

LABOUR FOCUS ON EASTERN EUROPE

A Socialist Defence Bulletin of
Eastern Europe and the USSR

SOVIET LEFT OPPOSITION
5 PAGES ON

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ROMANIAN POLICE

ARE HOUNDING

THOUSANDS OF

TRADE UNIONISTS

EMERGENCY

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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.

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EDITORIAL

End Silence on Romanian Workers

No one would imagine from reading the British press that Romania is now the scene of a protest movement which, in the terms currently applicable in Eastern Europe, has assumed truly mass proportions with the development of the Free Trade Union of the Working People of Romania (SLOMR in its Romanian initials). The SLOMR was formed in February of this year by a small nucleus based in Bucharest and the industrial town of Turnu Severin. But it soon became clear that, for the first time in Eastern Europe, a significant section of the population was turning to a human rights committee (which is essentially what the SLOMR is) as a vehicle for expressing its many social grievances. In two provincial towns, Tirgu Mures and Sighisoara, nearly one in every hundred adult inhabitants has registered his or her support for the union (1,000 in the former town, the centre of the Hungarian Transylvanian population, and 1,487 in the latter, an industrial town in Southern Transylvania with important Hungarian and German minorities.) Everywhere, including in Bucharest, the predominantly working-class composition of this movement is an unmistakable sign of a process that began with the 1977 Jiu Valley miners' strike: namely, the entry of the industrial proletariat on to the national arena as a major social force seeking to establish its own independent organisations and champion the struggle for democratic rights. Just as clearly, it is only in the development of such a countrywide democratic movement that the Hungarian and German minorities can see the possibility of overcoming the contradictions unleashed by the official policy of Romanianization.

The Ceausescu regime, much less skilled than its Polish or Hungarian counterpart in domestic political manoeuvres, has previously sought to quell discontent through a mixture of harsh individual repression and displays of circus nationalism. With each new turn of the screw, however, this formula reveals itself to be less and less capable of holding together the rigid bureaucratic edifice, less and less capable of damming up the flow of popular discontent that has now passed the stage when the 'disappearance' of one or two individuals seemed to bring the movement to an end. Repression, if that is to remain the answer, will now have to adjust itself to the broader character of the movement, and unless effective international solidarity action can swiftly be organised, it may well result in a veritable mass terror, at least in certain parts of the country.

In a series of telephone conversations held in April with the French Committee to Defend Human Rights in Romania*, Ghita Radu Sorin spoke of the way in which SLOMR members 'are being picked up off the streets, brutally interrogated and arrested and convicted without any grounds'. In the case of Bucharest, it is possible to establish a fairly complete list of those still under arrest on 21 April. But information about the two main centres, Tirgu Mures and Sighisoara, is much harder to obtain: Virgil Chender, for example, the spokesperson for the Sighisoara union which recently 'merged' with the SLOMR (see document on page 3), has not been heard of since he visited Dr Gheorghe Cana in Bucharest in March.

While the agents of the Securitate are hitting at the core of the SLOMR, other specialised agencies have been organising an international campaign of ferocious slander — at least in

countries like France where the press has seen fit to mention the Free Trade Union's existence. Thus, according to a document issued in France by the Romanian Ministry of Justice, the founding declaration of the SLOMR (which, as readers of the last Labour Focus may judge, is deeply imbued with democratic and working-class ideology) was circulated 'in order to gain the support of Romanian fascist elements abroad and of legionary (fascist) elements in the country, for the creation of a new fascist organisation'. Such talk, reminiscent of the blackest period of Stalinism, is hardly likely to make much impact on labour movement opinion in the West ... provided only that the real facts of the case are available.

But of all this, as we said, no one would have any idea from reading the British press. SLOMR members, knowing that the regime's power to enforce isolation is its strongest weapon, have continually appealed for their case to be made known throughout the world and for international trade-union bodies to take up their defence. As at the time of the Jiu Valley miners' strike, however, the British press seems to have decided that the struggles of Romanian workers are not newsworthy: that while Solzhenitsyn, Sakharov and others can serve as useful symbols in the Western political, ideological and military rivalry with the Soviet Union, the very same considerations weigh against coverage of democratic movements in Russia's 'dissident ally'. Romania is the clearest example of a new kind of double standard: no longer is it merely friendly regimes like the Shah's Iran about which the pro-Washington and pro-Whitehall media are prepared to 'keep mum'; their generosity now extends to East European regimes, however repressive, however anti-democratic, so long as there is a chance of manipulating them for the needs of the hour.

The labour and socialist movement has no reason to compromise its own defence of democratic rights in such a way. Working people have need of the same basic freedoms of speech, press, organisation and so on, in each and every country of this planet 'the planet of human beings, not of beasts in the forest', as the Sighisoara trade-union document so strikingly puts it.

Two major French Unions, the Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail and Force Ouvrière, have publicly expressed their solidarity with the free trade union, and the CFDT has written to the official Romanian Central Trade Union Council calling for the free exercise of trade-union rights. Representatives of both federations attended a press conference organised by the French Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Romania and reported in *Le Monde* of 14 April 1979. The CGT, however, which has previously spoken out in support of democratic rights in Eastern Europe, made known that it preferred to intervene 'in its own manner, which it does not intend to make public'.

In Britain, no trade union has yet responded to the foundation of the SLOMR and the harassment of its members. We hope readers of Labour Focus will do everything they can to break through this curtain of silence.

*14, rue de l'Armorique, Paris 14e, France.

ROMANIA

[As of the end of April more than 2,500 people had come out in support of the unofficial Romanian trade-union movement. As the following SLOMR communiqué explains, a large part of those

had come from a clandestine trade union already created in 1978 in Sighisoara. The document has been translated from the original for Labour Focus by Anca Mihailescu.]

1. Over 2,500 Support Free Trade Union

Following the publication of the SLOMR Founding Declaration on 4 March 1979, the milling-machine operator Virgil Chender, representing the Unofficial Trade Union of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers of the Mures County, came to see Dr Ionel Cana, the initiator of the SLOMR. The Mures union was set up clandestinely at the end of 1978, and according to its representative, had no less than 1487 (one thousand, four hundred and eighty-seven) members. They do not have a list of names: the trade unionists know one another by numbers going up to 1487.

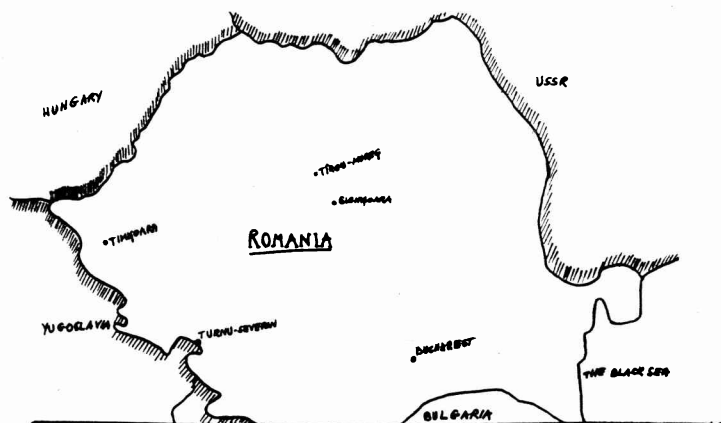
Dr Ionel Cana argued that a trade-union association ought not to be a conspiratorial grouping, and that a trade union does not pursue political aims. The laws and international agreements signed by Romania—especially State Council Decree No. 212 of 1974—allow for trade unions to engage in free activity and to affiliate to other trade-union organisations, including international bodies, with the aim of protecting the interests of working people. And so, he maintained, it is not justified for such a numerous trade union organisation to be clandestine.

Virgil Chender expressed his agreement with these views concerning the openness of the Unofficial Trade Union of the Workers, Peasants and Soldiers of County Mures. Moreover, considering the striking similarity between the 24 points of the Mures Union's programme and the statement of aims in the SLOMR Founding Declaration, he proposed that the Mures Union should be incorporated into the SLOMR, with the addition of a few necessary points to its statement of aims.

We shall mention these additions after we have listed some of the 1487 Mures unionists. The list was reconstituted from memory by their representative. The other members should affiliate to the SLOMR by means of signed letters, addressed to: Dr Ionel Cana, Bucuresti, Oficiul Postal 47, Giulesti, Post Restant, Cod 7700. They should also contact us by telephone at one of the following Bucharest numbers: 17-59-46; 88-65-40; 50-71-62, communicating their name, address and telephone number if they have one.

Here is the first list of SLOMR members from Sighisoara: Virgil Chender, Str. Vasile, Lucaci, 12, Sighisoara, Judetz Mures Ioan Coman, Str. Closca, 47, Sighisoara, Judetz Mures Aurel Militariu, Str. Cinepii, 35, Sighisoara, Judetz Mures Dietmar Wolff, Str. Gh. Gh. Dej, 93, Sighisoara, Judetz Mures Edmond Gabor, Str. Florilor, Bloc I, Sighisoara, Judetz Mures Carol Fülöp, Str. Ilarie Chendi, 83, Sighisoara, Judetz Mures Alexandra Bran, Str. Primaverii, 20a, Sighisoara, Judetz Mures Imre Lukács, Str. Ana Ipatescu, 20, Sighisoara, Judetz Mures Elena Stef, Str. Pastorilor, 17, Sighisoara, Judetz Mures

And now we shall quote a few lines from the introduction to the 24 points mentioned above, adding two facsimiles from these documents in order to prove their authenticity:



Map of Romania showing towns where people have joined SLOMR

'We who are many throughout the country are suffering, live badly and in need, while the few live well, have everything, go in want of nothing. We have nobody to turn to, no one listens to us, no one understands or wants to know anything about us. We are always promised, from one five-year plan to the next, that we shall live better; but in fact we live worse and worse.'

Of the 24 points, we shall also quote those which are being added to the SLOMR Statement of Aims:

'—The worker must be free to move from one factory to another and from one agricultural cooperative to another, wherever he thinks that he can live better.

—Members of cooperatives must be free to sell their own products on the market, and must no longer be contracted on disadvantageous terms to sell lambs, calves, pigs, wool and other products.

—The pensions of cooperative workers must be the same as those given to factory workers, since a pension of 150 lei is enough only for a few days.

—People doing their national service should no longer be forced to put their tongues out during instruction, to go into cold water during the winter, or to stay wet for hours on end. As things are, the soldier lives the life of a convict.

—The Romanian government must abolish terror, beating, imprisonment and internment of those fighting for human rights. This is a barbaric practice, unworthy of the times in which we are living.

—We should all be brothers, creators of a dignified, free and happy life on our planet — the planet of human beings, not of beasts in the forest.'

The SLOMR is very happy to adopt these principles, written in the forceful style of the working people.

The SLOMR also announces the membership of English-language teacher Nicolae Dascalu, Str. Valea Ialomitei, 1a, Bloc C18A, Ap. 60, Sector 7, Bucharest. He was also a signatory of Mr Paul Goma's appeal to the Belgrade Conference. Other new members include: Ilie Dascalu, the younger brother of Nicolae; and Ion Marandici, a teacher of mathematics living at Str. Valea Argesului, 9, Bloc 17, Scara A, Et.4, Ap.13, Bucharest. He has been told of other educational workers in Romania who are about to join the SLOMR.

SLOMR
Bucharest

6 March 1979

2. Police Drive Against SLOMR

[The following information about repressive measures against SLOMR was communicated by phone to Romanian exiles in Paris who tape-recorded it. Translation for Labour Focus is by Anca Mihailescu.]

1. We demand that opinion polls be conducted, with the participation of the world trade-union movement, in the factories, educational, cultural and other institutions, as well as in the villages, concerning the need for the SLOMR to exist. We demand that our programme should be made known through the Romanian press, radio and television, and that we should be able to rent an office and enjoy the same rights as the state-run union.

2. We wish to communicate the following protest:
We vehemently protest against the brutal methods employed against SLOMR members. We protest against the methods of

intimidation used by the **Securitate** in relation to those who wish to join the SLOMR. We vehemently protest against the abuse of state laws and decrees in order to hit at citizens demanding their rights. We demand the immediate release of the founder-members of the SLOMR. We demand an immediate end to beatings-up, to the disconnections of telephones, to the interception of correspondence, to arrests at people's homes, to street-kidnapping, to the war of nerves with all its terrorist methods of intimidation. We demand the release of all those tried and imprisoned not for committing crimes but for demanding their rights. We call for the support of all honest and worthy citizens of Romania, on whom depends the existence of the whole state, including that of the people who are seeking to suppress our legal rights. We ask the international trade-union movement and all human rights organisations to support our protest to the Romanian government.

This protest is also the first action of the Bucharest Amnesty International group, set up on 6 March 1979.

3. Every SLOMR member is entitled to admit new members, and every request for membership should be duly signed by the new member.

The Arrested and Abducted

The following members of SLOMR are known to have been arrested or are thought to have been abducted by the security police without any formal charges being made, as of April 21. (Those arrested but released after a few days are not included in the list.)

*Sentenced to 2 months in jail: Alexandru Comsa, worker at CAP Jilava, near Bucharest; Nicolae Oblici; Marian Zamfirescu, chemical worker in Mogosaia, near Bucharest.

*After refusing release in return for denouncing SLOMR as an illegal organisation, sentenced to 4 and 3 months respectively; A. Nagy and Vlad Mihai.

*Disappeared: Lucian Neagu, Vasile Paraschiv.

*Held incommunicado: Nicolae Dascalu.

*Arrested in Timisoara on April 4th: Ludwig Erwin, Edgar Ludwig.

*Disappeared soon after the foundation of the SLOMR in March: Dr. Gheorghe Cana, Gheorghe Brasoveanu.

4. Other points:

It is very important that the SLOMR programme be read out again (on Radio Free Europe), since many people were not able to hear it before, at least in its entirety.

On Saturday 31 March, Colonel Miu of the 'counter-information' service of the Bucharest **Securitate**, accompanied by a huge, giant-like policeman, forcibly entered the apartment of Professor Dascalu when he was not at home. They shouted at the professor's wife, who was holding their four-month-old daughter in her arms, and threatened their friends, Rodica and Bogdan Meschiu, who were then paying a visit. The policemen stayed for more than two hours and issued a series of threats, in particular the threat of 'years and years in jail'. Before leaving, they asked that the professor should present himself to the **Securitate** on Monday 2 or Tuesday 3 April. (This same Miu, in charge of interrogating Dascalu, had previously insulted, beaten and terrorised him and threatened him with death, having kidnapped him off the street.) On 3 April, **Securitate** agents returned to the professor's home, asked if he was back in Bucharest, and renewed their 'invitation'. We mention this case because it is a good example of the war of nerves launched by the **Securitate** against SLOMR members.

At the same time, a frenzied campaign has been unleashed to discredit SLOMR members. All kinds of rumours are spread: 'They are all mad; paranoids'; 'Dr Cana had a brain operation'; 'the economist Brasoveanu is a paranoid', and so on. No less use is found for diversion: those who have applied for passports are promised that all their problems will be solved so long as they give up their activities.

We do not know what Dr Cana is charged with. The **Securitate** has arranged for various official channels to let it be known that he is under arrest. Often in an ironic way: 'Oh, can't you find him? All you have to do is look.' In other words, he has disappeared. There is no charge.

We would like a world trade-union body or a national union to get in touch with us, to ask us for the information we have.

We are organising in Bucharest a committee that will remain in existence until Dr Cana and the others are released. We shall send you details as they become available.

SOVIET UNION

The Crackdown on the Leningrad Students

By Helen Jamieson

The confrontation that has been taking place between some hundreds of Leningrad students and the KGB over the last few months is one of the most significant recent events in Soviet domestic politics. When news of the arrest of some members of a left opposition group reached the West last November the affair seemed to involve a tiny isolated group. A demonstration against the arrests near the Kazan Cathedral in Nevski Prospekt on December 5th showed that this was not the case. And the lengthy account by V. Nechaev that we publish below indicates that the 'Left Opposition' group was linked to a much broader movement among Leningrad students and was also in touch with other leftist youth groups in Gorky, Moscow, the Baltic Republics, Belorussia, Ukraine and the Caucasus.

This information must lead socialists in the West to alter their conventional picture of

opposition in the Soviet Union being largely confined to purely human rights activists, national movements and religious currents. A vigorous defence of the arrested students is of the utmost importance, and we hope that the information that we publish here will be acted upon by the NUS, the NUSS and the various socialist youth organisations in this country as well as by the wider left.

Since Vadim Nechaev's article was written, new and more detailed information has been reported by Cronid Lubarsky, editor of **Cahiers du Samizdat**. According to Lubarsky, Arkady Tsurkov one of the leaders of the 'Left Opposition' group aged 19 who was arrested last October was tried between April 3rd and 6th. He was accused under the notorious Article 70 of the Russian Criminal Code against "Anti-Soviet Agitation and Propaganda" and sentenced to 5 years strict regime labour camp to be followed by 2 years internal exile. He was alleged to have written one

article in *Perspektivy* and to have made verbal criticisms of Party policies to a circle of student friends. He pleaded not guilty to the charge of anti-Soviet agitation. His friends outside the court-room were arrested by the militia. Some had come from Moscow and Gorky for the trial and one of these, Viktor Pavlenkov, was detained for 15 days. Two other friends staged a 15 day hunger strike in support of Tsurkov. Another leader of the group, Aleksandr Skobov, aged 20, also arrested in October and sent to the infamous Serbsky institute in Moscow for psychiatric tests in December, was sentenced in Leningrad on April 19th at a closed trial. Declared schizophrenic, he was sentenced to an unlimited period of psychiatric detention. One of those due to have testified at his trial, Aleksei Khavin, was arrested during the hearing after he had refused to give evidence against Skobov. The police later claimed that they discovered drugs hidden in his clothing.

During March a third student, Andrei Reznikov was badly beaten up by 8 unknown attackers. His wife, Irina, who is 6 months pregnant, has been receiving anonymous telephone threats. On April 20th, the KGB searched their flat for drugs

and found nothing. They returned 3 days later and 'found' drugs. But no arrest has taken place as yet.

A Moscow student, Andrei Besov was

arrested on October 16th and interned without trial in a psychiatric hospital for 3 months. He is now under militia surveillance and must report to a psychiatric centre daily for treatment.

The Leningrad Left Opposition, a history

By Vadim Nechaev

[The author of this article, Vadim Nechaev, a Leningrad writer, was a member of the Writers' Union until his expulsion in 1977 for participating in the literary underground and for organising an unofficial exhibition to coincide with the Venice Biennale. He now lives in Paris. The article was written on March 1st. Translation from Russian and footnotes for Labour Focus are by Helen Jamieson.]

In October 1978, the leaders of the 'Left Opposition' group, Aleksandr Skobov, aged 20, and Arkady Tsurkov, aged 19, were arrested in Leningrad. These arrests were followed by numerous searches and investigations and heralded the start of the crackdown on the 'New Left' anarcho-syndicalist youth movement.

The previous history of the group goes back to the opening day of the 25th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1976. On that day, Leningrad was seething with half-cautious discussions of strange events: the distribution of anti-government and anti-Party leaflets in Nevsky Prospekt (1), in the Underground stations and in various institutions. The leaflets declared that the CPSU had completely compromised itself in the eyes of the people, that its policies were bankrupt, its methods Stalinist and its current 25th Congress a complete bluff. The leaflets called for pluralism and humane socialism.

Despite the terror and periodic purges, Leningrad, a city of 3 revolutions (2), has to this day retained its oppositional traditions. For this reason it is heavily guarded by the KGB and the militia (3). Very few people know that the workers' demonstrations in Dvortsovy Square on the revolutionary holidays of 7 November and 1 May (4) are observed from two vantage points: by the Party leadership from the platform and by machine gunners from the garrets of the Hermitage (5). But everyone knows that on November 7th, May 1st, on election days and during Party conferences, the army is called into the city, the strengthened ranks of the militia are on patrol around the clock, and the voluntary 'vigilantes' are also mobilised.

