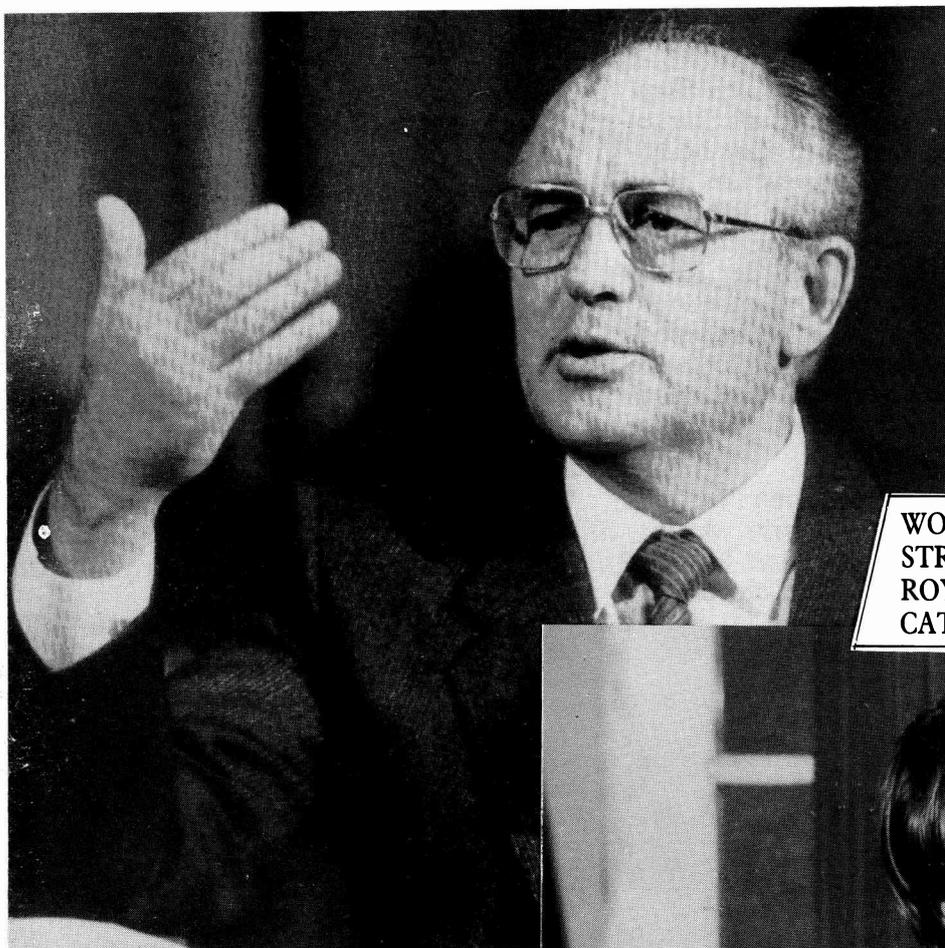
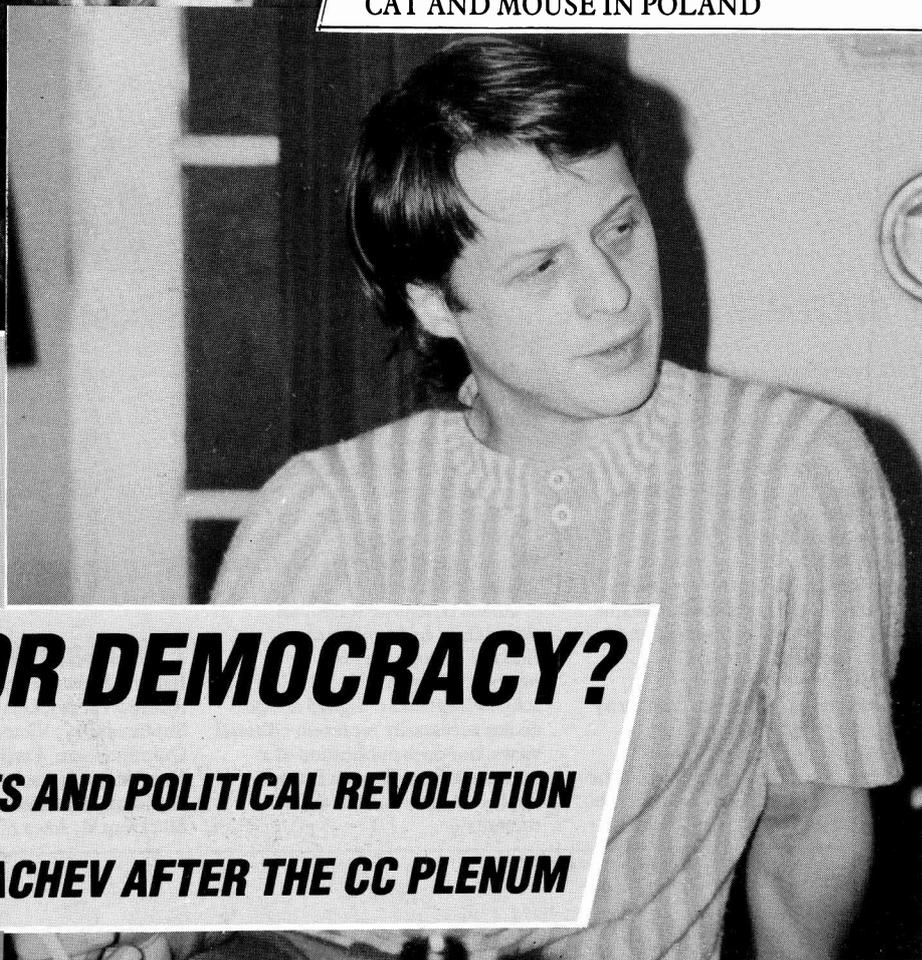


# *Labour Focus on* **EASTERN EUROPE**

VOLUME 9/NUMBER 1/MARCH - JUNE 1987 ● £3/\$5



WOLFGANG TEMPLIN ON PETR UHL  
STRIKES IN THE USSR  
ROY MEDVEDEV ON SOVIET CULTURE  
CAT AND MOUSE IN POLAND



## ***GLASNOST OR DEMOCRACY?***

PETR UHL ON

***HUMAN RIGHTS AND POLITICAL REVOLUTION***

ZHORES MEDVEDEV ON

***GORBACHEV AFTER THE CC PLENUM***

# Labour Focus on EASTERN EUROPE

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## STATEMENT OF AIMS

*Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* is a completely independent journal whose editorial collective includes various trends of socialist and Marxist opinion. Our purpose is to provide comprehensive analysis of trends and events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, documentation of opposition movements in those societies, and a forum for the developing dialogue between radical democratic and socialist forces East and West.

We are opposed to the "liberation" of Eastern Europe by Western capitalism and the exploitation of the victims of repression in these societies for the Cold War propaganda of those who prop up racist and fascist

dictatorships in other parts of the world. We believe that the division of Europe can only be overcome by a common movement for socialism and democracy. We support the struggles for working-class, democratic and national rights in the USSR and Eastern Europe and call on the labour movements of the West to extend their internationalist solidarity to them.

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# THEMES

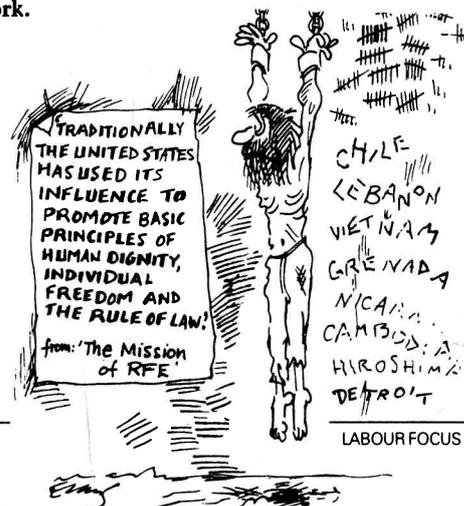
**E**ver since 1917, the fate of the Soviet Union has been of supreme importance to socialists of all hues. You could eulogise or denounce it, but there was no escaping the fact that, for better or for worse, the future of socialism was inextricably tied up with the consequences of the first socialist revolution. Seventy years after that momentous event, most socialists—while acknowledging the impressive transformation of a huge, backward empire into a modern industrial power; the crucial role of the Red Army in the defeat of fascism; and whatever else they may see as positive aspects of its role in the world—would draw a largely negative balance-sheet of the USSR's impact on socialism: has it not, after all, provided our enemies with their most effective propaganda ammunition? Propaganda ammunition which, as anybody with direct or indirect experience of the Gulags, Eastern Europe since 1945, and the Berlin Wall knows, has an irrefutable foundation in facts?

Not surprisingly, therefore, the emergence of a new, reformist General Secretary of the CPSU has caused enormous interest and debate. To many, Mikhail Gorbachev represents a new hope for socialism, the dawn of a new era of democracy and economic and cultural progress in the Soviet Union, as well as peace and disarmament worldwide. But how much of this is wishful thinking? "Things are moving in Moscow:", Wolf Biermann (the socialist songwriter expelled from East Germany in 1976) quipped, "the lips of the General Secretary". In this issue, we continue to pursue our own intense interest in the developments in the Soviet Union with several contributions. Zhores Medvedev, reviewing the outcome of the recent Central Committee plenum and drawing on his detailed knowledge of developments inside the USSR, strikes a sceptical note and insists that the "Gorbachev revolution" will have to be judged by deeds, not words—a valuable antidote to the euphoric coverage in most leftist and liberal publications. His ent historian and socialist critic of Stalinism living under (recently relaxed) KGB surveillance in Moscow, describes the extent and the limitations of the cultural thaw under Gorbachev. A thought-provoking interview with an anonymous left-wing oppositionist, an article on the Writers' and Cinemaworkers' congresses and a review of a survey of strikes in the USSR complete our coverage. There will be more in issues to come, and especially in our special issue on the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution later this year.

Despite Gorbachev, however, this issue of *Labour Focus* is dominated by Petr Uhl's *Human Rights and Political Revolution*. This is the tenth year of Charter 77, and we mark that anniversary with a major essay by someone who has not only been an outstanding activists in the Czechoslovak human rights movement but also a staunch defender of the revolutionary mission of Marxism against a regime which imprisoned him for a total of nine years in the name of Marxism. Human rights in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have become a battle-cry for the right in recent years, and we are therefore especially pleased to be able to present an East European, left-wing voice on this issue. Controversial as they are, Uhl's views are nevertheless much respected outside Czechoslovakia because of his impeccable record as a human rights activist: alongside his essay, we print a first reaction to *Human Rights and Political Revolution* by Wolfgang Templin, one of the three spokespersons for the East German "Initiative for Peace and Human Rights".

*Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* is dedicated to promoting debate, and this issue sees the launch of a new rubric for that purpose. A disagreement from within our own editorial collective may appear to be a somewhat synthetic start to a regular discussion section, but the issues are real enough and further contributions, on this and other controversies, are invited from our readers in East and West. This also provides the cue for an apology regarding the non-appearance in this issue of the "East-West" section which quite simply fell victim to the length of Petr Uhl's essay. It will, however, be back with a vengeance in our next issue which has *The German Question and Eastern Europe* as its special theme.

