jobs in our village because they have to walk 5 km. to work. 2. In the Firemen's House, also built by the village, there is room for a Health Service Centre and part of the necessary equipment. Two years ago signatures were collected under a petition for a Health Service Centre in Lowisko. Unfortunately the authorities are more interested in our land than in our health. We have 8 km to go to the nearest doctor. 3. We intend to support the church authorities in their endeavours to build a church in Lowisko. The building materials prepared for this purpose are decaying while the authorities refuse their permission.

Farmers Self-Defence Committee  
Lowisko, Rzeszów Region

28 November 1978

### Notes.

1. An are is a metric unit of 100 square metres.

nevertheless have their roots in the country and help out during harvesting, etc.] On 21 October we also sent a letter to the Radom voivodship, demanding that the deductions be stopped. We have not yet received any answer to the letter. On 23 October a bailiff arrived in our village together with policemen in order to enforce the collection of pension contributions. The people did not allow it. The meeting resolved that if the authorities continued to try to collect the contributions in their present form from the farmers of our district, we would stage a longer and further-reaching strike.

2. The inhabitants of the Wierzchowina village, Jasieniec commune, informed the meeting about their problems. The village has no beaten track and so the children, in order to reach the school in Jasieniec, have first to walk 4 km to Zbrosza, and from there take a bus to school. In order to make life easier for the inhabitants of Wierzchowina, the Committee suggests to the authorities that a bus stop be introduced at the end of the asphalt road, next to the pig farm. Then people will have 2 km less to walk to the bus. In Wierzchowina there are no shops, not even a subsidiary service centre. The area of the village is not drained and the meadows are wet. There are about 45 farms in the village, everybody is paying taxes and the only thing they have received from the State since the War is electricity.

3. In the village of Lisów near Bialobrzegi, where the Provisional Founders' Committee of the Farmers Independent Trade Union is active, committee-member Henryk Koszut was detained on 1 November. During a search of his farm, Koszut's wife fainted and the police not only did not help but actually prevented an ambulance being called. Before his wife was brought back to consciousness, Mr Koszut was dragged into a police car and taken to gaol in Radom. There he was beaten up during interrogation. Henryk Koszut went on a 48-hour hunger strike in protest against illegal detention. The meeting expressed its solidarity with Henryk Koszut and its indignation at the methods of the police. Permanent police and security posts have been withdrawn from Lisów.

## 4. Village Life Since the War — Letter to the Local Party Secretary

To Party Secretary, Leszek Golota  
The Commune Party Committee, Jasieniec.

We refer to the discussions that have taken place between yourself and some members of our Committee, concerning the Committee's activity. According to you, it is confined to writing, putting forward demands, and criticising the authorities, without any personal involvement in the social and economic life of our region. The Farmers Self-Defence Committee—Grójec region discussed the matter at a general meeting on 12 November 1978 in Zbrosza Duza and concluded that these charges from the commune and its representatives are wrongful and highly unjust towards the farmers. We believe that it is our right to call on the authorities to meet our just demands, and that it is our right and duty to criticise the work of the local administration. Our farmers have for a long time now, at many meetings and in different offices, submitted their complaints and difficulties to the local administrators. We have a great number of examples illustrating the callous attitude of the local authorities towards the farmers' problems. This is what ultimately influenced the emergence of the independent farmers' movement in the Grójec region. People in our area have many times shown their commitment to the social and economic problems of the region. To give just a few examples: the road from Lychowo to Kozie Glowy and Wola Lychowska; the millenium memorial school in Wola Lychowska (today not in use), the school and church in Zbrosza.

Despite the sense of solidarity and involvement of our people, the authorities have not been able to establish contacts and cooperation with us. All we hear from them are ceaseless complaints and grumbings about the farmers' attitude. It is painful to see how those who have advanced even a little can become undemocratic towards the rest of the people. We have very good legislation in the field of agriculture. Many government decisions concerning the country should restore the farmers' sense of dignity and improve their social standing. Unfortunately some links in our administration are so sluggish that the farmer still believes that what is written or said in the meetings is untrue. Undoubtedly there are not enough people who would serve the villages with devotion, although many of them are well paid with money earned by farmers. This inefficiency is clearly seen in the way villages are supplied at

4. In support of the proposal to make radio and television available for religious programmes and for broadcasting the Holy Mass to the sick, 486 inhabitants of the local villages signed a petition to the Sejm on the matter.

5. As we have previously stated, the Secretary of the Polish United Workers Party, Leszek Golota, confirmed the legitimacy of our demands for the Zbrosza-Daltrozów road to be completed. At the same time he suggested that the authorities provide machines and material while the farmers should provide labour. The meeting discussed this proposal for a long time, remembering how on a previous occasion 100 tons of concrete was provided which, left unprotected, was totally spoiled. We turned to the voivodship about this matter. The meeting finally resolved to help in the construction of the road and on 6 November the work began. However, the meeting decided that this is the last time such work will be done. Farmers are tax-payers and roads should be constructed by specialised enterprises. In the country, we have to build almost everything ourselves as part of so-called 'social action': schools, roads, shops, fire stations, clubs, etc.; whereas in towns all this is built at the State's expense. Farmers compare this so-called 'social action' with the services made to the landlord in the days of serfdom ('szarwarki').

Farmers Self-Defence Committee  
Zbrosza Duza, Grojec region.

7 November 1978



Peasant carts parked outside a church on Sunday in the Radom region

harvest-time and the way our applications are treated. Or when farmers have to buy or sell; there are miles-long queues; then closing time comes, the day has been wasted and one returns home empty-handed. And how is the farmer treated in offices? It does not matter that he is not dressed in a suit! It would be well if he could see in an office how people should be treated. Farmers feed the country and they deserve respect. If the farmer is treated with respect in an office, he will treat others with respect as well. In the name of truth we want to point out to the Party Secretary the faulty agricultural policy in the country, in our homeland, a policy which you support in your official capacity and which you are trying to justify.

Shortly after the war devastation, the village suffered from shortages of tools and agricultural machines but the peasant was patient and hardened in adversity. Farmers hoped that it would grow better with time. In the fifties they went through the first pressures of collectivisation. This was all the stranger in that it took place only a few years after the agricultural reform, at a time when the farms started to recover and develop. At the same time a campaign against the so-called kulaks began. All this undermined our trust in the security of private property in the country and weakened the willingness to invest. Then came the

time of compulsory deliveries exacted in ways similar to those of occupation times. The so-called plans were set high and the payments were low. In those days we struggled to survive and the spectre of the plans hung over us until 1970. In the meantime a whole generation grew up who, seeing all this injustice, left the village in great number for the towns. 1970 brought about certain improvements in the state's agricultural policy. Owing to advantageous loans and allowances, a number of farms recovered. During that time the government took two decisions suggesting a concern for farmers: repeal of the plans, and social insurance for farmers. Another important step was the farmers' pension scheme — so far inadequately worked out. Farmers themselves should be consulted over the problem of farmers' pensions. They find it particularly galling that state-owned farms receive preferential treatment in the purchase of machinery, grain and fertilizers, as well as in the reduction of dues and taxes.

Some state-owned farms are profitable and even exemplary, but too many are far from being so. A large number suffer from the lack of honest work and management, as well as of order and a

sense of responsibility. Investments are wasted, crops decay and machines disintegrate — and all this costs the state a lot of money. We are sorry to see all this happen under conditions in which there are not enough machines and fertilizers for us, and when we are always the last to obtain state subsidies. As if we were worse! We ask you why things are like this. It certainly undermines greatly our trust in the authorities and has an adverse effect on various kinds of social action. Too often, it is explained to us that food shortages are due to the fact that a considerable acreage of land is owned privately, and that 'a farmer will give if he wants to, and if he doesn't, he won't'. Yet what we see is quite different.

To summarise all this: we have to conclude that the Secretary's judgement of the farmers is purely bureaucratic, subjective, and propagandist. The reality is quite different.

**Farmers Self-Defence Committee**  
**Zbrosza Duza, Grójec region.**

**13 November 1978**

## 5. Self-Defence Committee Raises Social Problems

### COMMUNIQUE NO.6

On 12 November 1978 a general meeting of our Committee and the inhabitants of the village took place in Zbrosza Duza. The following problems were discussed:

1. The Farmers Self-Defence Committee—Grójec region took up the difficult situations of numerous families and sick or suffering people who are outside social care in our area. Cases mentioned by those taking part in the meeting will be investigated by members of our Committee, and action will be taken to remedy the existing situation.

2. The meeting discussed the question of the critical attitude towards our Committee taken by Leszek Golota, Secretary of the local committee of the Polish United Workers Party, expressed orally to some members of our Committee. Committee members and others present at the meeting resolved to send a memorandum to the Party Secretary in Jasieniec in response to the accusations, and to make the text of this memorandum publicly known.

3. The inhabitants of the nearby villages lodged a complaint with

the Committee about the sale of alcohol in Olkowice, Promna commune and Gośniewice, Jasieniec commune. Local people inform the Committee that in the shops in the above-mentioned villages, alcohol can be bought at any time of day or night, whereas food products are available only during working hours. The Committee and the villagers present pointed out that there are too many shops in our area where alcohol can be bought, even by minors. At the same time we want to point out that some of those shops are situated on important communication routes, for example the shop in Broniszewo — at the E 7 motorway.

4. The Committee resolves to send to the Radom voivodship a complaint about the commune leader in Promna, Wiktor Jankowski. The local people have been turning to him with a request for roofs to be put on bus-stops on the Olszany-Promna route. To this day children commuting to school in Promna have to wait under open skies, and the local authorities remain passive.

**Farmers Self-Defence Committee**  
**Zbrosza Duza, Grójec region.**

**14 November 1978**

# ROMANIA

## New Trade Union Committee Gets Big Response from Hungarian Workers

According to dramatic, but as yet unconfirmed reports, as many as 1000 workers in the Hungarian city of Tirgu Mures in Transylvania have declared their support for an independent trade union committee whose formation in Bucharest has recently been announced.

The trade union committee, which calls itself **The Free Trade Union of the Working People of Romania** (its Romanian initials are SLOMR), issued a founding declaration, printed in full below, signed by 22 signatories with addresses in Bucharest and in Turnu Severin, a town near the border with Yugoslavia. The Committee's creation was reported in *Le Monde* of 8 March, but was otherwise ignored by Western news media — the Ceausescu government is looked upon favourably by many Western governments which see it as a

valuable source of diplomatic friction within the Soviet bloc.

It took the Romanian police about 48 hours to quarantine members of the Trade Union Committee and cut them off from telephone contact with the West. But it had already been possible for Romanian exiles to acquire the text of the committee's founding declaration and to talk with a member over the telephone about its formation and support. It was then reported that about 1000 people in Tirgu Mures had come out in favour of the new body.

If this report is true, then it indicates that for the first time in Eastern Europe an independent trade union body has been able to link up with a significant section of the masses. There does not seem to have been any equivalent response to either of the two

trade union groups set up in the Soviet Union in 1978, or to the Silesian and Baltic trade union committees in Poland. Were the SLOMR able to maintain its base in Tirgu Mures it could begin to pose itself as a credible trade union organisation for working people.

Whatever the precise extent of support for the SLOMR, reports from Romania indicate that social unrest throughout the country is combining with resistance to national oppression on the part of the large Hungarian minority which is mainly concentrated in Transylvania. Tirgu Mures is the main centre of the Hungarian minority in Romania.

As we have reported in previous issues of **Labour Focus**, signs of general social unrest have been accumulating over the last two

years. The regime appears to have been incapable of responding adequately to this unrest and the SLOMR's formation is a further striking confirmation that the crisis has not been resolved, and that forms of opposition developed elsewhere in Eastern Europe are having a profound impact on small but significant sections of the population.

As the SLOMR founding declaration makes clear, the founder-members regard The Free Trade Union of the Working People of Romania as, in essence, 'a committee for the defence of human rights' rather than a mass alternative to the official trade unions; and much of the material concerns the struggle for human rights and against bureaucratic privilege. However, the declaration clearly reflects the growing weight of working-class discontent by focusing on violations of labour rights and the general living

conditions of the working class. The list of signatories points to a certain continuity with the Goma Human Rights Committee established two years ago (see *Labour Focus* Vol.1, Nos. 2 and 3); but the majority of members are industrial workers from the small town of Turnu Severin.

The response of the regime so far has betrayed its extreme nervousness at the mounting contradictions and its inability to take any meaningful initiative. Thus Doctor Cana's telephone (the number of which is given in the text) was very quickly cut off, and the house of another member Gheorghe Brasoveanu is reported to be under constant police surveillance. When the long-standing worker-dissident Vasile Paraschiv (see the interview with Paraschiv in *Labour Focus*, Vol.2 No.3) tried to visit Brasoveanu to express his support for the union, he was arrested by the police guards and beaten up

at the headquarters of the *Securitate*. The officer on duty warned Paraschiv that a car accident would be arranged if he did not cease his activities, adding, in a curious Balkan touch, that his name was on the files of *Interpol* as a member of *El Fatah*!