In such conditions, the leafleting action was especially dangerous. It was staggering that, although the leaflets were scattered in the most public places, not one of the youths involved was caught and handed over to the KGB. Indeed, the security organs needed more than a fortnight of strenuous activity in order to track down the participants. They used a map to chart the main centres of leaflet distribution, and marked out a supposed route of the leafleters. Their suspicions focussed on two places: the

Technological Institute and the University. They also took advantage of the fact that some of the leaflets were hand-written and drafted into the suspect institutions the most advanced graphology experts to check people's handwriting. Thousands of hand-writing specimens were examined and hundreds of interviews were carried out. As a result they were able to break one student at the Technology Institute and they detained a fairly large group of students from Leningrad State University and from other institutions. Among these were Skobov, Reznikov, Tsurkov, Lepetukhina and others.

In all about 30 people were involved. They were mainly first-year University students and school students. It is often quite easy to confuse such a large group, forcing people to make statements against each other. But in spite of intensive interrogations and searches, the investigation produced evidence only against Andrei Reznikov. He was put on trial, charged under Article 70 (anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda) and Article 190-1 (the distribution of deliberately lying fabrications containing slander against the Soviet system). The court sentenced him to two years hard labour. Many other students who had been investigated were expelled from institutes, or placed on 'black lists'; Tsurkov from that date on was periodically shadowed.

This operation possessed some curious features. One female student who had been in indirect contact with the group and who had been so frightened that she had repented everything to the police, was expelled from the Technological Institute and from the Komsomol (6). But another female student who was one of the 'ring-leaders' made such an excellent defence speech at the Faculty meeting that she was allowed to remain at the Institute provided she acted within the bounds of Komsomol policy. Even the presence at the meeting of 'older comrades' was not enough to influence the decision of the general meeting. And at the University, famous for its sedition — everyone still remembered the case of the All-Russian Social Christian Union for the Liberation of Nations (7) — the authorities were afraid even to organise general meetings.

Reznikov was 17 years of age when he was placed in the strict regime camp. Because of his age, he was drafted into the army for 2 years after he had served 2 months in the camp and he stayed in the army until June 1978.

By this time, Aleksandr Skobov had organised a commune on 37 Primorski Prospekt, a small wooden house on the outskirts of the city. The second floor of the

house was inhabited by the Vinogradovs. Felix Vinogradov's father worked in the ranks of the KGB and was therefore well off.

After Skobov had organised the commune, his parents—intellectuals and also prosperous people with a luxurious flat and a wonderful library—kicked him out of the house. Thus did social fears force 'decent' people to repudiate their own son even before the storm broke.

Skobov was the only person to live permanently in the commune. Aleksandr Chystiakov would go there as well, preferring to live away from his father, a colonel in the MVD (8), and a 'thick-headed Marxist' according to his son. Isolation from, and lack of understanding amongst, parents as well as parents' fear about their sons' and daughters' socially dangerous behaviour often leads the younger generation to break their links with their families.

The commune on Primorski Prospekt was open to anyone. The location of the key was known, the address was easily available at the 'Sphinx' cafe. In the small, smoke-filled flat, where independent youth gathered, the atmosphere was comfortable. Long-haired, in army overcoats—the most chic was considered the overcoat with respirator bags from 1914—these people spoke a language incomprehensible to the average person: 'I've just come out of the Kashchenko (a psychiatric hospital). There were dissidents and pacifists in there.' A youth, on whose back was the slogan "don't go into the army, the army is evil", in a melancholic manner added: 'Yes, I know. They have doctors-fascists, who inject sulphur. (9). One woman even wrote her thesis on this.' Strange people came to the commune: pacifists, lovers of modern music and travelling, impassioned debaters, hippies ... There was nothing to steal there in the two half-empty rooms on the first floor, the smaller one allocated for families. There was bread and sugar in the cupboards. There was a typewriter on which anyone could write their poetry, or articles for the samizdat journal *Perspektivy*, or retype material from books. Aleksandr Skobov, a fourth-year history student at the University, brought his library which included: early Marx, Kropotkin, Trotsky, translations, etc. Copies of the *Chronicle of Current Events* and *Kontinent* were to be had there. Everyone in turn read *Gulag Archipelago*. The walls were covered in home-made posters — a portrait of Che Guevara, a bearded Jesus Christ carrying a submachine gun and his twelve apostles, also armed, with the caption, "If you are hit

on the right cheek, turn the left, but if they hit you on the left cheek too ...'. Paintings by avant-garde artists also hung there. There was a collection of the songs of Galich, who was a favourite of Skobov's.

Skobov's appearance was colourful. Anyone on the street could have seized him and said: 'You are an anarchist! You have a bomb in your bag.' He wore a long, curly beard that served to conceal his youth and the simple lines of his face, and he went about in an old torn overcoat and a VOKhR peaked cap with a star (10). He was a mild-mannered and kind-hearted individualist who would not hurt a fly. In his political convictions he was an avowed anarcho-Marxist, in economics an adherent of the early Marx. His programme included a pluralist economy, full democracy in politics and ideology and pacifism. He opposed all forms of violence and represented the most peaceful wing of the youth organisation, in which he was recognised as the movement's theoretician. Skobov sympathised with hippies, although he was not one himself. He was enrolled as an external student at the Department of History and he also worked as a night-watchman. He used his meagre earnings to support the commune, paying the rent and buying tea and sugar, because the inhabitants of the commune—young artists and hippies from the Baltic Republics, Moscow and Belorussia (11)—didn't usually have any money. They held continual political discussions, in the course of which it emerged that the 'new left' was widespread, scattered across the country, with groups in Moscow, the Baltic republics, Ukraine and even the Caucasus. They were not organisationally linked but they were like-minded: they had similar positions on the current situation in the country and a common desire to change it. Thus the idea gradually emerged that they should consolidate all these leftist forces. To facilitate this it was necessary to put out a political journal *Perspektivy* and to call an All-Union Conference of the 'Left Opposition'.

The first issue of *Perspektivy* appeared in June 1978, the second in July, the third in August. The journal contained a variety of materials, but its basic fare was theoretical articles on political subjects, reprints from the *Chronicle* (12), and reports on the student demonstration of 4 July, explaining, how, in order to disperse a 15,000-strong spontaneous demonstration, the 'Blue Division' of the army was sent in. This division is specially trained to crush street disorders. The journal was widely distributed. The articles inside were to serve as the basis of discussion at the all-Union conference. The first conference was to be of a theoretical character and if it had been successful, then the second one would have discussed how to organise left-wing youth forces.

PART 2: ARRESTS AND SEARCHES, DEMONSTRATION AT KAZAN.

The conference of oppositional youth was being prepared for September 1978. But

events moved much faster. In August, the commune was smashed: the militia broke in and turned everything upside down, carried out a thorough search and confiscated the typewriter. In response to a demand for a search warrant or at least some grounds for the raid, they stated: 'We are the masters here and we do what we like!' The house was placed under surveillance and the group was able to see a physical menace of imminent hostile events. But they had no intention of changing the date of the conference. A committee was chosen, talks were prepared and the aim was to allocate most of the time to free discussion. The conference was to have taken place on 12 September, but because of the behaviour of an orthodox Marxist group, it had to be postponed. At the last moment 'insurmountable' differences had appeared within the group and this had resulted in the Marxists sending out invitations very late. Thus a majority of the youth in other cities were not able to come and the conference was put back to October.

Then a new blow was dealt to the group: in September, Skobov warned his comrades that he was being shadowed. And in October he was called in for questioning by the KGB. Afterwards, following discussion with his comrades, Skobov sent a statement to the KGB withdrawing all the depositions he had made up till then and declaring that he would make no further depositions henceforth, regardless of the pressure put on him.

From 10 October onwards a concentrated wave of searches swept through the homes of the commune participants and their friends. Indeed, everyone who was suspected of having left-wing views was touched. They could find nothing compromising at Chystiakov's place, so they seized a volume of Mandelstam's poems (13) — they simply stole it. Others affected included Lopotukhina, Volkovysky, Vinogradov, Antonenko, Sokolov and others. The police repeatedly insisted that weapons and explosives be produced. Most of the searches were illegal, lacking sanction from the procurator (14).

And the interrogations began. People were summoned to the KGB headquarters or 'interviewed' at schools, institutes or work-places. The KGB used these interrogations to try to find out about the personality and politics of those being questioned, particularly Skobov and Reznikov. They wanted information about the conference—where, when and how it was being held—and about the journal *Perspektivy*, which had been confiscated in one of the searches. They wanted to know whether the articles 'Theses on the Present Situation' and 'A Critique of the Theses' were considered to be the programme. And they were interested to discover any links that Skobov might have abroad.

On 14 October Skobov was arrested. An unknown woman phoned Reznikov with the news, along with a message from Skobov to the group: 'Hold out to the last.' On 16 October others were arrested at the railway

station as they arrived for the conference: Andrei Besov, aged 21, and others from Moscow, and Viktor Pavlenkov, aged 19, from Gorky. Besov was charged with petty hooliganism and placed in the Kashchenko psychiatric Hospital in Leningrad. Pavlenkov was held under arrest for 3 days, then sent back to Gorky. His parents are active in the civil rights movement and his father is a former political prisoner.



Vladlen Pavlenkov, father of Viktor: jailed for 7 years in 1970 for his human rights activity.

A., a member of the commune and a close friend of its organisers, who emigrated from the Soviet Union at the end of 1978, had this to say about the interrogations in the Great House, the KGB headquarters in Leningrad:

'I was questioned three times, each time for six hours. There was a conveyor-belt system: first there were two functionaries, who shouted and threatened in a way that was difficult to follow. Then came the 'good' interrogator: "You shouldn't quarrel with your family ...", a peaceful discussion now took place on this and that, everything from music to photography. He then leaves and the first pair return: "We are a strong outfit. We'll spoil everything for you in the West as well! You think we'll jail you for a political offence, but we'll process you as a simple criminal. We don't even have political clauses — it's a criminal code! We only have 200 political prisoners, of whom 700 are Chinese deserters." The main thing here is to frighten, confuse and break the person.'

The next day A. told Reznikov and Tsurkov about the interrogation. They left the house together and behind each was a shadow. A. returned home. The first two interrogators were waiting for him:

'Get ready!'

'Shall I take my things?'

'That's not necessary, for the moment.'

Again they took him to the Great House for questioning. Then the first remark of the interrogation: 'A. doesn't want to leave here!' followed by supposedly friendly advice: 'Remember what's been said. Think carefully about it. There is no reason for you to go to jail. The boys — they're finished. Think more about yourself, for everyone is the blacksmith of his/her own happiness.' What a picture of the morality of these authorities' representatives: be the blacksmith of one's own happiness through

betrayal! No wonder that M. Feingold, after making depositions against Skobov, had his hand shaken by the KGB officers with the words: 'Sleep peacefully — you're a real Komsomol'. Thereafter he was held up as an example which was widely broadcast during the investigations.

Meanwhile the searches continued. Copies of the **Gulag** were confiscated at Reznikov's. During the search at his house, Andrei Reznikov's wife, Irina, locked herself in the toilet with the preparatory documents for the conference. By the time they had broken down the door and dragged her out it was too late: nothing was left floating, the only evidence being Irina's arm, wet to the elbow.

They persistently looked for copies of the **Chronicle** and **Kontinent** (15), obviously to work out who had placed the reprints from these journals in **Perspektivy**. They tried to blame A. for attempting to smuggle programmatic documents abroad. In fact, he had to learn the documents and reconstruct the contents later.

Then, on 31 October a new blow was struck, with the arrest of Arkady Tsurkov. He was a third-year mathematics student at the Herzen Institute. A pleasant person from a family of mathematicians and quite remote from everyday life, he was sharply against labels and divisions along political lines. An opponent of violence, Tsurkov at the same time considered that violent action would be necessary for a democratic overthrow, though at the start it would be necessary to utilise all possible peaceful paths towards democratisation. Symbolically, at the time of his arrest, Tsurkov was completing a study on German National Socialism.

Both Tsurkov and Skobov were placed in the KGB investigation prison in Priazhka. The investigation was conducted by an entire brigade of KGB investigators under the leadership of Colonel Bielozerov. Three charges were brought against them: anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda under Article 70; the creation of an anti-Soviet organisation under Article 72 (in one of the issues of **Perspektivy** it was proposed to create a 'Revolutionary Communist Youth League'); and the distribution of deliberately lying fabrications containing slander against the Soviet system, under Article 190-1.

The courageous behaviour of Skobov, Tsurkov and their comrades forced the KGB to drop the charges under Articles 72 and 190. Skobov was sent to the Serbsky Institute in Moscow (16) for a psychiatric diagnosis and his case was marked out for separate handling. This is the usual method of dealing with an accused person who refuses to make depositions or who cannot be broken. Thus, to avoid a flop in court, they attempt to pronounce a sane person psychologically irresponsible. Evidence of the youths' courageous behaviour lies also in the fact that, despite interrogating 40 of their comrades, the KGB was not able to organise any person-to-person confronta-

tions (17). Physical methods of coercion were tried against some of the suspects. Andrei Reznikov lost his job as a programmer EVM in the ship-building Institute and Irina Lopotukhina lost her job as a machinist in the Textile Institute. The majority of students were threatened with expulsions from their educational establishments.

But the KGB was not successful in frightening off the youth. On 5 December in the Kazan Cathedral square they held a demonstration protesting against the arrests of Skobov and Tsurkov. About 200 university and school students took part in the demonstration, because the 'Left Opposition' group and the journal **Perspektivy** had exerted a great influence in the city's higher education institutions. The authorities knew about the planned demonstration and the entrance to the square was cordoned off by militiamen with cars. Students approaching the square were seized, their arms were twisted and they were thrown into the cars. The Reznikovs and 15 other comrades were held at the militia headquarters from 5pm until 11pm.

The date of 5th December had been chosen because in Moscow the human rights activists traditionally demonstrate on that day, calling for the observance of constitutional rights. (The 5th of December was the date of the passing of the Stalin constitution) (18). Furthermore, as early as the mid-19th century, the Kazan square was a traditional site of student demonstrations.

After the demonstration, repression intensified. The KGB carried out a political information-gathering campaign in the schools; it called in hundreds of school and university students for questioning, threatening and frightening them. KGB men also 'interviewed' the relatives of demonstrators, explaining to them that their children's behaviour could have repercussions for their future as well.

On 12 December unknown assailants badly beat Andrei Reznikov and immediately took him to the militia headquarters. There he was charged with hooliganism and immediately jailed for 12 days. During his detention, Andrei's wife received a visa for him to go to Israel. Back in September, during the interrogations, Skobov, Reznikov and Tsurkov had been offered the chance to emigrate. They had categorically rejected the deal.

Reznikov had previously refused to emigrate despite his knowledge that the KGB proposes emigration before opening an investigation. And as a 'political recidivist' he was threatened with a long jail sentence.

PART 3: IN PLACE OF A PROGRAMME

The journal **Perspektivy** published two programmatic articles: 'Theses on the Current Situation' and 'A Critique of the theses on the current situation'. The former

is a critique of Soviet society, economy and ideology from the standpoints of Plekhanov and Marcuse (19). Its preamble states:

'This group of young people is not entering the political struggle for the sake of playing at revolution or for reasons of self-aggrandisement, but is moved by the sole desire to save the country from imminent catastrophe, and to lead it out of the terrible plight it has been in for the last 60 years. We are profoundly concerned for the future of both the Russian people and the other member nations of the Soviet Empire. On the fate of the peoples of Russia now depends the future of the peoples of the entire world. And this is a matter of the most profound concern to us. For the past 60 years Russia has been in the hands of phrasemongers, bandits and robbers masquerading as Communists.'

The author, using the pseudonym of Rene Hat, went on to say: 'During the first years of the revolution, the state was only a means, but it has now become an end in itself. The state exists, not for the people, but for itself. The state is a military-bureaucratic apparatus with all the appropriate attributes — the army, the KGB, the militia and the propagandists. We are not against the state in general; we are against this type of state. The state can and should carry out only an educative function ... In the Soviet Union, only the people at the top live well; the rest of the people go begging. Ideas of a free health service and free education are a bluff clearer than water, a con. In the first place they are not free, since the resources for them are taken from the pockets of the workers, through enormous taxes, an outrageous robbery of wages for labour, and all kinds of dues. In the second place the quality of these services leaves much to be desired.

'The system of education is the smithy in which the Soviet system forges its cadres — it is a pre-requisite for Soviet rule. However, instead of fulfilling its primary function of educating the new person, the educational system produces the opposite result. Young people in the schools and in higher education are brought up cynical and morally depraved. The result plays into the hands of the opposition.' The author justly points out that the system produces cadres who are either indifferent to it or who begin to oppose it, because they see lies everywhere, lies which seem to govern the educational programme in the schools. In the author's opinion, 95% of the pupils savagely hate their teachers and 95% of the teachers hate their pupils.

The author draws conclusions in economic terms as well: 'since the salary of school teachers is small, it is practically impossible to find committed teachers and only failures enter pedagogical institutes ... At the moment the majority of the working class is integrated into the system. The conditions for integration are less strong than in the West, but the working class has nevertheless lost its revolutionary character, and so in the present period the leading force of the

revolution can be the intellectuals and the youth. Thus, the main orientation should be towards these groups.

On the economy: '...The structure of the economy is not justifiable. The existence of a planned economy is anti-popular, and therefore despite its rich natural resources, the country finds itself in a catastrophic economic situation. The peasant economy is in decline. Collectivisation, which cost millions of peasants' lives, has not justified its existence. Private peasant economy has all the advantages over collectivised agriculture.'

As long as the means of production are in the hands of a small group of people at the top, that group acquires the entire national income and can waste enormous resources with the people's knowledge, on arms and on adventurous undertakings in various corners of the earth, aiding doubtful allies and supporting various bloody regimes such as those in Ethiopia, Vietnam and Angola.'

The workers lack incentive to work and therefore most people are not interested in their work and its quality is very low. 'Socialist' property is plundered on a mass scale, thereby only aggravating the economic collapse. Not seeing any way out of the established set-up, the working class takes to alcoholism and assumes an attitude of indifference both to the existing regime and to its own situation. The workers don't even have the elementary right to strike.

The ideological bankruptcy: Soviet ideology has wandered into a blind alley. Bearing no relation to Marxism, the official ideology appears as a crude falsification of it. In the same way, the entire official history of the CPSU is a crude fabrication of real history. Stalinist fascism had destroyed the committed communists by 1953. The country had been transformed into an enormous camp and the population was deprived of the very scientists about whom the press and the Soviet constitution have spoken so profusely. The people are living in an unreformable country.

The masses do not believe in anything. The apparatus, the Komsomol, the lower and higher Party organisations are completely rotten: apparatuses in which corruption and bribery flourish involved in pushing forward 'their own' people for the key jobs. Party activists are contemptuous of the working class; they consider themselves the new aristocracy and look down on the people as 'the plebs'. The word 'communism' has become a joke in the mouths of the ordinary people.

In the second section of the document, entitled 'Methods of changing the existing situation', the author attempts to make a prognosis for the country's short-term future. His first variant is: 'a group within the party-bureaucratic apparatus will grasp that by continuing the existing policies a catastrophe is threatened, and this group will therefore go for a gradual change in the system which will entail democratisation. It will opt for this solution through seeing the consolidation of the opposition, the collapse of the economy, etc.' The second variant is that 'there will be a further tightening of the screws involving terror from above which will in turn produce terror from below. Quite simply, there could be a state of civil war.'