Regular readers will notice the growth of our list of sponsors. Sponsorship does not involve participation in, or responsibility for, detailed editorial policy but it expresses political sympathy with, and support for, the general aims of this journal as summarised in our *Statement of Aims*. The very diversity of the political backgrounds represented among our sponsors also serves to underline that *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* is a non-sectarian journal, reflecting the collaboration of different strands of socialist opinion. We do, however, have to draw a line somewhere, and it is with some regret that we announce the exclusion of the name of Leonid Plyushch from that list. Plyushch, the mathematician and former Soviet citizen, has a very honourable record as a fighter for human rights and for many years was distinguished by distancing himself from the more right-wing currents of Soviet dissent with his socialist views. It has come to our attention, however, that he has recently signed an appeal to the US Congress demanding increased aid for the Nicaraguan "contras". We cannot tolerate being associated with a supporter of the murderous counter-revolutionary mercenaries of the CIA and have therefore had no alternative to taking this, we hope, singular measure. Unfortunately such defections of formerly left oppositionists to the far right are not unprecedented (remember Pyotr Grigorenko?) and reflect both the pressure of the right and the weakness of the left on the issue of democratic rights in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. To remedy that weakness on the left is one of the principal purposes of our journal, and the sad case of Leonid Plyushch only highlights the necessity of this work.



# THE JANUARY PLENUM AND GORBACHEV'S COURSE

*An interview with Zhores Medvedev*

*The January Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee has been reported as a turning point in Soviet politics by much of the press and Gorbachev's report has been hailed by some as being of equivalent importance to Khrushchev's secret speech at the 20th Party Congress in 1956. How do you judge the overall significance of the event?*

The meeting was three times postponed and when finally held it marked a deep-going compromise which fell far short of expectations spoken of amongst reform circles before hand. These expectations were based upon actual projects which included such things as the following: a definite retirement age for officials; the promotion of Yeltsin (the reforming Moscow party leader) to full membership of the Politburo and of Yakovlev (head of the Propaganda Department of the CC) and Dobrynin (the top foreign policy adviser) to candidate membership; the removal not only of Kunaev but also Shcherbitsky; changes of responsibilities, including the transfer of Chebrikov to First Secretaryship of the Ukrainian Communist Party in place of Shcherbitsky, the retirement of Gromyko and his replacement as Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet by Ligachev, enabling Yakovlev to assume full control over ideology. These were the expectations in Moscow party circles, based upon real intentions on the part of a certain group within the Central Committee.

Yet in the end, after the various postponements of the meeting, none of this happened. The failure to introduce a fixed retirement age was a particularly serious setback. In the Politburo, only Kunaev's retirement took place. This was anomalous since Brezhnev's last politburo had 14 members and the body elected at the 27th Congress had only 12 members (with only 7 rather than 8 candidate members) and now there are even fewer. This indicates that there was no agreement within the Politburo over who should gain promotion. In other words the log-jam at the top has not been broken.

This leaves us with Gorbachev's report. It contains very serious criticism of the Brezh-

nev years, but it names no names and is thus less explicit than the December 19th Pravda article marking the 80th anniversary of Brezhnev's birth. Beyond this the speech contained points about changes in the Party rules and about calling a special party conference next year, but these points were put forward simply as suggestions from Gorbachev, not as decisions by the Politburo. It has not been made clear as to how they will be implemented and Gorbachev's suggestions themselves were formulated in vague terms.

*Could it not be argued that the speech also contained a very important ideological dimension. Gorbachev argued in the report that the CPSU's theory was fixed in an outdated mould originating not in the Brezhnev but the Stalin period, in the 1930s – a dogmatic and authoritarian conception of socialism buttressing a conservative managerial machinery and so on. And he counter-posed to this the need for 'revolutionary' measures to democratise Soviet political life. Democratisation he said was a matter of principle and was not only a crucial instrument for carrying through economic reorganisation but was needed for its own sake, like 'the air we breath'. Does this not represent an important ideological lever that can be used by reformers throughout the party for strengthening their position?*

Yes and no. Actually he had already made the remark about the air we breath at the 27th Party Congress. Furthermore, although Gorbachev did talk about theory, he did not actually talk theoretically: there was no clear, new theoretical doctrine spelt out in his report. And although his remarks about outdated theory derived from the 1930s were significant, they were ambiguous and skated over such matters as the theoretical innovations of the Khrushchev period – the more or less radical idea that the Communist Party was no longer a party of the proletariat but of the whole people, and the concept that the Party should not confine itself, as Stalin had, to relations with other communist parties but should have relations with all progressive parties and movements in the world, like for example Nasser – an important change in theoretical

principles: all this could be considered developments by Khrushchev in socialist theory. We could also mention the developments in socialist theory in many other countries – Euro-Communism, for example – and there was no mention of this in the report.

I do, in fact, think that Gorbachev had wanted to say that the Soviet Communist Party had remained in large measure a Stalinist Party. But he was not allowed to say this explicitly. He needed to say that the CPSU remains a party operating with Stalinist principles of appointment and dismissal, Stalinist methods of arbitrary rule by the leader or the politburo, the dangerous but real possibility for leaders to entirely change the direction of policy, the dependence on the personal qualities of the leaders: all this is what he had wanted to speak about in the context of a report on personnel policy. But instead, he confined himself to vague remarks concerning theory.

*Why did the report not contain such points?*

Because such a radical report would amount to an acknowledgement that the Party had been very far from on the right course all that time. The Party's authority had continued to be eroded throughout the Brezhnev period and such an admission from Gorbachev would have further undermined it. Furthermore, it is one thing to say that a party leadership had made some mistake, or had failed to apply the theory correctly; but it is quite another to claim that the entire basis and principles of the party had been wrong for decades.

*One point then does emerge, surely, from this Gorbachev report: the image of Gorbachev as nothing more than a consensus seeker within the leadership, as a kind of Brezhnev mark two has been undermined, particularly since his speeches in Krasnodar in the autumn. Your remarks just now clearly indicate that he is trying to lead from the front, directing all his fire at the Conservatives, though attempting to avoid an open rupture within the leadership. He has chosen to put himself at the head of the reform current within the Party. Do you agree?*

Yes, this is true, but we must realise what lies behind this role that Gorbachev has now

assumed. He has been through a learning process.

### **There was serious resistance from the workers**

When he came to power in 1985 he was much more optimistic about the economy than he is now. He thought that there could be swift and dramatic economic progress with the start of the new five year plan in 1986. Nothing of this sort happened. There was modest progress in some traditional and some high technology fields, the oil supply improved a bit, but in other areas the situation actually deteriorated. This occurred in food supply during the summer; the transport situation remained very bad, the problems in the high technology field were much more serious than he had thought, and there was, of course, the Chernobyl disaster. Above all, the entire mechanism of economic management was in a very poor state and attempts to move it into top gear to achieve maximum output actually led to breakdowns at many points.

It therefore became clear that his initial aim of relying on the old mechanism for swift results while simultaneously reorganising the economic mechanism and introducing new methods had proved incorrect. This initial idea had involved closing obsolescent plants, transferring the work-force to more modern plants and introducing shift-work there. This was attempted in all sectors of manufacturing. It produced a lot of social tension in the country, especially over the night-shift, because transport arrangements had not been made, kindergartens had not been adapted, and so on. So there was very serious resistance from the workers. And there was also a greater strain on machinery, involving breakdowns and so forth. The result was that there was a once and for all improvement in output, but it was modest and was secured at a significant social cost, by emergency means. At the same time, Gorbachev realised that the actual modernisation of technology was a much slower process, lacking the proper machinery and proper design. Thus, by the end of 1986 there were clear signs of frustration within the leadership over the performance of industry.

In line with Gorbachev's initial economic strategy, he had planned to postpone tackling the accumulated social problems

in the field of culture and had repeatedly told people working in these areas that before reforms could come in culture, he wanted to get the economy moving again. Once economic progress was visible, it would be possible to discuss ideological, cultural and political issues, because his own authority would have been enhanced by success on the economic front.

But the economic turn-around did not take place and he therefore evidently decided to change course, seeking to tackle political and cultural problems. Yet the radical, even revolutionary changes that he has spoken about introducing in these fields have not as yet materialised: matters remain at the level of general slogans.

*Yet according to the official figures economic progress in 1986, if not dramatic, was at least real overall in both agriculture and industry. A growth rate of 4.6% is, after all, not bad by any standards, assuming that the official figures are an adequate guide.*

Well, we must note that the figures reveal an 8 % drop in foreign trade, reflecting the large drop in foreign earnings and the very great difficulties the Soviet Union has in importing high technology goods from the advanced capitalist countries. Secondly, the aggregate gross national output figures include construction and we must remember that much of that output was emergency work: 135,000 Chernobyl victims had to be rehoused and 60,000 houses destroyed by the earthquake in Moldavia to be replaced, and all this boosts national output figures.

Furthermore, what concerns the leadership is not simply the aggregate figure but the real impact of economic change on the population. Now surveys show that the main concerns, the main sources of discontent within the population are food and housing (consumer goods come third). As far as housing is concerned, Gorbachev's report could offer the population only the promise that everybody could have an apartment of their own by the year 2,000 – a rather distant goal and a modest one. At the same time, the food supply for the population deteriorated significantly in the summer and autumn of 1986 thanks to the debacle that resulted from last year's law on unearned income. This law produced a serious drop in the supply of vegetables and fruit – official reports on fulfilment of the 1986 plan acknowledged that production in these fields was lower than previous years. The law was actually directed at middle men and traders, but the farmers themselves rely on such

people for selling their fruit and vegetables in distant markets since they lack their own means of transportation for moving large quantities of produce. The middle men are often themselves from the same village as the farmers who depend on them, taking their own products as well as those of their neighbours' on a lorry to distant markets. The law allowed only those who produced to sell their own products. And such people had to get a permit – a spravka – even to sell in their own district and these permits are valid only for a single week. Yet the market is frequently far beyond the producer's own district and at the same time these products are perishable and must be sold quickly. There were reports of especially strong discontent in Georgia over the law: there districts are very small and the peasants usually wanted to sell in Tbilisi, outside their district and were unable to do so. There were also reports of anger from peasants in Krasnodar and Stavropol who had previously hired lorries to transport their products to industrial centres like Rostov and the Donbas and were now banned by the law from doing so. Prices on the markets rocketed three or four times higher than normal: cucumbers or tomatoes that normally were 50 or 60 kopeks in the market in the late summer last year continued to fetch 3 or 4 rubles a kilo or even more. Consumers were very angry.

Some people associate Ligachev with this law, but the whole Politburo including Gorbachev must share responsibility. And this law was, of course, contradicted by the law passed in the autumn approving individual private labour, yet the earlier law has not been repealed and the new law is not due to come into force until May 1st this year. All this smacks, frankly, of incompetence and made people very angry: there had to be an emergency campaign to mobilise trucks and bring the fruit and vegetables to the towns for direct sales from the trucks at lower prices – an emergency measure carried out by collective and state farmers. And thus, overall, the people did not actually experience any of the improvement in food supply that the gross agricultural statistics might suggest. In addition, the very bad winter frosts have hit the grain output for next year very badly.