The small, courageous group of signatories fear above all else that they will be robbed of any contact with their fellow-citizens and the international labour movement. Already the French trade-union federation *Force Ouvrière* and the proof-readers' branch of the CGT have issued statements of solidarity with the independent trade union. In this country, too, messages of support from labour movement bodies can play a vital role in breaking the screen of isolation that is carefully being built around these human rights activists.

By Patrick Camiller

## Founding Declaration of Romanian Trade Union Committee

[The following document was received by Romanian exiles direct from Bucharest. Translation is by Anca Mihailescu and Patrick Camiller.]

**Preamble:** The Free Trade Union of the Working People of Romania (SLOMR) was founded in February 1979, in accordance with Article 22 of the International Pact on Civil and Political Rights and with Article 8 of the Pact on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ratified by Decree No. 212 of the Council of State of October 1974. A list of the members of the founding nucleus, together with their occupations and addresses, is appended to the text of this declaration. The SLOMR declares its affiliation to the World Federation of Trade Unions, and declares its solidarity with all Romanian and foreign associations and committees fighting for the observance of basic human rights, laying particular stress on rights connected with work relations.

### The SLOMR's Principles and Reasons for Existence

The creation of the Free Trade Union of the Working People of Romania (SLOMR) became objectively necessary because of the economic, social and cultural situation of the country. Its foundation is a perfectly legal act, since it bases itself on respect for the laws of the country and for Romania's international commitments confirmed by Decree No. 212 of 1974. Thus, Article 8 of this decree (Article 22 of the International Pact on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and also the Pact on Civil and Political Rights) stipulates that: every person has the right freely to associate with any other person, including the right to form and belong to trade unions in order to protect his or her interests. Such trade unions have the right to engage in free activity and to affiliate to international trade union organisations. The SLOMR does not propose to carry out actions of a political character (as distinct from defending the political rights of citizens). As its name indicates, the Free Trade Union of the Working People of Romania freely carries out its own activity, not being the transmission-belt of any political force. (In this respect, it complies with a valuable official statement of 1971 to the effect that 'from now on, the trade unions will no longer be transmission-belts'; unfortunately, and in a curious manner, this statement was rapidly consigned to oblivion, along with many others of the same kind.)

The SLOMR intends to fight for the defence of civil rights in Romania, in conformity with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ratified by the Romanian Socialist Republic (RSR) through the above-mentioned decree, which proclaims the goal that human beings should be freed from fear and misery. The SLOMR fights to implement Article 11 of the Pact on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which prescribes the right to an adequate level of nourishment, clothing and accommodation. The SLOMR starts from the premiss that these basic rights can and must be realized here in Romania — for every citizen of the country without

discrimination — and that the solution to these material demands of the human being does not lie in leaving the country. However, the SLOMR also looks to the authorities themselves to respect Article 12 of the Pact on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Decree 212, according to which 'every person is free to leave any country, including his own country', and 'every person is free to return to his own country'.

The Free Trade Union of the Working People of Romania (SLOMR) intends to fight especially for observance of those civil rights in Romania that refer to work relations. Thus, numerous Romanian citizens have become unemployed in their own country as a result of the countless restructurings involving reduction of the work-force that have taken place over the last few years in various factories and institutions — a process which is itself due to the economic difficulties facing the country caused precisely by the desire, which we share, to bring Romania in a short period of time to 'the highest peaks of well-being and civilization'. It is regrettable that official statistics do not keep even an approximate record of unemployment in Romania. The summer 1977 pension law, which led to a wave of discontent culminating in the strike of the Jiu Valley workers, brought about the unsatisfactory situation in which many old people still capable of work no longer have access to jobs on the relatively favourable conditions prescribed by the former pension law. In numerous cases, workers have been unjustly pensioned off for so-called psychiatric reasons, because over the years, as a result of their convictions and opinions, they had become troublesome to the superstructural system. Those who had been lengthily detained for their convictions found that these years did not count in the reckoning of pensions (as they did only until 1944); their old-age or disability pension does not provide them with adequate nourishment, clothing and accommodation (thereby violating Decree No. 212), or else they receive no pension at all, not having the necessary length of service. As for those out at work, staff reductions accompanied with the maintenance or growth of plan targets subject them to additional burdens often surpassing their capacity to work, and leading to illness, absenteeism and falling labour productivity. In these conditions, pay has not grown at a corresponding rate, or the increases given are completely insignificant or ineffective. The SLOMR strongly urges that the workers' activity should take place in conditions where human dignity is respected, in an agreeable and stimulating environment with regard to heating, lighting, reduction of occupational hazards, free protective materials, and such health-protecting foods as milk, sparkling mineral water and hot meals. Such measures would lead to a growth in labour productivity and transform work from a chore into a pleasure.

The SLOMR proposes that the mobilization of citizens for so-called 'patriotic works' should be carried out by voluntary rather than coercive

means, since it is well known that the Romanian has always been 'industrious and obliging when necessary'; if, for any reason, an individual or group does not come forward for such work, no act of persecution should follow at the level of work relations.

The SLOMR proposes that mobilization for various rallies and demonstrations should be of a voluntary nature and kept within decent limits: it should not disturb factory and institutional activity, and it should not involve any measures of coercion. The SLOMR fights for the right to weekly rest to be respected, and for the workers' total free time to be increased. The SLOMR does not encourage laziness or tendencies to **embourgeoisement** and lining one's pockets. (The official mass media also refer to such tendencies, but present them as isolated cases rather than as symptomatic, pathogenic cases of contemporary Romanian society.)

The SLOMR proposes that the Party's closed distribution outlets should be integrated into the general trade system of supplying the population; this would lead to diversification of food and mass-consumer products, and replace the present shortages by a truly rational food-structure. The SLOMR proposes that the so-called Party hotels and houses that exist in every municipality or county-town should be converted into public hospitals, old people's homes or hotels open to every citizen. We also propose decent limits to the motor-car fleet of the superstructural organs, and suggest that, as far as possible, these organs should make use of public transport; this would lead to considerable economies of money and energy, so badly needed for the rapid growth of heavy industry without which our well-being is inconceivable. The SLOMR declares itself in favour of effective popular control over the financial activity of superstructural organs.

The SLOMR strives to inform domestic and international public opinion about cases in Romania where Human Rights are not being respected as required by Article 19 of the International Pact on Civil and Political Rights ratified by Decree No. 212 of the Council of State which declares that 'every man is free to seek and disseminate ideas of any kind, regardless of frontiers, in oral, written or printed form'. Accordingly, the SLOMR appeals to every Romanian citizen whose rights are being violated, especially work-related rights, to report his or her situation through a signed letter to: Doctor Ionel Gheorghe Cana, Bucuresti, Oficial Postal 17, Giulesti, Post Restant, Cod 7700. At the same time, the sending of the letter, together with the person's name, address and telephone number, should be reported to the Bucharest number 50-71-62. Both the signed letter and the telephone call will be considered as acts of joining the SLOMR, the Free Trade Union of the Working People of Romania. We appeal to those thinking of joining to have no fear in communicating with us: for they will be turning to fellow-citizens not to the office of some hegemonistic power. The SLOMR is a free association of citizens formed precisely out of respect for the above-mentioned articles of Decree No. 212 of the Council of State. The SLOMR appeals to organs concerned with letter-censorship to respect the provisions of Article 17 of the Pact on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Decree No. 212, an article which stresses the inviolability of mail. Even if the organs concerned do examine the content of the letters, we ask them to allow the letters to reach their destination.

In essence, the SLOMR is a Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Romania, concerned especially with labour

relations; since it initially has no budget, membership does not involve payment of any kind of dues. The SLOMR calls upon the superstructural organs of Romania to contribute, on the basis of open dialogue, to the satisfactory solution of cases reported. If Romania were to recognise before its own citizens and international public opinion that there are still cases in which human rights are not respected, then Romanian officialdom would have reasons to be proud in relation to the civilized world. Such an action would help to raise the international prestige of the RSR, and in particular to win the international economic support so badly needed to realise the grandiose programme of multilateral development of Romania. If the United States of America — a country already at the peak of well-being and civilization — does not shrink from informing international public opinion about its own human rights violations, how much more prestigious and praiseworthy would be such a thing in the case of Romania.

It is possible that we founders of the SLOMR will be morally and physically crushed by the perfected apparatus of repression. Should any of us go back on the above principles, we declare his or her action null and void because extracted through force and repression. We may be liquidated, but the ideal for which we are fighting will not perish so long as there is a Romanian left in this country. We are sure that others, younger and more courageous than us, will carry further the undying flame of human dignity in Romania.

Sign: I:

The Free Trade Union of the Working People of Romania (SLOMR) Bucharest, February 1979

There follows a list of the founding nucleus of the SLOMR:

**Doctor Ionel Cana**, general physician, Strada Alion No. 37, Sector 7, Bucuresti; **Gheorghe Brasoveanu**, economist, Strada Grigore Alexandrescu No. 26, Bucuresti; **Nicolae Gugu**, old underground CP member, fighter in Spain, Calea Victoriei No. 98, Sectorul 1, Bucuresti; **Gheorghe Fratila**, reporter, Soseaua Colentina No. 66, Bloc 196 Etaj 3 Ap. 13, Sector 2, Bucuresti; **Grigore Ioana**, Party activist, Strada Odai No. 8, Sectorul 1, Comuna Otopeni, Bucuresti; **Ilie Blidaru**, welder, Strada Traian No. 7, Drobeta, Turnu Severin; **Costel Haritoian**, sheet-iron worker, Strada Crihala Bloc A/2 Scara B Ap. 4, Turnu Severin; **Endre Molnar**, sheet-iron worker, Strada Kiselef Bloc A/6 Scara 3 Ap. 7, Turnu Severin; **Romulus Bodea**, riveter, Strada V.I. Lenin No. 14, Turnu Severin; **Nicolae Mutu**, founder, Bulevardul Republicii 33 Scara 6 Ap. 4, Turnu Severin; **Aurelian Paunescu**, caster-founder, Bulevardul Tudor Vladimirescu Bloc B/2 Ap.2, Turnu Severin; **Vasile Otel**, polisher, Strada Cicero No. 54, Turnu Severin; **Aurel Mustachide**, riveter, Strada Proletari 22, Turnu Severin; **Nicolae Balamut**, welder, Calea Tirgul Jiu, Bloc B/5 Scara 4 Ap. 8, Turnu Severin; **Elena Pesmăgiu**, welder, Strada Crihala Bloc C/4 Ap. 5, Turnu Severin; **Victoria Ivanovici**, electrician, Strada Dorobanti No. 103, Turnu Severin; **Froşa Pesteanu**, caretaker, Calea Grivitei No. 11, Turnu Severin; **Petre Papa**, welder, CET Nord Bloc/B1, Scara 1 Ap. 3, Turnu Severin; **Mihai Gheorghiu**, electrician, Strada Marasti No. 21, Turnu Severin; **Romica Badiu**, welder, Strada Dorobanti No. 109, Turnu Severin.

## The Hungarian Minority in Transylvania by Mihaly Vajda

*[The oppression of Romania's 2 million strong Hungarian minority, the great majority of whom are concentrated in the north-western Transylvanian area, is one of the most explosive issues confronting the regime of Romania's President Ceausescu. In previous issues we have reported on the development of opposition among Transylvanian Hungarians to attacks on their national rights by the extremely nationalist Romanian regime, and published documents describing the situation in which the Hungarians find themselves. In this article Mihaly Vajda, a former pupil of the well-known Hungarian Marxist Georg*

*Lukacs, who was associated in the late 1960s with an opposition current amongst Hungarian intellectuals of a broadly 'new left' orientation and is the author of a study of Fascism which has been published in English, looks at some reasons for the existence of national oppression in the 'socialist' countries and underlines the reality of this oppression in the case of the Transylvanian Hungarians. The article was first published in the bulletin of the Sozialistische Osteuropakomitee of February 1979 and was translated for Labour Focus by Patrick Camiller.]*

## THE NATIONAL MINORITIES IN ROMANIA

The present-day national state in Romania comprises three parts. Two of these—the former principalities of Moldavia and Walachia—are territories whose population is almost entirely Romanian. The third part, Transylvania, presents in this respect a highly variegated picture: Out of its sixteen counties or administrative areas there are today, after years of Romanianization, still three in which the absolute majority of the population is not of Romanian extraction; in seven counties more than 20 per cent are Hungarian, in one as many as 88 per cent, and in one other 79 per cent. There is one county in which Germans make up 23 per cent of the population, another in which they constitute 18 per cent (all figures taken from the 1966 census). The Hungarian minority, which even according to official statistics numbers over 1,700,000 citizens, is numerically the largest national minority in Europe. Since Transylvania was incorporated into Romania following the post-World War I dissolution of Austra-Hungary, there could be no 'just' solution. Perhaps a juster one could have been possible, but given that most of the Hungarian minority lived in 'islands' separated from present-day Hungary by Romanian-populated settlements, it was impossible to prevent the emergence of such a large national minority.