The methods which the author advocates are in the first place and on the whole non-violent, namely propaganda work. This is to be done mainly among students, workers and the armed forces, with special emphasis on the army. Secondly, he urges consolidation of the opposition. Despite the various viewpoints in the various groups, in the beginning consolidation of forces is considered to be essential.

The author of a second article in the journal, entitled 'A Critique of the Theses on the current situation', agrees with the socio-economic analysis and the evaluation of the present situation that the Theses contain, but focuses his criticism on the possibilities and methods for changing the existing system. He expresses doubts about the idea that a section of the

party-bureaucratic apparatus could opt for democratic reforms. He takes as a matter of course the idea that armed confrontation would be inevitable. He argues for what he considers to be more decisive and stronger actions to influence the course of events, mentioning releasing an enormous quantity of forged money and possibly kidnapping hostages. The author proposes adopting the methods of action used by West German anarchists (specifically, the Baader-Meinhof Group) and urges the creation of a 'Revolutionary Communist Youth League'.

But at the same time, other, quite different viewpoints were also canvassed in the 'Critique of the Theses'. One such was an exclusive reliance on peaceful methods of struggle. This was Skobov's position.

POSITIVE PROGRAMME

Whatever the differences on methods and orientation, all currents were united on a 'Positive Programme' which was also published in the journal. Here is a summary of its positions:

*Full freedom and autonomy for each individual in society, based on respecting the freedom and autonomy of others. Such personal freedom required that all the democratic freedoms—of the press, of speech, of assembly etc.—be guaranteed by law.

*Freedom and autonomy of associations and organisations.

*Full pluralism in all spheres of life — political, economic, cultural, religious.

*The liquidation of the KGB, of Party control, of the Komsomol and other bureaucratic apparatuses, and their replacement by social and cultural organisations.

*The liquidation of the conscript army and its replacement by a voluntary army.

*The need for reforms in the industrial and peasant economies, in political and cultural spheres and in education where the main aim would be the creation of a new and fully-valued personality enabling the future elimination of the necessity for the state.

*In the sphere of foreign policy it would be necessary to adhere to a policy of non-alignment, end the financing of various adventurous undertakings, gain good-neighbourly treaties with democratic countries, remove the threat of war, achieve all possible progress with the US on mutual disarmament, gain a treaty with China.

*On the national question, the right of self-determination should be applied.

Aleksandr Skobov, a leader of the 'New Left' is an indisputable humanist and pacifist. His main achievement lies in the fact that he was able to create free discussion circles. He often affirmed that political opinions emerge only in and through social activity. While a person is inactive, he or she does not have political views. Skobov and Tsurkov were the recognised leaders of the movement and that is the main reason why they were arrested.



The first Left Opposition: a group, including Preobrazhensky, Radek, Rakovsky and Trotsky, on their way to exile in Siberia in 1928 after being expelled from the Party.

Footnotes.

1. Main Leningrad thoroughfare made famous during the revolutions of 1917.
2. 1905, February 1977 and October 1917.
3. The KGB is the political police. The militia is the local police.
4. The two main public holidays.
5. Former palace and now a famous art museum.
6. Short for Young Communist League, the official youth organisation.
7. Seventeen members were tried and sentenced in 1968.
8. The militarized regular police.

9. Psychiatric repression is common in the USSR for dealing with unyielding political prisoners.
10. Caps of the armed guards in labour camps and secret installations.
11. The Baltic Republics are Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia. Belorussia borders Poland.
12. **The Chronicle of Current Events**, a news bulletin about repression that has been appearing since 1968.
13. One of the greatest Russian poets, liquidated by Stalin in the 1930s, partially rehabilitated in the 1960s.
14. The title of a legal official, required to sanction arrests and searches.

15. **Kontinent** is an emigré journal started by Solzhenitsyn in exile.
16. The KGB controlled clearing house for political prisoners being processed for psychiatric repression.
17. Confrontations are a technique developed under Stalin whereby broken political prisoners accuse their former comrades of crimes in face-to-face prison meetings.
18. It was passed in 1939 and superceded in 1977.
19. Plekhanov was the founder of Russian Marxism, and a major classical Marxist philosopher. He moved to the Right during World War I.

The Real Life of Vladimir Klebanov

By Victor Haynes

[Last month a complete collection of documents from workers demanding their rights in the USSR was published here under the title *Workers Against the Gulag* (edited by Olga Semyonova and Victor Haynes, Pluto Press, £1.95). We will be reviewing this important book in our next issue. One of the central figures in *Workers Against the Gulag* is Vladimir Klebanov, a miner from the Donbass who is now interned in the Dnepropetrovsk Special Psychiatric Hospital for organising a Free Trade Union Association in January 1978. Recently the National Union of Mineworkers decided to accept the official Soviet version, that Klebanov is mad. Below Victor Haynes gives the most complete account so far available in the West of the real life of this intransigent campaigner for the rights of Soviet workers. See the Labour Movement section for more information about the campaign in defence of Klebanov.]

Vladimir Aleksandrovich Klebanov was born in Belorussia in 1932. He got married in 1952. From the first marriage he has two daughters. In 1973 he separated from his first wife. His second wife has also acted as the secretary of the Free Trade Union Association.

Klebanov left school in 1949 after completing the 8th grade. In 1950 he began his working life in the Donbas (Ukraine) as a boiler-maker and coal hewer simultaneously attending evening classes to finish the 10th grade, which he did in 1951. From 1951-59 he worked as a coal-cutter and then as a coal-combine operator. From 1958 onwards, he began to publicly criticise the management for cheating the miners on wages, prolonging working hours, concealing industrial injuries, etc. For this he was suspended for 20 days in 1959. But he won his reinstatement and got back wages paid. Throughout this time from 1958 he attended the Donetsk Polytechnic as an external student for a secondary specialist degree which he finished in 1962.

Klebanov suffered a skull injury at work on 2 November 1959. He was treated for ten days in a hospital, and then as an out-patient for three months. In February 1960, he was given the invalid status of the third category, which means 70% fit to work.

However in 1961 Klebanov decided to go back to work in the mines. He wanted a surface job, but was refused. Instead he settled for an underground job as a foreman. He demanded the observance of the six days at six hours per day working week. He stated that he carried out his function as a mining foreman 'very honestly, didn't permit any violation of the safety code .. showed by his own example that it was possible to work without having any accidents'.

Klebanov's 'trade unionism' angered the management. They got the KGB to interview him. In 1962 they took away his invalid status. This was

ordered by the Party chief of the Donetsk region, V.I. Degtyarev at the request of the management at the mine. (Degtyarev later became one of the leading Party officials in Ukraine. Presently he is Chairman of the State Committee for Safety in Industry and Mining of the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR.)

In addition to losing the invalid status, Klebanov also lost his job on 4 January 1965. On his labour book (which every Soviet adult has to carry besides a passport) it was falsely stamped that he 'left the job voluntarily'. Also he was given ten days to leave his flat. He later wrote: 'The police tried to throw my family and me out on the street, but miners from where I worked prevented this arbitrary act.' Then there were attempts by the local authorities 'to forcibly intern me in a psychiatric hospital for observation, with the help of a whole squad of police, but they were also frustrated by the miners.'

Klebanov fought back by appealing to higher authorities, and had some successes. The most notable one was with the Deputy Head of the Department of Heavy Industry of the Ukraine, I. Nikolayev. On 1 March 1965 Nikolayev wrote: 'Comrade Klebanov informs us that he has appealed to the Party and Soviet organs over a number of years, with the request that they investigate malpractices in the mine ... The evidence contained in the letters of comrade Klebanov has been thoroughly checked .. The former head of the mine and others have been brought strictly to account by the Party and administration for their reported malpractices in the field of production.'

Klebanov claims that in reality no measures had been taken. He lists a number of Party officials and managers against whom he has complained since 1958. Among them is A.P. Lyashko, who in 1966 was promoted to the Second Secretary of the Central Committee of the Ukraine. Today he is a member of the Politburo of the Ukraine, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Ukraine and a member of the Central Committee of the CPSU.

From 4 January 1965 to September 1967, Klebanov was unemployed and had no source of income. 'My family were in a dreadful position. I'd been out of work for about three years. My wife was often ill as a result of childbirth. She didn't work. Our two children had to be fed and clothed. While I was out of work we sold literally everything. Our savings had all gone.'

Eventually Klebanov was successful in his petitioning. In September 1967 he not only obtained a job but also his invalid status was recognised. His new job was as a mining engineer-planner. This was because since finishing his secondary degree in 1962, he started as an external student on a higher degree in 1963, which he eventually finished in 1968.

His success only lasted a year. On 12 September 1968 he was arrested and charged with the crime of 'deliberately and systematically spreading slanders against the Soviet state and social system in oral and written form ...' (Article 187 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code). What seems to have happened, (on this Klebanov provides scant information) was a semi-uprising at the pit against the management. 'Hundreds of workers,' he says, 'were transferred to other pits, some were made to work in such terrible conditions that they were forced to quit.'

For the next five years Klebanov was shifted between a number of prisons and psychiatric hospitals. Two of those years he spent in the notorious Special Psychiatric Hospital in Dnepropetrovsk, which is inside a prison. (He is at present in this hospital again.)

Klebanov was freed in the spring of 1973. He again wrote numerous complaints to party and state organs and to newspapers and appealed to the courts. He demanded his invalid pension for the five years he spent locked up in psychiatric hospitals. The court, while deciding in Klebanov's favour, ordered the mine management to pay only half of the compensation due to him. Klebanov quite legitimately demanded 100% compensation, as well as a job, and continued to petition the authorities.

Klebanov travelled to Moscow where, in February 1977, he was arrested 'by KGB agents who tried to charge me with the bombing of the Moscow Metro'. (Recently three Armenians were convicted in secret for this bombing and executed.) The KGB forcibly put Klebanov in a psychiatric hospital for two months. During the time of his detention, the KGB searched Klebanov's flat and confiscated '2,100 roubles from the money I had received in partial compensation for my unjustified detention in the 'Dnepropetrovsk Special Psychiatric Hospital.'

Soon after his release, on 20 May 1977, Klebanov and eight others issued an 'Open Letter to International Opinion'. They describe themselves as being from different towns, sacked and deprived of a job, and claimed that their petitioning to every conceivable Soviet organ had met with 'continuous persecution'. 'The only reason for this is that we are decent, principled people who have come out against bribery, swindling, theft of socialist property, concealment of industrial accidents and other abuses by managers at the enterprises where we used to work.'

On 18 September 1977, the group of petitioners now numbered 25 people. They issued their second public statement: 'Open Letter to International Opinion on the True Situation of Workers and Employees on the Eve of the 60th Anniversary of the USSR'. They appealed to international opinion through the 'bourgeois press' because their leaders, press and party and

Soviet organs ignore their problems. On the contrary they repress them with prisons, psychiatric hospitals as well as unemployment.

How many working people are in a similar situation to this group of petitioners? **'We think we are tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands.'**

On 1 November 1977 the day the 60th Anniversary of the Russian Revolution was celebrated, the group, now numbering 33 people, issued another document which included two demands:

1. the creation of an authoritative commission to investigate the activities of the Department of Administrative Agencies of the CC CPSU, who, it is our deepest conviction, govern on the basis of their personal interests and wishes and not of the directives of the Party and Government.

2. that as is our right under the Constitution of the Soviet Union, the leaders of the Party and Government who are barred from us by the barrier of bureaucracy receive us personally, and help us to put right the wrongs we have suffered.

The only reply to these petitions was repression. On 25 November 1977 Klebanov held the first informal press conference with Western journalists at which he announced the group's intention to 'organise our own genuinely independent trade union'. Klebanov and ten others held a second press conference on 10 January 1978. A third press conference was held on 26 January 1978, at which Klebanov and six others said that 200 workers were ready to join. Meanwhile the police were trying to keep Klebanov and his comrades out of Moscow. On 19 December 1977, Klebanov and another miner, V.F. Luchkov and V.V. Chetverikova (his second wife) were arrested on the streets of Moscow and shipped back to the Donbass. Klebanov had to spend a few days in a psychiatric hospital as a punishment. However, as soon as Klebanov was released, the three of them went back to Moscow. On 27 January 1978, the KGB attempted to arrest the three of them but failed: **'The balance of forces was such that in the fight which followed their comrades, helped by passers-by, managed to protect them from the arbitrary violence unleashed by so-called defenders of law and order.'**

On 1 February 1978, Klebanov and 43 public members announced the existence of the Free Trade Union Association. They claimed 200 additional members who didn't want their names to be known. They also presented 110 individual cases which the FTUA intended to take up, and listed them as candidate members. The Free Trade Union Association was open to any worker, skilled or unskilled, from any branch of industry (on the pattern of the official trade unions, which include all grades of workers). The difference between the FTUA and the official unions, however, was that 'all officials from top to bottom were to be elected by members' at general meetings.



Donbass miners taking a break.

'And so, we decided to organise our own genuinely independent trade union. We did this in order to win the official and legal right to defend our interests - a right guaranteed by the Soviet constitution - and to enlist in the common struggle for our rights other willing persons whose rights are unjustly violated.'

We consider that only through a union of our own, basing itself on the public opinion of workers of all countries, can we force our government to respect the ordinary workers.'

In our country, there is no organ which objectively defends the workers' interests. Soviet trade unions do not defend our rights and do not have the necessary authority ...'

The police responded viciously. One leading member of the FTUA, V.T. Poplavsky, received a year's imprisonment in a labour camp supposedly 'for not wanting a job'. In reality he was sacked in 1975, according to him, 'for exposing the abuses of the factory director ...' At an ILO inquiry in February 1979 on the FTUA, the Soviet Government delegate said that Poplavsky was a former armed robber who failed to return to an honest occupation (when Poplavsky was sacked he was a department head at a ferro-concrete plant in Klimovsk, near Moscow).

As for Klebanov, a Soviet delegate said at the ILO inquiry that after suffering a serious injury he had been awarded compensation of ten thousand roubles, and also a normal invalidity pension equivalent to an average wage in the USSR. Also that Klebanov refused to accept various offers of suitable employment, and that the Soviet trade union did everything possible to provide him with employment.

Klebanov's biography shows that throughout most of his working life he had had to fight for suitable employment as well as for injury and invalid compensation. Another lie by Soviet officials was that a medical examination had revealed that Klebanov needed treatment by a psychiatrist. If organising an independent trade union is considered a psychological disorder then the Soviet officials should clearly state that to the world. Otherwise they are covering up why Klebanov has been locked up in psychiatric hospitals from February 1978 until the present time, April 1979. Klebanov has repeatedly stated that he has been locked up in the past because of his activities exposing State officials and demanding his rights. His first wife has reported that she had a meeting with him on 16-17 May 1978. Klebanov stated **'he considers himself normal and the hospitalisation unnecessary'**.

News In Brief

*On 27 April, five imprisoned Soviet oppositionists were exchanged for two Soviet citizens convicted of spying, in a deal between Moscow and Washington. None of the oppositionists was given a choice over leaving the USSR, and two of them, Alexander Ginsburg, and the Baptist leader Georgi Vins, stated on their arrival in the USA that they did not want to leave and be cut off from the struggle in the USSR. The other three are Edward Kuznetsov and Mark Dymshits, both Jewish activists, and Valentyn Moroz, a leading activist within the Ukrainian national opposition. On 20 April it had been announced that five other Jewish activists sentenced in 1970 and 1971 for hijacking an aircraft, had been pardoned by Brezhnev. These events, together with the granting of exit visas to Misha Voikhansky (see below), and Leonid Slepak seem to be connected to efforts to gain US support for granting most favoured nation status in trade to the USSR and for SALT II.

*Misha Voikhansky, son of exiled Soviet psychiatrist, Dr Marina Voikhanskaya, was allowed to leave Leningrad and join his mother in London on 25 April after a long campaign in the West.

*After the sentencing of one member of the Free Inter-professional Trade Union Association in April—the person's name is Volkhonsky but his jail term is not yet known to us—a second trial, of Skvirski, is due to open on 15 May.

*Mykhailo Melnyk, an activist in the Ukrainian national movement is believed to have committed suicide after the KGB had raided his flat. Melnyk, a member of the Ukrainian Helsinki Monitoring Group, was found dead on 6 March.

*On 28 March a group of Soviet artists held a press conference for Western newsmen in a Moscow flat, announcing plans for a series of exhibitions of non-conformist art. Ms Kuznetsova, the artist whose flat was used, was arrested just afterwards and jailed for 15 days for allegedly failing to report to the police to answer complaints made against her by neighbours.

*At the end of March the 83-year-old 7th Day Adventist leader, Vladimir Shelkov, was given 5 years' hard labour for his church activity.

As of 17 April, flooding near the Chernobyl nuclear power station was threatening the plant's cooling system and 'special measures' were being taken to protect the plant.

*On 27 March three Volga Germans were arrested in Red Square while displaying placards demanding the right of ethnic Germans in the USSR to emigrate to West Germany. On 26 April, according to *Le Monde*, 'many Volga Germans' attempted to invade the American Embassy in Moscow, but were stopped and arrested by the police.

'WOMEN IN EASTERN EUROPE' Newsletter New issue out at the end of May.

Contents include:
Interview with a Russian dissident woman
Women in Czech Social Democracy
Diary of a Polish peasant woman
Plus reviews of new books; news; work in progress.
Price 40p. Available from:
either c/o Labour Focus
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POLAND

Attack on Kuron's flat Shakes Warsaw Intelligentsia

by Peter Green

On 21 March, a gang of youths broke into the flat of Jacek Kuron, vandalising personal belongings, insulting the occupants and severely beating Kuron's 19-year-old son and a family friend, Henryk Wujec. The attack itself, and the later discovery that it was organised at the headquarters of the official youth organisation, have profoundly shocked academic circles in Warsaw.

According to opposition statements, a meeting of the Flying University, the unofficial educational association started in 1978, had been scheduled to take place at Kuron's flat on the evening of the break-in. But the meeting had to be cancelled when Kuron's 74-year-old father suffered a heart attack. Some 3 hours after an ambulance had been called and a notice had been posted on the door announcing the cancellation of the meeting, some youths forced their way into the flat — at this time there was still no sign of an ambulance. The youths went on a rampage, causing severe concussion to Kuron's son and Henryk Wujec before leaving. A number of others were also physically assaulted.

Two Warsaw activists of the SZSP, the official student organisation, were recognised amongst the gang of attackers. They were university students by the names of Pisarkiewicz and Witrowy. Later, Aleksander Swiatopelk, chairman of a SZSP department board at the University also admitted that he had participated in the attack.

These facts were immediately circulated throughout the University in a leaflet produced by the unofficial Student Solidarity Committee. A week later on 28 March, the Socialist Association of Polish Youth issued a leaflet turning this story on its head, saying that 3 student activists had been let into the flat, taken to separate rooms and beaten up by the occupants.

Other student activists had then entered the flat to rescue their three colleagues, according to this account.

However, this account was quickly discredited. Protests were made in various university and polytechnic departments against the attack and on 3 April the council of the History Department at the University decided to present the names of the students involved in the raid to the University Disciplinary Committee. This was followed by a motion passed by the council of the University's Biological Faculty, expressing its concern at the activity of the student gang. The Council of the Polish Philosophical Society also passed a motion protesting against the activity of such gangs.

Yet on 29 April, the leader of the gang, Jerzy Folcik of the Warsaw Academy of Physical Training was shown on Polish TV as a platform speaker along with Edward Gierek, the leader of the Party, at a meeting at the Warsaw steel mill, 'Huta Warszawa' — a clear indication that the actions of the SZSP gang had been inspired and supported by elements in the Party leadership.



Victim of an earlier police provocation, Stanisław Pyjas, a student leader: found murdered in Krakow in early May 1977.