**Matters remain at the level of general slogans**

Thus overall, the population does not have a significant sense of an improved economic situation.

*What is the short-term impact of the various new mechanisms that had been introduced within the economy? Presumably, their impact on economic growth will be slow to appear, yet at the same time they can hardly be popular amongst many groups of workers.*

This is right. The impact is long-term and the immediate effect of using economic indicators and of the new body for quality control tends to be disruptive and even cause social tensions. Workers in factories with sub-standard technology or unable to produce goods of adequate quality find their income declining and this has caused tension. At the same time, some workers in the more modern plants will gain wage increases and other workers will want to leave their jobs and move to such higher-wage plants; yet the authorities will have to try to control such movements. So the short-term effects of the economic reforms will not strengthen Gorbachev's position.

*I would like to press one more point on the ideological aspect of Gorbachev's report, namely the radical shift in historical perspective he has introduced, in contrast to the Brezhnevite perspective. Under Brezhnev, the stress was placed on the USSR having finally arrived at the stage of advanced, mature socialism and on the task of presenting and defending this 'real, existing socialism' in the modern world. The leadership acknowledged problems and weaknesses and even accepted that the USSR could learn from abroad, notably from some features of the East European states, but the overwhelming message for Soviet Communists was that the USSR had 'arrived', had found the best possible mechanism. Gorbachev has, in effect, repudiated this entire perspective on the historical position of the USSR, declaring that its very survival depends upon a 'revolutionary' transformation of the basic socio-political and organisational mechanisms within the USSR. This is surely a major shift and one that can be used by reformers within the party to greatly strengthen their position.*

Yes, this may be true, but my basic point is that we are referring only to a speech to the Central Committee and not to, for example, new theoretical or programmatic documents approved by a Congress. And the fact is that Brezhnev also was capable of making quite good, even quite radical speeches. I am not only referring to economic speeches like that on agriculture in 1978, but also to Brezhnev's 1969 speech tackling socialist democracy, relations with the intelligentsia, the need for new cultural initiative and so on.

Indeed, in the late 1960s and right through until the turn to detente and the crackdown on the intelligentsia in 1972-73, reforming speeches could be heard from within the party leadership. There was a visible toleration of dissent and a real feeling that the country was becoming less and less repressive, and living standards were rising.

And all of this makes it especially important that our standard for judging developments must not simply be speeches and promises but actual changes, real structural developments. Indeed, this point has repeatedly been stressed by Gorbachev himself: he promised that he would be different by going beyond promises to actual changes.

I do not wish to imply that Gorbachev's promises are worth nothing. He promised changes in the field of culture and there have indeed been quite rapid changes in cultural life: I would not say a full liberalisation but a real improvement. (Yet we can't help noticing that most of the people particularly active in this cultural revival are from the older generation: people like Zalygin and Yevtushenko who had already emerged during the Khrushchev period. We have not yet seen new, younger figures of outstanding calibre emerging, and the best new works appearing now were, in fact, produced long ago: I can, for example, remember Dudintsev beginning his novel, that is now published, back in 1966, and the same is true of Granin's novel. No doubt it will take time for new figures with new works produced in these new conditions to emerge).

*But there has been this new film on Stalin.*

Yes, and interesting new paintings. But we cannot say that this film was the product of new conditions in the artistic field. It was commissioned politically by Shevardnadze — at 'government request' as we say — in Andropov's time. And I would say that the real test of the party leadership's seriousness about creating a new framework for cultural freedom will be what is produced in the new volumes of party theory, party and Soviet history. We must see what is produced in this field for the 70th anniversary jubilee this autumn. This will show whether we have improvements or whether we have real, qualitative change.

*Turning to the field of civil liberties, the independence of the judiciary and the legal underwriting of glasnost, Gorbachev has repeatedly declared, both at the 27th Congress and at this plenum, that new draft laws are being introduced to guarantee these things. As yet, these draft laws are not published, but what is your assessment of possibilities in this field?*

This is a very important area. In relation to the press, for example, there has never been any law since the revolution outlining the rights of the press and of journalists and the need for greater independence of the judiciary from party control has also been evident for decades. All of these matters relate to the need to protect citizens to some extent from

the state. Now, traditional Soviet theory has dismissed this problem as more or less meaningless since it is argued that the main instrument the citizen has for protection is the state itself, guided by the party. Thus there is said to be no basis for the citizen to oppose the state — that would be like a child opposing its mother and father.

We must wait to see what these new draft laws will contain, yet I would be cautious here for there is no evidence that Gorbachev is inclined to disperse the power of the Communist Party. All efforts over the years have been concerned with concentrating power in the hands of the party and Gorbachev's whole effort is geared to reviving the party, restoring its authority, and not fragmenting it.

*But doesn't this gloss over an important distinction? Of course, all reform communists — Khrushchev, the Dubcek leadership in Czechoslovakia, reformers within the Polish Communist Party like the Fiszbach current in the early 1980s — they are all in a sense devoted to strengthening the Communist Party, 'enhancing its leading role' and so forth. They do not want to establish party political pluralism — none of the Czechoslovak leaders in 1968 was willing to approve this — I suppose Imre Nagy in Hungary in 1956 was the only exception here. Yet they want to place the authority of the party on a new basis of consent and therefore may wish to underwrite citizens' rights vis a vis the state.*

Well, if we take a particular issue such as the political independence of the press from party control, will the press be guaranteed in law complete freedom from control by the party leadership? Gorbachev has so far given no indication that he would be in favour of this, in other words of giving up the possibility of using the press as an instrument of his own policy. So far, he has used very ambiguous terms for handling all these issues: glasnost itself is a very ambiguous word.

*Can we turn then to the proposals at the January Plenum that were given such wide publicity in the Western press: the proposals for electoral reform within both the Party and the Soviets. The actual remarks that Gorbachev made on these issues were brief and general, but do you think that they may herald some important changes?*

For me the most important changes we need are in the Supreme Soviet elections, yet the actual proposals here amount to little more than window-dressing.

The problem with the existing system is, of course, that there is no choice as between candidates: there is only one candidate on the ballot paper in each constituency. Gorbachev's proposal is that there will be many candidates in each constituency. But still there will be no competitive electoral choice, for the simple reason that the constituencies will be changed from single member to multi-member constituencies and there will

still be no more members than seats!

Therefore, as before the voter will still have three choices at elections. He can pick up the ballot paper with the names of the candidates on it and put it straight into the ballot box where the electoral commission sits. Alternatively, he can show the electoral commission what he thinks of the official list by taking the ballot paper off to a booth to do one of two things: either spoil the paper by crossing people out or cast a vote against the official candidates by replacing the official name with another name.

The only change which the new procedure allows is that the voter has a larger number of official candidates on which to give an opinion. In the past, with only one name on the paper, a voter crossing it out could be voting against Soviet power. Now a voter who crosses out one name is not necessarily opposing Soviet power and may simply be objecting to a particular person. In addition, under the old system, the candidate would often be someone from the party leadership who had no connection with the constituency and might not be known to the voter; now, some local leaders could also be on the ballot and the voter could express an opinion on them.

But overall, the change is so miniscule as to be scarcely an improvement – just window-dressing.

*But there is to be the possibility of choice in the elections within the party for local First Secretaries, is there not?*

Yes, this applies after the various party committees have been elected, when people are being chosen by the party committee members for particular posts. As in the past, the party committees are elected by secret ballot with a single list of candidates. But whereas in the past the elected members of the committee would then be presented with a candidate for, say, the post of first secretary nominated by a higher party body, now the committee members may put forward an alternative candidate of their own. In principle, therefore, the members of an Obkom (regional party committee) could reject the Central Committee nominee and vote in an alternative as first secretary. This is a real change, but it would require exceptional circumstances for such a flouting of the Central Committee to take place, and in any case whoever is elected has to be subsequently ratified by the Central Committee.

My view of this change is that it is intended to introduce greater flexibility and it can be used by the Politburo to exert pressure from below as well as above on middle level networks and leaders. The change could have practical importance if, for example, Ligachev supports one candidate and Gorbachev supports another in a particular Obkom. And probably if this mechanism had existed in Kazakhstan, the Russian candidate proposed by Moscow would not have been elected by the Kazakh

Central Committee. But it does not amount to the introduction of a new democratic principle within the party.

And it is quite clear when we look at the proposals for electing plant managers that one of the main purposes is to increase the authority of factory directors by basing that authority not only on appointment but on election as well, thus making them feel more secure.

### ***It does not amount to a new democratic principle in the party***

One of my grounds for scepticism about the importance of such changes is that they have long applied in scientific establishments. The directors of these bodies are first appointed but then must be elected by the academic council through secret ballot. But this system has not significantly changed the internal life of such institutions.

The most important point made by Gorbachev in this whole field of appointments policy is not any of these procedural changes but the declared intent of bringing many more non-party people into positions of authority. But the list of posts open to non-party people should be made public.

*You have made a powerful case against the idea that the January Plenum introduced radical reforms. Yet you have also indicated that there are major differences within the Central Committee over the general political orientation that the party should adopt. You have also at times implied that Gorbachev is within the more radical reforming camp. Indeed, the general picture you give is one of Gorbachev being blocked over personnel changes, being largely blunted in the field of practical measures, and being given scope only in the field of rhetoric and general slogans.*

*Yet there was one practical proposal of Gorbachev's which did gain acceptance: the proposal for a special party conference next year to discuss how to further the reorganisation and democratisation – the first such conference held by the CPSU since 1940. This conference will take place next spring just before the regional party conferences to elect new regional party leadership and Gorbachev stressed in his report that such elections should be based not on purely technical criteria of the expertise and competence of candidates, but on political-ideological criteria, above all attitude towards the reorganisation.*

*All of this could point towards the January CC meeting being a prelude to a greater intensification of the struggle between conservatives and reformers within the CPSU, a struggle in which Gorbachev should be seen as leading the reform camp and pressing to go far beyond the January line, while at the same time trying to avoid an open rupture with the conservatives.*

*Would you accept this interpretation?*

Yes, this is obviously one dimension of the situation, but not the only one. Another perspective is to see what is happening in terms of Gorbachev's struggle to consolidate his own power within the party, and to see some of the resistance of so-called conservatives as an attempt by some to prevent any too great accumulation of power in the hands of the new General Secretary.

The fact is that Gorbachev after two years has considerably less power than either Khrushchev or Brezhnev had after two years in the general secretaryship. In terms of consolidating his power – his control over the machinery of the state – Gorbachev faces three problems in the following order: first and foremost, the KGB; secondly, the Government apparatus; and thirdly, the Supreme Soviet.

### ***The KGB can constitute a parallel power network***

During the Brezhnev period, Andropov developed the KGB into an independent centre of power as an instrument for mounting his own challenge to Brezhnev. Brezhnev was not happy with this but could not change it because Andropov had wider allies within the Party. Andropov extended KGB jurisdiction from external security to internal supervision, absorbing the work of the Committee for state and party control, and to internal ideological supervision; legislation was passed giving KGB powers to deal with dissent; it was also empowered to keep files on party officials – though not to act against them directly. All this turned the KGB into a relatively independent centre of political power that Andropov used very effectively to gain the general secretaryship in 1982.