Everyone knows that the existence of national minorities contains the seeds of grave problems. And anyone who is at all familiar with the social system of the East European socialist countries will hardly expect that the question of minorities has been solved there. However, the fact that the position of minorities in these socialist countries is 'still worse' than before, is one of the bitterest experiences for socialists. This 'still worse' can be demonstrated beyond any doubt, although such a demonstration can be provided only through detailed historical study. Here I would just like to show why this is the case, and then briefly describe the stages of minorities policy in Romania and the most important forms which it has taken.

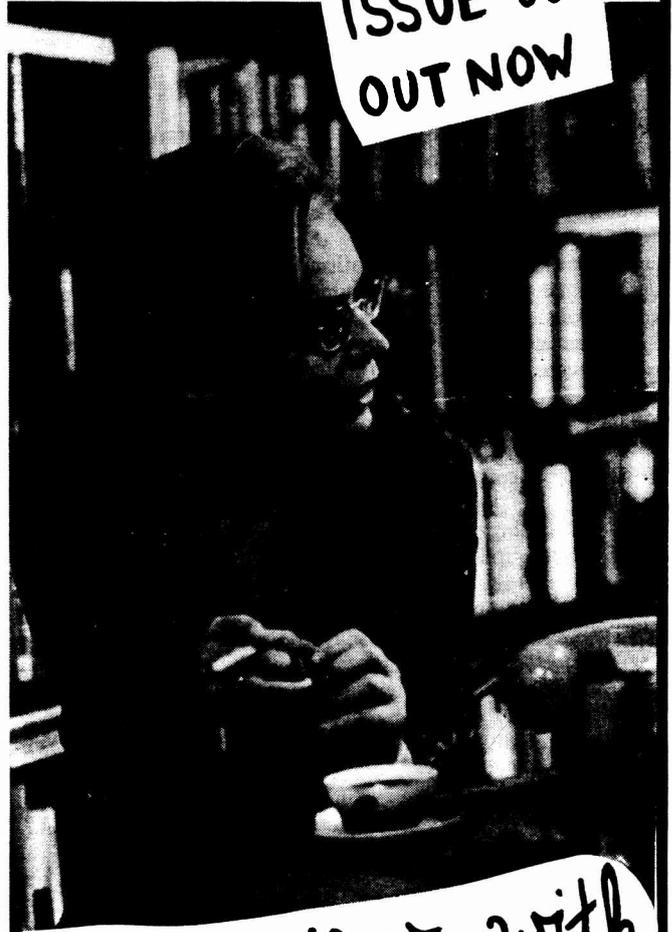
## THE PRINCIPLES OF MINORITIES POLICY IN THE SOCIALIST STATES OF EASTERN EUROPE

The so-called Leninist nationalities policy, the basis of which is complete equality and self-determination, could never realise its fine principles under the socialism that exists. This is so not essentially because, within such systems, it is not only the national minorities which dispose of no truly functioning organ to champion their interests. It follows from the monolithic character of the system that no particularity either has the right to express its specific interests in an organised form, or has the possibility of defending them. In relation to the Party and State, which are supposed to incorporate society as a whole, all organisations of specific groups and layers (organisations of social layers, where they exist at all, women's and youth organisations, and so on) are completely without power; they are empty and formal. The role of national minority organisations is no different from that of the others. As a result of the system's very nature, the national minorities are at the mercy of the rulers whenever the latter turn their attention to the minorities' specific interests. There are two distinct, but inter-related reasons for this. First, the nation *qua* particularity has no place within the legitimising ideology of the system, that is to say, within Marxism-Leninism. Oppression as such is something negative, and so the national minorities, too, are supposedly not subject to any oppression. Like every other particularity, the nation is therefore condemned to decline as an historical formation. The Stalinist solution, according to which the culture of socialist peoples should be socialist in content and national only in form, is nothing other than a denial of the justification for national cultures. As for national contradictions, they are seen as simply a device whereby the old ruling classes seek to divert attention from the essential, class contradictions. Within this conceptual apparatus, one can brand as reactionary all attempts by the minorities to free themselves from the oppression of the dominant nation. When socialism has abolished all oppression,

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anyone who shouts about oppression is an agent of the bourgeoisie.

Secondly, for the rulers in every country, nationalism is one of the most important constituents of the real basis of legitimation. Thus, to take only the most important case, the Soviet Union is the proud heir of the Russian empire. And in Romania, nationalism plays an equally fundamental role: the power of the rulers is absolutely indispensable if the country is to maintain its independence of the Soviet Union. The dissemination of this atmosphere is part of everyday life in Romania. The national minorities which sometimes bemoan their fate—not knowing what else to do—wish to break up the strong and united Romanian nation. (One factor adding to this complex and tragic picture is the fact that, in the existing climate, some Hungarians understandably place their hope in a Soviet or Hungarian intervention!) It is hardly worth pointing out that these two moments of the ideology of legitimation stand in the most glaring contradiction with each other.

### ROMANIAN MINORITIES POLICY

In this respect, the history of socialist Romania may be characterised as a process of gradual Romanianization. Until 1956 nothing happened other than what directly followed from the nature of the social upheaval: above all, abolition of the independent organisations of the minorities. Since every independent political organisation was dissolved, so it was necessary to abolish the independence of the minority organisations. During this period, direct measures of repression were taken especially against the German minority, whose members were designated wholesale as 'fascists'. I know not how many, on purely national grounds, were really Nazi sympathisers: there were certainly quite a few. But supporters of the Romanian fascist movement were much more readily forgiven, even though national factors could not have played a role in their convictions.

1956 was a turning-point in minorities policy. The sympathy of the Hungarian population in Romania with the Hungarian revolt gave rise to energetic measures against the Hungarian minority, especially in relation to the educational system. As we shall see, cultural policy understandably played, and continues to play, the major role in the rulers' attempts at Romanianization. The only Hungarian university in the country, the Bolyai-University of Cluj (Klausenburg in German, Kolozsvár in Hungarian), was incorporated into the Romanian university after 1956.

The year 1968 brought a new turn. In essence, the rulers then made more and more significant concessions, while at the same time pursuing a clear policy that would lead to annihilation of the minorities in a foreseeable future. The significant concessions are to be explained by the fact that, after 1968, those in power in Romania were afraid of an intervention by Warsaw Pact troops and thought that their minorities policy would give an appearance of legitimacy to the regime. Today, particularly since the Helsinki Agreement, their policy of concessions is bound up with their fear that the esteem of 'independent' Romania is beginning to suffer in the West. However cynical the Western public may be, it is impossible to deny that human rights are being trampled on in Romania.

What, then, are the main characteristics of present minorities policy?

1. In the sphere of cultural policy, there are now no independent Hungarian schools, only Hungarian classes within Romanian schools. A Hungarian class has to be provided when, in the community in question, a minimum of 25 pupils in any year have to be sent to school. However, a Romanian class has to be provided when there is a minimum of just one Romanian child in the community. And since there is no community without any Romanians (some jobs being filled only by Romanians even in purely Hungarian localities), Hungarian children have to go to Romanian classes in the smaller villages.

In the technical schools there are very few subjects that are also taught in Hungarian. In Cluj County, which has a Hungarian population of 26 per cent, only two out of 176 technical school classes were taught in Hungarian in 1973/74, but nine out of 201 in 1976/77. However, the prevailing insecurity is such that, even in the 'best' years, parents do not dare to send their children to Hungarian classes. For it is quite possible that these same classes will be wound up within a couple of years.

At university, moreover, one can only study the applied science if one has mastered the Romanian language.

2. In the course of the rapid industrialisation of Transylvania, a great deal of industrial plant has been erected. However, the managers and skilled workers are brought in from the Old Kingdom (i.e., Romania minus Transylvania), even when qualified Hungarians are to be found in the local community. It goes without saying that Romanian is the official language in these industrial enterprises. And so the Hungarian technical intelligentsia is cut off from the Hungarian community. Upward mobility draws Hungarians into the Old Kingdom, where the majority of Hungarian families are automatically Romanianized.

3. Hungarians are excluded from the most important political offices, and the bodies in which they do figure are sham organisations. Even in purely Hungarian regions, the most important posts are taken by Romanians; everywhere the language of leading bodies is Romanian.

As we have already mentioned, the rulers have recently made certain concessions by appointing Hungarian professors. (In Cluj, for example, a Hungarian has been made rector of a high school.) At the same time, however, stronger measures are being taken against Hungarians in the form of police harassment and more outspoken propaganda. It is claimed that the Hungarians are calling for a revision of boundaries, that they are preparing national resistance, and so on. The Romanian writer Adrian Paunescu tours the country with his fascist tales, sometimes even arousing a pogrom-type atmosphere.

This minorities policy, whose ultimate goal is the annihilation of assimilation of the national minorities, is naturally but part of an overall policy also directed against the Romanian majority. The clear emergence of this minorities policy may be explained by three factors:

A. The Hungarian minority in Romania is very big.

B. Romania's anti-Soviet line is being strengthened simultaneously with its overt nationalism. (A nationalist policy is simply impossible in Czechoslovakia or Poland, because power in those countries is grounded on Soviet bayonets.)

C. Given the hostile relationship between Romania and the Soviet Union, people in the other socialist countries are allowed to speak, albeit cautiously, about the repression of the minorities in Romania. (Of course the question is of greatest interest in Hungary.) It is not permissible to talk about the fate of the Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia or the Soviet Union, which is in no way better.

Sources: György Lázár, '9Jelentés Erdélyből', in *Irodalmi Ujság* (Paris), March-April 1977; George Schöpflin, *The Hungarians of Romania*, Minority Rights Group, Report No. 37.

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# SOVIET UNION

## 200 Protest Arrest of Left Oppositionists in Leningrad

At 4pm on 5 December 1978 about 200 young people held a demonstration near the Kazan Cathedral in Leningrad to protest against the arrests of members of a group calling themselves the 'Revolutionary Communist Youth League' (RCYL). The majority of the demonstrators were students at various Leningrad colleges — the University, the Polytechnic, the Academy of Fine Arts and the Serov Art School. The carefully planned character of this remarkably audacious action was indicated by the fact that the demonstrators carried placards and distributed leaflets to passers-by. The police eventually intervened and arrested about 20 people. All were subsequently released.

News of the crackdown on the Revolutionary Communist Youth League and of the subsequent student demonstration has reached the West through *Cahiers du Samizdat*, edited by recent Soviet exile Cronid Lubarsky. (See also the 12-14 February issues of the Paris Trotskyist paper *Rouge*.) The demonstration is one of the largest unofficial protests in Russia in decades and it is made all the more significant by the fact that it occurred in defence of a left-wing group. One of the demands of the demonstration was that the arrested members of the RCYL should be tried in public.

The Leningrad 'Revolutionary Communist Youth League' first came to public attention in October 1978 when the KGB interrogated some of its members. On 14 October, Aleksandr Skobov,

a student and member of the group was arrested. Skobov had also operated the 'Leningrad Commune', a discussion club devoted to political, philosophical and cultural questions.

The 'Leningrad Commune' operated for a year and a half. Young people from Leningrad, Moscow, the Baltic republics, Belorussia and Moldavia participated in its events.

Also on 14 October 2 other members, Andrei Besov from Moscow and Viktor Palenkov from Gorky were arrested at the Leningrad railway station on charges of 'banditism'. Besov was subsequently interned in the Kashchenko Psychiatric Hospital. On 31 October, another member, Arkady Tsurkov was arrested. Two other students, A. Chistyakov and Vynogradov have been threatened with expulsion from Leningrad University because of their involvement with the Commune and many other students have been interrogated by the KGB.

Members of the RCYL were evidently prepared for the crackdown. Before their arrest, Skobov and Tsurkov, as well as Andrei Reznikov, were threatened by the KGB and warned that they should apply to emigrate, but they rejected this warning. One student associated with the group has emigrated to the West.

The group evidently comprised both Marxists and anarchists. One issue of its journal *Perspektivy* contained articles for and against the Kronstadt

Uprising of 1921. The organisation apparently had close contacts with student groups in Moscow and in other Soviet republics.

At first Skobov and Tsurkov were charged under Articles 70, 72 and 190 of the Russian Criminal Code. But the charges under articles 72 and 190 have now apparently been dropped — a move that could represent concessions to public protests. Article 70 is the notorious Soviet law against 'anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda' which carries a maximum of 7 years in jail or labour camp followed by 5 years in exile. Under this clause the two accused are charged with the following 'crimes': publishing and distributing a samizdat journal called *Perspektivy* — three issues of the journal appeared and they contained several programmatic documents; distributing copies of *The Chronicle of Current Events, Kontinent* and the brochure *Torture in Georgia*; finally, attempting to organise an 'All-Union Conference of Left-Wing Groups'.