The 21 March attack appears to have been the climax of a mounting campaign against the Flying University lectures of Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik — both leading ideologists of the main unofficial opposition movement, the KOR. According to a long statement by the Student Solidarity Committee issued on 21 March,

the official youth and students organisations decided to launch a campaign against the lectures in December 1978. At first the campaign was confined to sending groups of debaters to the meetings to combat the ideas of the lecturers. This did not disrupt the meetings, but rather suggested the possibility of a dialogue. But soon, in place of argument the 'youth activists' resorted to insults and slanders and when this failed they turned to physical intimidation, working in harness with the security police. A lecture in Kuron's flat was broken up by several dozen thugs at the end of January. Another lecture on 7 March was besieged by a gang which attacked some of the participants and the lecture on 14 March was similarly disrupted. The gang clearly hoped to make 21 March a decisive victory over the Flying University. But the action boomeranged, threatening a crisis within the SZSP.

The Party leadership's long-term strategy has involved allowing the organised intellectual opposition to continue, provided it is confined to a ghetto existence. This was required strong repression against working-class activists and against efforts to gain broad support among students. The authorities clearly regard the Flying University as a dangerously attractive influence on students. But their methods of combatting the unofficial lecturing association may produce an opposite effect to the one they desire. And the use of the official student and youth organisations' centres for goon squads may seriously undermine the legitimacy of these bodies in international student politics, and not least in the eyes of the British National Union of Students.

Meanwhile the effectiveness of national and international pressure on the authorities was shown in March when the worker activist, Kazimierz Switon, though given a one year jail sentence, was released on bail pending an appeal against his conviction. But more ominously, 150 civil rights activists were called in for questioning on 18 April, the day after a closely guarded statue of Lenin in the southern industrial town of Nowa Huta was bombed.

The Strike Movement

[The following document was produced jointly by the fortnightly trade unionist paper Robotnik [the Worker], an unofficial publication which has been appearing regularly since the autumn of 1977, and the KSS-KOR, the civil rights body whose initials stand for Social Self-Defence Committee — Workers' Defence Committee. The document both assesses recent strikes and takes a clear stand against any attempt by the government to make the working class pay for the economic crisis. This political stand takes on an added significance in view of the increasing media campaign to blame the working class for an economic crisis which stems fundamentally from the bureaucratic basis of the political system. The document and translation have been made available by the Appeal for the Polish Workers.]

Reports have reached the **Robotnik** of workers' strikes in many factories. Here are some data covering the last quarter of 1978.

From 9 to 11 October workers of the Pabianice Dressing Materials Factory 'PASO' went on strike. They were losing several hundred zlotys a month because a change of package sizes was introduced, without any corresponding change in the scale of payments.

On 10-14 October workers of the Pabianice Pharmaceutical factory 'Polfa' went on strike because their bonus was withdrawn. The reason for this was that their factory's delivery plan was not fulfilled, although the production plans were met, and it was the

management, not the workers, who were responsible for deliveries.

At the end of November workers of the Pabianice Electric Bulb factory 'Polam' went on strike, in protest against being deprived of a work-free Saturday. On 1 December the spinning room workers in the Technical Textiles Plant in Pabianice went on strike. The reason was that an inferior quality yarn was classified as top quality, and workers were deprived of a special bonus for working with inferior quality yarn.

On 26 October 1978 workers of the Confectionary Plant 'Optima' in Łódź went on strike, demanding a wages settlement. Their wages were reduced due to lack of raw materials.

On 18 November 1978 workers of the concrete-mixing factory in Myszków went on strike because their wages had not been paid on the appointed date.

On 22 December 1978 a violent protest broke out among the miners of the 5th division of the 'Gliwice' mine against the twelve-hour working day and enforced work over Christmas holidays. Earlier (last summer) miners of the Rybnice and Upper Silesia coal-fields protested against prolongation of working time.

Reports of strikes reach us by chance. We can assume that they illustrate only a fragment of a wider workers movement in the whole country, for conditions in other factories are similar to those that caused workers' protests known to us.

The immediate cause of strikes is most often a wages reduction, increase of production norms not previously accepted by the workers themselves, cancelling of work-free Saturdays, or enforcing additional working hours [work on Sundays or 12-hour day on Saturdays]. Managements try to save their threatened production plans by economising on the workers' wages or looking for 'reserves' in an extension of working hours or productivity increases. Many plants have not fulfilled their plans as a result of numerous standstills in the second and third quarters of 1978, or did not work at full capacity, due to lack of raw materials and energy, irregular supplies, bad organisation and mismanagement in the whole of the economy.

Economic and political management on different levels is trying to lay the blame for the economic crisis on workers who are not responsible for it. This takes place at a time of a general fall in living standards (rising prices, 'commercial' shops) and deterioration in the supplies of foodstuff, in a situation which offers no prospects of a change for the better in the living conditions of workers and their families.

All attempts at further lowering of workers' living conditions must meet with firm protest. All cases of workers' protests known to us had the same character: workers have been defending themselves against unjust wage reductions or exploitation. As an additional postulate they demanded improved goods supplies to shops. They have not put forward new demands but merely defended what is theirs by right.

In the disputes between management and workers, the party-controlled trade unions defend the vested interests of the party-economic apparatus. And thus workers cannot count on the unions' support. A strike, or the threat of a strike, has become the only method available to defend workers' rights. On the whole, strikes last for a short time and end with a short-term success. The management refund lost wages, restore former productivity norms, or reintroduce a work-free Saturday. For the most part, however, these concessions apply to individual cases only and take a form that does not satisfy the workers: for example, they are given a bonus instead of due wages and thus have no guarantee for the future. Food supplies that usually improve after a workers' protest also have a temporary character. Often, some time after the tense atmosphere is relieved, reprisals come for the active participants of the strikes — they are dismissed from work or transferred to worse jobs.



The official image: Party leader Edward Gierek demonstrating his easy rapport with workers.

A significant weakness of workers' protest actions has been so far a lack of solidarity with the persecuted colleagues as well as a temporary character of the achievements won by the strikes. Therefore it is necessary that workers organise themselves in more permanent forms, such as Strike Committees or Free Trade Unions. These in turn would represent workers in disputes with management, would see to it that the rights won by workers are respected, and would organise defence for the victims of repression.

The Social Self-Defence Committee 'KOR' and **Robotnik** announce that they give help and will continue to give it to the persecuted worker activists. Our help involves: legal aid in case of deterioration in working conditions or dismissal; financial help in the form of unemployment benefit in case of dismissal and inability to find work elsewhere. This help is distributed by a Workers' Fund created from the contributions of workers and members of the intelligentsia and supported by the Fund of the Social Self-Defence Committee 'KOR'.

The Social Self-Defence Committee 'KOR' and the editors of **Robotnik** declare their intention to inform the public—since the official media keep silent about the strikes in our country—about all workers' protests confirmed by us. Please send in all confirmed information about strikes to members of 'KOR' and the editors of **Robotnik**, in particular to:

Bogdan Borusewicz, Sopot, 23 marca 98 m 24.

Anka Kowalska, Warsaw, Estonska 4, Tel. 17 53 07.

Jacek Kuron, Warsaw, Mickiewicza 27 m 64, tel. 39 39 64.

Jan Józef Lipski, Warsaw, Konopczynskiego 4 m 9, tel. 27 34 72.

Jan Litynski, Warsaw, Al. Wyzwolenia 9 m 125, tel. 28 71 04.

Zbigniew Romaszewski, Warsaw, Kopinska 36a m 77, tel. 22 29 25.

Józef Sreniowski, Łódź, Laurowa 2, tel. 73 470.

Henryk Wujec, Warsaw, Nessesberska 3 m 48, tel. 42 63 38.

Information sent in should include: name of town and factory, if possible the division and shift, the date of beginning and end of the strike, its causes, demands put forward, the course of the strike, the number of strikers. Please supply detailed information about persons who held talks with the strikers, if and how their postulates are to be met, who suffered reprisals after the strike was over, and how, and whether the workers' demands have been met.

All information received about strikes will be verified. It will be of great help if we receive addresses where details can be obtained. Unconfirmed reports cannot be published.

The Social Self-Defence Committee 'KOR' and the editors of **Robotnik** will support peaceful forms of workers' self-defence. The policy of lowering living standards of the population and increasing exploitation does not help to overcome the economic and social crisis but, on the contrary, aggravates it.

Social Self-Defence Committee 'KOR'
Editors of '**Robotnik**' (The Worker)
Warsaw

2 January 1979

The Medicine Crisis

[The non-expert may have some difficulty in assessing the full significance of the information contained in this document. We therefore gave the text to doctors who are members of the Socialist Medical Association for their opinion of the seriousness of the shortages. They explained that some of the drugs are not clearly enough discussed to be sure about the dangers produced by their absence, but that the lack of the following drugs mentioned in the text produced a serious danger to life: streptomycin, insulin, aminophylline, adrenal steroids, carbenicillin, thyroid, cystostatics, injectable B-complex vitamins. They add that using the World Health Organisation's criteria, lack of the following

medicines mentioned in the text would be grave: ampicillin and suprarenal hormones.

This case illustrates the appalling risks that can be produced by a system governed by secrecy and lacking any form of accountability from below. It runs parallel to the nuclear power scandal in Czechoslovakia reported in Labour Focus Vol 2 No 6.

The translation of the document was made available by the Appeal for the Polish Workers.]

To Professor Marian Sliwinski,
Minister of Health and Social Security, Warsaw.

OPEN LETTER

We are writing to you, sir, regarding a biological threat to our society. This threat is produced by the situation in our home pharmaceutical market. The chronic lack of medicines, from the most commonplace up to hormone preparations, psychotropic agents, and fluids for drip infusion, is creating a real hazard to the life and health of our citizens. Everyone is under threat. However, in particular, this is the fate of the poorer strata of the population. Below we give certain data from the Pharmaceutical Supply Catalogues, sent to all pharmacies, and intended exclusively for internal use. The Catalogues cover the months of August, September, October, November, and December 1978, and January 1979. They note the following:

In the group of antibiotics: a shortage, *inter alia*, of ampicillin and streptomycin (essential for the treatment of tuberculosis), carbenicillin and syntarpen (essential for various kinds of infections);

in the group of drugs for cardiac disorders: a lack, *inter alia*, of aminophyllin and deslanoside in injection form (essential for treating inadequacies of the cardiac muscles);

in the group of hormone treatments; a lack, *inter alia*, of several forms of suprarenal hormones, thyroid and pancreas preparations, and drugs used in gynaecology;

in the group of cytostatics: a lack, *inter alia*, of drugs needed in the treatment of tumours and leukaemia;

in the group of vitamins: a lack, *inter alia*, of B-complex vitamins in injection form, essential for patients who cannot accept medicines orally; in the third quarter there was a serious deficit in the supply of vitamin D3 (essential for the prevention of rickets in children);

also, a lack of the elementary dehydration drugs used in the case of inflammation of the lungs, inflammation of the brain, kidney insufficiency; a lack of fluids for drip infusion of practically every kind, a lack of medicaments for external use, a lack of drugs acting on the central nervous system, a lack of articles of hygiene and rubber articles, such as surgical gloves, disposable syringes, cotton wool, and lignin.

We need hardly mention those lacks which doctors call the most serious among the serious. Certain groups of drugs are 100% lacking. The Pharmaceutical Supply Catalogue (November '78 - January '79) cites 60 preparations that are 100% lacking and predicts an interruption in the continuity of supply of about 150 drugs and articles of hygiene.

Doctors, aware of the threat that the continuity of supply of a drug will be interrupted, find it impossible to decide on a choice of treatment which would have to run the full course. This situation is exacerbated by a total lack of explanation of the causes of the predicted interruption of supply or the out-and-out absence of a given drug from the market, even in the out-and-out absence of a given drug from the market, even in the

case of a home-produced drug. The doctor is forced to decide on a treatment without having any knowledge of the prospects of possible changes in its availability in the near or more distant future. Not long ago, the pharmaceutical industry was one of the principal foreign currency earners for the whole pharmaceutical industry. Nevertheless, the investment in POLFA [the state pharmaceutical company] was no more than 20% of what was required. Not a single new factory for drug manufacture has been built in Poland for a great number of years. To give an example, the building of the Tarchomin II factory has been held up for three years. As a result, 10 million dollars already spent on American equipment and licences has been wasted, and this sum amounts to one-third of the total annual foreign currency requirements for the purchase of raw materials for pharmaceuticals.

For the state to effect savings at the expense of the health and life of its citizens is inadmissible. Yet within the framework of savings during the first quarter of this year (1978), there was a cut-back for the pharmaceutical industry of 90% of the foreign currency allotment for the purchase of drugs as regards cash operations, while the total amount of currency assigned for the purchase of drugs by credit operations was reduced by two-thirds. Furthermore, provision was made of only 70% of foreign currency in the first half-year for the purchase of ready-to-use drugs. With all this, the total for the import of drugs and medicines amounts annually to about 30 million dollars. This is scarcely a fraction of one percent of the sum received annually by individual branches of the engineering industry. The neglect of the pharmaceutical industry together with fundamental deficiencies in the supply of foodstuffs must bring society to a tragic state of health. Already obstetricians are observing the symptoms of malnutrition among mothers in the lower income bracket, which must of course have an effect on the children born to them, all the more so, because there is a chronic lack of baby foods. We have reached a position where the social strata are becoming even poorer, and are on the road to equality with the level of the Third World.

In this situation, if a radical change is impossible, the Committee for Social Self-Defence 'KOR' has declared its intention of turning to the Polish community abroad, requesting it to organise action to provide patients in Poland with the most essential drugs and medicines. The unceasing help which the Polish community abroad has for many years extended to our society is well-known to everyone in Poland and has an enormous significance for them. We believe that, as always, on this occasion too, the Polish community abroad will reply with understanding to our appeal concerning the state of biological threat to our society.

At the same time, we are turning to you, Mr Minister, to express our willingness that the bureaucratic apparatus under your control should act as an intermediary between the patients and benefactors; the latter would be sent by the relevant institutions acting on your instructions, the names and addresses of the

patients and the names of the drugs, on the basis of the prescriptions supplied. The patients or their families would receive the medicines sent directly to their own addresses to eliminate possible misappropriations.

The Committee for Social Self-Defence 'KOR' will wait four weeks, Mr Minister, for a positive answer from you. If nothing is heard within that time, we shall have to take it as a refusal. In that case, the Committee for Social Self-Defence 'KOR' will itself

appeal to the citizens of our country to take action to organise Social Welfare committees to act as intermediaries between the patients and the Polish community abroad. Otherwise, the situation regarding the state of health of the people of our country will deteriorate from month to month, creating the prospect of irreversible disaster.

For the Committee for Social Self-Defence 'KOR'
Jan Kielanowski
Warsaw

4 December 1978

EAST GERMANY

Tensions in Regime Produce Policy Shift

By Oliver MacDonald

A series of decisions taken during the last 2 months indicate a change of policy by the East German Party leadership and suggest tensions within the Party apparatus as the GDR approaches its 30th anniversary.

At the beginning of April, the Party daily announced that from April 16th people would not be able to use West European currencies to buy foreign goods in the chain of 'Intershops' that has linked East German consumers with Western markets over the last two years. Instead they would have to use special coupons issued by the banks.

This measure does not in itself hit the East German consumer but it places greater control over the West German deutschmark economy that has sprouted in the East in recent months. And it would facilitate any future restriction of Intershop business that may be planned.

The announcement had been preceded by a major speech on economic failures by Party leader Eric Honecker in early February. Speaking to a two day conference of the East Berlin section of the SED (The East German Communist Party) Honecker admitted 'excessive bureaucracy' in industrial management and at the same time criticised the City Party leadership for its failure to make full use of the city's development funds. The East Berlin party secretary, Konrad Nauman — the target of Honecker's attack — is thought to be a leader of those within the Party apparatus who have opposed the Intershop experiment and other concessions to consumerism. Neuman is also thought to be a potential rival for Honecker's job of party leader.

On April 16th, the government took new measures against Western correspondents in the GDR, forbidding them to interview anybody without official permission. This decision appears to have been a response to West German TV interviews of shoppers in the East who were ready to complain loudly about the new restrictions on the Intershops. West German TV can be viewed by the overwhelming majority of East Germans.

The new restrictive posture of the regime took a further stride forward with a drive



The guard has now been removed from Havemann's house ... and replaced with a charge of illegal currency transactions.

against the veteran Marxist critic Robert Havemann and the unorthodox novelist Stefan Heym.

On April 16th the security police, who have held Havemann under house arrest ever since his protest against the expulsion of his close friend Wolf Biermann from East Germany in autumn 1976, invaded Havemann's home and carried out an all-night search. In the days that followed, the 69 year old scientist's family was almost totally sealed off from the outside world and search-lights were beamed through the house's windows each night. Havemann, a veteran of the pre-war Communist Party jailed by the Nazis for his underground resistance during the war, was unable to acquire the drugs needed for his severe lung disease.

This assault on Havemann was followed on April 19th by a decision to ban Stefan Heym from travelling to the West. No reason was given for the ban, which also applied to the writers Rolf Schneider, Eric Loest and Klaus

Pocher. All 4 writers have published books in the West which were not approved by the East German censors, and Heym's latest novel contains an expose of the methods of the security police.

But at the beginning of May what had appeared to be a fairly routine harassment of critical intellectuals acquired a new dimension with the announcement that both Havemann and Heym are to be brought to trial for illegal currency transactions — on paper at least a very serious charge that could involve many years in prison. The announcement of these charges, accompanied by the removal of the police cordon around Havemann's house, indicated that the government has decided to tie repression against the writers directly to its drive against the deutschmark economy.

According to opposition sources in East Germany this new tough orientation on the part of the regime is linked to a challenge to Honecker's authority within the party apparatus. His failure to manage the economy over the last three years has laid him open to attack by opponents within the leadership who fear a general decline of political controls over East German society during his period of rule.

But another element in the internal party struggle is suggested by an article published by the Soviet ambassador to East Berlin in the April issue of the GDR foreign policy magazine *Horizon*. He felt it necessary to publicly repudiate rumours that the Kremlin was preparing some new initiative towards German re-unification. These rumours, which have been causing a great deal of concern to West Germany's NATO allies who fear a new policy of friendship between West Germany and Moscow, would also spread panic within the East German bureaucracy. There is a long-standing, widespread fear within the party apparatus that any sign of a real end to tensions between the two Germanies could lead to a rapid disintegration of the East German regime. Such currents within the party may feel that Honecker has already gone too far in extending economic and political links with the West and the time is ripe to call a halt.

Statement by Havemann

The following statement by Robert Havemann, issued by the West German news agency on April 19th, resulted in the police assault on Havemann's home reported above. Translation for Labour Focus is by Jo Singlewood.]

Since the exile of my friend Wolf Biermann from the GDR in November 1976, i.e. for two and a half years, I have lived here in my house in prison-like conditions. Those measures are being justified by reference to the judgement of the District Court in Fürstenwalde which sentenced me to house arrest for an indeterminate period of time. This sentence was a result of my declaration against the expulsion of Wolf Biermann which was published in *Der Spiegel*. The Court declared that peace and order in the GDR were threatened by this publication. The carrying out of this 'arrest' was done initially in a rather mild manner. According to Herr Windisch of the Public Prosecutor's Office this was done because they took into account my record of participation in the Anti-Nazi resistance.