Now the KGB is represented on all the Bureaus of the Republican Committees as well as the all-Union politburo and it therefore can constitute a parallel power network and block Gorbachev to a significant degree if necessary.

The second problem is the government. Ryzhkov is a very able man who doesn't feel the need for Gorbachev's advice on how to run the government. He is a technocrat, more centre-oriented, in favour of Gosplan and central planning and so on and seems intent upon shaping the government in line with his own ideas.

And within the Supreme Soviet Gromyko remains highly respected and does not see himself simply as a rubber stamp for Gorbachev's initiatives. So this is a further check on Gorbachev's will.

Against this background, Gorbachev's denunciations of bureaucracy could be taken

not so much as part of a democratising drive but as part of a drive to strengthen his own position against the rival apparatuses of power that confront him. It is noteworthy in this connection that his remarks against burocracy did not contain the egalitarian thrust of those who have denounced the privileges of the elite.

*Would you then see the handling of the demonstrations on behalf of the imprisoned refusenik Begun as a demonstration of KGB autonomy?*

Yes, this was a repeat of the Andropov tactics against Brezhnev's detente policy in the late 1970s. You see the KGB would have an official duty to disperse this crowd and it is a very professional organisation which is capable of stopping such demonstrations with minimal publicity. Yet the KGB organised the matter to gain the maximum publicity, enabling the foreign press to link up with the protesters, enabling crowds to gather for a couple of days and then cracking down and beating up journalists in a way that was calculated to gain the maximum impact, with TV coverage of everything, and the politburo shown to be quite impotent.

And of course the KGB could not be happy with the release of many people from the camps: after all the KGB had actually tried them in the first place and is responsible for their treatment – actually gross mistreatment, in the case of people like Koryagin – in the camps and they therefore try to get them to sign pledges before their release to stop anti-Soviet activities or at least to apply for clemency.

*Do you think that Gorbachev may even face a threat to his position from a coalition of opponents within the leadership?*

No, not at present, both because there is no alternative candidate and also because Gorbachev is actually proceeding very carefully.

*Are there any indications of public attitudes towards the reform movement?*

Actually Zaslavskaya, the economist, recently wrote an article pointing out how little systematic work was done in the Soviet Union to discover what public opinion actually was – there is only one journal devoted to this issue in the USSR as against 8 in the USA.

But in general we can say that the intelligentsia is very happy with Gorbachev's reforms, even euphoric, even claiming that the changes are irreversible – something which is actually not true. Scientists and technical intellectuals on the other hand tend to be much more restrained in their praise because they feel the need for many more changes – not least much closer international links – for work in their fields to improve, yet at the same time they are under increased pressure from the government to produce results without gaining better salaries.

## **Gorbachev will come to realise that it is not possible for the party to decide everything**

There is little reason to suppose that the workers are very enthusiastic. Food supplies have not improved much, they have no short-term hopes of great improvements in accommodation and their living standards in general don't seem likely to improve quickly. They have to put up with a harsh campaign against alcohol without any very substantial compensation in other fields. They hear that things are moving forward, but I don't think they as yet feel that things are moving forward.

Furthermore, not everybody will respond positively to the very strong negative criticisms of all sorts of things in the press. Some sections of the public will probably consider that there is little positive value in all the criticism if a lot of it raises problems that can't easily be actually solved. This can produce feelings of frustration rather than hope.

*Are there now marked differences of general editorial attitude within the press?*

There are differences to some degree amongst the central papers: nothing significant as between *Izvestia* and *Pravda*, but I am told, for example, that *Sovetskaya Rossiya* is the most interesting of the central newspapers (though I don't actually read it myself). But the main difference is between the central and the regional press. This derives from the differing statuses of the editors: the central editors have a degree of independence because they have been appointed by the politburo, while the local editors are under the control of the Obkom secretaries and are at great risk if they attempt to take up matters sensitive for the local party chief. The leadership is evidently striving to make the local papers more independent – less the instrument of the Obkom secretaries – but this is not an easy task to accomplish.

*Are there any signs of ferment and debate within the party itself at a local level?*

In general, the local party organisations seem to remain very much under the control of the regional secretaries. This was illustrated by what happened after Gorbachev's visit to Khabarovsk and the Far East. During the visit, local activists were encouraged to speak openly and criticise their local superiors, being told that the influence of the central committee would ensure their ability to do so. Yet afterwards some of those who has spoken out were actually dismissed or reprimanded by the local bosses. This is not an encouraging sign.

Furthermore, the debates at important

party meetings are still closed: speeches are not published, even, for example, from the January Central Committee meeting and this does not encourage open, vigorous debate.

*You have given weight both to inter-institutional politics and to the idea of conservatives versus reformers within the Party. Yet you don't in the end seem to attach great weight to the role of various ideological-cum-political trends within the party. Your approach seems to contrast, for example, with your brother Roy's classic account of the various political trends within the Communist Party and with the weight he attached to the analysis of these trends. Am I right?*

Yes. Of course, you could view the present situation as one where Roy's party democrats – Yakovlev, Bovin, Burlatsky and so on – are achieving some ascendancy, along with reformers like Gorbachev himself, although the reality is that these people have achieved a role almost exclusively in the ideological field and have not gained dominant positions inside the party apparatus itself. But the basic issue here is what sort of changes you think are necessary.

I myself think that the most important changes are those that need to be made within the government machinery – a complete overhaul of the way the government functions in relation to the economy and the society along with greater independence of the government from party supervision.

Yet the location and outlook of these party reformers involves them in attempts to change conditions through stronger party control and supervision of the government itself. Neither these people nor Ryzhkov are interested in a real and far-reaching decentralisation. From all Gorbachev's speeches he wants to increase the party's authority and to link the party with economic achievements – for credit for all governmental successes to rebound to the party. Gorbachev still seems to want to come up with a party answer to all questions, from ideology to the technology of robots, or the details of quality control. This is not a realistic approach. Why, for example, should the party leadership feel it necessary to have someone from the politburo responsible for agriculture? This has resulted in Ligachev, a man with no experience whatever in agriculture, being put in charge of agriculture and giving speeches on fodder and fertilisers and so forth – it's ridiculous: his field of specialisation is the aviation industry.

But I believe that Gorbachev will eventually come to realise that it is simply not possible for the Party to attempt to decide everything, and run everything in all spheres. Then hopefully he will seek to concentrate real change in the properly political sphere – measures for socialist democracy and changes in party ideology and so forth.

*Finally, could you give any pointers as to what we may expect from the coming months?*

I don't expect any very dramatic developments during the next few months and I think the main attention of the party leadership will be concentrated on implementing the various economic measures that have already been agreed. The new experiments in industry will be launched in earnest with the establishment of the new networks of control to check on quality. It is very difficult to predict how this system is going to perform. Then from May 1st the law on individual activity is due to come into force,

allowing individual labour in small trades and services. Then we will see whether, in the spring and summer the new law on unearned income will continue to operate or will be scrapped. Another very important issue will be the new penal code which is promised and this should indicate the type of legal system that the party leadership wishes to develop: to what extent lawyers will be given greater powers to defend the rights of citizens and to what extent judges will be made more independent of party

control and so on.

This legal reform will be the most important question and will indicate the real extent of the liberalisation which the leadership is attempting to introduce. It will be much more significant than the release of imprisoned dissidents, since such releases can be temporary.

The interviewers for Labour Focus were Oliver Macdonald and Michele Lee

It is in the spheres of literature and culture that the end of the Brezhnev era has found its most spectacular reflection so far. Zhores Medvedev's brother Roy, the renowned historian and critic of Stalinism, who lives in Moscow under KGB surveillance, reviews some of the recent trends.

## A PANORAMA OF CULTURAL LIFE IN THE USSR IN 1986

**C**ertain changes in the internal and external politics of the USSR—the rapid turnover of leading cadres, the 27th Congress of the CPSU and, particularly, such an event as the Chernobyl catastrophe—have for a long time held the attention of all observers, demoting to second or third rank changes which have begun to occur since 1985 and which are more and more distinct in the cultural life of our country in 1986. Nevertheless, this is unquestionably a reflection of political moods and tendencies and it is difficult therefore to comprehend the numerous political events of the last five years including dissident movements of all tendencies and hues, without having studied the changes which took place in cultural life at the end of the fifties and beginning of the sixties.

Nobody now denies that a slowdown in economic development bordering on stagnation, began in the USSR in the sixties. But, during the same period, culture fared even worse; here one has to speak not of stagnation but of decline. Certainly, the creation of spiritual well-being has been pursued during the last fifteen years. Aitmatov, Bykov, Astafiev, Zhigulin, Okudzhava, Belov and a few others have not ceased to delight us with their writings. Certain theatres have lost neither their popularity nor their committed positions. There have been several successes in the cinema: *The Red Guelder-Rose*, *Byelorussia Station*, *Mos-*

*cow does not believe in tears*, *Your Son*, *Earth*, *Station for two*. I will not discuss music, architecture or fine art where the creative act has been somewhat absent.

### Heavy Losses

The essential cause of the decline in culture was, in the first place, the worsening of the political and moral atmosphere of society, the increased pressure on the intelligentsia, which crushed anyone who was new or talented and encouraged mediocrities. Numerous doors were closed to the creative intelligentsia, but some in the West were left half-open. As a result of which and for a variety of reasons, Rostropovich and Solzhnitsyn, Vladimov and Nekrasov, Brodsky and Aksenov, Kopelev and Zinoviev, Lyubimov and Tarkovsky, Neizvestny and Rabin, Voinovich and Etkind found themselves in emigration...one could go on. A number of talented intellectuals concentrated their attention on subjects far removed from present-day life. Some among them simply remained silent for a long time. There were other great losses: in the last fifteen years, Tvardovski, Romm, Tendryakov, Trifonov, Shostakovich, Abramov, Simonov, Bek, Khatchaturian, Dumbadze all died. Vysotsky and Chukchin died before their 45th year.

But there were also losses of a different nature. Many talented intellectuals who had gained a deserved popularity during the six-

ties did not know how to or did not wish to resist the pressure and, instead of swimming against the stream, allowed themselves to be carried away thereby betraying the truth of art in order to better embroider and thereby distort reality in its official sense. This compromise with their conscience allowed certain of them to occupy important positions within the hierarchy but removed from them any possibility of creating valued works of art. One needs only to mention in this regard the names of Yevtushenko and Bondarev.

The fact of the disappearance of such talents from our culture has not been counterbalanced by the appearance of new ones. Among the hundreds of poets admitted to the Union of Writers over the last fifteen years, I could not name a single one whose verse and poems have gained a national audience. Amongst prose writers only one can be mentioned: V. Rasputin. In the field of dramatic art the only one to have been recognised was A. Vampilov, but, regrettably, only after his tragic death. The enormous success with readers of the "historical" texts of V. Pikulia, and similarly with the pseudo-historical novels of I. Stadniuk or A Chakovski testify not only to the degradation of the profession of the writer, but also to the taste of the reader.