The accused deny their guilt on these charges.

In the 1960s Leningrad produced several left-wing groups. The significance of the RCYL shows that left-wing political traditions have found root in a new generation. You can express your solidarity with those arrested by sending messages to the Skobov family: Leningrad, Piskarevski Prospekt 20, apartment 4, USSR.

By John Scobie and Helen Jamieson

## Declaration by Trade Union Group

*[The Free Inter-Trade Union Association of Workers (SMOT) was formed in Moscow on 28 October 1978. It was the second attempt to form an independent trade union in the USSR and according to Cahiers du Samizdat, edited by Cronid Lubarsky, "the organisers of SMOT state that it is composed of autonomous groups, each of which includes workers of very different trades. At the time when its formation was announced there were 8 groups with about 100 members. It is stated that there are now 10 groups with 200 members. SMOT also organises the remnants of the Klebanov trade union crushed by the KGB. Every group elects one representative to the council of SMOT. Decisions of the council have an advisory character. (News Brief No. 1, 1979)*

*The following declaration by SMOT has been translated for Labour Focus from the original by Helen Jamieson and Victor Haynes.]*

We, representatives of the Free Inter-Trade Union Association of Workers (SMOT) of our country have been delegated by our members to issue the following public statement:

Today in this country there is no organisation independent of the state authorities which could directly represent the workers. In the majority of the conflicts with management and the organs of authority that are known to us, the workers have not been successful in defending their legal rights and interests. The reasons for this seem to be: an insufficient knowledge of their rights, a lack of knowledge as to how to clearly formulate their demands, the lack of possibility of solidarity from the general public, and fear in the face of threats of victimisation.

Individual struggles with management over the infringement of workers' rights are often made more difficult by the formalism and corruption of the bureaucratic apparatus. In most of the disputes known to us, the official trade union functionaries take a stand on

the side of management (contrary to their statutes), betraying the interests of the workers and appearing to be, in effect, appendages of the state apparatus.

Because of this SMOT has set as its goal the defence of its members in cases of the violation of their rights in various spheres of their daily activities — economic, social, cultural, spiritual, religious, domestic and political. This defence is to be carried out by all possible means within the framework of the existing Constitution and international agreements signed by the Soviet government. Furthermore, SMOT intends to look into the legal basis of the complaints of workers, and to ensure that these are brought to the notice of existing organisations, to facilitate a speedy solution to their complaints and in cases of a negative result, to publicise them widely before the Soviet and international public. In order to give stronger assistance to workers who are not members of SMOT, a workers commission is also being organised.

We should point out that there is a history of previous attempts to organise free associations of workers in our country. Recent such attempts were the creation of the free trade union in 1977 and the independent trade union in 1978. These were in effect smashed by the authorities. SMOT continues the work begun while learning from the earlier mistakes and inadequacies.

SMOT operates within the framework of the existing Constitution. SMOT's activities correspond to the interests of the country.

SMOT is not a political organisation, and does not turn to governments for support. It counts on support from workers both inside and outside the country.

**The council of SMOT: L. Agapova, V. Borisov, L. Volokhonsky, A. Ivanchenko, E. Nikolaev, V. Novodvorskaya, V. Skvirsky, A. Yakoreva.**

## Executions in Moscow

Stepan Zadikian, Hagop Stepanian and Zaven Bagdasarian — all Armenians — were condemned to death 26 January 1979 by the USSR Supreme Court. On the night of 30 January 1979 they were executed by a firing squad.

They were accused of planting a bomb in the Moscow metro in January 1977. But Moscow dissidents have raised serious doubts about the alleged guilt of those executed and they have condemned the judicial procedures used to arrive at the death sentence.

At first, Soviet authorities announced only that Zadikian had been executed. The names of his 'two accomplices' were not released until several days later. On hearing the news of Zadikian's execution, Andrei Sakharov immediately declared a hunger strike in protest.

Sakharov pointed out that Zadikian was a well-known oppositionist. He had already spent five years in a prison camp from 1967 to 1972 for 'nationalist anti-Soviet activities'. But Zadikian was on record as 'opposing violence'. He was a member of the unofficial Armenian Party of National Unity. The PNU, created in 1966 was strictly legalistic in its methods of work and advocated the secession of Armenia from the USSR through a popular referendum. The right to secede from the USSR is guaranteed by the Soviet constitution.

The fact that raises the biggest question regarding Zadikian's so-called 'guilt' is the assertion by many of his friends that he was far away from Moscow the day the bomb exploded. Moreover Moscow dissidents assert that his trial was a travesty of justice. The proceedings were held in strict secrecy, and even his wife was barred from entrance to the courtroom.

Sakharov maintains that from the very beginning of the affair, the KGB spared no effort to blame the Armenian national opposition for the Moscow bombing incident. At the time of the incident, it was widely rumoured in Moscow that the bombing was a KGB provocation. In a recent interview published in the left-wing Paris daily **Liberation**, Leonid Plyushch maintained that the main motive for the trials and executions was to try and prove that the Soviet Armenian dissidents—who oppose terrorism—are in fact similar to the Turkish branch of the Armenian resistance which advocates terrorism. He also recalled the fact that during the recent trial of Robert Nazarian, an active member of the Armenian Helsinki Monitoring Group, Nazarian was also accused of involvement in the bombing. The charge against him was so ridiculous that it had to be dropped. But those who protested the gross illegalities surrounding the Nazarian trial were accused of 'harbouring sympathy for nationalist terrorists'.

In the opinion of the Paris-based Armenian Liberation Group the executions 'were designed to intimidate the nationalist movements and discredit them'. But far from discrediting the Armenian dissident movement, the executions have provoked a wave of protest in the West. In Paris on 3 February 1979 a demonstration was held in front of the Soviet Embassy and a delegation headed by Jean-Paul Sartre attempted to deliver a letter repudiating the Soviet actions. A large mobilisation of the Left was called for a demonstration on 9 February.

The fact that three individuals were tried and sentenced to death in a secret trial is indicative of the depths of the degeneration of Soviet justice. But the executions bring into focus a much overlooked fact of Soviet reality — namely, that a so-called 'socialist state' still widely employs the death penalty. In the USSR even economic crimes are punishable by the firing squad. It should be remembered that one of the first official acts of Soviet power in October 1917 was the abolition of the death penalty. During the civil war the death penalty was reintroduced. But already in 1920 Lenin announced that the death penalty would be abolished as soon as the civil war was over. Fifty-nine years have passed and still we are waiting ...

-- by Ustym Tsyhanenko

## Medvedev, Agapova seek to stand in Elections

Roy Medvedev, a dissident Marxist historian and Ludmilla Agapova, member of the recently formed Inter-Trade Union Association and wife of a Soviet sailor who defected to Sweden and who herself has attempted four escapes, both agreed to stand as candidates in the March 4th elections to the Supreme Soviet. They were nominated by an organisation claiming 28 members and calling itself 'Election 79'. The announcement caused a sensation in Moscow.

Elections to the Supreme Soviet—the USSR's legislative body—are usually highly predictable and boring affairs. Over 99 percent of eligible voters turn out to cast their ballots and over 99 percent vote in favour of the Party slate. Dr Medvedev said on 2 February 1979 that under

Articles 9 and 38 passed by the Supreme Soviet on 6 July 1978, any organised group can propose their own candidate. But in practice, the Central Elections Commission sorts through the nominations and puts forward only one name for each seat and that candidate is the Party's choice. The name of the candidate is printed on a ballot which the voter, having presented his or her identification card to officials, is then expected to drop into the ballot box. In other words, no marks at all need be affixed by the voter. Some brave souls occasionally mark the ballot by crossing out the name of the candidate or substituting a write-in candidate, and several curtained booths at the other end of the room are provided for those who wish to use them. But the identity of those refusing to vote for the official candidate is

known to officials in the room.

The 'Election 79' group applied to the local election board to register their nominees. Their request was turned down on the pretext that the nominating organisation was not officially recognised. The group then submitted their documents to the local election administration in Moscow. 'Election 79' spokesperson, Vladimir Sychyov, said that since the election board accepted the papers, his group was now recognised by the government. The group sent an appeal to the Central Election Commission asking the panel to place the two candidates on the ballot along with the Communist Party candidates. Dr Medvedev was entered to run against a Bolshoi ballerina; Ms Agapova against a Russian Federal Supreme Court judge.

## Ukrainian Activists Under Attack

The Soviet secret police continues its harassment of members of the Ukrainian Helsinki Monitoring Group as well as Ukrainian oppositionists in exile. Petro Sichko, member of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group was removed from his position as senior engineer and offered a job as a labourer in the galvanizing section of the electrical division of the factory. He has written a letter of protest and has also declared a hunger strike. Sichko was arrested in 1947 for alleged participation in an illegal student group at the University of Chernivtsi and sentenced to a 25-year prison term. He was released after serving 10 years. His son Vasyl, also a member of the Helsinki Group was recently thrown out of university as a reprisal for his father's refusal to cooperate with the KGB. Another case of

harassment involves Oksana Meshko, also a Helsinki group member. She was mugged in her apartment on 3 November 1978.

Yosyf Zissel, a civil rights activist living in Chernivtsi, Ukraine, was arrested on 8 December 1978 and charged with circulating 'anti-Soviet documents'. He was linked to the Helsinki group. His wife, Iryna, insists that she too ought to be arrested for circulating 'anti-Soviet documents'.

In preparation for Human Rights Day, December 10, 1978, the KGB summoned a number of civil rights activists in Kiev for discussion. Among those called were Vera Lisova, wife of the imprisoned philosopher, Jan Borovsky, Volodymyr Malenkovich. They were warned not to take actions to mark Human Rights Day.

Hryhorii Tokaiuk, a 30-year-old engineer from Kiev, who describes himself as a supporter of political pluralism with sympathy for the ideas of Eurocommunism, has protested against KGB harassment since 1972.

In February 1979 Vasily Ovsienko was sentenced in Radomysh to 3 years' hard labour for resisting a policeman.

Long-time political prisoner, Danylo Shumuk may be released to join his family in Canada. Along the same lines, reliable sources believe that several other prominent Ukrainian political prisoners may soon be exiled to the West.

## Old Bolshevik Dies

Arnost Kolman, Lenin's comrade and one of the very few old Bolsheviks to have survived Stalin's purges, died in Stockholm January 26, 1979. Kolman was 87. He lived in the USSR until 1976. That year he obtained a visa to visit his son in Sweden and chose to remain there.

From Sweden Kolman resigned from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In his letter addressed to Brezhnev he wrote:

"I am 84 and have been a party member for 55 years. I joined its ranks in order to fight for social justice, for a happy future for mankind... When your tanks and armies occupied Czechoslovakia... I lost any illusions I may have had about the nature of your regime... And in any case, about what sort of socialism can one talk in the USSR? ... The Soviet Union lacks the most elementary democratic rights: instead of free elections there is voting for candidates imposed from above; there is no public political life; strikes are forbidden and the trade unions are subservient to state interests..."

Kolman's last political act was to issue a statement supporting Bahro to the West Berlin Bahro Congress.

(Rouge, Jan. 29, 1979)

## NEWS IN BRIEF

A number of prominent Soviet writers refusing the label 'dissidents' have published a 250,000-word literary collection entitled 'Metropol' without submitting their texts to the censor. This decision has generated much excitement in Moscow. Many of the writers are in fact members of the Writers Union. Among the five co-editors are Vassilly Aksyonov, Andrei Bitov and Fazil Iskander. Such well known literary 'starts' as Andrei Voznesensky, Vladimir Vyssotsky and Bella Akmadoulina contributed to the first issue. The writers announced that they took their decision in order to challenge official censorship and to overcome the dilemma of either publishing their workers 'illegally' in the West or 'writing for the desk drawer'.

Soon after copies of 'Metropol' began to circulate, five editors were called to a formal meeting where about 50 fellow-writers accused them of sinning against the state and warned them to stop. At the same time, films, plays, novels, etc. by these authors have suddenly become unavailable.

\* Semion Gluzman, the psychiatrist who denounced the use of psychiatric repression and along with Bukovsky published a manual of conduct for the victims of these practices, has been transferred to solitary confinement where he is to remain until the end of his sentence this May. He was sentenced in 1972 to 7 years of hard labour.

\* Handicapped people, who in the West now call themselves the 'Fourth World', have formed an independent association in the USSR. A Moscow designer Yuri Kisiliov and Valeri Tefelov informed foreign correspondents that they have formed an unofficial Association of Invalids to work towards improving conditions for invalids in the USSR. The authorities have responded with threats and warnings. To date there have been no arrests.

\* Six or seven dissidents charged with publishing a new **samizdat** publication **Poisk** (Search) were recently arrested in Moscow. Copies of an issue of the publication which began appearing three months ago were also confiscated. The issue contained 300-400 pages.

### DZHEMILEV EXILED AGAIN

On 6 March a Soviet court reportedly sentenced Crimean Tatar leader Mustapha Dzhemilev to 4 years' internal exile for 'violating probation'.