As time went by, the measures taken against me were increased. For over a week now no-one has been allowed to enter my property in Grünheide which has been completely closed off by the People's Police. In this time also the restrictions on my personal freedom of movement have been extended to my wife and even to my six-year-old daughter. My daughter can visit neighbours once in a while but my wife is prevented from taking our daughter to the Kindergarten where she takes classes. My wife has to ask the neighbours to do our shopping for us and for

this purpose she is allowed to speak to someone over the fence from time to time. Shortly before these rigorous measures were introduced my wife was stopped as she was driving in her car. Her purses and the car were searched. Nothing was kept since they obviously didn't find what they were looking for. A similar thing happened to my son-in-law who, after a visit to us, was completely searched without any explanation whatsoever. This search also, of course, produced nothing. Neither for this stepping up of the measures taken against me, nor for the fact that my wife has also been placed under the same house arrest, has any single word of explanation been given, either written or verbal. The police who carry out those actions simply explain that they have the proper orders to do so.

I will not make any judgement now whether the measures taken against me personally are legal or not, but in the case of my wife and child these measures are a complete violation of human rights for which the authorities cannot even bring forward the appearance of legality. This is an action of inhumane arbitrariness, which reminds one of the practice of the so-called 'Sippenhaft' [the practice of extending punishment to the family of the person condemned], which we thought belonged to the past once and for all.

I demand the reinstatement, for my wife and daughter, of all those rights to freedom which they are guaranteed by the constitution of the GDR.

Czech Solidarity with Havemann

The following declaration in solidarity with Robert Havemann was issued by various Czechoslovak Socialist exiles and published in the West Berlin daily *Tageszeitung* on 25th April, 1979:

"We, the undersigned Czechoslovak socialists in exile, support the statement from Jurgen Fuchs, Wolf Biermann, Sarah Kirsch and others of 23 April 1979 in which the public was informed of the acute danger of measures being taken by the GDR authorities against Robert Havemann.

"We are also aware that our solidarity with Robert Havemann must remain only verbal since we are not in the position to support him in any way other than with our protest. However, it is important for us to express our anger at the behaviour of the GDR

authorities, and we are certain that this feeling is shared by many of our comrades who are united in Charter 77. They are not as well informed as we are; they cannot react so quickly. They also, like Robert Havemann, suffer repression, are interrogated, arrested, insulted, placed under house arrest and are subjected to Berufsverbot. They also, like Havemann, defend themselves against this treatment and remain true to their political convictions.

"It is our experience that broad publicity can offer protection, that the rulers prefer to act in secret rather than in full view of everyone. Therefore we appeal to all socialists in Eastern and Western Europe:

"Publicise the case and express your solidarity with Robert Havemann.

"We cannot and will not look on as our comrades die in the hands of the police."

Signed:

Informat Group, producers of the journal of the Czechoslovak revolutionary socialists, *Informacni Materialy*, West Berlin.

Jitka Bidlasová, Charter signatory, presently in Uppsala, Sweden.

Ludvik Kavin, Charter signatory, presently in Vienna, Austria.

Jiri Pallas, Charter signatory, presently in Uppsala, Sweden.

Jiri Pelikán, producer of the socialist journal, *Listy*, former Director of Czechoslovak television, presently in Rome, Italy.

HUNGARY

From Intellectual Theory to Samizdat Practice

By Bill Lomax

"The Hungarian left, if it is to remain true to its ideals, has to be prepared for complete isolation"

—Gabriel Becker

"Now when everything is as always, this is just the time ..."

—Dezső Tandori

To the extent that the Western Left is aware of an opposition movement in Hungary, this is still most commonly conceived as the

so-called Budapest school, the disciples of the Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács, and the pupils of the Hungarian sociologist András Hegedüs. Their most well-known representatives have been the philosophers Agnes Heller, György Markus and Mihály Vajda (many of whose works have recently been published in English by Allison and Busby), and the sociologists Ivan Szelényi and György Konrad (whose book *Towards the Class Power of the Intelligentsia* is

shortly to appear in the West). At the same time some of the spokespersons of a younger generation of more politically active and radically committed intellectuals have gained prominence in left-wing circles in the West, like the former Maoists György Por (several of whose writings have appeared in *Les Temps Modernes*) and Miklós Haraszti (whose book *A Worker in a Worker's State* was recently published by Penguin in collaboration with *New Left Books*.)

Over the last few years, however, with the exception of Lukács who died in 1971, and Hegedüs who is now retired, every single one of these individuals has left Hungary for the West, at least temporarily, and their importance and influence within Hungary itself has greatly declined. At the same time, these very same years have seen the gradual emergence within Hungary of a samizdat network organised mainly by former 'pupils' of the so-called Budapest school, and drawing support from wider circles of even younger and less ideologically motivated intellectuals. The activities of this newly-born Hungarian samizdat have been described in recent articles by Janet Asquith and Miklós Haraszti in *Labour Focus*, and by Balázs Rab in *Index on Censorship*. Perhaps their most well-known spokesperson is the writer Marc Rakovski.

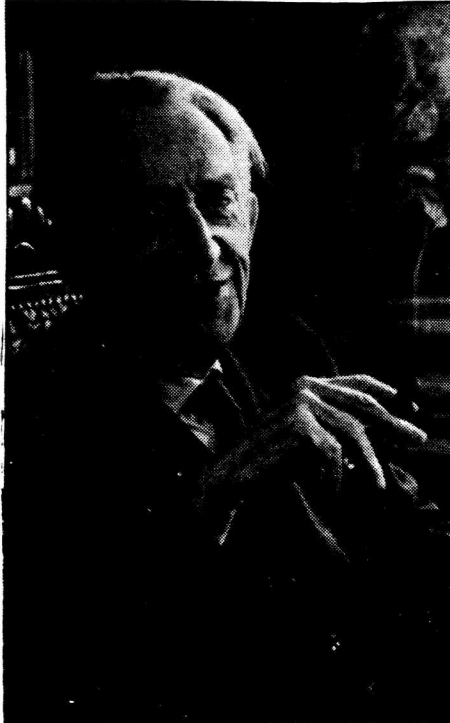
The crucial turning-point which led to both of these developments—emigration to the West for some, internal emigration into the underground for others—was the ending of the era of liberalisation and reforms which reached its peak in the late sixties but was gradually reversed in the early seventies. The final seal on the post-1968 consolidation was imposed with the sacking from their academic positions and expulsion from the Communist Party of the leading intellectual figures of the Budapest School in 1973, the removal under Soviet pressure of the key figureheads of cultural liberalisation and economic reform, György Aczél and Rezső Nyers respectively, in 1974, and finally the 'resignation' of the Prime Minister of the reform era, Jenő Fock, in 1975. These changes implied the end of the possibilities for official publication of works of radical social criticism, and also the end of illusions in the gradual reform and liberalisation of the regime.

Moreover, while the older generation of the Hungarian Left, the intellectuals of the Budapest School, had consistently maintained their adhesion to Marxism, albeit a strange hybrid of Hegelian theory and Revisionist practice, the younger generation of oppositionists—the Lukács Kindergarten' as they were derisively dubbed at the time of their break with their former mentors, those who have come to constitute the core of today's samizdat network—have explicitly rejected the central theoretical tenets of the Lukács school of Marxism, and gradually come to question even the utility of the Marxist methodology itself.

It would be a mistake, however, to equate this movement away from Marxism with the desertion of Marxism by many of its former adherents in the West at the height of Stalinism and the cold war, who rapidly jumped from one simplistic dogmatism to another, from a blind faith in Marxism to an equally uncritical belief in the values of bourgeois democracy. Certainly the 'road away from Marxism' of the present Hungarian opposition is not one that points in the direction of either Western-style capitalism or liberal-democracy. On the

contrary, the break with the Marxism of the older generation of the Hungarian Left is a break which opens up a movement in a far more radical direction, both theoretical and practical.

The Lukács school of Marxist philosophers and sociologist pupils of Hegedüs almost all had one thing in common — they believed that the existing East European societies were essentially socialist in structure; that only political reforms were needed to turn them into more humane and pluralistic



György Lukács in his study in Budapest shortly before his death.

societies. The younger generation of today's samizdat writers, however, increasingly follow the views of Marc Rakovski, most clearly expressed in his book *Towards an East European Marxism*, that the existing East European societies are neither socialist nor capitalist, nor societies transitional between the two, but class societies of an entirely new type unenvisaged in traditional Marxist theory. As such they are societies that cannot be reformed into more liberal or truly socialist ones either from above or from within — from this new perspective the ideologies of reform, of liberalisation, of market socialism, even of socialist humanism, are all regarded as mere illusions.

Paradoxically then, it is the older generation of Hungarian Marxists who are really the liberals in the East European context, while it is the younger generation who are more openly rejecting the socialist nature of their societies and even questioning the utility of Marxism for critically analysing them, or for providing any relevant programme of social and political change, who represent the most radical tendencies in Hungary today, and who consequently merit a much greater recognition and support from the Western Left.

Moreover, the isolation which these new

radicals first envisaged for themselves, the pessimism which arose on the basis of their analysis of Soviet-type societies as new social formations *sui generis*, is possibly far less the case today than it appeared even two or three years ago. Their stepping down from the realms of grandiose theory to the more mundane world of criticising and exposing the everyday repressions of a corrupt and hypocritical society, opens up much greater possibilities for contact and interaction with far wider sections of the population. The samizdat network in Hungary today possibly numbers some 2-300 persons, a very small and untypical minority of young intellectuals, the majority from middle class or even more privileged backgrounds. But whereas the writings of Heller on Marxist aesthetics and philosophy, of Márkus on anthropology, or of Vajda on fascism, could interest only small layers of Budapest intellectuals, the activities of today's samizdat writers in exposing the imprisonment of workers and peasants for minor acts regarded as 'political agitation', the serious hardships facing immigrant urban workers from the countryside, or the repression of religious minorities like the Methodists, have a direct appeal to the everyday needs and concerns of far wider circles of the population.

Also relevant to any attempt to assess the significance of this newly-born Hungarian samizdat is the fact, still not generally recognised in the West, that the Hungarian 'economic miracle' whereby both living standards and the access to Western consumer goods have increased progressively ever since the late fifties, is finally coming to an end. Real living standards have, in fact, scarcely increased since 1975, while the present year will see a whole range of price rises that will cause real living standards to fall significantly for the first time since 1953. The result will certainly be frustration and dissatisfaction amongst the industrial factory workers, who will feel the pinch the hardest, though it is unlikely to parallel the levels of unrest in Poland in recent years. This is not to say that Hungary is today on the verge of a revolutionary crisis of the same order of that of 1956, though at the same time there are growing similarities with that period — a looming economic crisis with its accompanying rise in working class discontent; a younger generation which is ever more unwilling to compromise with what it sees as a boring and hypocritical social order, and an ever more outspoken hard core of oppositional intellectuals.

The ruling elite in Hungary is no longer going to be able to rule in quite the same way as it has been able to over the last 20 years; if only because the road ahead is going to be far more bumpy than anything it has had to face since 1958, and for this far firmer hands will be needed on the wheel. Equally in such a situation, with the main plank of the Kádár regime's legitimacy—its ability to deliver the goods by steadily increasing living standards—being undermined, the ruled masses too are not going to be

prepared to acquiesce in quite the same way that they have in the past. The younger generation in particular, for whom the economic reform era is as distant as the Stalinist terror, are not going to compromise in their everyday life, even for the sake of their careers, in the same way as they have seen their parents do. The potentialities for change, for the Hungarian opposition to break out of its recent isolation, are thus perhaps far greater than either they themselves or their observers in the West, including the present writer, would previously have supposed.

Thus Western Marxists should not be discouraged by the Hungarian Left's apparent break with Marxism, as represented in some of the most significant samizdat writings of the last two years (most important of which are the articles in the volume *Marx in the Fourth Decade*), but should rather see it as opening the way to a far more critical and radical movement in both theory and practice. Especially if this opposition does succeed in breaking out of its present isolation, in developing and growing into a wider movement and establishing roots in the working class, it

will inevitably call forth far harsher repression from the Hungarian state, and in such a situation will both need and deserve the active solidarity and committed support of socialists and Marxists in the West.

Footnote

An edited selection of the recent Hungarian samizdat has been prepared by György Bence and János Kis under the title *0.1%* for publication in Polish samizdat, and a French edition of this, introduced by Miklós Haraszti, is shortly to be published by Seuil.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Sabata Given New 1½ Year Sentence

By MARK JACKSON

Jaroslav Sabata, veteran Communist and leader of Charter 77, the Czechoslovak human rights movement, was sentenced to 18 months in jail by a Czech court on May 10th. Sabata was already serving a 9 month jail sentence for insulting a policeman.

The new prison term has in fact been imposed as a result of Sabata's activity in November 1971 when he participated in a leafleting campaign during the national elections at that time. He was arrested and jailed in the summer of 1972 for 6½ years. At the end of 1976 Sabata was released after serving 5 years of his 6½ year sentence. But by convicting him of insulting a policeman, the authorities acquired the legal right to make Sabata serve the remaining 1½ years of his earlier sentence.

On 22nd April, in a letter sent to the 1st May Committee in Belgium, a labour movement defence committee for political prisoners in Eastern Europe, Sabata's son Vaclav appealed to the labour movements of Western Europe to take up his father's defence and demand his release from prison.



Jaroslav Sabata pictured shortly before his arrest last October.

Vaclav Sabata writes: "My father did not adopt Marxism simply as a label: FOR HIM IT IS A REAL CONVICTION: You, socialists, communists and representatives of all tendencies on the left have the capacity and opportunity to take up the defence of your comrade in the face of a regime which calls itself socialist..."

At the beginning of April, the three new Charter spokespersons appealed to the 15th Congress of the Italian Communist Party to support the campaign for Sabata's release, and a separate appeal for support has gone to the French CP Congress (see Labour Movement section).

Meanwhile, as feared (see last issue of *Labour Focus*) Sabata's lawyer, Josef Danisz, has been expelled from the National Lawyers' Association for his vigorous defence of accused civil rights activists.

But the Charter continues to operate as vigorously as before and has just issued a new document on illegal travel restrictions imposed on Czechoslovak citizens.

Discussion within the Charter The Ethics of Opposition:

Introduction

[One of the distinguishing features of Charter 77 since its formation in January 1977 has been its capacity to combine within one united movement openly divergent ideologies and political currents. At various times open, public debates have broken out within the movement concerning its future perspectives and touching upon some of the most fundamental problems of the struggle for basic rights by oppositions in Eastern Europe. (See *Labour Focus* Vol. 2 Nos. 3 and 4 for texts of an earlier debate.) Here we publish 4 contributions to a discussion which began at the start of this year.

This debate appears to have been used as a pretext for a highly irresponsible piece of journalism in the *International Herald Tribune* of February. The article was constructed around a supposed interview with an anonymous person said to be a former *Chartist* who had broken with the movement. [Only one *Chartist* is known to have withdrawn his signature from the Charter and he did so in January 1977 a few days after he had signed.] This mysterious person suggests that the Charter is on its death-bed, strangled by 'extreme' elements within it. As confirmation, the *Tribune* journalist adds the comment that none of the new Charter spokespersons are internationally famous. The *Tribune* article was gleefully reprinted by the Czechoslovak Party daily *Rude Pravo*, presumably on the assumption that while readers might not believe its own views they would certainly share those of a paper like the

Herald Tribune whether the journalist was an innocent victim of a plot by the regime or was writing what he knows Western editors would like to hear in the post-Belgrade atmosphere is unclear. But in any event, those who talk to the *Chartists* themselves are not aware that the Charter is on its death-bed.

Nonetheless, the discussion which has been taking place within the Charter does tackle a major problem which the movement has been confronting for some time. While new people are evidently being continually drawn into activity, the regime succeeded quite early on in cutting the *Chartists* off from the mass of the Czechoslovak population. The debate raises this problem in the form of the relationship between the active *Chartist* minority and the "passive majority" of the population. And the discussion also tackles the problem of the relationship between the more and the less active elements within the Charter itself. Both these issues are, of course, bound up with the crucial problem of repression. But the debate also raises more fundamental philosophical and moral questions about the role of political activity and political activists in society, questions posed sharply in the repressive conditions of Eastern Europe, but equally relevant and too little discussed amongst socialists in the West.

For reasons of space we are not able to publish all the numerous contributions to the discussion and have selected 4 which we think most clearly represent the arguments on both sides. The

contributions fall into two pairs: first Ludvik Vaculik's Notes on Courage which started the discussion, and Vaclav Havel's reply; then Petr Pithart's rejoinder, followed by Jaroslav Suk's reply.

Ludvik Vaculik and Vaclav Havel are both famous Czech writers. Vaculik wrote the celebrated 2000 words Manifesto in 1968 and both men signed the 10 Point Manifesto of August 1969, a public rallying point for opposition to the so-called "normalisation" drive after the Soviet invasion. Vaclav Havel was one of the first spokespersons for Charter 77 and became a temporary spokesperson again last year following the arrest of Jaroslav Sabata. Petr Pithart was one of the most prominent of the younger generation of Party cadres active in the Prague Spring. He resigned from the Party voluntarily after the invasion and was in the initial list of Charter signatories, as was Jaroslav Suk. An organiser of

the November 1968 student strike that launched a wave of student and worker opposition to the Soviet invasion, Suk was a member of the Revolutionary Socialist Party until his arrest in 1969. After his release from prison in the early 1970s Suk signed, along with former political prisoners, a public declaration of solidarity with the Chilean working class in its struggle against the Pinochet dictatorship.

Among many other documents in the discussion not published here are a reply to Vaculik by Jiri Grusa, a reply to Pithart by Havel, and a discussion between Grusa and Lubos Dobrosky.

The original texts were supplied by Palach Press and translated for Labour Focus by Mark Jackson and Susannah Fry.]

Ludvik Vaculik — Notes on Courage

I sometimes wonder whether I am sufficiently mature for prison. I am scared of it. Everybody who achieves a decent age has to face up to this question. Should he behave as if the question didn't arise, or face up to it and weigh up the risks involved? It is not a good thing to be shut up for something that everyone will have forgotten about before the sentence is ended. This is what happened, in fact, to the people who were put in jail because of the leaflets about the 1972 elections. I very much took to heart the advice which Jiri Müller gave from prison, to the effect that people outside should be careful and not get themselves locked up.

It is one thing, however, for people to be imprisoned who have some idea of what they are doing, but quite something else when some young man, hardly into adulthood, ends up in jail through bad luck. I am appalled to think of the fate of someone like, for example, Karl Pecka, who wasted his youth away in the uranium mines. To rebuild such a life and give it an aim and a value after such destruction is something I would certainly describe as bravery, of a sort which he had certainly not had to show before his career as a prisoner began. Even a relatively mild person, if normal, will tend to begin with a flourish, even if they are only going in for a chess tournament and are not good. At the next chess tournament he or she will have the opportunity to start again in a different way, but this is not true of life.

It is not a good situation when someone provokes someone else to do something which they are then unable to retract without damage to pride or loss of prestige and authority, and it's just the same with people who flirt with prison. Reacting in this way only makes things worse. The person who suppresses the opinions of others is a mere censor; a censor who is forced to put people in prison because of their resistance to censorship has become a dictator; a dictator who orders people to be shot down in the street when they demonstrated in protest is a murderer. We had the possibility of communicating with the censor, so that his attitude could change, and finally his office was abolished altogether, and he himself transferred elsewhere. But the murderer is an enemy who cannot enter into dialogue with us because the end for him is with the gallows.

What are these remarks driving at?

Nobody can give a convincing answer to the question of whether Charter 77 has made things better or worse or what things would be like if it had not happened. In the answers that we get, moral impulses seem to be out of synchronisation with political opinions, and the strongest positions arise from character rather than intellectual orientation. Charter 77 has become something different from what it was when it started in 1977. We have all experienced various things. Now I hear people sighing that all this is not so nice. My reply is that anyone who doesn't agree with the activist orientation and the thoroughly committed people, should quietly get out of the way and not hinder the work that is going ahead. Everyone can find the means which best suit them. When some collective tightens up its inner structure and toughens the

rules under pressure, it cannot expect to find a very wide resonance. While on the one hand the free man is frightened by the demand for unity, on the other the sober majority can less and less see anything in more and more heroic deeds of the less and less numerous warriors as more than the personal hobby horse of these latter. Which I think is the case with religion.