In reviewing the path travelled in the last fifteen years, a number of masters of Soviet culture today express themselves in a

strongly critical fashion: "Today, more than ever, we have an abundance of lack of scruple, standards and an ocean of spiritual illiteracy" declares Rasputin on the situation at the heart of the Writers' Union. (*Ogonyek* 8/1986, p.25). "I am tired of this mediocre prose, this greyness which fills our journals and is put out by our publishing houses. I prefer to watch documentaries rather than all the rubbish which is served up. For a very long time we have produced a simplistic literature, a literature prettifying reality. There was often the constraints of the period, but also the mediocrities who pushed in this direction with their prose creating an atmosphere lacking any scruple or standard" said the writer V. Astafiev (*Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, 3/1986 pp.71-72). "The primary cause of the decline of drama is a general one and not solely literary. The truth proves difficult to penetrate when there is so much half-truth, apparatus, pomp, false appearance and practical jokes. Every year we are further deluged with novels of use only to their authors, paintings of which their creators have no need, films which are striking by the total absence of the personality of the maker and songs which can neither be sung nor heard. This art resembles our commerce: what one wants, one can't find; and what is there, one has no need of..." These biting remarks are in an article by the playwright M. Roshchin (*Sovietskaya Rossiya*, 1/1986).

The decline of opera, variety shows and architecture have also been evoked in as sharp a manner.

## The Atmosphere Changes

The appearance of such fiercely critical points of view testify to a change in atmosphere in Soviet culture. To a certain extent it began spontaneously as a reflection of the unfolding struggle on the political scene. But beyond that, the whole panorama of the cultural life of the country is beginning to be slowly modified.

At the end of the fifties, after the Twentieth Congress, the new atmosphere in our society was echoed most rapidly in poetry. Everyone points out certain poems of Yevtushenko and Voznesensky but more often as political demonstrations. It is only at the soirées of Zhigulin and Okudzhava that true lyrical, politicised poetry has resounded over the last months. In prose, general critical attention has been focused in the last year on two works: the narrative *The Fire* by Rasputin (*Nash Sovremennik* 6/1985) and the novel *The Sad Detective* by Astafiev (*Oktyabr* 1/1986). Two exceptional works which, two or three years ago, would have been rejected as "defamatory".

Television has reacted with great diligence to changes in the political atmosphere. Until recently interesting programmes on television were very rare; one could only see boring films on the Soviet

small screen, and only sports programmes enjoyed a relatively large audience. A celebrated writer has said frankly: sometimes, when I see a television film, I have a mind to pick up my flat-iron and throw it at the set. Now, however, they are beginning to programme films which television has not previously shown.

Television has begun to present interesting programmes. The cutting interview in March with Academician Likhachev, one of the moderate representatives of the liberal wing of the Soviet intelligentsia, would have been impossible a year ago. The transmission *Problems—Research—Solutions* during which the highest leaders of industry, agriculture and science had to respond to questions asked by telephone, aroused general interest. During an hour and a half to two hours the studio succeeded in recording almost 800 questions, certain of which visibly embarrassed our ministers and academicians. They are not yet used to having to "account for themselves" in front of an audience of several million people. A new programme *The Twelfth Stage*, designed for young people, encouraged no fewer questions. One of these programmes, devoted to problems at school, provided a platform to young people referring to the freedom and rights of the individual in connection with school life. Even "punk" members of groups of adolescents aged between 15 and 17, stripped of all principle and whose existence in the USSR was denied three or four years ago, were allowed to express themselves. The Deputy Minister of National Education, obliged to respond to the schoolchildren's questions, was visibly lacking in assurance...

A televised debate between Leningrad and Seattle was organised in the Spring of 1986. The Americans spoke frankly of what they thought of respect for human rights in the USSR, in Poland and in Afghanistan. Their Soviet adversaries attempted to face up to this criticism and condemned the American way of life. If our press was to be believed, this "debate" was won by the Soviet side. But the majority of Muscovite viewers considered that it was the Americans who had carried it off.

Favourable changes have also happened with local television, for example in Georgia and in the Stavropol region where I recently spent a month. The inhabitants of the Stavropol region twice a month watch with interest a programme entitled *The Satirical Object of Television*.

In short, one can perceive changes in almost all fields of culture. But in 1986, the honours returned to the theatre and in particular to the stages of Moscow and Leningrad. Last season's productions achieved great success with the public and were liberally commented upon by the principal Soviet papers and periodicals. But why has the theatre taken first place?

Theatre is undoubtedly one of the most operative aspects of art. One can create a new performance much more quickly than a film or a novel. Only one year ago severe measure against alcoholism were taken, but already in Autumn 1985 some eight plays on the crimes of alcoholism were in the course of rehearsal. During the last fifteen years it is the theatre which has suffered the least "human" losses. Literature is an individual labour. Therein lies its strength but also its weakness. Films are created by collectives which break up after they are shown. The theatre is a stable collective at the heart of which have been established solid traditions, styles and schools. Theatres function whether the time is "favourable" or "unfavourable", whereas the novels of outstanding writers are rejected by the publishing houses and film directors remain without work or salary. It is not surprising that it is precisely in the theatre that in the last ten years a young and talented group of playwrights and producers have appeared nicknamed "the new wave". Certainly, it has not been good working in the stifling atmosphere of the last years of Brezhnev's era and their research has more often been limited to disturbances of a personal or marginal character. Drama posed more questions than it gave answers but, at the same time, it assimilated new styles and studied the lesson offered by contemporary western drama. The theatre was therefore able to begin its renaissance more rapidly than other fields of art.<sup>1</sup>

## The Demons in Power

Three productions have become the event of the season, both from an artistic and a political point of view. Firstly, the production of the "Khudozhestvenny" Theatre (MKhAT) in Moscow, inspired by A. Masharin's play *Silver Wedding*. The Soviet Minister of Culture has not allowed this play to be performed for a very long time. It was only after Politburo member, Yegor Ligachev, came to see it that it was allowed to figure in the repertoire. Gorbachev and several delegates to the 27th Congress assisted afterwards. The subject is not complicated. An important Moscow manager, Vybornov, relieved of his duties "because of his nomination to another post", but who has not yet received his new destination goes to a small town a long way from the capital because of his mother's grave illness. Vybornov, 65 years of age, began his career there where he had been successively manager of wolfram mine during the war, then secretary of the District Party, then of the Regional Party. Gradually, in order to advance himself, he also had to climb over "his own" people. Vaynov, the present district secretary is Vybornov's former chauffeur; Goloshchapov, the President of the District Soviet is his old deputy. In difficult moments they had always enjoyed Vybornov's support.

Unexpectedly, after the funeral of his mother who had been found dead, the Muscovite guest appears at the house of Vaynov where others have been invited to celebrate the "Silver Wedding" of the master of the house. All of the play's action takes place in Vaynov's enormous new residence, which he had had built with Goloshchapov's help on fictitious budgets. Vybornov, who had not returned to his native village for twenty years, is indignant about a number of things: the district economy is in decline, there remains only a single wealthy kolkhoz of which the President, Siri, a relative of Vaynov, is invited to the "do".

In fact, all of the business of the district is controlled, not by Vaynov who is too stupid, but by the rogue and cynic Goloshchapov who values bribes and has had put in prison Poletaev, the editor of the local paper who had tried to criticise the local "bosses". From all the evidence, Goloshchapov is above all a Stalinist and his ideal is "order" based on fear and coercion. "How many years have we directed, mobilised and led the people!" he exclaims. "And all for nothing! To return to the beginning! They're giving back land, they're returning the livestock to private property. Soon they will be distributing all of the land. And they encourage them... They have loosened the reins on the people". It is not bonuses but prison they should give to the malcontent specialists, reckons Goloshchapov. Indignant, Vybornov, sat at the festive table, cries out: "But what do you allow yourselves? You think that I see nothing? That I understand nothing? Petty tsars! Local voivods! Everyone for themselves, especially so as not to lose your place! So as not to give up a single crumb of power! Have you forgotten why you are there?... You are demons!".

Little by little Vaynov's conscience is pricked and he is ready to give up his house to build a kindergarten. But he reproaches Vybornov: "I have always applied your policies like they were my own! When they were hard and when they were democratic! Always, always I have applied them! It's you I have served!".

Siri, the kolkhoz President, says the same thing to Vybornov, reminding him of Goloshchapov's machinations which he had formerly encouraged, as well as his friendship for the swindler Berendeev, recommended for the post of Regional Party Secretary at his behest and recently dismissed. Vybornov had also been familiar with the arrest of their old friend Poletaev, but had not found the time to intervene into that affair.

Another character figures yet again in the play, Vybornov's mother to whom he had not had the time to say his farewell. She appears on the scene either like a ghost or as a memory. She tells her son: "Everything is different these days. Nobody listens to anybody! Everybody thinks of themselves and

only themselves! Is it possible that you have become like that, you as well? It's frightening, Gena! How do you live? You have forgotten your conscience, your soul! Start over again! It's your mother telling you this!"

Vybornov, at first helpless, then with more and more resolution repeats his mother's words: "Power without conscience is dishonest. Conscience without power is impotent". He departs for Moscow having taken an important new position there; but from now on he works in a different way. Here is the principal idea of the performance which had so pleased Ligachev: you only have to get rid of those who are unrepentant; the others must work differently according to their conscience.

One can find a number of allusions in the play which would be incomprehensible to some people. The play begins with a piece of music by the composer T. Mynbaev inspired by Pushkin's poem *The Demons*. It is necessary to know that Dostoevsky made several verses of this poem an epigraph for *The Possessed* the theme of which is the degeneration of revolutionaries and their ideas. But the spectators understand perfectly well of whom Goloshchapov is thinking when he says: "I often used to wish that he would come out from the fir trees and that he would look around him. And not only round here. He knew how to do it. He saw the whole world! With the eye of an eagle. In a single glance 'from one end of the world to the other'. So he could then speak on the mountain tops".

The song about Stalin "From one end of the world to the other, on the mountain tops...", we all learned a long time ago at kindergarten and school. The hall also laughed on hearing Siri's bitter joke: "In spring, we sow the seeds and in Autumn we reap the full rewards". - "Even the usurers do not take from the muzhiks as much money as they have to give at present to our dear Soviet power" cries Siri. And the Soviet spectator knows that the usurers who loaned the money against their interests were strangling the peasants well before the revolution.

### Speak!...and be silent!

The second play we wish to talk about is also devoted to life in the provinces. The play in question is taken from V. Ovechkin's book *An Everyday Place* which, in the fifties, opened the way for a new "rural prose". The play taken from A. Buravski's book entitled *Speak!* has been put on by a young producer, V. Folin, at the Ermolov Theatre in Moscow.