Dzhemilev has already served four prison terms because of his leading role in the struggle of the Crimean Tatars to return to Crimea, from which they were forcibly deported by Stalin in 1944. He has been subjected to continual harassment by the KGB since he finished serving a 2½ year labour camp sentence on charges of 'anti-Soviet activity' in December 1977.

## Labour Leaders in New Bahro Appeal

In a letter dated 13 March, a number of Labour MPs and trade union leaders have appealed to East German Party leader Eric Honecker to allow Rudolf Bahro to leave the German Democratic Republic as soon as possible.

Among the signatories of the letter are left-wing Labour MPs Eric Heffer and Tom Litterick, Miners' Union General Secretary Lawrence Daly and the President of the National Union of Journalists, Denis MacShane. The letter follows Bahro's recent letter from an East German jail indicating his willingness to go into exile in the West (see page 1 of this issue for the full text of his letter).

The appeal was initiated by the Rudolf Bahro Defence Committee as part of its continuing campaign for Bahro's release.

The Defence Committee is following up this appeal with a national meeting for those wishing to be involved in continuing activity on behalf of Rudolf Bahro. The meeting will take place on **18-19 May** at the **Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London**. On Friday evening, 18th May there will be a public meeting with representatives of the various currents on the Left speaking on Bahro's **Alternative**, and on the Saturday there will be discussions on the tasks of the defence campaign, future activities, and the present situation in the GDR.

Meanwhile, the Labour Party's International Committee has passed a resolution proposed by the EESC Hon. Chairman Eric Heffer, calling for

Bahro's immediate release. Noting that Bahro's book has been 'widely acclaimed as a landmark in the development of socialist thought', the resolution states: 'The imprisonment on fabricated charges of men such as Bahro is in itself an indictment of the East German regime.' The International Committee's resolution was passed without opposition by the Party's NEC on 28 February.

The Eastern Europe Solidarity Campaign is collaborating with the Rudolf Bahro Defence Committee in spreading information on the Bahro case through its bulletin.

The third issue of the Defence Committee's information bulletin, the **GDR Bulletin**, is now available. If you wish to receive a copy of the bulletin, or further information about the May meeting and other aspects of the defence campaign, write to: **The Rudolf Bahro Defence Committee, 24A Bellevue Rd., Ryde, Isle of Wight**.

## Sabata Protests

The EESC has launched a campaign throughout the labour movement for the release of Jaroslav Sabata. Its Hon. Chairman, Eric Heffer MP, has successfully moved a resolution on the Labour Party's NEC calling for Sabata's release, and the first issue of the EESC bulletin calls for protests by labour and trade union organisations. For copies of the bulletin contact:

**Eastern Europe Solidarity Campaign,  
10 Park Drive, London NW11 7SH.**

The EESC's bulletin, the first issue of which is now out, contains a detailed refutation of Soviet slanders against Klebanov. And in April, Pluto Press brings out **Workers Against the Gulag**, a complete dossier on repression against workers in the USSR.

## New Moves in Klebanov Affair

At its meeting on 20 February, the 9-member ILO Committee on Freedom of Association decided to reject a vigorous Soviet challenge and press ahead with its investigation of trade union rights in the USSR.

The ILO investigation originated with the formation of the unofficial Soviet Free Trade Union Association, established in February 1978 by Vladimir Klebanov and other Soviet workers and employees. A dossier of information provided by the Free Trade Union Association formed the basis of a call by the ICFTU on 19 May 1978 for the ILO to investigate trade union rights in the USSR. The ICFTU is the Western, non-Communist international trade union centre to which the British TUC is affiliated.

The official Soviet delegate to the ILO, Leonid Kostin, attempted to discredit any ILO investigation by claiming that many of those involved in the 'mythical' unofficial Soviet trade union group were 'in conflict with Soviet criminal and civil laws'. As an example he alleged that

Kostin went on, 'he failed to return to honest occupation.' These allegations are flatly contradicted by the fact that Poplavsky occupied a highly responsible position as a department head at a ferro-concrete plant in Kilmovsk in the Moscow Region until he was sacked in 1975 for, in his own words, 'exposing the abuses of the factory director V. Polstyanov'. (See **Workers Against the Gulag**, pp.60-1 for Poplavsky's biography).

Rejecting the Soviet delegate's charges, the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association pointed out that the Soviet government 'has supplied no precise details concerning the allegations'. It went on to recommend to the ILO governing body that the latter provide 'detailed information concerning the prime allegation that it is impossible legally to create in the USSR a trade union organisation independent of the State and of the Party'. It secondly called for investigation of 'the facts alleged by the complainants concerning the arrest or confinement in psychiatric hospitals of the founders or members of the [Trade Union Association]'.

It was precisely this second point concerning the forcible internment of Vladimir Klebanov in a psychiatric hospital that the British Miners' Union has raised with Efremenko, the head of the official Soviet Miners' Union at a meeting in Poland last November. Efremenko claimed ignorance on this point, saying he did not know whether Klebanov was receiving 'treatment' voluntarily or under compulsion.

Yet despite official Soviet evasion on this, the key issue in the whole affair, the NUM has so far taken no further action in defence of Klebanov. Indeed, the **Yorkshire Miner**, journal of the Yorkshire NUM has swallowed the official Soviet story whole. Its December issue even writes: 'The idea of management dismissing workers unlawfully, as claimed, was equally implausible since management in mining, as in every other Soviet industry, could not dismiss anyone without trade union consent and the trade unions kept a strict watch.'

This view of the Soviet trade unions exercising vigilant control over the Party in the factories conflicts sharply with the view of Georges Seguy, the French Communist Party leader and General Secretary of the CP-led CGT, France's largest trade-union federation. In April 1978 at the WFTU conference in Prague, Seguy, according to the **Guardian** of 18 April, bluntly declared that the WFTU 'had still too little freedom from State interference by Communist Governments to be an effective champion of workers' rights'.

By **Oliver MacDonald and Victor Haynes**

\*\*\*\*\*  
The Eastern Europe Solidarity Campaign is organising meetings on the Klebanov affair at which Victor Haynes of the EESC, co-editor of **Workers Against the Gulag**, will be available to speak. Those interested in arranging such meetings, or in getting more information about the Klebanov case should write to: EESC, 10 Park Drive, London NW11

## Workers Against the Gulag

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# REVIEWS

## “Towards an East European Marxism”

[While Rudolf Bahro's book, reviewed in the last issue of Labour Focus, has rightly received wide acclaim on the Left, the Hungarian study of the dynamics of East European societies which we review here has received less attention than it deserves. On the eve of its publication in paperback, we asked Professor Wlodzimierz Brus, the Polish Marxist economist and author of many books including *The Economics and Politics of Socialism*, which won the *Deutscher Memorial Prize* in 1976, to review *Marc Rakovski's* book.]

**Towards an East European Marxism** by **Marc Rakovski**.  
(Allison and Busby, London, 1978, 140pp.)

This book belongs to the Marxian persuasion, a rather rare species among East European 'samizdat' writings on political and socio-economic questions. It is earlier than Rudolf Bahro's 'The Alternative' (the French edition of Rakovski appeared some two years before the English one), and also different conceptually: no attempt to formulate alternative blueprints, 'merely' to suggest new approaches which may eventually lead to better understanding of the complex problems of the societies in question.

Appropriately for a book of this kind, Rakovski starts by diagnosing the fact that 'it is marxists themselves who are now difficult to find in Eastern Europe' (p.8). While acknowledging that this requires a sociological explanation he lays very strong emphasis on the intellectual factors

involved. Obvious enough is the enormous damage caused by 'official marxism'. But how are we to explain the failure of that 'marxism of the thaw' which, emerging in the mid-1950s particularly in Hungary, Poland, and later in Czechoslovakia, seemed to carry the promise of authentic regeneration? Although a historically structured answer is presented only in the last section of the fifth and final chapter ('The Detours of East European Marxism') the argument is developed throughout the book, intertwined with sometimes passionate disputes with Western marxists' views on East European societies.

The 'marxists of the thaw', argues Rakovski, were unable to disengage themselves from the official 'marxism of the apparatus' — and hence from a position admittedly critical of 'deformations' but remaining within a system that proved to be much more lasting and adaptable than was expected. What is needed therefore is a clean break with the old stand: 'if marxism is possible at all in Eastern Europe, it has to stand on a completely new theoretical foundation' (p.15). Three basic elements of this new stand are advanced: 1. The recognition that 'Soviet-type society is neither socialist nor capitalist, nor is it a mixture of the two systems. It is a class society *sui generis*, a different kind of class society existing alongside capitalism' (p.15) 2. Abandonment of the unilinear evolutionism characteristic of, or having a 'deep affinity' with Marxian historical materialism; for such an approach leaves 'no place for a modern social system which has an evolutionary trajectory other than

## By Wlodzimierz Brus

capitalism and which is not simply an earlier or later stage along the same route' (p.17) 3. 'Renewal of the lost connection between marxism and its natural class base' (p.15) which should be interpreted, this reviewer hopes correctly, as the need for theory to address itself directly to the working class (or more broadly to the 'oppressed class').

In assessing the validity of the points made by the author, one should keep in mind two interrelated but not identical questions: whether or to what extent Rakovski's positions are substantively correct, and whether or to what extent acceptance of them is really conditioning the revival of marxism in Eastern Europe (or with regard to Eastern Europe). Let us now briefly discuss the three points.

As for the first, Rakovski considers it to be of paramount importance because of the need decisively to break with the three theoretical interpretations of Soviet-type societies to which all existing marxist positions can be reduced: that Soviet-type society is socialism (both the official ideology and the ideology of 'critical fellow-travelling intellectuals' who add such extenuating circumstances as initial underdevelopment or speak about distortions, tragic errors, etc.); that is a transitional society (Trotsky's position in the thirties); or that it is capitalism (with some specific features — state capitalism). Criticism of the first and second models in the book is very brief, and refers here to their substance rather than the political consequences of accepting them — for example, the fact that 'marxists of the thaw' had very quickly either to join the official ones or to find themselves

underground. The third model is rejected after relatively comprehensive discussion, conceived as a dispute with the position taken nowadays by a substantial part of the Western left. (This position is dubbed 'the left-wing version of the convergence theory' — quite an apt label when one recalls those who seek to derive from capitalism in the East and in the West the basis for a common direction of struggle.) Chapter 4 ('The Two Systems in Action') is analytically very interesting from this point of view; it considerably strengthens the case against the proponents of the state-capitalism-formula, as I myself can testify having recently tried to counter Charles Bettelheim's stand at the 'II Manifesto' conference on the post-revolutionary societies (Milan, January 1979).

However, why should the 'fourth hypothesis' of a new-type class-society be the only legitimate marxist interpretation promising to re-establish marxism in Eastern Europe? It is by no means a new concept, as may be seen from Hilferding's 1940 article, reprinted in extracts in Sidney Hook's 1955 collection *Marx and the Marxists. The Ambiguous Legacy*, and most recently from Paul Sweezy's piece in No. 5 vol. 30 of *Monthly Review* — 'Is there a Ruling Class in the USSR?' It does not answer the standard accusation that, regardless of how we call the Soviet-type society and what wrongs we see there, it is the outcome of an attempt to implement the marxist socialist project. But the 'fourth hypothesis' also continues to generate the impression that for marxists socialism remains an eschatological concept, an embodiment of ideal society in which all conflicts are resolved and all sources of alienation removed. Thus, wherever domination, social injustices and manifest inefficiencies are found, some critical marxists seem quick to invent a new name, thereby avoiding profanation of the sacred altars and denying that any given form of socialism can be in crisis (because socialism simply doesn't exist). I share the contempt for the official 'marxist' priests, most of whom probably do not even believe their own sermons. However, it seems to me that to neglect the links between Soviet-type societies and the socialist project means shunning genuine problems of decisive importance for the future of marxism and of the struggle for 'likeable' socialism.

There seem to be other weaknesses in Rakovski's 'fourth hypothesis', especially his justification for including a class-element among the characteristics of Soviet-type societies. The author speaks about 'basic classes' (p.43) without defining them clearly; he leaves vague both the scope of the ruling class and the relationship between the working class and the oppressed class in general and so on. But my main doubts as to the value of the 'fourth hypothesis' for the revival of marxism concern its link with the second point listed above. I shall not argue here either for or against the substance of the author's view on the unilinearity of

historical development in connection with Soviet-type societies. My impression, however, is that the question here at stake is the existence of **regularities** in historical development (I do not hesitate to use the term 'laws'), particularly the interaction of changes in the forces and relations of production. Rakovski does not present the internal conflicts of Soviet-type societies in these terms (although he speaks at one stage of 'development tendencies' which may lead to economic collapse of the system, p.103), and nor does he attempt to use these tools in his examination of capitalist change. He may be right or wrong to reject them, but as far as marxism is concerned he seems to propose saving the theory by abandoning it.