Most people know their own limits and only do things whose consequences they are ready to take. Anyone who urges people when times are rough to do things beyond their capacity shouldn't be surprised if they get clobbered. Fear of hunger awakes in a healthy and sober person a feeling of sympathy for someone, who for their own and the common good goes on hunger strike. But the sober person is alarmed: is it worth going through with it to the death? and looks for a way to retreat. No psychologist or politician would expect heroism in public life from people except when the atmosphere is charged with some vivifying current from a powerful source. Heroism is not a normal part of daily life. It comes into existence under the impact of extraordinary events. In such situations it is effective, but the situations and the heroism do not last long. Mass heroism is an excellent thing so long as there are some sober heads around who are well informed and have an idea of what they are doing.

The strength of the normal person differs from this sort of heroism. The normal person sticks to his good habits and feelings; he has his irreducible standards and will stop them from being degraded. They don't like it when they see someone taking risks, but like to say that honest work in peace is best, even if it is not well-paid and that proper behaviour gets a proper answer; in fact the main attack is not launched against the heroes, but against what is considered to be normal conditions of work, behaviour and human relations.

I would even go so far as to say that heroes are only going to get restrained doses of repression. The regime is already sufficiently implicated and does not like it, since it does not want to create any heroes! The war must be carried on pseudonymously, without public faces. For this reason the crucial task for them is to find new ways of penetrating into the crowd, where they do not have to physically or spiritually destroy anyone: simply change their ways of behaving. This is a real neutron bomb made up of the unscarred vacant faces going to and from work.

Sometimes we discuss whether things are better or worse today than in the '50s. Evidence can be brought to support both views. A correct answer depends on how we intend to start from the present situation to arrive at a better future. The '50s were a time of revolutionary cruelty and disinterested enthusiasm. Whole social groups were savagely treated and suffered a lot. These days nobody talks about enthusiasm, and cruelty of the sort which resulted in excesses exists no more. It no longer matters which group one belongs to. Violence has become more human. The total surveillance over the population has been mitigated and now lacks its old convulsive hatred. Is the attack on the whole idea of normal life better or worse? I consider it as more dangerous than the situation in the fifties, but I think that we have an easier time of it.

Vaclav Havel — Reply to Vaculik

Dear Ludvik,

You say, should one behave as if prison didn't exist, or should one weigh up the risks involved in taking a particular action? The answer is obvious. Before someone steals something from the supermarket it is advisable for them to consider if their booty is worth the risk.

However, people do not only get put into prison for stealing from supermarkets. It also happens to people who write novels. It may be true that Vaculik did not go to prison for writing *Morcata* (1), but Grusa did for his *Dotaznik* (2). According to you it was dumb of Grusa to write *Dotaznik*, because it is stupid to go to jail. Vaculik, however, was smarter, since he only wrote *Morcata*. I am sure you can see that this is absurd.

I am sure you know perfectly well that Grusa might not have been put inside for *Dotaznik* and Vaculik might have been for *Morcata*. You know as well as anyone that the decision as to whether to imprison Grusa or Vaculik has nothing to do with who weighed up the risks most accurately, but is the result of cold and cynical calculation. At one time it might be better tactics to imprison Grusa and attempt in this way to intimidate Vaculik, at another it might be cleverer to imprison Vaculik and try in this way to intimidate Grusa.

Grusa's novel is good and so in the final analysis perhaps it was worth two months. But what if it wasn't a good novel? And what if the two months had been two years? Then it clearly would be necessary to pity him like those poor fools who at the beginning of the '70s imagined that if they reminded voters of their constitutional right not to vote, they would get away with it.

Have you forgotten that you, as well as me, are still charged with a crime from 1969? (3) And have you forgotten that instead of Sabata or Hübl it might have been us who ended up inside in the first half of the '70s? Do you think that the text that we signed then was worth it?

When you look at it like that, nothing is worth it. Not leaflets, nor visits to the ball (4) nor the writing of any novel. Was it worth Lederer's while to send writings by Czech authors to exile journals? Presumably he belongs to those clever heroes who are pleased to be on the receiving end of 'only mild doses of repression', since the maximum sentence under the paragraph under which he was charged is 10 years and he only got 3. Was it worth Simsa's and Sabata's while to resist humiliating treatment? Clearly it was not; it would have been better to have bent down, since then people would have understood and they would have avoided adding themselves to that shameful layer of heroes. And if only the Plastics had played with Helenka Vondrackova (5) they would have found themselves perfectly at one with decent people within the confines of the normal, and would not have finished up in such a ridiculous situation.

I don't know what you thought you were doing with your essay, but I do know the effect it makes, at least on me. Stripped of its array of Havlicek-peroutka-Vaculik stylistic flourishes the essential conclusion one draws from it is that the decent person does not behave heroically and stays out of jail. To be a hero is to be unsociable; it is something other than that good honest work which decent people like so much and which keeps society going; it is something which repels and appals people. In any case heroes are dangerous because they make things worse. It is true that the people up there behave okay when one treats them decently. Why provoke them with novels, music or sending books abroad? Such things force these nice people to beat up women and drag our comrades into dark woods and kick them in the stomach. We must respect their prestige and not go around provocatively waving a wad of International Agreements or even insolently making copies of various writings by Cerny, Vaculik, Havel, etc. for which crime, as you know, three boys of the same age as your sons are currently sitting in jail in Brno. (6) Such heroes these people, who only make things worse.



Vaclav Havel (right) discussing with Marta Kubisova and Polish oppositionist Jacek Kuron in summer 1978.

But to leave aside polemical exaggerations, we simply do not know what is going to happen to us when we do something. Only your prudent prototype of a decent person existing within the bounds of his/her norms of behaviour can be certain about this. We never decided that we would go to jail, in fact we never decided to become dissidents. We have been transformed into them, without quite knowing how, and sometimes we have ended up in prison without precisely knowing how. We simply went ahead and did certain things that we felt we ought to do and which it seemed to us decent to do, nothing more nor less.

People who are decent and do not go to jail are lucky. But why should those who have not been so fortunate be set apart from them? Is it not often a matter of complete chance who gets put inside and who doesn't? The people who you call heroes, and suggest are eccentric, did not go to prison out of a desire to become martyrs but because of the 'indecent' of those who go around imprisoning people for writing novels or playing tapes with unofficial songs on them!

Nobody wants to go to jail. If people followed your line of argument and acted as if they were contemplating whether to steal something from a supermarket then there would have been no displays of solidarity for those who are unjustly persecuted, there would not have been good novels and free songs, there would not even have been essays in our country for a long time. For is it certain that tomorrow they will not begin to imprison people for writing such essays?

Perhaps your intention was to say that the silent and unspectacular degradation of thousands of anonymous people is a worse thing than the occasional imprisonment of one dissident. I would agree. Only why do they put this dissident in jail? In most cases, ultimately, because the dissident was telling the truth about this very degradation of the thousands of anonymous people.

Some of us have passed the last two years, others 10 years, and still others their whole life in a tough and depressing confrontation with the secret police. Nobody enjoys it. None of us know how long we can keep it up. And everyone has the right when they have had enough, to retreat into the background, to stop doing certain things, to take a rest or even emigrate. This is entirely understandable, normal and human, and I would be the last to resent it.

But I do resent it when such people do not tell the truth, and you—don't get angry—on this occasion are not telling the truth.

Yours,
Vaclav Havel

25 January 1979

Petr Pithart — Some People's Shoulders

I can see and hear Jirka now, as if it were today. (7) He was sitting in the bucket-seat of a clapped-out old car among the fragrant fruit and laughing slightly triumphantly. He had just confided in me something which surprised me rather, which I was not prepared for, and certainly not from him; and now he was enjoying the confusion of the young assistant lecturer who had read a few books on politics but was more interested in thinking than action. Not like Jirka.

I was so surprised that I can still recall the whole scene today: the sun had just risen, but was already shining with an unpleasantly bright light. About half past four in the morning, not yet unbearably hot. We were on the Shomrat plantation, not far from Haifa. Behind us to the right rose the mountain range of the Old Testament Carmel. We were picking pears. It was the middle of August 1968 and we were fighting about democracy — what else! Jirka had just peremptorily cast doubts upon all the conceptions of government of the people I had put forward: apparently they did not sufficiently examine the scope of those who wanted to act more, and more consequentially, than others.

He had just spoken very suggestively about the 'active minority' and their rights. No constitutional provisions, no procedural guarantees protecting the unpunctual, the absent, the indolent, the simply unaware citizens, no arrangement to protect what is sometimes called the 'silent majority' should impede those who want always to be in the midst of things. Who want to have as much influence as possible and, as far as they can, to decide as much as possible. Why should these people be hindered by some egalitarian regulations for the benefit of those who are less involved, who are perhaps more indifferent, more sceptical, are short of time or are simply not interested? Everybody can be active; in a democratic system nothing is stopping anyone — except their lesser interest. Or their interest and preoccupation with something other than politics. Let those who are really concerned about it, who prove that they have a serious interest, have the deciding word. Thus spoke the strident leader of those years, Jiri Müller.

I guessed that there was a mistake in his insistent reasoning. At that time I could not yet formulate my objections more precisely and say that, on the scales of the general will one could not weigh down the side of the 'active minority' with the imponderable weight of that strong interest in public affairs and elect that the side of the majority who irresponsibly devoted themselves to work, thinking, drinking, women and fruit growing, who didn't go to meetings and ignored the elections, be judged as light just for that reason. For a lesser concern with politics is part of life, in fact it is a decent life, and good policies guarantee such a life.

I didn't manage to think of a forceful answer at the time, and even if I had been able to, it wouldn't have been much use. There is no fool-proof defence against the eager activists who resolve to shoulder our burdens. And such a defence is even more difficult under abnormal conditions, when there are fewer written, and—perhaps more importantly—unwritten regulations and norms which have a tradition and are considered indisputable, general, respected, honoured and therefore habitual.

We are ten years older; we should be that much wiser. In recent months I have frequently remembered our conversation in the Shomrat pear orchard. The concerns of 15 million of us have been shouldered by a minority which declared its rights as the most active group at a time which was, shall we say, not completely normal'. It was so abnormal that this minority had to take not only these rights but all power as well. There was probably no other way of doing it. We are still waiting tensely and hoping that eventually it will have no alternative but to share more of those heavier and heavier burdens with us.

Two years ago about 1,000 people decided to declare their right to a share of the responsibility for conditions in this country in the sphere of human rights. An active minority, if you like. The justification of this effort lay also in the endeavour to create a collective group without the prejudices and accompanying mistrust of parties. And there was also justification in the proven courage of the signatories and their faith in the liberating effect of a truthful word.

Today I think that what little hope there was for a constructive dialogue with the government (and that is what we wanted!) began to evaporate from our side when we stopped being able, and then even stopped wanting, to restrain the active minority amongst us, the minority which took our burdens upon its shoulders: when a handful of enthusiastic, self-sacrificing, hotheaded, zealous, impatient, in all—and frequently against their better judgment—radical people took charge of something

which should have been collective. We were afraid lest our free organisation became a sect of the last right man. We did not want to isolate ourselves in a ghetto of arrogant exclusiveness, which carries the risk that we might come to feel comfortable there, but we didn't manage to prevent all our plans and concerns from being taken over by a small group of self-appointed activists who are in a hurry. And this group also chooses the way in which, on behalf of these thousand people, it speaks to the outside world.

We refused to organise ourselves more cohesively because we did not want to develop the manners of the apparatus: a decreasing awareness of the importance of individuals, a measured discretion (what you tell whom and what you do not, when you say it and in what packaging), the atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust, mutual accusations, intrigues, as if it were already a question of power. We were afraid lest our thought become merely a negative impression of the thought and action of the SNB. (8) However, what we so much did not want is happening. Instead of politics, which we soberly left to those who are in charge of it today, there is ardent politicking.

Should we all have been more active, in order not to give those zealots such an opportunity? We should, yes we should have done just that. I can hear their voices, here sincerely reproachful, there hypocritically pleased.

But that is just not possible. Some people are always going to be more agile than others, some will be self-sacrificing and brave. But even that gives them no rights as far as the rest are concerned. One must take into account that people differ, and will differ, from each other. But we can take account of it in two ways. Some people interpret this circumstance—both banal and politically fatal—as a vocation, a call to a 'mission'. The rest can only live in the hope that, with their zeal and concern, they won't overdo it; that they won't overburden what was originally a joint effort with pressing and important demands which it cannot bear, under which—in our case—as merely a citizen's initiative, it has simply collapsed. We can only hope that they are concerned less about proving their own rightness vis-a-vis the government than about the collective interest of the nation; that they will restrain their private political and ideological twitchings.

The most active people desire a lot from us but are achieving less and less. Who today knows anything about their good work? In accordance with the law of inner development of every narrow group of initiates they are increasingly nourished by their own completely internal problems and disputes. One should not be surprised by this. The police are always at their heels and, most important, they have been deprived of their means of existence. But it is also not surprising that they demonstrate less and less understanding of the daily problems of everybody else: not just the original thousand people—devil take them—but all the citizens of this state. Recently they have infallibly chosen for resolution those problems which are the least easy to resolve and which relate only to a few people. What could we have expected? We could have hoped only for a miracle: that the active ones would have an understanding of tranquility, that the zealous ones would be restrained, that the self-sacrificing would be patient and the initiated, wise.

Obviously, we all wanted too much, and we did not take enough account of the abnormal conditions which have, after all, marked us as well: even we suffer from the same things that decent citizens suffer from in the wider context of the state. Some people's shoulders obviously always want to be weighed down with more of other people's worries than they can carry. In abnormal conditions they have a better opportunity for this.

We should correct abnormal conditions, there is no question of that. But where and how? We should try to do it first of all where we will not have to give any opportunities to the active minority, where our own responsibility will be enough; where we can make it absolutely concrete, personal and untransferable, undelegatable. I cannot and do not want to advise anybody where 'where' is. I think that, at least for the moment, it is closer to our everyday problems than to the sacred freedoms, closer to the problems of the workplace than to the problems of parliament and the higher powers in general, closer to our duties than our rights.

These rights are in us very self-evident. In contrast with the paper world of constitutions and international pacts, in our existential definition of the world it ought to hold good that there exists something more basic, some kind of inner claim on these rights and freedoms, not self-evident but merely logically unambiguous. This must be a claim which, for the individual and for the whole society, can derive only from a really conscious responsibility, and accordingly from the general quality of human relationships. Power relationships are only a part of our world and so we cannot hold them responsible for everything we do not like.

After that, I worked once more in Shomrat with Jirka. We were woken up before 2am, and in the long, gloomy dawn we loaded cockerels onto a lorry. With a hook I picked them out of the terrified flock by the talons, took them in my hand two at a time and gave them to Jirka on the lorry, where he stuffed them into boxes. The cockerels were going wild and pecked us whenever they could. Their plaintive chorus ushered in the morning of that end-of-August day, 1968. We were silent — there was nothing else we could be. That strange work, and that time, produced in us

so many different feelings that we never returned to the problems of the 'active minority'.

The cockerels have long since fulfilled their mission on the neighbouring farms, and gentlemen have eaten them. Jirka has been released from prison.

We should finish that discussion.

Petr Pithart

31 December 1978

Jaroslav Suk — Reply to Pithart

I see and hear Martin as if it were only yesterday: he is sitting with me on a small platform on a high silo which rises above the shomrat kibbutz. The sun is shining and we are playing chess. Peace and quiet and a cloudless sky.

There is nothing to worry about, everything is forgotten, we have left the world to its cares. We have our splendid observation point, our game and our thoughts.

Suddenly in the distance on the horizon shots ring out and a few moments later comes the roar of supersonic fighters. Israel was not an idyllic place either in 1968. The sight and whistling sounds of the Phantom jets reminded us, that it is not possible to escape from cares.

What I, and perhaps also Martin Vaculik, felt at that moment was a premonition of the hard days which awaited us. Days when we would have to find our own answers and act upon them. Many more everyday events, lacking the exotic setting, brought home to us the fact that, both as individuals and parts of a definite society, we would have to act.

I do not believe in the natural 'silent majority'. Everybody adds up to more than their beer, work, thoughts, sex life, fruit growing, etc. Above all these, connecting everything together, there is something which defines under what conditions, and whether, these interests can exist at all. If you are keen on fruit trees then you are clearly inclined to worry if someone threatens to send a bulldozer to flatten the garden (this is something which has agitated me in recent years). If I like going to pubs, then clearly I will be worried that pubs will be abolished, or that they will be required to close earlier, or that my favourite pub will be closed. I want to be able to do work which interests me; I want to be able to communicate my thought to others without the risk of encountering a counter-argument backed up by the force of law. I like talking to women about solitude — there are, in fact, people who like talking about such things to others. The 'silent majority' is a creation of people who want to rule over it. It is not by chance that in recent times it has been invoked by the Portuguese fascists.

When in the throes of my 'private political and ideological twitchings' I have this desire to bring this 'silent majority' into active life. That is why I joined Charter 77, an active minority which seemed to me to have similar aims.

In spite of the fact that our mission has a certain grandeur, it is necessary to keep in mind at all times that we are a minority and that we must continually concern ourselves with the lived experiences of the masses (forgive me that word). It is necessary to take note of what unsatisfied interests the silent majority has, what its worries are and what solutions it would be attracted by. I think that the active minority only justifies its existence insofar as it strives to extend itself and finally dissolve itself in the active masses which it sets into motion in accordance with the masses' rhythm. For this reason I am convinced that this minority does not need the traditional centralised and formal structure.

The author of the thesis about the 'active minority' was Mirek Tyl; Jirka Müller, it seems, repeated his impressions of this discussion in Shomrat. At the Agricultural College, where Tyl was active, rather than a self-management body, there arose at one time an 'Organisation of Student Activists' (SOS). I myself have learned a lot about active minorities from the student movement.

In fact, when anything happened, people always divided into two groups. In one corner there gathered those whom Petr has so accurately described as 'enthusiastic, self-sacrificing, risk-taking, zealous, impatient, in sum ... radical'. At the other end, as is logical, people of a conservative, moderate, relaxed, patient, cautious and pessimistic cast of mind congregated; people who cared about the safety of their own hides. Some of these later turned out in reality to be fighters on the other side of the barricades (Trencansky,

Ondrouch, Pospichil). The ideas which held this second group together (although the borders of the groups were rather indefinite) were defeatism and a complete lack of understanding of the situation. They had illusions about the possibility of tacit collaboration with the government, which was attempting to manoeuvre in the space provided by 'reality'. They had the idea that it was a good government which would be undermined if people were too militant.

The ethical imperative which I have formulated for the active minority can, in fact, prevent the extremes at both ends from taking form. The difference is that it is possible to demarcate oneself from the radicals on a non-ethical basis whereas, when it comes to the moderates one is dancing on the head of the ethical pin. The radicals alienate the majority if they let themselves get the famous two steps ahead of it, so that their zealotry makes them blind and they play the role of provocateurs. At such moments the moderates play the role of the ethical ones, if they stop these wild characters from taking their suicidal steps.

The November student strike of 1968 was without doubt one of the most important political events of that year. It would not have happened if someone had not sent a telegram from the VSZ to Olomouc and back when the atmosphere was explosive, saying that the strike had already started in certain faculties. The strike would not have gone on for another 24 hours, in protest against the government's appeal for it to be brought to an end, if someone at the meeting of the Prague student action committee had not taken out the fuses, thus plunging the proceedings into darkness so that the strike could not be called off with the proper measure of agreement and formal announcement. Then someone called out 'we want light' and the situation suddenly became more radical.