From the opening scenes we see villages in 1952, miserable and subject to despotism by the Secretary of the District Party, Borzov, a person all powerful and devoid of all conscience. His main task is not to increase the grain yield but to take it from the peasants. Stalin's death changes the life of the

peasants and Borzov is replaced by another leader, Martynov. But the survivals of "Borzov's time" do not immediately disappear. Martynov passes his days and nights in the kolkhozes, but he is convinced that the essential decisions should be taken at the top. So when a kolkhoz assembly dismisses its drunken president and almost exclude his pals from the Party without taking into consideration the recommendations made by the District Party Secretary, Martynov takes this for a revolt, an unacceptable demonstration of anarchy. The play adds another character to the original text, the young writer Ovechkin, who himself argues with Martynov and defends the rights of the population. *Speak!* is seen as entirely contemporary, and without doubt raises for the first time in our theatre the question of the responsibility of the Party before the people but also, at the same time, that of blame for its bad leadership. In the final scene, the speakers read to a Party Conference speeches already written for the previous year. A milkmaid loses the thread of his speech and Martynov tears up the paper from which he is reading and asks her: "Speak! You've surely got something to say, speak!". But the woman remains silent, she has not been taught how to speak. At that a group of artists, representing the people in the play, walk across the stage repeating a single word: "Speak!" The moral of the story is simple: while the people do not begin to speak, there will be no change.

Finally, a third play. This is being put on by the Theatre of Lenin's Komsomol and is called *The Dictatorship of the Conscience*. As in these other plays, Shatrov, its author, builds the action by counterposing Lenin's ideas to everything that has happened since his death. The play unfolds in the form of a "process" debate—of the kind of contradictory debates which the youth loved to use after the Revolution to defend their ideas. On stage the debate takes place in the Editorial Board of a modern journal for youth. The "accusers" attack the realities of the socialist world and the communist movement, the "defenders" and "witnesses" advance their theses and "objective judges" give their verdict. Certainly, it is the Leninist ideas which come out on top, but the simple idea of putting them in doubt and of giving a voice to the enemies of Leninism was considered a heresy by the Minister of Culture who did not authorise keeping Shatrov's play in the repertoire until after the intervention of Ligachev and Yakovlev a Secretary of the Party Central Committee.

There is a particular character in the play, the stranger, interpreted by O. Yankovski. During the earlier performances, he called on the public to participate in the debate. But one of the spectators who was given a voice said: "My grandfather was a Menshevik. They shot him in the thirties. Nowadays we talk a lot about the democratic

spirit. But experience shows that you can't have a real democracy without opposition parties". After that incident, the discussion with spectators ceased. Contemporary "audience participation" by no means allows freedom of opposition.

Thus an interesting but carefully rehearsed debate unfolds on the stage. But in the life of society there is no genuine democracy.

**Author's Note** 1. During the last fifteen years an evident decline in the theatre could be observed in the USSR. The rate of theatre-going slackened and halls

were only an average 70% full. In the Russian Republic there were more than seventy where they could only sell half (or even less) of the tickets. In the RSFSR, in 1984, theatres registered a million less customers than in 1983. This decline is not explained by competition from cinema or television but by the low level of performances and boring plays. Today, the situation in the theatre is in the process of change. During the 1985-86 season, eight to fifteen new plays gained great success. Among them, *Number 40, Sholom Aleichem Street* by A. Stavitsky at the Stanislavski Theatre in Moscow. For the first time and even if in a distorted form, this play poses the problem of the causes of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union. Elsewhere it is difficult to get a ticket for E. Radzinski's play *Theatre at the time of Nero and Seneca* at the Mayakovsky Theatre in Moscow. The events of Antiquity here appear as the present day to the contemporary viewer. R. Burlatski's drama, *A Single Night*, put on at Moscow's

Theatre of Satire has equally grabbed the attention of theatre-goers. The principal characters in this drama are the intelligent and resolute John Kennedy and his noble and charming brother Bobby who, during the Cuba crisis, gain a difficult victory over the American "hawks". Curiously, in the cast list one does not find Khrushchev without whom the Cuba crisis could not have happened or have ended so relatively well.

The Contemporary Theatre has revived an old play by M. Shatrov, *The Bolsheviks*, as if to make a bridge between the sixties and the eighties. Several theatres have successfully put on Kudryavtsev's play *Ivan and the Madonna* and Dozorski's *The Last Visitor*. L. Dodin, the producer of the Dramatic Theatre in Leningrad, has successfully produced F. Abramov's celebrated novels *The House* and *Brothers and Sisters*. The play looks at the difficult life in the campaigns after the war (...)

Roy Medvedev's overview of the current state of Soviet culture in this issue of *Labour Focus* provides a valuable first-hand account of the changes taking place within Soviet literature and drama under the impact of Gorbachev's leadership. While Medvedev focuses on the content of current literature, the organisations which maintain control of the various spheres of Soviet culture have also been affected by the "new thinking".

SEAN ROBERTS

# SOVIET CULTURE EMERGES FROM THE DEEP FREEZE

Since the publication of Solzhenitsyn's "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" in 1962, personally sanctioned by Khrushchev, Soviet authors have been subject to harassment, imprisonment and even exile for works too critical of the Soviet past or its present reality. Many Soviet authors have found the only avenues for publication of their work in either Samizdat or Western publishing houses (so-called Tamizdat).

The Eighth Congress of Soviet Writers, therefore, provided a test of how far Gorbachev's zeal to transform the economy and democratise society in general has permeated the Soviet cultural organisations.

Prior to the Congress two events of significance occurred. Firstly, Petr Demichev, notorious for his repressive attitude to unorthodox cultural manifestations during the seventies, was shunted over from Minister of Culture to First Deputy Chair of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet. This was a culmination of Demichev's gradual demotion from Central Committee Secretary and Politburo member in the early 70's. Secondly, Gorbachev met with a group of writers and he impressed upon them the tasks facing Soviet society and the role of the author. He made it clear that he viewed

writers as an ally in the dissemination of the new ideas and as a means of circumventing the layers of the bureaucracy identified as an obstacle to restructuring. Although this meeting did not receive too much attention in the press, its impact at the Writers' Congress itself was marked and the Gorbachev buzz-words, "openness" (*glasnost*), "restructuring" (*perestroika*) and "acceleration" (*uskorenie*) were much in evidence.

## Compromise appointment

The Congress was opened by Georgii Markov, First Secretary of the Writers' Union since its Fifth Congress in 1971. Markov's key-note speech indicated that he had not quite mastered the needs of the moment. He came in for criticism not so much for what he said as for what he did not. Attacks on bureaucratism and literary officialdom were on the order of the day and Daniil Granin and Grigorii Baklanov, in particular, attacked the hierarchy within the Writers' Union. Baklanov asked "What are most of the conversations in the Writers' Union about? About a new book that has become a big event? No, the main views and conversations are about who will be appointed to what post and what that appointment will mean". Markov was to be replaced as First

Secretary by Vladimir Karpov, Editor of the prestigious journal *Novy Mir*. This was one of a number of compromises - although Karpov is respected he is still very much part of the literary establishment as he demonstrated in his defence of the publishing policy of *Novy Mir* which had been berated for publishing only second-rate material while talented authors had their material shelved.

The problem of literary quality was a common thread running through many of the critical speeches. Baklanov again ironically mused "It's a strange thing: the higher a writer rises on the administrative ladder, the lower he demands that the critical crossbar be placed for him". As Andrei Voznesensky put it "a writer spends 10% of his life writing a book, and 90% trying to get it into print". This thought was not simply limited to current authors but extended to those who had been out of favour for decades. Both Voznesensky and Evgei Evtushenko explicitly called for the publication of complete editions of Pasternak and Akhmatova and for the turning of Pasternak's home at Peredelkino into a museum.

## Military opposition

Voznesensky also pointed out that a number of noted authors had been prevented from attending the Congress as delegates, implying that voting had been rigged in the Moscow organisation. Despite their absence four of these – Bella Akhmadulina, Bulat Okudzhava, Vyacheslav Kondratiev and Yurii Chernichenko – were later voted onto the Board of the Writers' Union. In contrast to these exclusions the Congress was graced with the presence of such literary notables as Lizichev, head of the Political Administration of the Army and Navy and Mishin, First Secretary of the Komsomol. The military, in particular, appears to be a source of opposition to any liberalisation in the cultural sphere. Lizichev, speaking at a meeting organised at the Ministry of Defence prior to the Writers' Congress attacked works containing "abstract pacifism" and his speech to the Congress itself contained no references to the new thinking and could have been delivered at any time in the past twenty years with the exception of a favourable reference to Afghanistan.

The Congress did not limit itself to literary matters but took up a whole range of political and social questions. Rasputin, Belov and Bondarev, in particular, concentrated much of their attention on the danger to the Soviet ecological balance particularly from the schemes to divert the flow of certain rivers, and the level of pollution of Soviet lakes and rivers. Bondarev considered that if the scientists were just allowed to get on with things, then one fine morning Russia would cease to exist.

Despite the level of criticism, however,

the final Congress Resolution committed the Writers' Union to very little that was specific. As the premier Soviet cultural organisation it would indeed have been surprising if there had been too radical an outcome. The Resolution called for the elimination of "inertia, bureaucratism and formalism...the practical realisation of the positions and conclusions of the 27th Congress (of the CPSU)" but pointed out little in the way of concrete tasks other than to analyse the remarks and proposals of Congress delegates and take measures for their realisation.

## Leadership replaced

The Writers' Congress did not quite match up to the drama at the Fifth Congress of the USSR Cinema Workers' Union in May 1986. Events at the Congress had been pre-figured by a campaign directed against the State Film Committee (*Goskino*) and its head, Filipp Ermash. They were heavily criticised for keeping successful directors from working and for keeping films already shot on the shelf. In contrast to the Writers' Congress where some liberals were excluded, Sergei Bondarchuk the famous director but too closely associated with the Brezhnev era was not allowed as a delegate, and two-thirds of the old leadership were replaced. Elem Klimov, a director whose work had been heavily affected by *Goskino* in the past, was elected First Secretary replacing Lev Kulidzhanov, a Central Committee member of the CPSU who had been rebuked at the 27th Congress for his over-fulsome praise of the new General Secretary. Klimov is thought not to be even a member

of the Party but high level approval for his election is indicated by the fact that he was nominated by rising star Aleksandr Yakovlev who was himself later promoted to Politburo candidate at the Central Committee Plenum in February of this year.

In an interview in *Pravda* in August, Klimov outlined the steps being taken by the Cinema Workers' Union to overcome the bureaucratic impediments to film-making, chief amongst which was the establishment of an unprecedented Commission of Investigation into the validity of bans on films over the past twenty years. He also indicated that a meeting had been held with some leading authors since the Writers' Congress about the problems of translating literature onto the big screen. A joint conference was being organised to discuss this in detail.

## Impact

The impact of removing leading bureaucrats from both the Writers' and the Cinema Workers' Unions is already being felt. Whereas at the 27th Congress of the CPSU, Georgii Markov had declared that "Doctor Zhivago" would never be published in the Soviet Union, it has just been announced that it is to be serialised in a Soviet journal in the very near future. Other authors who had previously been banned are also being considered for publication. The film sensation of the moment is "Repentance" which had previously been shelved and is a strong attack on Stalin. As with the entire policy of *glasnost*, the wider political implications and dynamic of this new liberalism remain to be seen in the months ahead.