This has some consequences for the **third** point, again as far as the conditions for a revival of marxism are concerned. Marxism clearly takes the side of the oppressed class; marxists should address themselves directly to the working class; they should search to establish an autonomous (presumably working class) base — in all this Rakovski is perfectly correct. Indeed I am sure that, **politically speaking**, East European marxists (and non-marxists for that matter) do try to act in this way, especially since everybody is aware of the political **potential** of the working class for both material and ideological reasons. Yet what has this to do with marxism as a theory capable of making us understand the society in question and its direction of change? Marxism claims to be a working-class theory not (or not mainly) on suprahistorical ethical grounds, but because it asserts an inextricable interconnection between the exigencies of socio-economic progress and the emancipation of the working class. Therefore, the validity and hence the attractiveness of Marxism for analysis of East European societies can hardly be proved outside the context of historical materialism — perhaps re-interpreted and modified, but still retained in a broad sense.

It has, I hope, been clear that my present intention is not to enter into dispute with Rakovski's propositions as such (this would require a much more positive contribution than a review), but only to question that these propositions are capable of pointing the way towards the revival of marxism in Eastern Europe. This qualification is all the more important in that the book's contribution should by no means be reduced to this aspect: one can find in it many deep insights into the present situation and problems of East European societies, and even the (understandable!) over-reliance on the Hungarian experience in some generalisations does not diminish their overall value.

The framework in which Rakovski discusses the problems of Eastern Europe is that of a **stabilized post-Stalinist society**. As I understand it, the notion does not involve denying the existence of strong destabilizing factors, but refers to the fact that the system assumed a definite, normal

shape differing from the extremities of stalinism with regard both to terror and to the handling of consumer interests, etc. In my own language (*Socialist Ownership and Political Systems*, London 1975), I call this 'the etatist model of socialism'. Rakovski strongly emphasizes that 'the peoples of the East European countries (are) no longer threatened with a return to stalinism' (p.32), the best evidence being provided by post-invasion Czechoslovakia. The domination of the ruling class is now assured in a much more complex way than before: 'It is characteristic of post-stalinist society that its coherence is no longer based on repression alone, but also on the passive consensus of the various social strata' (p.54).

It is from the point of view of various social forces that Rakovski discusses the concept and reality of '**market socialism**' (Chapter 2 — "'Market Socialism' in Retrospect'). Interestingly enough, he tries to distinguish between the ideology of 'market socialism' (which 'would appear to come from that segment of the ruling class which extends from the decision-makers on the enterprise level to those who, although they are decision-makers at the national economic level, nevertheless remain outside the political elite', p.21) and the actual interest in implementation of market-oriented reforms. The above-named group (or sub-class?) appears to have lacked such an interest, because it feared being left alone with the workers without the shelter of the centrally controlled institutional set-up ('if the hierarchy above enterprise level were to disintegrate and lose its authority..., the workers would have a chance to institute and consolidate their own counter-organisations, and to coordinate the running of them', pp. 27-28). Thus, contrary to beliefs held by a wide section of the western far left, it was not the launching of market-oriented reforms but rather the failure to implement them that reflected the interests of the ruling class. Unfortunately Rakovski does not measure this assessment against the realities of Yugoslavia (which is completely left out of the book).

Clearly referring only to Hungary, Rakovski argues that the way in which limited changes have been made to the economic mechanism created misgivings among the workers (the question of differentials), and enabled the 'elite of the ruling class' (as distinct from what may be called the managerial stratum of the ruling class) to present itself as the protector of the working class. In general, however, the author tries to show that consistent 'market socialism' is under the circumstances in the interests of the working class — both politically (the point mentioned before) and economically. He rejects the superficial analogy between, on the one hand, Western consumerism and, on the other, the increase in private consumption and the growing desire to accumulate personally owned objects in Eastern Europe. It may sound paradoxical, but he seems to have a point when stressing that 'the growth in the

role of private consumption has a consequence which is positive beyond all doubt' because it increases the economic independence of the population in relation to the centrally administered economic organisations (p.95). Pinned to this trend are even long-term hopes of greater non-conformism in the younger generation of workers.

The book has much of interest to say about the **intelligentsia**, and not only in the special chapter 3 ('The Intellectuals'). As elsewhere, the idea is to analyse the position and role of the intelligentsia against the background of the 'fourth hypothesis' model of Soviet-type societies. This helps to explain, according to Rakovski, the strange phenomenon that whereas none of the social classes, not even the ruling class, is in a position to organise itself, the intelligentsia — which does not constitute an autonomous class — is able to create its own ideology and its own culture, and 'if not independent political organisations, then at least a functional equivalent to them' (pp. 42 and 47-48). By no means does it follow from this that the intelligentsia as such makes use of these unique possibilities; a soul-searching discussion of the relationship between establishment and non-conformist intellectuals shows the whole range of interests and problems involved. What emerges clearly is a passionate defence of the intellectual underground, which is regarded as important even when it finds itself at one stage or another isolated from the large groups of society, including the workers ('the workers have no interest in the elimination of the underground. But nor do

they have any interest in its survival. The question does not even pose itself for the working class' p.65). 'Propaganda by action' of the non-conformist intellectuals is held to be of paramount significance because it shows that 'it is not necessary to accept the world installed by the regime, that it is possible to act according to norms other than those of the existing institutional system' (p.67).

How is this 'propaganda by action' related to the prospects of changing the situation of the working class? The latter — as opposed to the Western working class, which has been able to create an organised movement influencing the conditions of life — is in Soviet-type societies deprived of the possibility of organising itself, and the rare organisational results of popular uprisings are never successfully consolidated. Non-conformist actions, by showing that the existing institutional set-up can be transcended, become a factor in a process of change, as a result of which the institutions of power will no longer be strong enough to fragment the working class; the workers themselves would then 'reach the stage of organised class struggle and institute, at least at factory level, associations which can then be stabilized' (p.66). For Rakovski the hope (of Trotsky in the 1920s but also of others later) that proletarian power can be guaranteed merely through industrialisation, was a theoretical fallacy because it treated the working class as a category of economic statistics and not as a political force which has to attain consciousness through its own practice (p.117). Apparently the activities of marxist underground intellectuals are expected to

facilitate the constitution of the working class as such a conscious force.

This line of reasoning leads to the message which the author has for the Western left: it is not enough to accept that one must have solidarity with everyone in the Soviet-type societies who disputes their institutions, it is also necessary — when distinguishing between variants of nonconformism — to apply criteria different from those which apply to Western anti-capitalist movements: 'We shall expect them (various oppositional trends) to do everything within the limits of their ability to dispel the belief in the necessity or indispensability of the existing institutional system. We shall expect them not to exclude from the nonconformist community on religious, national, racial or other grounds, any individuals who choose marginalisation... It is with such criteria as a basis that one can also criticise those marxists leninists for whom marxism means continuity with official ideology and are hoping for reforms from above' (p.72).

The number of fundamental issues raised in the pages of this slim book is impressive indeed, and small wonder that not all of them are elaborated with equal thoroughness and consistency. Nor would it be surprising, therefore, if Marc Rakovski were to reconsider some of his positions, even those of a fundamental character. Whatever these reconsiderations though, he may be sure of the stimulating effect of this book.

Oxford, February 1979

## LETTERS

### Debate on Boycotting Soviet Union

*[The three letters that we print below are all responses to a letter from various Soviet exiles that we published in our last issue. Some readers took our introduction to that letter to imply support for all of its views. We did not intend any such impression.]*

*We see our letters column as providing a forum for our readers and will avoid the practice of making immediate editorial responses to the letters we publish. But we would like to express our sadness that Tamara Deutscher, who has supported Labour Focus since its foundation, now feels that she must withdraw her sponsorship from the journal.*

*Tamara Deutscher refers to the point made in our statement of aims (published in the inside front cover of this issue) that Labour Focus is not a journal for debating the*

*nature of the East European states. There are other forums on the Left for such debates. But we hope our readers will contribute letters particularly on the policies that the Left should adopt in relation to repression in Eastern Europe, as well as coming back at us on the articles which appear in the journal.]*

Dear Editor,

You have published, in the **Labour Focus** of January-February 1979, a letter which contains an appeal to Western Socialists and Communists. Your introduction stresses the weight of the signatories as a 'very authoritative group of Soviet socialists and civil rights campaigners', and you obviously attach great significance to their statement which poses 'very sharply ... very important questions for socialists'

and warrants serious thought'. And yet there is in the whole issue no editorial comment in which you distance yourself from, or in any way show disagreement with, the views expressed by the signatories while your Introductions suggests that your editorial board adopts at best a neutral attitude towards the appeal.

**Labour Focus** is, as you say in the **Statement of Aims**, not a journal of 'debate' but of 'information' and, in my view, should not lend its pages to discussions, especially of a kind which start from premises removed from socialist principles. Most of the signatories of the Appeal can hardly be described as socialists; and most can find ample space to express their views in bourgeois and right-wing papers.

The Appeal calls for nothing less than a wholesale boycott of the USSR and a complete break of all relations between West and East — in other words, for isolating the Soviet Union and putting it

into quarantine. Such methods would in no way help the process of democratisation in the East. On the contrary, they would only strengthen all reactionary forces in both camps. The not so distant past has taught us that Stalinism was at its worst in the period of the Soviet Union's isolation.

I have been watching with increasing unease your treatment of some of the problems of dissent in the East. The appearance of the Letter, without any critical comment of its content, led me to the decision to withdraw my sponsorship of the paper, and it is with real regret that I feel I have to ask you to delete my name from the list of sponsors.

With all personal good wishes,  
Yours fraternally,  
**Tamara Deutscher.**

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You publish in your January number of **Labour Focus** an appeal from various emigrés from the USSR which demands an answer. First of all, this appeal addresses itself to 'people who support democratic socialism', and this entitles such people to ask the appellants in turn, 'is democratic socialism something which you support?' If it is, then how can this be consonant with contributing to the reactionary Springer Press, and its sponsored organ **Kontinent**? Mr. Pyotr Grigorenko, in a recent article in that journal has apparently complained that Western socialists did little or nothing about his case while he was detained in the Soviet Union.

But the Russell Foundation collected more than 10,000 signatures from European universities, to a petition appealing for the release of Mr. Grigorenko himself, and also for that of Vladimir Bukovsky. American socialists joined actively in this work, with meetings and publications, as did Australian communists. When Mr. Bukovsky finally arrived in England, he failed to keep an appointment with a director of the Russell Foundation, but he speedily appeared at a gala function of the

National Association for Freedom, alongside Ms. Margaret Thatcher. We do not think that either of these former detainees owes any thanks for our work on their behalf, since we were campaigning for their liberty as a democratic principle, and our campaign was not conditional upon their agreement with our politics. But we do not really need their advice about how to serve 'democratic socialism' in alliance with Ms. Thatcher and the Springer Press.

More seriously, the attack on detente made by the signatories to your appeal is a truly alarming incitement to renew the cold war, or worse, to escalate it beyond its worst point hitherto. Most of the positive developments in the field of civil and human rights in the USSR since Stalin's death have been accompanied by a widening of 'social, trade union, academic, cultural and athletic' contacts: and our own developed experience of agitation against psychiatric abuse in the Soviet Union, for instance, has depended for its limited successes on the fact that Soviet psychiatrists were, and wished to be, part of the relevant international associations. The campaign of Zhores Medvedev against Lysenko's domination of Soviet genetics, similarly, drew great strength from the dialogue with professional colleagues on an international network. Even the links between trade unions maintain a valuable pressure upon the Soviet authorities, as I know from personal experience.

To tell Communists in Western Europe to initiate a 'rupture of inter-party relations' is almost equally silly and damaging. When the Italian Communists maintain their links with the CPSU whilst publishing Roy Medvedev on their Party presses, they make an important contribution to the legitimisation of democratic argument within the Communist movement. Were they to sever such connections, they would be abandoning their Soviet colleagues to the most reactionary and xenophobic of their leaders, and this would be a grave dereliction of duty.

The agitation of Grigorenko and his

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is needed — if only to clear the good name of socialism from the disrepute brought upon it by over fifty years of bureaucratic tyranny. There can also be no doubt that the reason for this state of affairs is not simply preoccupation with the struggle at home against the domestic enemy, but a real reluctance to criticise the Soviet Union too openly. Will a campaign against the political regime in Moscow and the rest of Eastern Europe, however carefully we ourselves may differentiate between the ruling bureaucracy and the non-capitalist society that it rules over, not necessarily be misunderstood and misrepresented in the prevailing climate of officially-sponsored anti-communism?

Given this reluctance on the part of the

colleagues fits a particularly serious need of Western conservatives, who are confronting a world slump, and face the re-emergence of mass unemployment in all the major capitalist countries. Youth unemployment is a particularly grave structural problem. Rearmament is one possible response to this crisis, which offers the advantage that the young may be 'employed' in uniforms. None of this will help civil rights in the West, however, and it is hard to see how growing authoritarianism in NATO countries will facilitate democracy in the East.