Perhaps one might wonder about the ethics of such actions; myself I believe that they fell within the framework of an ethical imperative.

I see two sides also in the activity of the minority grouped in Charter 77. Let us look at the milieu in which these two forms of activity take place

Charter 77 is a movement for civil and human rights. It groups together representatives of different political currents, along with many people who do not identify with any political tendency. If what we wanted to do was to create a 'society without political prejudices', this need not mean that we have to discard our political ideas. Through Charter 77 we have experienced the miracle of unity in diversity, a common interest in human rights and a real possibility to struggle for social changes, taking into account *everyone* who has something to say about these changes.

Petr Pithart does not make himself clear; the way his text is written does not make for discussion. It is unclear what he means by the 'common national interest' — perhaps this refers to our current barracks room equality? What are those problems 'which are the most difficult to resolve, and which only concern a few people'?

Perhaps it refers to those who have unjustly been imprisoned (Document no. 16 and the activity of VONS). Does it refer to nuclear power and the proposed foundation of an ecological commission? Does it refer to document no. 23 which is about the Gypsies? Perhaps it refers to the Charter statements in solidarity with Rudolf Bahro and the Soviet activists. We aren't told. I would point out that all these activities are fully in accord with the basis of the movement for human rights, with Charter 77. If anybody wants to make Charter 77 into a political association, pretending to speak for the whole nation (as was the case, for example, with the statement on the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic) and expressing a political standpoint in the name of the whole Charter then they are behaving in an authoritarian way towards a definite section of the Charter and in definite cases also towards a part of the nation. The task of the human rights movement is to draw attention to violations of human rights, in particular to the worst violations, in every sphere. We should least of all concern ourselves with our own problems, but should concentrate on problems which affect everyone. This is what Pithart has himself recommended and which is spelt out in document no. 21.

The doubts which I have about Charter 77's activity are mainly to do with the moderate/radical division, although my reservations are not as strong as those of Pithart. Up until now I have not had any basic disagreements with the activity of Charter 77, and I continue to feel a spiritual comradeship with every one of its signatories. I do not, however, support that hyperactivism which is the mark of the professional politician. Politics affects everybody and everybody should have the opportunity to have a say in social affairs. To bring this about is a problem which is as hard to solve for society as a whole as it is within Charter 77; I hope that we can find the solution. I am not talking now about power, but about something rather analogous — the manipulation of some people by others. The hyperactivists, for example, meet together and—as far as I know—vote for one of the spokespeople, although their meetings are quite unrepresentative. I have no great reason to be disturbed by the doings of the hyperactivists but there is a principle involved: I do not like to have to put my confidence in someone who is going to decide things in my name. In the case of the Charter spokespersons I have had to do this, but I would feel happier if they themselves contributed to resolving the situation.

In the absence of some sort of substitute for democratic relations, mutual confidence is not enough. We need to be able to put our views forward and discuss things. What is happening, however, is that such things as a council, chance agreements at chance meetings, information confined to a circle of initiators, disinformation, slanders, blows below the belt and provocations

are becoming institutions. In the recent past I have heard some signatories saying really unpleasant things about others, and this I do not like. It is not a healthy situation, but everybody cannot be so active as to take part in everything. Elaborate organisational structures (such as the SVS) do not solve this problem.(9)

However, I would propose that there should at least be regular meetings of advisers to the Charter (perhaps 15 people) which would be rotated, and frequent meetings of the spokespeople with 'marginal' signatories. I would like the hyperactivists to take note of the thesis on the ethics of the activity of the active minority and warn them that if they get too far removed from normal life they will be unable to implement it. Since at the beginning of this article I eulogised politics (defined as public initiatory activity), I would now like to point out that politics is only a derivative activity. It is a struggle, discussion, argument and agreement about the improvement of human life (determined by definite social relations). Someone who sees the only sense of life in politics leads an impoverished life, and is potentially a 'professional politician' even if they feel themselves to be revolutionaries. Life is not politics, the latter only makes changes in the former. Life consists much more in thinking, in work or in drinking beer.

Jaroslav Suk
Prague

12 February 1979

Footnotes.

1. *Morcata* (The Guinea Pigs) has never been published in Czechoslovakia. Translated into English 1973.
2. Jiri Grusa, another Czech writer who cannot have his work published at home. 'Dotaznik' means The Questionnaire.
3. Vaculik was sent to prison in 1969 for writing the Ten Point Manifesto.
4. Havel and some other members of the Charter were beaten up and arrested on their way to the Railwaymen's Ball in spring 1978.
5. Helena Vondrackova, a popular Czech singer, intimate with many high-up Party officials.

6. Petr Cibulka, Libor Chloupek and Petr Pospichal from Brno were imprisoned in May 1978 for copying texts by forbidden Czech writers (including Havel) and possessing tapes of underground music.
7. 'Jirka' is Jiri Müller.
8. SNB - state police.
9. SVS - Union of University Students.

Oppression of the Romanies, Part 2

[We publish here the second part of the Charter 77 document on the oppression suffered by Czechoslovakia's substantial Romany minority which makes up some 2% of the country's population. The first part of the document was published in our last issue. The text was supplied by Palach Press and translated for Labour Focus by Mark Jackson.]

ROMANIES AND EDUCATION

Until now the school system has not taken the large Romany minority into consideration at all. Nearly 30% of all Romanies are illiterate, and even among the 15 to 29 age group the illiteracy rate is 17%. 10% of male Romanies over thirty have not been to school; 50% have only completed 5 grades, with only 15% having finished the basic 9 years of schooling. Only 0.5% have secondary school education, and the number of Romanies with higher education is about 50 for the whole of Czechoslovakia.

A common answer to the lack of success of Romany pupils in Czech and Slovak schools is to transfer them to special schools for mentally handicapped children. In the school year of 1970-71 in the Czech lands, 20% of Romany children were in such schools as against 3% of the majority population. According to detailed psychological investigations, the majority of these Romany children did not belong in such schools. The indiscriminate transfer of Romany children to these special schools reinforces the exclusion of Romanies from skilled and professional work. Children who have been through special schools, like those who have not finished primary education, are not able to get apprenticeships in the majority of trades. They are excluded from art schools for the same reason, despite the exceptional musical talents which are often to be found among the Romanies; both musical and dance companies are interested in them but are unable to employ them.

The chief reason for the lack of success of Romany

school-children is the fact that there are no Romany schools which would both be connected to and develop Romany culture. The powers-that-be do everything to destroy it, while the media systematically foster the idea that no such culture exists. Romany children are forced to attend Czech and Slovak schools where they do not understand the language of instruction and where everything, from the pictures in the spelling primers to the curriculum as a whole, impresses on them the idea that they are foreigners from an inferior race without language, history or character.

In recent years, in places with the largest Romany population, special classes have been introduced for Romany children. In the higher grades, children who have been in these special classes are transferred to the normal school classes, as a rule doing better than Romany pupils who have not attended special classes. However, even in these special classes, language problems have not been solved; while the whole burden of the experiment, which is carried out with quite minimal financial backing is borne by the teachers. They have no special textbooks or other aids, receive no syllabuses, and cannot even get the most elementary language books which would help them to tackle the language problems of Romany children. Many of these teachers perform their work with a great deal of self-sacrifice, but without the slightest aid or support from the Ministry of Education.

ROMANY EMPLOYMENT

The job structure of the Romany minority is now much more one-sided than in the days when the Romanies lived on the margins of society, performing traditional vocations that demanded higher qualifications than they need for their present jobs. Some of these traditional 'gypsy' professions—for example, basket-making or fancy metal-work—continue to exist, but are no longer accessible to the Romanies. Their musical traditions remain vigorous and many talents are developed to a very high

level through training received within the family and clan communities. Very few, however, find their way through the bureaucratic labyrinth to the point where they are able to give public performances.

In the past, although they were recognised as good craftworkers and musicians, the Romanies lived in extreme poverty. Today's miners and relief workers earn much more than their forebearers, but this only serves as a striking example of how it is possible for the material level to rise without the social position improving. In the current economic situation, the powers-that-be need the Romany minority to remain in the position in which it is now; uneducated, without clear prospects, and ready to move from one end of the Republic to the other in search of unskilled work without knowing where they are going to live. The existing shortage of unskilled labour is not, however, a normal or inevitable consequence of economic development.

The fact that labour is cheaper than the technical innovations which could replace it, is a result both of technical backwardness and of a deeper socio-economic problem which makes it easier to employ more labour than introduce technical improvements. This state of affairs cannot last forever, and whatever the dysfunctions and incapacities of the system, it must, as in the previous crisis, come to some kind of settling of accounts with world development. The demand for unskilled labour will then fall, threatening the Romanies with massive unemployment which will expose this ruthlessly urbanised minority to extreme pressures, and fuse their social ostracism and material oppression with a new ethnic consciousness, all the stronger the more cruelly it is today suppressed.

JUDICIAL TREATMENT

A process of social disintegration is taking place among the Romany minority of a kind which has no analogy in their history. One expression of this is the rise in the number of Romanies who receive prison sentences. The chief reasons are not the social conditions in which they live nor urbanisation and the consequent loosening of family bonds, although all these play a part. The chief reason is the Romanies' unequal position vis-à-vis the law and society as a whole.

In many cases, the so-called 'specificity of Romany criminality' is the direct consequence of unemployment among the younger generation of Romanies who have not finished primary education. There are not sufficient job opportunities for 15 or 16-year-old Romanies, and the labour exchange can often only find them the worst unskilled jobs in conditions which are often totally unsuitable if not actively conducive to crime. Girls are often kept at home by their families to look after their brothers and sisters, although they can be charged with parasitism for this. In other cases the so-called 'specificity of gypsy criminality' is a result of the rapid social and biological maturation of the Romany population. Relationships which frequently develop into lasting cohabitation and stable families are often treated as moral crimes, without any account being taken of the different cultural and social codes which give rise to such forms of behaviour.

Unwritten laws, which carry more weight with the courts than written ones, demand that Romanies should get higher sentences than would be given to members of the majority population in similar cases. Furthermore, their lack of knowledge of Czech and Slovak and of their basic civil rights is systematically used against them. A Romany is more likely to receive a prison sentence for his or her crime than a member of the majority population, and they are discriminated against even in the course of their sentence.

The most depressing thing, however, is the court decisions by which Romany children are placed in children's homes against the will of their parents. Romanies, who tend to stick to their children, attempt to prevent them from being taken away. A case is known in which the VB used a dog to drag out a Romany child hidden under a bed, before the eyes of his parents. When

Romany children are placed in homes against the will of their parents, the main aim is usually to ensure that they are exclusively exposed to the influence of the majority population, rather than that of their own ethnic group.

STERILISATION

The question of sterilisation is an especially serious one; sometimes it is admissible and even necessary from a medical point of view, although it always raises problems of a moral kind. The agreement of Romany women to sterilisation is secured by means whose objectivity is not certain. In some regions, sterilisation takes place as a planned administrative policy, and at internal meetings the success of the workers is assessed according to the number of Romany women whom they have persuaded to be sterilised. There can be no question of objectivity in such circumstances. Often financial rewards are cynically offered in order to get the women's consent. Sterilisation is a means by which the majority population oppresses a minority, with the aim of preventing the demographic growth of that minority group.

ROMANY ORGANISATION

Towards the end of the '60s, the subjective ethnic consciousness of the Romanies found expression in the Union of Romanies/Gypsies. The first aim of this organisation was to turn its members from passive objects of social concern into a voluntary association of socially conscious citizens possessing equal legal rights — an association which would be able to collaborate both in developing a policy to change an anomalous situation and in implementing that policy. For the first time in their history, the Romanies of Czechoslovakia began to act in a way which approached the real size and depth of the problem. It is significant that this organisation was unacceptable to the 'normalised' regime. Although, during the whole period of its existence, the Union of Romanies/Gypsies sought collaboration and behaved in an entirely loyal way, it was forced to cease activity in April 1973. When the disbandment of this organisation was being prepared, its leaders were subjected to considerable pressure and open threats, under which they showed consistency and courage unparalleled in the history of union activities in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s. As a result, many Romanies with higher education who took part in the activities of the Union are now working at jobs below their qualifications.

FORCED ASSIMILATION

The current regime envisages that the problems of the Romany minority will finally be solved through its destruction and dissolution into the majority population. The minority problem is to be abolished through abolishing the minority. The theoretical justification for this aim is provided by the doctrine according to which the Romanies are 'a dying ethnic group' which is 'doomed to disappear'. In order to hasten this disappearance, the regime uses all possible means to deprive the Romanies of their own independent culture and social life, and of their language and communal identity. It endeavours to break their family and clan ties and their social structure as a whole. However, the attempt to forcibly dissolve the minority into the majority only widens the gap between the Romanies and the rest of the population. What is supposed to be integration, in reality only causes an ever more profound disintegration.

The real policy of the regime is one of forced assimilation. The Romanies defend themselves against this, since it involves destruction of their social structure and violent dissolution of the bases of their social being. One result of the Romanies' defensive reaction has been the overcoming of traditional divisions between the ethnic groups, the weakening of family rivalries, and the creation of an entirely new sense of mutual interdependence. At the very same time that the Romany language has been declining in communication among the younger generation in Bohemia and Moravia, an opposite process has taken place leading to the growth of a new Romany literature, created by people who did not speak Romany in their childhood. Just as with some of the

figures associated with the Czech national revival, many of these authors only learned Romany as adults. The linguistic vacuum they have experienced as a result of the suppression of Romany culture has stimulated them to create literary works in the Romany language — and in this way to set in motion a process which may lead to the creation of a new literary language for the Romanies. These authors are condemned to isolation by the prevailing cultural policy, although they are the living proof of the growth of a new Romany intelligentsia which could help to stop the process of social disintegration.

The regime's policy is inadequate in every respect, because it begins by rejecting out of hand the only natural road to the social integration of the Romanies: their integration as a group.

The policy of attempting to destroy this ethnic group must inevitably lead to further increases in repression: if its continued failure is not subjected to thorough review, Czechoslovak institutions will very soon find themselves guilty of breaking Article 259 of the penal code relating to genocide, among whose provisions are the following:

1. Whoever seeks to destroy fully or partially any national, ethnic, racial or religious group;

b. takes measures in order to prevent reproduction among this group;

c. or forcibly transfers children from one of these groups to another will be subject to punishment of between 12 and 15 years in prison or to the death sentence.

2. Anyone who takes part in the act outlined in Paragraph 1 will be similarly punished.'

If the practice of forcibly taking Romany children from their parents and sterilising Romany women continues as hitherto, then no attempt at concealment or judicial illegality will prevent the bringing of charges on the basis of firm evidence.

The influx of Romany families into the industrial centres is bringing about the growth of segregationist and racist tendencies among a majority population kept completely uninformed about the Romanies and their problems. Despite the fact that the

majority population is completely excluded from exercising control over the affairs of state, it morally bears a share of responsibility for the oppression to which Romanies are subjected. People who carry out illegal instructions affecting the Romanies at all levels and in all spheres of activity are themselves both legally and materially responsible.

The only people who have the right to decide whether a minority group will dissolve into the majority, remain an ethnic minority or develop into a national minority, are the members of that minority itself. Whether or not this decision-making process will be peaceful and smooth, and what influence will be exercised by the weight of accumulated injustices, depends on the extent to which the majority population is prepared to recognise the collective rights of the minority. Without such recognition the Romanies cannot use even those rights which the legal code gives them, always supposing that the regime itself will begin to stick to the code. Lacking collective rights, the Romanies are unable to develop any cultural activity that would help them to find their own identity, without which no genuine social integration is possible.

In the spirit of the principles of Charter 77, we propose that all hitherto concealed information about the Romanies should be published, so that illegal attacks on the Romanies and their cultural and organisational activity may be investigated and discussed in accordance with the relevant legal articles, and so that the relevant ministry, in conjunction with the CSAV (Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences) and assisted by other institutions, should carry out and publish a serious analysis of the situation of the Romanies. The purpose of this would be to enable a free public discussion to take place about a solution to the problem, and in particular to draft legal adjustments to the position of the Romanies. Without bringing out the fundamentals of the problem, without basic legal changes, and without genuine participation of the Romanies themselves in decision-making, attempts to solve the question of the Romany minority are illusory. This question does not concern only the minority but involves the conscience of the whole of our society.

International Appeal for Bahro

We go to press just before the Rudolf Bahro Defence Committee is holding a public meeting in Conway Hall, London on 18 May to discuss the imprisoned East German Marxist's book *The Alternative*. Speakers at the meeting will include Istvan Meszaros, the Hungarian Marxist philosopher, Monty Johnstone of the Communist Party, Dave Fernbach, Bahro's English translator, Chris Harman of the SWP and Tariq Ali of the IMG. The following day, activists in the Bahro campaign will be discussing plans for further activities, including a proposal from the Rudolf Bahro Defence Committee to hold a large public meeting in London on 29 June, the first anniversary of Bahro's secret trial at which he was sentenced for 8 years. On 30 June a picket of the

GDR Embassy is planned.

At the same time, the international campaign in defence of Bahro has acquired a new focus with the launching of an international appeal by the Berlin Bahro Defence Committee. This international appeal, which is being circulated in Britain by the Rudolf Bahro Defence Committee, calls for a general amnesty for political prisoners in the GDR as well as demanding the immediate release of Bahro.

The Berlin committee is planning to collect some thousands of signatures for this appeal throughout Western Europe in preparation for the 30th anniversary of the founding of the GDR

this October. At that time it is hoped that the campaign will culminate in an international demonstration in West Berlin.

A Bahro Defence Committee has now been established in Spain, and the French Bahro Committee was holding a large central Paris meeting on the 12 May.

Copies of the international appeal along with other news of the campaign are included in the fourth number of the GDR Bulletin published by the British Rudolf Bahro Defence Committee. Also available from the Committee are Bahro posters and a list of people available to speak to Labour Movement meetings on the Bahro affair. Write to: The Rudolf Bahro Defence Committee, 24a, Bellevue Road, Ryde, Isle of Wight.

E E S C Notes

*The EESC has written to the National Union of Students, the National Union of School Students, the Labour Party Young Socialists, the Young Communist League and other socialist youth organisations asking them to take up the case of the arrested members of the Leningrad Left Opposition group and demand their release from prisons and psychiatric detention.

*The EESC has prepared a dossier on the repression against the members of the unofficial trade union association in Romania and is sending it to labour movement organisations, appealing to

them to raise the case with the Romanian authorities in the strongest terms.

*20 members of the Islington Branch of the National Association for Mental Health have taken up the case of Alexander Podrabinek, author of *Punitive Medicine* and founder of the 'Unofficial Working Commission to Investigate the Use of Psychiatry for Political Purposes' which is based in Moscow. Podrabinek was sentenced to 5 years' internal exile for his activities against psychiatric abuse and the Islington group has drawn up a petition demanding his release.

*In its campaign in defence of the Soviet trade union activist Vladimir Klebanov, the EESC has prepared a special briefing for members of the National Union of Miners, urging the Union to continue to press for Klebanov's release from detention. The NUM Executive has effectively dropped the case as a result of discussions with the head of the official Soviet Miners' Union who had declared Klebanov to be insane and detained for his own good.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON THESE CAMPAIGNS WRITE TO: EESC, 10 Park Drive, London N.W.11.

'Hands off Dzhemilev' say Black Prisoners

The following letter was written after news had reached the USA of renewed repressive measures against the Tatar leader in the USSR, Mustafa Dzhemilev. Dzhemilev has already served 4 prison sentences for his role in the Tatars' struggle to return to their homeland in the Crimea — they were forcibly deported to Central Asia by Stalin in 1944. In February 1979 Dzhemilev was again arrested and, according to the American socialist weekly, *The Militant*, a Soviet court sentenced Dzhemilev to 4 years' internal exile on 6 March for 'violating probation'.