Yevtushenko, Rasputin

SEAN ROBERTS

# “AN EXTRAORDINARY OCCURRENCE...”

A Review of *Zabastovki v SSSR—Poslestalinskii Period* (Strikes in the USSR—Post-Stalin Period) in *SSSR: Vnutremnye Protivorechiya* (USSR: Internal Contradictions) No. 15, New York, 1986.

**W**hile most attention these days tends to be focused on happenings in the Politburo, it is useful to be reminded that struggles continue in other areas of Soviet life. Information on the working class and its independent activity has been limited in English to Victor Haynes' and Olga Semyenova's excellent collection of documents "Workers Against the Gulag" (Pluto Press, 1979) and M. Holubenko's article "The Soviet Working Class: Discontent and Opposition" in *Critique* No.4, so the appearance of Alekseeva's systematic review of strikes in the Soviet Union, although in Russian and thus limited in its readership, is to be welcomed.

Alekseeva's examination of Samizdat, emigre memoirs and the official Soviet press for information turns up documented evidence for only 75 strikes during the entire period from 1953 to 1983. The chronological distribution of only two strikes in the period 1953-59, seventeen for 1960-69, twenty-five (1970-79) and thirty-one (1980-83) gives the appearance of a gradual upsurge of working-class activity towards the end of the Brezhnev years. This is not necessarily the case. A spate of strikes is known to have occurred at the end of the fifties when samizdat was in its infancy and the increase in recorded strikes in the eighties probably reflects the development of samizdat as much as that of the strike movement.

Despite believing from her discussions with recent emigres that strikes are a much more frequent occurrence than hard facts would lead one to believe Alekseeva has confined her analysis only to those strikes where substantial evidence exists, ruling out, for example, those which reportedly took place in Tol'atti and Gorki in May 1980 involving thousands of car workers but which samizdat sources later confirmed never occurred. However, this scrupulousness does not account for the curious omission of some strikes for which there is evidence and which are referred to in Holubenko's article including one in Kiev in May 1969 which, as far as I know, is the only such action mentioned in the "Chronicle of Current Events".

## The significance of strikes in the USSR

If strikes are so infrequent, how do Soviet workers improve their living conditions? Denied independent organisation and faced with opposition from the official trade-union, Party hierarchy, factory management and KGB informers, the most straightforward way is by simply changing jobs. This is possible in conditions of full employment and indeed a shortage of labour. When strikes, euphemistically referred to as "Chrezvychainye Proissheshtvie", extraordinary occurrences, do take place they therefore take the form "not of the organised expression of workers pursuing definite ends, but of the spontaneous outburst of desperate people". Alekseeva contradicts herself a few lines later when she states that "...a strike is...an organised protest..." Clearly it is possible to have a collective but spontaneous response to some injustice and the rest of Alekseeva's evidence supports the idea of spontaneity under extreme provocation. However, the Party's central control of the economy and political system naturally becomes the focus of any action and Alekseeva correctly observes that "under such conditions, a strike never assumes an economic character, it cannot last long and it cannot cause any sort of significant loss of production. A strike is... a means of appealing to a possible higher level of the leadership, a collective petition."

## The scale of strikes and their demands

Few strikes, however, have overtly political demands from the beginning. The exceptions have been a refusal by dockers at a series of Baltic ports to handle imported foodstuffs destined solely for the bureaucracy's special shops and stoppages of work in Estonia in 1981 in support of a range of political demands issued by the underground organisation "The Democratic National Front of the USSR". This, incidentally, is the only instance of outside agitators provoking a strike despite the claim of

the authorities that outside forces hostile to the Soviet system are usually to blame for such events. Naturally, once a strike escalates as in Novochoerkassk in 1962, its demands become more and more radical and in that case prompted the intervention of the Politburo.

Novochoerkassk is, undoubtedly, the biggest strike to have taken place in the Soviet Union in the years since Stalin and far surpasses every other in terms of the number of people involved, the factory where it started alone employed 20,000 workers. Other strikes have been more modest. In Priluki in 1967, and at Krivoi Rog in 1963 and 1983, workers from several factories struck and there has been more than one instance of a city's entire transport system being brought to a halt. On the whole strikes tend to be small, localised and short in duration. Even a strike with the breadth of Novochoerkassk lasted only three days as the material and organisational prerequisites for a protracted struggle were not there and the bureaucracy could not afford to let such a revolt continue.

The form that a strike can take varies but it is very rare for the workforce to leave its place of work. Sometimes this is because of the short duration of the stoppage but again, even at Novochoerkassk, the majority of workers would return to their factories during the day and stand around at the gates. Only in 9 cases did workers completely leave their place of work—bus drivers in Kishinev in 1969, collective farm workers at Zarenchenka in 1970 and Zanosychi in 1978, workers at a clay works in Mishelevka in 1980 and the dockers in the series of stoppages on the Baltic coast in 1977. This again attests to the spontaneous character of these disputes.

Alekseeva's analysis suffers from its oversociological approach and consequent lack of political context. It is weakest when attempting to draw out conclusions from a minimum of data. With age, for example, only the most banal and generalised conclusion can be drawn — "...leaders of strikes are more often people of middle age, but amongst the active participants, a significant

section is youth.”

The preponderance of industrial workers in disputes is noted by Alekseeva and explained away by the fact that workers in light industry, despite their comparatively low wages, pilfer goods to which they have access in order to supplement their income. This cushions them against sudden increases in food prices or cuts in wage rates and makes strike action more unnecessary. This ignores the fact that pilfering can be highly lucrative at all levels of Soviet industry by providing material for spare parts or a second job. It is still the case that workers in massive factories are the most socially cohesive, and can have a more immediate effect through collective action.

The geographical spread of strikes is not examined by Alekseeva although it would appear to be an important area of analysis given the intertwining of the national question with other political and economic factors. A brief glance indicates that a disproportionate number have occurred in the Ukraine and Baltic States. This contra-

sts with the almost total lack of disputes in Soviet Central Asia and the Transcaucasian Republics. This would seem to be a reflection of firstly, a strong sense of nationalism coupled with a numerically strong working class located in major industrial centres in the case of the Baltic States and the Ukraine. Secondly, these have a much more active dissident movement and a proximity to the West which would more easily allow such occurrences to become public knowledge.

Holubenko noted the preponderance of strikes at the “periphery” of the USSR which was affected more by shortages, less easily penetrated by the KGB and less of a threat than strikes in the strategic heartland. Holubenko also claimed that strikes at the periphery tended to be much more violent. Alekseeva only deals with the question of violence from the side of the authorities. Without doubt, violence has been used to suppress strikes but, since Novocherkassk, the more common tactic has been one of “damage limitation”—conceding demands, letting out as little publicity as possible and

then taking action against individual “organisers” afterwards.

Soviet strikes have a surprisingly high success-rate and, even in some instances where strikes have been suppressed, belated cognisance has been taken of the justice of the strikers’ demands and officials have been sacked, food supplies improved etc.

Alekseeva concludes her study saying that “. . . it is possible to hope that strikes will be more frequent in the USSR while not becoming something common, the normal means of settling labour disputes between workers and the administration”. This is possible if the gap between Gorbachev’s promises of more democracy and consumer goods and Soviet reality becomes too great, but gauging any upsurge in working-class activity will remain a problem unless the new openness makes available much more information about dissent and opposition.

The following interview with Soviet left-wing activist Alexander Severukhin (a pseudonym) was recorded during a brief visit by a North American socialist student to the USSR. It challenges some widespread notions about the virulence of the nationalities problem in the USSR and gives an insight into the thinking of a current of left-wing dissent

## “WE MUST MOBILISE THE MASSES FOR REFORM”

*What can you tell us about the left opposition in the Soviet Union today?*

I would say that the left opposition is just emerging as a political factor. In the late 1970s and early 80s the problem was simply to prove that we actually do exist; to prove this both to our society and in some sense also for the Western left.

The position of the dissident emigres has been that in the Soviet Union there is absolutely no socialist opposition; that it disappeared after the invasion of Czechoslovakia. It was true, that the old style reformist communist opposition disappeared. Our task was to begin from the very beginning, from almost nothing. No, from less than nothing, because a socialist ideology was considered something old fashioned, even “reactionary”. The Stalinists had managed to make most intellectuals anti-socialist. But at the same time, right-wing dissidents and emi-

gres showed that their so-called solution was even more totalitarian and stalinist than official Stalinism. It was a kind of inverted, anti-communist Stalinism. Solzhenitsyn is a very typical example. But many others, still inside the Soviet Union are also inverted Stalinists. The younger generation realised that anti-communist dogmatism is no better than communist dogmatism, and among some of us there was a revolt against both types. There existed a need to find basic principles for a new left-wing thought in the Soviet Union: to study the Western left-wing tradition; to study the tradition of Russian socialist thought; to study our own concrete experience and work out ways of solving our problems and to find a kind of synthesis. I would not say that this has already been achieved, only that there is a process—a process of synthesising different left-wing traditions. People considered to be left wing in the Soviet Union don’t think of

themselves as “social democrats” or “revolutionary Marxists” or whatever, they think of themselves as “people of the left”. It isn’t necessary to specify a tendency or tradition because the idea is to overcome divisive elements in the tradition—to find a non-sectarian left-wing ideology. We are trying to integrate ideas of so-called market socialism, ideas of self-management, of revolutionary Marxism and so on.

There are also tendencies which are objectively left wing or socialist, but lack socialist consciousness—such as the Trust Group—which objectively has a left-wing element in its political positions and is associated with the Western left through the peace movement. But they do not think of themselves as a left-wing group.

In the ecologist movement, which is semi-official, there are some people thinking in more or less left-wing terms. I see a lot which coincides. . . but one should not think

of them as genuine left-wing people.

In official reformist currents there are also some groups that are moving slowly towards the radical left, but they are moving under the real pressure of objective facts.

*What can you say about the position of the Soviet working class?*

It is important to remember that the Soviet working class is very different from the traditional Western understanding of the working class or proletariat in general, because the Soviet working class was produced by rapid industrialisation under the conditions of a totalitarian state. This later moved gradually towards a kind of new post-totalitarian authoritarian form—but one which is different from the kind of authoritarianism we know from Latin American or Third World experience. In that sense the Soviet working class is still rather marginal; it is large if you count by numbers, but the real working class in the Marxist sense is only a section of the so-called working class, or rather “working masses”. We speak of a working mass of which the actual working class is only a sector, but we hope a decisive one.

*Could you enlarge on what you see as differentiating the Soviet working class from “the traditional Western understanding” as you called it?*

Well, during the process of rapid industrialisation the number of so-called workers grew very rapidly. Then, during the Krushchev period of rapid urbanisation, there was a second wave of growth among the working class. In reality, though, this was not a real “organic” working class, but rather a mass of marginal, classless people, who were moved from their places and thrown into factories with neither a class consciousness nor a class structure. Such a “mass” could simply not exist separate from the bureaucratic system. The system was very important because the official politics were always to integrate people into the system directly, in a way which would prevent them from consolidating their social relationships, and from becoming a class in the real sense.

Friends of mine who have tried to explore the real nature of social relationships in the factory have discovered that there are a lot of ties connecting workers with administration. We call these “corruptive ties”: ties connecting them with the bureaucracy and with lower levels of management.