In his strangely partial campaign on 'human rights', President Carter (joined by Mr. David Owen) has defended the Shah of Iran up to the last possible moment. Yet throughout the sixties and seventies, repression in Iran has been rather evidently more naked and widespread than it has been in the USSR. But in military terms, and in economic terms, the despot of Teheran has been an 'ally' of the West. What does Mr. Grigorenko think about political prisoners in Iran, or for that matter about those in Indonesia, or Latin America? What should democrats, leave alone democratic socialists, be expected to do about the endemic worldwide violation of human rights in those countries which remain subject to imperial domination?

One thing is clear: hysterical acceleration of war preparations will gravely impair such human rights as have already been won, whether in the East or the West. Attacks on detente, however motivated, will be invariably accompanied by new pressures for rearmament.

For these reasons, while most of us will agree that Mr. Grigorenko's personal focus on Eastern Europe has quite explicable roots in the ill-treatment he has suffered, it is stretching our credulousness to extraordinary limits to call it a 'Labour' focus. Everything he and his colleagues advise is exactly what we should **not** do.

**Ken Coates**  
**Nottingham**

The letter from Ludmilla Alekseyeva, Pyotr Grigorenko, Valentin Turchin and others touches a familiar raw nerve: are Western socialists and communists, in their determination not to lend support to the anti-communism of their own ruling class, too reluctant to adopt a clear and unambiguous stance over the suppression of basic civil and democratic liberties in the countries of 'actually existing socialism'? In my view this charge is entirely justified. Despite the rise of 'Eurocommunism', the appearance of a 'new left' independent of Moscow, and the formation of campaign bodies such as the British Eastern Europe Solidarity Campaign in recent years, labour movement activity in the West in support of the democratic and socialist oppositions in Eastern Europe still falls far short of what

Western left it would be quite wrong to reproach the authors of the appeal for posing the question as sharply as they do. The real problem today is not a dangerous anti-Sovietism of the Left, but apathy, indifference and equivocity. The basic starting point of the appeal is, in fact, as unexceptionable as its implied criticism of Western socialists: the insistence that since 'the current situation in the Soviet Union is marked by a growing crisis in all branches of life' there is a 'possibility for people who support democratic socialism in the West to influence the direction of changes in the political life of the Soviet Union and the countries in the Soviet bloc'. The response to Eurocommunism — measured both by the hysterical reaction of the popes of 'true

Marxism-Leninism' and the constant references to it found in the writings of East European oppositionists — bears out what the authors of the appeal say about the 'important influence on the consciousness of the majority of people in the USSR, including a significant section of party workers' that the Western left can exert. And who could object to most of the activities proposed in the appeal — 'protesting against the systematic violation of human rights in the USSR ...', 'supporting civil rights campaigners', 'putting forward new constructive ideas of democratic socialism'?

The idea that such activities could contribute to anti-communism is fundamentally mistaken. It has always been the reluctance or, worse, straightforward refusal to resolutely defend democracy that has discredited socialism more than any amount of bourgeois propaganda (which, after all, does not have to invent the horrors of 'actually existing socialism').

The real problem with the appeal arises where the authors advocate campaigns, slogans and measures which really do raise the possibility of a real, practical collusion with bourgeois anti-communists and the capitalist state against the Soviet regime. They propose that Western socialists issue an ultimatum to the Soviet leaders: 'Unless you take steps to restore basic democratic and human rights, we will refuse to co-operate with you on any level and will campaign for every Western organisation and our governments to boycott you until you do'.

It would be wrong, in my view, to discuss the rights or wrongs of using the boycott tactic against the Soviet Union in the abstract. It all depends on **who** boycotts **whom**, and **for what reason**. If the reaction of the NUM to the results of their recent enquiry into the Klebanov case had been to decide on a boycott of all official junkets with the bureaucrats of the Russian 'mineworkers union' until these come up with a more serious response, that would have been fine. Such a step would have strengthened and encouraged Soviet workers trying to free themselves from the tutelage of the official unions, whereas the uncritical acceptance of the Russian 'explanation' and the continued maintenance of 'fraternal relations' as if nothing had happened actually amounts to aiding and abetting the denial of basic trade union rights to the Soviet working class. Similarly, much of the criticism of the Soviet Union now articulated by many Western CPs is rendered ambiguous by the way they still handle official relations with their 'fraternal parties' in Eastern Europe. Why should Gordon McLennan not make his next trip to East Berlin conditional on a satisfactory answer from the SED to the questions the CPGB has asked about Rudolf Bahro?

But that is quite different from organising pressure on our governments 'to demand

that they adopt real diplomatic and political methods in response to the Soviet authorities' obvious violations of humanitarian articles and principles ...', or from demanding 'the exclusion of the USSR from all social international federations', or a general 'boycott of the Soviet Union and its representatives by social, trade union, academic, cultural and athletic organisations and associations in the West'. Not mentioned in the appeal, but consistent with it and demanded by many others, is the call for a boycott of the Olympic Games in Moscow 1980.

The Olympic Games are, in fact, of great symbolic significance. The choice of Moscow is a publicity-effective token of the process of detente between the USSR and the West, intended to relay the end of the Soviet Union's long isolation from 'the world community' onto the television screens of the world.

There are two reasons why we should not call for a boycott of the Moscow Games, and not advocate the general boycott tactics proposed in the appeal. The first one is that even if one considers detente as the continuation of the cold war by other means, even if one recognises its limitations and the fact that not humanitarian motives but calculated power interests are behind it on either side, it is nevertheless clear that socialists have no interest in campaigning against it. What do we have to gain by a relapse into the Cold War? The last ten years or so have seen a number of positive developments that are partially by-products of detente: the relaxation of anti-communism in the West (in West Germany, for instance, the banned Communist Party had to be allowed to re-form legally — partly in order to clear the way for the 'normalisation' of relations with East Germany); the relaxation of traffic restrictions across the former 'iron curtain' (and it is by no means only business executives who benefit from it); and even a certain, if perhaps only cosmetic, improvement in what Carter likes to call the Soviet Union's 'human rights record'. The process of detente, particularly the Helsinki Agreements, have encouraged not only illusions, but also a new will to struggle for basic rights. It is hard to see what interest we could have in reversing all this.

Certainly the Soviet bureaucracy would not be forced into restoring democratic freedoms by such means, rather the opposite. Detente is, in fact, far from being universally supported among the rulers in either the East or the West. In both camps strong factions are very aware of the risks involved in the erosion of the traditional cold war images and are seeking to return to a policy of confrontation. In the West, the banner of 'human rights' is already increasingly being misused for the resumption of a Cold War style anti-communist crusade, while in the East sections of the bureaucracy view detente with scarcely disguised suspicion. On either side a return to the Cold War will, of

course, also mean intensified repression against any democratic or socialist dissent. But whatever the outcome, it should be clear that the policies of the Western capitalist governments will never be motivated by their concern for democracy, but by the search for the best strategy to roll back 'communism' and re-incorporate Eastern Europe (and China) into the capitalist world market. From this stems my second, more fundamental, objection to the campaign advocated in the appeal: to demand from the American, British, West German and other such governments that they 'adopt real diplomatic and political methods' to force the Soviet Union to restore democracy is not merely a simple illusion in the effect this would have in Moscow, but tantamount to spreading the more dangerous illusion that Carter/Reagan, Callaghan/Thatcher, Schmidt/Kohl are actually **potential allies** of democratic socialism. Many class-conscious workers would—quite rightly, in this case—refuse to have anything to do with a campaign on behalf of the East European opposition that makes such appeals. It would be counter-productive in not solving the problem described above—the reluctance to speak out on Eastern Europe—but rather strengthening the misconception that public opposition to Brezhnev and Co. on the part of socialists is inevitably grist to the mill of anti-communist reaction.

No, a badly needed labour movement campaign in solidarity with the democratic and socialist opposition in Eastern Europe must at all times remain absolutely independent of all bourgeois 'human rights' campaigns. This is not simply a question of formal organisational independence, but one of political orientation. The comparison with past—and I believe correct—campaigns such as the campaign to force a boycott of South Africa, of Chile, or the World Cup in Argentina, is instructive in this respect: then it was a question of bringing the weight of the labour movement to bear on governments to force them to abandon their collusion with, and contribute to the downfall of, regimes which were, and are, utterly dependent on being propped up by 'our' governments. The campaigns served to expose the hypocrisy of 'our' government's democratic rhetoric. In the case of the Soviet Union, nobody could claim that Brezhnev has been installed or is being kept in power by the Pentagon, the CIA, or Whitehall. The withdrawal of Western collaboration with Moscow would hardly cause the regime's collapse. The bourgeois democrat's hypocritical rhetoric actually depends on condemning the 'Communist dictatorship', not covering up his collusion with it. When 'our' governments take a harder line on democratic rights in the 'socialist' countries, both democracy and socialism will be the losers and not benefit from it.

Günter Minnerup  
Ryde, Isle of Wight.

# LABOUR FOCUS ON EASTERN EUROPE

## INDEX OF VOLUME 2

March 1978 — February 1979

### EDITORIALS

Now Concerted Defence Work Can Begin .....	1,1
The Trade Union Association Must be Allowed to Function .....	2,1
10 Years After Czechoslovakia 1968: An Unresolved Issue .....	3,1
Double Standards .....	4,1
Defend The Chartists and the Soviet Trade Unionists .....	5,1
The Miners' Union, the Kremlin and Kiebanov .....	6,1

### BULGARIA

#### Articles

'Declaration 78' issued by Opposition Group .....	2,21
---	------

### CZECHOSLOVAKIA

#### Articles

A Testament to Political Bankruptcy -- by Marian Sling .....	1,7
Police Thuggery and Provocations Continue -- by Mark Jackson .....	1,8
Czech Committee Plans Conference on Prague Spring (LM) .....	1,17
Political Currents Emerge Within Charter 77 -- by Jan Kavan .....	2,8
Sabata Replaces Hajek as Charter Spokesperson -- by M. Jackson .....	2,9
More Charter 77 Supporters Jailed -- by M. Jackson .....	2,13
Dossier on Sacked Chartists .....	2,13
Defence Committee Formed by Chartists -- by Patrick Camiller .....	3,18
In Retrospect: The Labour Movement and	
The Invasion of Czechoslovakia (LM) .....	3,24
Conference on 10th Anniversary of Invasion (LM) .....	3,25
Invasion Anniversary Passes, Crisis Remains -- by M. Jackson .....	4,6
Complete List of Political Prisoners .....	4,8
Rally and March Call for Troops out of Czechoslovakia (LM) .....	4,21
New Drive Against Charter Activists -- by Oliver MacDonald .....	5,3
Sabata Jailed for 9 Months -- by Susannah Fry .....	6,2
Who is Jaroslav Sabata -- by O. MacDonald .....	6,2
Plastic People Record Out .....	6,4
Czech Case Histories .....	SI Women,7
A Day for my Love (R) .....	SI Women,21
The Apple Game (R) .....	SI Women,22

#### Interviews

Interview with Members of the Plastic People of the Universe .....	4,9
Interview with Veteran Communist, Gertruda Sekaninová-Cakrtová .....	5,3
Sabata and Charter 77 Perspectives - An Interview .....	6,3
Polish KOR Interview Charter 77 Representatives .....	6,5

#### Documents

10 Years Since Prague Spring .....	2,9
100 Years of Czech Socialism .....	2,11
Information to the Parties of the Second International --	
by Jiri Müller .....	2,12
Letter from J. Müller to M. Hübl .....	2,13
SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT: The Debate on Perspectives in Charter 77	
1. Open Letter from Jan Tesar to Prof. J. Hajek .....	3,10
2. Open Letter from Jiri Hajek to Jan Tesar .....	3,11
3. Letter from Hejdanek to a Friend .....	3,12
4. Letter from Lubos Kohout to J. Tesar .....	3,15
5. Letter from Petr Uhl to Lubos Kohout .....	3,16
Charter 77 Document No. 18 -	
Statement on the 10th Anniversary of the Soviet Invasion .....	4,7
Joint Statement by Charter 77 and the Polish KOR .....	4,7
Founding Statement of the Prisoners' Defence Committee .....	4,8
SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT: Part II	
Jan Tesar Replies to Debate in Charter 77 .....	4,10
Support Human Rights Throughout Eastern Europe .....	5,2
KOR Appeal for Sabata .....	5,2
Independent Socialists Outline Their Views .....	5,5
Charter Representatives Appeal to Western Socialists .....	6,2
Polish KOR Interviews Charter 77 Representatives .....	6,5
Charter 77 Exposes Nuclear Power Scandal .....	6,7

\*\*\*\*\*

### SPECIAL DOSSIER ON POLITICAL VICTIMISATION OF CHARTER 77 SUPPORTERS (Produced Jointly With the Committee to Defend Czechoslovak Socialists)