The three black prisoners who have written the letter are currently serving long sentences in the Southern states of the United States. James Grant and T.J. Reddy are two of the "Charlotte 3" currently serving sentences for arson — a charge considered to be a frame-up on the American Left. Grant is serving 25 years and Reddy 20 years. Gary Tyler is a Black youth serving a life sentence in Louisiana on a charge of murder, also a frame-up according to *The Militant*.

This remarkable letter is given added significance when it is remembered that the Soviet government has repeatedly expressed its concern about the numerous cases of savage political repression of Black militants in the USA.

The letter was written on 19 February, before Dzhemilev's trial. After his arrest, a number of prominent American radicals, including Kate Millet, Leon Harris, Daniel Berrigan, Paul Seigel and George Novack sent a letter of protest to the Soviet Representative at the United Nations.

We are alarmed by reports that Crimean Tatar leader in the USSR, Mustafa Dzhemilev, continues to suffer intense police harassment since his release from prison camp in December 1977. Even though he finished serving his term, the fourth he has served for championing the fight of Crimean Tatars for the right to live in their homeland in Crimea — he is denied the right to live where he wants, in Crimea; he is denied even the right to travel to visit his aged parents and his daughter; he is kept under constant police surveillance; and he has been repeatedly detained by police and interrogated.

Because he has refused to accept these illegal police restrictions on him, which amount to a term of parole, Mustafa is now threatened with a new arrest, and a new term of imprisonment, three years for "passport violations".

Now we have learned that these restrictions and these harassments have made life so intolerable for Mustafa that he has renounced his Soviet citizenship and applied to leave the USSR.

What a blot on the Soviet government that it has made Mustafa's life so unbearable that he saw no choice but to abandon his life's hope and to leave his family and his people for whose struggle he has suffered so much! And all because the rulers will not let him and the Crimean Tatars live in Crimea!

As prisoners ourselves who suffer from the national oppression of Black people in the United States and who, like Mustafa, are the victims of frame-up trials, we deplore the continuing persecution of Mustafa Dzhemilev, this great leader of an oppressed nationality in the USSR.

We call upon all who support democratic rights and the rights of oppressed nationalities the world over to join us in our demand on the Soviet rulers: Hands Off Mustafa Dzhemilev!

JAMES GRANT, Camp Green Prison, Charlotte North Carolina
T.J. REDDY, Camp Green Prison, Charlotte North Carolina
GARY TYLER, Angola State Prison, Angola, Louisiana

Call for Review of Executions

The Paris-based Committee to Safeguard the Rights of the Armenian People has launched an appeal for an international campaign to demand that the Soviet authorities review the three death sentences carried out in Moscow last March (See the last issue of *Labour Focus* for a report on the case).

The Committee's appeal lists the following disturbing aspects of the trial and execution: the secrecy of the trial, the speech with which the executions were carried out, the refusal to allow the lawyers chosen by the families of the accused to attend the trial, the failure to make public the legal article under which the accused were charged and most importantly, the failure of the court to hear the evidence of the family and friends of one of the accused, Zatikian, that he was not in Moscow on 8 January 1977 when the explosion in the Moscow Metro took place.

Sabata Campaign

The *Guardian* of 11 May describes how a group of dissidents in the French Communist Party presented to its leadership an appeal for the support for Jaroslav Sabata. The appeal came from Prague where the three French dissidents went to collect it. They themselves had been arrested in Czechoslovakia and later deported; they were Daniel Onaki, Didier Lapostre, and Violette Harvin.

The appeal was signed by the Charter 77 spokespersons: Vaclav Benda, Jiri Dienstbier, Zdena Tominova and symbolically by Sabata himself. It was presented to the Communist Party leadership on the eve of the Party's 23rd Congress, but it remains unanswered.

Previously, a delegation organised by the left-wing French International Committee Against Repression went to the Czechoslovak Embassy on 21 March to demand the release of jailed Chartist spokesperson Jaroslav Sabata. Although the Embassy refused to admit them, some of the delegation were able to get into the Embassy where they had a discussion lasting half an hour with an official.

The Committee's appeal also draws attention to the way in which the KGB used the case to attack the entire movement for civil liberties in the USSR. Vladimir Klebanov, the trade union activist, was arrested on a charge of carrying out the bombing at one point, and the Soviet press published material specifically accusing Sakharov of being an accomplice of the bombing.

The Committee's appeal has already been signed by Leonid Plyushch, Victor Fainberg and D. Mayer, President of the International Human Rights Federation. Labour movement support is sought in various West European countries and an international meeting on the case is being organised to take place in Paris in June. Copies of the appeal can be obtained from S. Becard, 54 Rue des Abbesses, 75018 Paris.

Olympics 1980

A group of West German socialist intellectuals, among them Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Rudi Dutschke and Jakob Moneta, have issued an appeal for action by socialists in defence of human rights in Eastern Europe around the 1980 Moscow Olympics. Rather than calling for a boycott of the Games, they propose that the Games be transformed into 'an international tribune for the defence of human rights, West and East, North and South', and a platform for protest 'by people who are involved in fighting against violations of human rights both in the West and the East'.

The Appeal, first published in the newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau*, lists a series of elementary democratic demands (freedom of assembly and the press etc.) to be raised at these protests. It also calls for the right of labour movement and human rights observers to be present at trials in Eastern Europe and for the German Trade Unions to follow the example of the Italian Trade Unions and take up these questions.

REVIEW

New Light on Hungary 1956

[*Despite the appearance of Bill Lomax's definitive account of the Hungarian Revolution, Hungary 1956, one crucial aspect of the events has remained shrouded in secrecy. A new book recently published in France, S. Kopacsi Au Nom de la Classe Ouvrière, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1979, unravels it.*]

Twenty-one years ago, on 17 June 1958, official sources in Moscow and Budapest announced the execution of Imre Nagy, prime minister of Hungary during the 1956 revolution, together with General Pal Maleter, minister of defence of Nagy's government, as well as Nagy's close friend and lifelong communist, Jozsef Szilagyi, and the communist journalist, Miklos Gimes. Geza Losonczy, minister of state in

Nagy's government, was said to have died in prison, while Sandor Kopacsi, head of the Budapest police in 1956, was condemned to life imprisonment, and long prison sentences were received by Nagy's colleagues Ferenc Donath, Ferenc Janosi, the former Hungarian President Zoltan Tildy and the journalist Miklos Vasarhelyi.

The judgements has been delivered after a secret trial in the central prison of Budapest, the only records of which had until very recently been the fifth White Book published by the Hungarian Government under the title *The Counter-Revolutionary Conspiracy of Imre Nagy and his Accomplices*. In the White Book, and in other public statements, the Hungarian authorities have consistently

sought not only to allege that Nagy and his comrades had conspired to overthrow socialism in Hungary and had instigated a 'counter-revolution', but also to discredit their political and moral integrity, suggesting that Nagy called upon the Western powers to intervene in Hungary, and that he and his colleagues deceived and betrayed each other both during the revolution and during the trial.

Recently, however, some of Nagy's co-defendants, released from prison in the 1960s, have come to relate the true facts about the events. Nagy's close friend and colleague Ferenc Donath, lifelong communist, active militant in the illegal communist party during the war, imprisoned under the Stalinist regime of Matyas Rakosi, prominent figure in the communist opposition movement to Rakosi in the early fifties, sentenced to twelve years' imprisonment for his part in the 1956 revolution, was released in 1960, since when he has continued to stand for a more humane and democratic communist society. In January 1977 his signature appeared on a letter of support for the Charter 77 activists in Prague, and in November 1978 the emigré journal *Irodalmi Ujsag* (Literary Gazette) in Paris published details of his account of the Imre Nagy trial.

According to Donath, the official version of the trial published in the Hungarian White Book blatantly distorts the actual depositions given by the defendants, as well as their role during the revolution. Up to the last moment of the revolution, Nagy and his colleagues had worked jointly and in close collaboration in taking Government decisions. As an instance, Donath cites Nagy's final radio broadcast announcing the Russian invasion on 4 November 1956 which, according to the White Book he, Donath, alone had written, at a point when it is sometimes suggested, Nagy was too confused and panic-stricken to know what action to take. In fact, however, the statement had been written jointly by Donath, Tildy and Nagy, and Imre Nagy had been quite clear that it should be drawn up so as to establish that the Soviet Union was committing an act of

unprovoked aggression against the legal Hungarian Government. At the same time, Nagy recognised the futility of resistance to a full-scale Soviet invasion, and wished to do nothing that would serve to increase the bloodshed.

Another of Nagy's co-defendants, the Budapest police chief Sandor Kopacsi, was released from prison in 1963, and finally allowed to emigrate to Canada in 1975. His memoirs have just been published in France under the title *In the Name of the Working Class* [Sandor Kopacsi, *Au nom de la classe ouvrière*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1979.] — the very words with which Nagy and his fellow communists had been sentenced in 1958 — and they contain both some remarkable character sketches of Nagy and his co-defendants, and also many new facts which have not previously been known.

Geza Losonczy, the real political genius of the communist opposition, was not killed accidentally by force-feeding while on hunger strike, as had previously been supposed, but was deliberately murdered in December 1957, in a cell adjacent to Kopacsi's, because his mental state had deteriorated so badly in prison that the authorities did not dare to place him on trial — even in secret. His dying cries were 'Murderers! Fascists!'

A similar fate also befell Jozsef Szilagyi—who, for different reasons, was not considered 'presentable'—and was tried separately and executed separately in March 1958. The full trial had actually been started once in February 1958 and then postponed, but during it, when asked if he pleaded guilty, Szilagyi had replied that, 'In this country, there is only one guilty person, a traitor named Janos Kadar. Supported by the bayonets of the Soviet imperialists, he has drowned in blood the revolution of his people', and gone on to declare that while he loved the ordinary Russian people, he hated 'the imperialist power that, under the guise of Marxism, has created a world of slavery and colonisation'. Obviously such testimony could not be tolerated—even at a secret trial—and Szilagyi was thus dealt with separately. He went to his death, however.

having lost none of his communist idealism, declaring at his final trial his profound conviction that 'It is possible to be a communist, without shedding blood, without suffocating the dreams of men'.

Some of the most remarkable passages of Kopacsi's testimony, however, concern the bearing of Nagy and his colleagues during the trial; consistently declaring themselves to have acted legally and constitutionally, and refusing to accept any of the charges brought against them. Nagy and Maleter, in fact continually declared themselves the legal prime minister and minister of defence of Hungary: Maleter, full of courage and vitality to the end; Nagy, meticulous to establish the finest points of detail concerning his actions during the revolution. Both of them going to their deaths with the words: 'Long live Hungary — independent and socialist!'

The spectres of Nagy and Maleter must still disturb the sleep of the present leader of the Hungarian Communist Party, Janos Kadar, reputedly forced by the Russians to attend in person the execution of Imre Nagy, just as he had been compelled by Rakosi to attend the execution of his former friend and leader of the illegal communist party in Hungary during the war, Laszlo Rajl, tried and executed as a 'titoist' and imperialist spy in 1949. Certainly the socialist aspirations of the Hungarian revolutionaries of 1956 continue to haunt the present Hungarian authorities, who do everything in their power to prevent the truth about 1956 being known by the younger generation in Hungary today. They would also not hesitate from stooping to the lowest of levels to discredit the reputations of the leaders of the revolution — maybe, before long they will even find a Western fascist to do the job for them.

Certainly, such an event is far more likely than that they should release the film that, according to Kopacsi, was made of the court proceedings of the trial and that could establish for all to see the true courage and dignity of these martyrs of the international communist movement.

S.P.

LETTERS

Debate on Boycotting Soviet Union

Tamara Deutscher and Ken Coates (*Labour Focus*, Vol.3 No.1) object to the letter signed by Ludmila Alekseyeva et al. which appeared in Vol.2 No.6 of *Labour Focus*, both in relation to its contents and to *Labour Focus* publishing it. The letter is critical of detente. It urges that Western democratic socialists advocate the boycott of certain forms of international contacts as a way of bringing pressure to bear on the Soviet government to adhere to its commitments on human rights. The socialist credentials of the signatories are questioned. Since most of them,

according to Tamara Deutscher, cannot be described as democratic socialists it is argued that they should be denied space in *Focus*, or, at the very least, that the Editors should have dissociated themselves from their views.

Tamara Deutscher and Ken Coates seem to want *Focus* to adopt the one-dimensional criterion of judging people according to the views they hold rather than to judge views according to the people who hold them. It seems to be suggested that Vladimir Bukovsky—and presumably the

millions of Bukovskys who inhabit Eastern Europe—should be treated in the same way as the small group of Western politicians who favour an increase in international tension. But opposition to detente by politicians anxious to use such tension as a cure for unemployment in capitalist countries is very different from opposition to detente by those who see it as a legitimisation of the oppressive regimes in Eastern Europe. Under totalitarian regimes oppositionists often clutch at every straw. This is related to their relative isolation in their own societies where opposition

clearly does not pay. In the case of 'dissidents' from countries under Russian military occupation the apparently hopeless situation their nations find themselves in makes them adopt a similar attitude.

The political naivité of many Eastern European opponents of their bureaucratic regimes is merely symptomatic of the political primitivism to which the opposition under conditions of political barbarism has been reduced. The failure on the part of their Western critics to recognise this shows either the extent to which these critics still harbour illusions about the 'Soviet' regime or just their ideological provincialism.

Both Tamara Deutscher and Ken Coates seem to regard *detente* as an unmitigated good. Clearly one can only welcome *detente* insofar as it reduces the level of military preparations. However, one part of the propaganda exercise by the oppressive regimes of Eastern Europe is to make the cessation of 'ideological warfare' the price the West must pay for peace. There is in fact no evidence that peaceful co-existence in any way depends on an ideological ceasefire. Soviet-German relations of 1939-41 demonstrated that war can break out despite mutual friendly noises since one of the friendly partners decided to mount a 'treacherous attack' upon the other. More recent example of Sino-Soviet relations shows that peaceful co-existence can be maintained despite mutual abuse at state propaganda level. What is true of propaganda at the official level is, of course, even more true of the politics of the labour movement. It is totally mysterious how the attitudes which the trade unions or the Labour Party take up can possibly contribute to the 'hysterical acceleration of war preparations'.

Tamara Deutscher and Ken Coates do not succeed in showing that there is a direct connection between the extent of internal oppression in the USSR and its relative diplomatic isolation. Thus Tamara Deutscher's memory plays tricks when she claims that 'Stalinism was worst in the period of the Soviet Union's isolation'. One of the peak periods of Stalinist terror was in fact in 1937—during the Soviet Union's military alliance with France and an unprecedented upsurge of fellow-travellerism in the West. As for Ken Coates he merely exaggerates the importance that Western contacts had on the 'positive development in the field of civil and human rights in the USSR'. No doubt the denizens of Gulag would particularly appreciate these latest Soviet achievements.

All this, of course, does not mean that what the nine signatories of the letter advocate should be followed. The question posed for Western socialists is what would be the most effective way of helping the Soviet working class and the oppressed peoples of Eastern Europe. This has to be decided in the light of circumstances as they exist. However, what course of action socialists ultimately choose to advocate should be decided on tactical grounds alone. For this reason boycott should not be ruled out. The fact that Tamara Deutscher and Ken Coates do so indicates that for them more is involved. In this they are no different from the great majority of Western Left whose support for the opposition forces in Eastern Europe has always been equivocal. It is because of this attitude by the Left that the opponents of the oppressive regimes in Eastern European countries look to the Western Right for support. Tamara Deutscher's and Ken Coates' arguments do little to dispel their distrust.

Vladimir Derer
London.

I would like to register my dismay at the reasoning in Tamara Deutscher's letter (in *Labour Focus*, Vol.3 No.1). My main concern is to warn readers against falling into the trap which Tamara Deutscher may force us into, namely that of establishing an unmaterialist dichotomy between what is material for debate and what is information.

Even if *Labour Focus's* Statement of Aims did exclude all debate (which it does not) that would in no way imply that the information in *Labour Focus* does not constitute matter for debate. It would simply mean that *Labour Focus* does not publish the resulting debate unless, as in this particular instance, readers react and demand to be printed!

Tamara Deutscher's argument went as follows: **Labour Focus* has published a text by Soviet exiles with which she strongly disagrees (as is her perfect right).

*She therefore regards the text as a 'discussion' and considers that *Labour Focus* should have editorially made clear the debatable nature of the text.

*She then accuses the editor of turning *Labour Focus* into a journal of general debate.

This, plainly, is 'Catch 22': without comment the text stands as a debatable item which the editors endorse masquerading as a piece of information; with a comment, the piece of information is turned into a debate and as such should not have been printed either!

In reality, for those who have agreed with the exiles' letter, its text cannot but appear as pure information; for those, like myself, who did not agree with it, it also constituted a piece of information (as well as a matter for debate), its information being that the gap between the most prominent non-Marxist socialist dissidents from the Soviet Union and Western Marxist socialists is widening disconcertingly.

Why on earth should *Labour Focus* be an ostrich's journal?

Let us now turn to the actual content of the exiles' appeal. It is necessary to state loud and clear that there is **nothing in principle** which should prevent socialists from mounting a campaign for a boycott of the Soviet Union. In our daily criticism of the Soviet Union, we know how we can easily differentiate ourselves from die-hard anti-communists; there is no reason why in a campaign for a boycott of the Soviet Union we could not put forward our same class position and point of view. As G. Minnerup so well puts it: 'It would be wrong to discuss the boycott tactic ... in the abstract. It all depends on **who boycotts whom and for what reason.**' It is because the appeal launched by the Soviet dissidents does not even begin to consider the type of class alliance they would be making that their appeal is totally unacceptable. As it stands, their appeal can happily be taken up wholesale

by the worst cold war warriors. Such a blanket boycott would endanger the living standards of many Soviet workers and allow the bureaucracy to pose as their champion.

However, to amalgamate as G. Minnerup does this frankly reactionary appeal with the kind of boycott of the Olympic Games that many socialists—especially on the Continent—advocate, is, at least, a sleight of hand, at most, sheer intellectual dishonesty. G.M. writes: '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'. If Günter had applied here his excellent criteria (**who boycotts whom and for what reason**) to judge a boycott, he may have actually sorted out from amongst these 'many others' the revolutionary working-class wheat from the hysterical petit-bourgeois chaff.

There does exist the possibility of adopting a working-class internationalist standpoint in a campaign for a boycott of the Olympics, and with it there can be working-class methods of struggle (blacking of transports, blacking of training facilities, media counter-reports, propaganda about the role of the Olympics and sport in general, etc. ...). Whether or not these struggles come to any fruition and to what degree, is a question of relationship of forces — as in any other struggle. Given the actual aims of such a boycott (the implementation of all the demands of the Democratic opposition) and given its target (both the ruling classes in the West and that in the Soviet Union and their collusion through *detente*) there is the basis for enormous support for such a boycott within the labour movement. It should be understood that such a campaign would not be calling on a bourgeois government to boycott the USSR. It would (and should) be a campaign within the labour movement, one of clarification, explanation, and, if possible, of action.

Could G. Minnerup explain to us how any campaign for a boycott guided by the tactics, aims and alliances outlined above can be said to lead inevitably to a slide into cold war?

'If you attack us, you'll allow the Tories in', say our Labour Party leaders. 'If you attack *detente*, you'll open the door to cold war', say G. Minnerup and many others (sic).

Surely *detente* is to cold war what bourgeois democracy is to fascism. The job of socialists at this precise moment, when the threat of a return to cold war is not at all serious (however much demagogues may rant), is to do their utmost to use the possibilities offered by *detente* to develop an international working-class practice, challenging *detente* and (it goes without saying) resolutely hostile to the sort of class collaboration which would make any resumption of the cold war possible.

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