#### Documents:

Political Unemployment Must be Stopped! .....	2
---	---

#### Documents:

Charter Letter to Federal Assembly .....	3
Charter Document No. 7 on Social and Economic Rights .....	6
Dismissal: A Typical Example .....	8

List of Political Victimizations .....	9-12
--	------

### HUNGARY

#### Articles

In the Wake of the Invasion of Czechoslovakia,	
The Myth of Kadarism -- by Miklos Haraszti .....	4,14
The Political Situation in Hungary -- by Janet Asquith .....	5,17
Abortion Petition in Hungary .....	SI Women,4

#### Interview

Hungarian Profiles -- An Interview with Miklos Haraszti .....	6,15
---	------

### EAST GERMANY

#### Articles

Bahro Affair: Growing Protests -- by Günter Minnerup .....	1,9
Marxist Workers' Circles in the GDR -- by expelled Jena Workers .....	1,9
Bahro Defence Petition (LM) .....	1,17
From Discussion Circles to Open Resistance --	
Part II of Jena Workers' Article .....	2,14
Bahro Still Held .....	2,15
Bahro Defence Grows (LM) .....	2,22
Bahro Sentenced to 8 Years in Secret Trial -- by G. Minnerup .....	3,19
'Socialism with a German Face' (R) -- by G. Minnerup .....	3,26
Bahro Defence Notes (LM) .....	4,22
Robert Havemann Speaks Out -- by G. Minnerup .....	5,8
Berlin Congress Launches Powerful Bahro Campaign (LM) .....	6,23
Berlin Congress Resolution (LM) .....	6,23
Bahro Symposium in London (LM) .....	6,24
Ambassador Beats Retreat (LM) .....	6,24
What Bahro Argues (R) -- by G. Minnerup .....	6,24

#### Interviews

Interview with R. Bahro .....	4,18
Interview with R. Havemann .....	5,9

#### Documents

Excerpts from the Manifesto of the	
'League of Democratic Communists of Germany' .....	2,16
Havemann Calls for Support for Jailed Marxist .....	4,16
Charter 77 Solidarity with Bahro .....	4,18
R. Bahro -- A Letter from Prison .....	5,7
Letter on the Current Situation .....	6,21

### POLAND

#### Articles

The Polish Opposition Speaks -- By Peter Green (R) .....	1,18
Appeal Launched by Workers' Group -- by P. Green .....	2,19
Polish Writers Attack Censorship -- by P. Green .....	2,20
Marxist Manifesto Calls for Socialist Democracy --	
by Pawel Jankowski .....	2,20
Unofficial Trade Union Committees Established -- by P. Green .....	3,20
Repression against Robotnik Activists -- by P. Green .....	3,20
Police Budget Soars -- by P. Green .....	3,20
The Peasant Movement - An Eyewitness Account .....	5,13
Rising Tensions in Poland -- by P. Green .....	6,10

#### Documents

Freedom of Assembly Under Attack:	
Statement of the Student Solidarity Committee .....	1,13
Committee of Social Self-Defence Declaration .....	1,14
Ex-Party Leader Calls for Moves Towards Democracy .....	1,15
Founding Declaration of the Committee for Free	
Trade Unions in Katowice .....	3,21
Leaflet by Katowice Committee .....	3,21
Declaration of the Founding Committee of Polish Free Trade Unions	
on the Baltic Seaboard .....	3,21
Joint Statement by Charter 77 and Polish KOR .....	4,7
Secret Leadership View of the Opposition .....	4,18
One Quarter Million Peasants Resist Pension Law .....	4,19
Peasant Committee Letter to Parliament .....	4,19
Peasant Committee Letter to Parliament .....	4,19
Social Self-Defence Communique on Peasant Strike .....	4,19
Lublin Peasants Organise .....	4,20
Appeal of Lublin Peasants Self-Defence Committee .....	4,20
KOR Appeal for Sabata .....	5,2
Support Human Rights Throughout Eastern Europe .....	5,2
Peasant Strikes: Resolutions and Communiques:	
1. Report of Assembly .....	5,15
2. Resolution of Sbrozsa Duza Peasants .....	5,16
3. Szbrosza Duza Communique 1 .....	5,16
4. Szbrosza Duza Communique 2 .....	5,16
KSS-KOR -- A Programme of Action .....	6,11

## ROMANIA

## Articles

- Ex-Ceausescu Aide Denounces Oppression of Hungarian Minority -- by Mark Jackson . . . . . 1,11  
 Paul Goma Calls for Support for Romanian Miners (LM) . . . . . 1,18  
 Regime Terror Against Hungarian Activist -- by Patrick Camiller . . . . . 5,19  
 Psychiatric Abuse in Romania -- by P. Camiller . . . . . 5,19  
 Ceausescu's Nationalist Card -- by P. Camiller . . . . . 6,19

## Interview

- Experiences of a Socialist Worker - Interview with V. Paraschiv . . . . . 3,22

## Documents

- A Worker's Plan for Independent Trade Unions -- by Vasile Paraschiv . 1,12  
 Repression in Transylvania: Letter from Karoly Kiraly to Janos Vincze on the Repression Against the Hungarian Community . 2,18

## SOVIET UNION

## Articles

- The Story of Klebanov and his Comrades:  
 1. Workers' Rights Under Attack . . . . . 1,2  
 2. Eric Heffer Calls for TUC Support . . . . . 1,3  
 3. Baluka, Fainberg, Paraschiv call for Western Labour Movement Support . . . . . 1,4  
 4. Workers and Employees in Defence of Human Rights . . . . . 1,6  
 Moscow Trial may be held soon -- by Helen Jamieson . . . . . 1,7  
 Arrested Members of the Trade Union Association . . . . . 2,2  
 Demonstrators win Victory in Georgia . . . . . 2,7  
 More Trials of Helsinki Monitors . . . . . 2,7  
 Grigorenko Challenges Expulsion . . . . . 2,7  
 Survey of Labour Movement Action in Support of Trade Union Group (LM) . . . . . 2,22  
 What Help for the Soviet Trade Unionists . . . . . 3,2  
 Labour and the Free Trade Unionists -- by Eric Heffer MP . . . . . 3,2  
 The Trade Union Association - The Basic Facts -- by Victor Haynes . . . . . 3,5  
 Trade Union Association Members in Psychiatric Hospitals . . . . . 3,5  
 Orlov Sentenced, Shcharansky next? -- by H. Jamieson . . . . . 3,6  
 Ginzburg for Trial -- by M. Jackson . . . . . 3,6  
 The CPSU Explains . . . . . 3,6  
 Podrabinek Charged -- by H. Jamieson . . . . . 3,6  
 10th Anniversary of the Chronicle of Current Events -- by Boris Weil . . . . . 3,8  
 New Support for the Soviet Trade Union Association -- by Victor Haynes . . . . . 4,2  
 Shcharansky - a Spy? -- by M. Jackson . . . . . 4,2  
 Health Worker Gets 5 Years for exposing Psychiatric Abuse -- by Patrick Camiller . . . . . 4,3  
 To be a Marxist in the USSR -- by Boris Weil . . . . . 4,5  
 TUC Takes no Action on Repression of Soviet Workers (LM) . . . . . 4,22  
 TUC Reply to Labour Party (LM) . . . . . 4,22  
 New Trade Union Group Formed -- by V Haynes . . . . . 5,10  
 New Report of fate of Klebanov and his comrades -- by H. Jamieson . . . . . 5,10  
 Soviet Paper Publishes Anti-semitic Attack -- by P. Camiller . . . . . 5,12  
 Gays in the Soviet Union (LM) . . . . . 5,22  
 News in Brief -- by H. Jamieson . . . . . 6,20  
 NUM Drops Klebanov Case (LM) . . . . . 6,22  
 French CGT and Canadian CLC Take up Klebanov's Case (LM) . . . . . 6,23  
 French CFDT Refused Meeting with Soviet Embassy on Podrabinek (LM) . . . . . 6,23  
 Being Gay in Moscow . . . . . SI Women,12

## Interviews

- An Interview with Vadim Belotserkovsky . . . . . 2,4  
 The Human Rights Movement After the Trials -- Interview with Leonid Plyushch . . . . . 5,11

## Documents

- Workers' Group Appeals to Western Trade Unions . . . . . 2,1  
 Statutes of the Trade Union Association . . . . . 3,4  
 Hungarian Socialists Defend Orlov . . . . . 3,7  
 Morning Star 'Guilty' of Orlov's Crime . . . . . 3,7  
 'Why I am resigning from the Official Trade Union' -- by L.M. Siry . . . . . 4,2  
 Charter 77 Solidarity with Soviet Dissidents . . . . . 4,3  
 Yuri Orlov in His Own Words - An Autobiographical Sketch . . . . . 4,4

## YUGOSLAVIA

## Article

- Managers Take Workers to Court for Complaint -- by Dunja Vukasinovic . . . . . 2,21

## SOCIALISTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

- The Debate in NUS: NOLS' stand on Human Rights in Eastern Europe -- by H. Barnard and N. Stanley . . . . . 1,19  
 Correction to V. Fisera's article in Vol.1 No.6 . . . . . 1,20

## LABOUR MOVEMENT

- Brussels Defence Conference . . . . . 1,17  
 Bahro Defence Petition . . . . . 1,17  
 P. Goma Calls for Support for Romanian Miners . . . . . 1,18  
 Czech Committee Plans Conference on Prague Spring . . . . . 1,17

- Survey of Labour Movement Action in Support of Soviet TU Group . . . . . 2,22  
 Appeal in Defence of Ukrainian Helsinki Group . . . . . 2,22  
 Bahro Defence Grows . . . . . 2,22  
 Special Issue on Women in Eastern Europe . . . . . 2,22  
 In Retrospect: The Labour Movement and the Invasion of Czechoslovakia -- by Patrick Camiller . . . . . 3,24  
 Campaign Launched for Bukharin's Rehabilitation . . . . . 3,25  
 Conference on the 10th Anniversary of the Invasion of Czechoslovakia . . . . . 3,25  
 Czech Committee Meeting on Prague Spring . . . . . 3,25  
 Bahro International Conference in October . . . . . 3,25  
 Eastern Europe Solidarity Campaign (EESC) Notes . . . . . 3,26  
 Rally and March Call for Troops out of Czechoslovakia . . . . . 4,21  
 EESC Notes . . . . . 4,21  
 Bukharin Rehabilitation Appeal . . . . . 4,22  
 TUC Takes No Action on Repressed Soviet Workers . . . . . 4,22  
 TUC Reply to Labour Party . . . . . 4,22  
 Bahro Defence Notes . . . . . 4,22  
 EESC Notes . . . . . 5,20  
 Left Wing Defence Bulletins on Eastern Europe -- by O. MacDonald . . . . . 5,21  
 ILO Investigates Human Rights Violations . . . . . 5,22  
 Gays in the Soviet Union . . . . . 5,22  
 EESC Notes . . . . . 6,22  
 NUM Drops Klebanov Case . . . . . 6,22  
 French CGT and Canadian CLC Take up Klebanov Case . . . . . 6,23  
 French CFDT Refused Meeting with Soviet Embassy on Podrabinek . . . . . 6,23  
 Berlin Congress Launches Powerful Bahro Campaign -- By Oliver MacDonald . . . . . 6,23  
 Resolution from Berlin Congress . . . . . 6,23  
 Bahro Symposium in London . . . . . 6,24  
 Ambassador Beats Retreat . . . . . 6,24

## REVIEWS

- The Polish Opposition Speaks -- by Peter Green . . . . . 1,18  
 'Socialism with a German Face' -- by G. Minnerup . . . . . 3,26  
 What Bahro Argues -- by G. Minnerup . . . . . 6,24  
 Films:  
 A Ballad of Two Lovers (USSR) . . . . . SI Women,20  
 May I Take the Floor (USSR) . . . . . SI Women,21  
 A Day for My Love (Czecho) . . . . . SI Women,21  
 The Apple Game (Czecho) . . . . . SI Women,22  
 'The Humanisation of Socialism' . . . . . SI Women,22

## LETTERS

- Letters From a Reader . . . . . 5,22  
 An Appeal to Western Communists and Socialists from Soviet Exiles . . . . . 6,26

## SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE USSR AND EASTERN EUROPE

- Official Views  
 Women's Organisations . . . . . 2  
 International Women's Day . . . . . 3

- The Opposition  
 Abortion Petition in Hungary . . . . . 4  
 Women and the Dissident Movement . . . . . 6  
 Czech Case Histories . . . . . 7  
 News Items . . . . . 8

- Home and Work  
 Housing and Services . . . . . 9  
 Why aren't women at the top? . . . . . 10

- Sexuality  
 Being Gay in Moscow . . . . . 12  
 Attitudes to Sexuality . . . . . 13  
 Violence Against Women . . . . . 14

- Birth-rate Politics  
 Babies or Jobs . . . . . 15  
 Abortion and Contraception . . . . . 16

- The Family . . . . . 18

- Reviews . . . . . 20

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