*To be compared with “corporate unionism” in the West, or a kind of class collaboration?*

Not collaboration. No. There are simply often common corruptive interests. For example, workers are not very disciplined or productive and the administration will ignore this fact. At the same time, workers

don't protest when they are underpaid, or when their rights are ignored by the administration, because management also ignores their own bad behaviour.

In that situation there are a lot of ties that are not class ties but rather anti-class ties. They are very real, not something invented to spoil the working class, but something organically developed by the system. Nevertheless, class ties also exist, and these are more and more developed within the process of social development. We maintain that there is a real working class in the Marxist sense, structurally organised along the lines of skilled, qualified labour. That is the nucleus of the real working class. Its interests are basic to the broad labour masses as a whole. We hope that the broad labour masses can be integrated into that nucleus, can be organised by it and follow it.

Nevertheless, we know that different elements of the labour masses have interests of their own, have their own specific social experience... For the qualified working class the main interest is in the idea of reform. Democratisation, and the type of reform characterised by the Czechoslovak experience; or perhaps, to begin with, the Hungarian model, later developing toward something more radical...

For unqualified labour, the main idea is justice. This sector seeks justice, but doesn't think very much about reform. The problem for the left is somehow to integrate these tendencies ideologically. To integrate the idea of justice and the concept of reform—that is the theoretical task of the left.

The official reformers do much to work out a program of specific measures which are oriented toward a kind of market socialism, and even towards a kind of democratic self-management. But their ideas are always theoretical. What do they do in reality? They write letters to the authorities.

The program must be to integrate real social interests into the movement for reform and to mobilise the social masses along lines of their own interests. That is a question which cannot be solved by the official reformism itself. Therefore, the unofficial left wing opposition must be formed for that very task. This is the main *raison d'être* for a radical left in the Soviet Union—a group that is more than simply reformist. It should be more than reformist; it should be revolutionary.

Revolutionary not only politically and methodologically, it must also have a kind of revolutionary *psychology*. Even if people are not revolutionary in their theoretical ideas (because there are a lot of people who are theoretically rather reformist; who would be social democrats in the West). They, nevertheless, practising as Soviet opposition leftists, are forced to develop a revolutionary psychology. That is why we have the possibility to integrate different tendencies of the left into a kind of “new Soviet left”—an

“organic left” as we say, integrating all the various tendencies, and all the versions of our historic experience as a combined left.

*With this task in mind, what concrete possibilities exist for you to do concrete work, to propagandise, to form yourselves as a movement?*

Because of reasons you can easily understand, I don't wish to be specific about concrete actions. I can only speak about these problems in a more general way (and perhaps this is also more to the point).

The 27th Party Congress made a great deal of promises to the people. At the same time, it is clear that the system is not capable of fulfilling these promises. The idea now is to exploit the official promises to the fullest extent possible. That is why, at least for the time being, we have some possibility of legal work. The main trend in our activity now is to work legally, but to organise ourselves in a somewhat “conspiratorial” way because even legal work must be organised in a way that is not “publicised”. Otherwise it will be quickly destroyed.

*Perhaps we could turn to more general problems. You have mentioned certain tendencies towards crisis of a social and political kind. What economic problems are most significant in this period?*

Economic tendencies are already well known in the West. The drop in oil prices accompanied by the decrease in production creates a very unfavourable situation for the Soviet economy. In some ways this is crucial because Brezhnev oriented the economy towards oil exports. These exports were necessary to pay for Western technology, and for grain—two elements which we used to support internal stability.

Brezhnev's idea was to solve difficulties with oil production partially by means of atomic energy. Since the Chernobyl events it is clear that the atomic energy programme will not compensate for these shortcomings in the system. It has become clear that the systematic weaknesses are stronger than any objective circumstances. By this I mean, for example, that we had resources, but we have managed to get rid of these and produce shortages instead. Then, there was an atomic energy programme—and now that is also in difficulties.

A second problem is that of machinery. Equipment in Soviet plants is not only theoretically out of date, it is physically too old—at this point the machines are literally falling apart. Economists believe that by the end of the eighties, because of this factor, it will be very difficult just to keep the economy going—simply to reproduce the economy will be very difficult. In other words, there is a level on which the system itself is making all adopted decisions counterproductive—is destroying the process of decision-making.



Gorbachev on walk-about

It is a particular moment of the system's natural development, a qualitative moment.

There is a Marxist law—the contradiction which may arise between the forces of production and the relations of production. The relations of production in the Soviet Union are not only in contradiction to the productive forces, but are actually destroying any real development of the productive forces beyond a limited minimal level. In the long term this contradiction is fatal to the system.

The only way out is a kind of reform—but a reform that can only be realised through a social struggle. Social struggle is not something that takes place between factions, as you know, but between classes. Sooner or later this struggle will be radicalised, and will involve broad masses of the population. That's why "reformism" is the only way to be "revolutionary" here. We must support the reformists' initiatives, seeking to make them *popular* initiatives, trying to get support for them from the grassroots. Those initiatives once receiving support from the grassroots, are no longer "reformist"—they become revolutionary. . .

*Because they are under an impulse from outside themselves?*

Yes. They become part of a spontaneous movement. The main task is to explain to the people that they themselves must do something to cure the evils of the system. Even if they support some aspect of the system and are not seeking to destroy it. They must be engaged in the life of society. Then that social life will produce something

new; it will "reproduce" or change those people who are engaged in it.

*In the West many analysts assign a significant role to the national question as a source of potential instability in the Soviet Union. What is your view of this?*

I don't think the national question is the main problem—though it certainly does exist. A different degree of Russification exists in each republic. . . perhaps the most backward republics can be said to have gained from being "colonised", from having been included in the system. The most advanced, on the other hand, feel themselves held back more or less. For example, when you discuss Azerbaijan in terms of Russification, it is not hard to guess that this is in some respects a positive development, a form of modernisation.

Interestingly, the official policy—in creating local national elites, at the same time, *creates* the problem of nationalism. The main problem in this sense is not a struggle of oppressed nationalities against Russians, in many republics it is really a factional struggle between bureaucracies: the local bureaucracy, elevated in the Soviet period (produced by the system) which want to have more rights and possibilities inside the system. For many bureaucrats, for instance in Azerbaijan or Uzbekistan, the most important thing about their national feelings is to get control of posts now occupied by Russians.

There is also a kind of intellectual nationalism—although I wouldn't call it a real "nationalism" because a large number

of very much russified intellectuals consider themselves nationalists. At the same time they are primarily concerned with the problem of censorship and other general problems. They are concerned with this because they are writers and artists, and are concerned with it exactly as Russian writers and artists are.

There are different kinds of "nationalism". Our task is to find progressive tendencies even in nationalist currents and to co-operate with them, seeing their positive elements, but we must not support "nationalism" as such. This is also a very important point.

Western speculation about the Soviet Union being almost broken apart by various nationalisms is simply not correct. There are many problems and many dangers for the system, but nationalism is not the greatest danger. It might, perhaps, work with others, complimenting them. . .

*Do you see the Ukraine as occupying a unique place in the realm of national problems?*

Perhaps I can say something about this specifically from the Russian point of view. Russian views of the Ukraine are very dualistic. For example, Ukrainians are generally the worst people inside the system, when they have been integrated into the system. There are a lot of Ukrainians (almost all having forgotten their own language and national origin) who are nevertheless the worst Great Russian chauvinists. Many in the secret police, the party hierarchy, and the army are from such a Russified Ukrainian background. It's an important point. There are more Russified Ukrainians than Russians at certain very important levels of the bureaucracy. The most oppressive elements within the system are using those people—they are used both against Russians, and against their own people.

At the topmost level of the bureaucracy, the whole group around Brezhnev was from Ukraine. For example, Fedorchuk, a well-known figure in the secret police, was a great enemy of Ukrainian nationalism, and of all other kinds of nationalism, except, of course, Russian.

There is a phenomenon among Russians which I call *khokhlophobia*—from *khkhol*—the slang word for Ukrainian. There is a lot of competition between Russian and Ukrainian bureaucrats (I mean Russified Ukrainian bureaucrats). I speak about those within the Russian republic. Many Ukrainians have moved there, and have been easily assimilated, since there is not such a great difference between us in the ethnic sense. Since they compete with Russians inside Russia, there is a great hatred against them within the bureaucracy. That is what I mean by *Khokhlophobia*.

But there are also anti-Ukrainian feelings among workers and among intellectuals—

this is because Russified Ukrainians do a lot of damage to the perception of Ukrainian nationality from the outside. That is why even dissident intellectuals in Moscow have had very dualistic feelings when the question of Ukrainians is raised. The Ukrainian movement within Ukraine is regarded of course as something very important and positive. But Ukrainians outside their own republic are considered some of the most active supporters of the system's most oppressive elements.

Ukraine is, of course, one of the biggest republics, and the most economically powerful, having many resources of its own. But what does it mean, "the Ukrainian question"? First it refers to a cultural question—a question of national identity, because Ukrainians have their own history. Now they are told that their history is important only as a history of being united with Russia. In this sense, they are forced to forget their own history. There was a Ukrainian cultural renaissance in the twenties, but almost all those who were engaged in this movement were later eliminated. Now there is a lot of pseudo-Ukrainian culture with mainly folkloristic elements, but the real Ukrainian cultural tradition cannot be developed.

In a sense you can say almost the same things about any other republic, even about Russians. But it is important to say that Ukraine is a highly developed part of the Soviet Union. Ukrainians produce more than any other nation in the Union. There is a feeling that distribution among the republics is unequal, meaning that Ukraine gives more than it receives in relation to other republics. This is also something it shares with other developed republics—the Baltic republics especially. The only case of a highly developed republic avoiding this fate is Byelorussia.

Maherov, a very popular party leader, managed somehow to separate the Byelorussian economy from the Union—establishing a kind of local republican autarchy. For Ukraine this is impossible, since the republic is so large and so closely connected with the functioning of the Union economy.

*How might the national question be said to relate to other tendencies toward crisis in the system?*

I am not a specialist on national problems except perhaps on the Baltic republics which I have attempted to study in greater detail. But my feeling is that the high point for specifically national movements has already passed in most of the republics. Now people are more concerned with general problems of the system as a whole. I see this as a positive development. This is not to say that national questions are no longer important. On the contrary, they are very important. But they are more and more integrated into

the general problem of the system's crisis.

It is interesting that in the official reformist tendencies, those operating legally, one can see the ecologist tendency, and another tendency which is moving to the left—toward self-management but still, the nationality problem is not taken up by any reformist tendency. It is mostly used by the dissidents. As I have mentioned, one of the ideas of our groups is to integrate different tendencies and demands into something more generalised, into a generalised radical reform movement which can later become something more than a reform movement. But great attention must still be paid to the national problem in an effort to understand what different nationalities really want, and how those national demands can be integrated into more general reforms.

I think that more freedom is better for everybody, and greater freedom in the sense of self-government is necessary also to solve the national problems. Decentralisation, liberalisation—these two reformist ideas—are already moving in a positive direction.

*You have often referred to Marxism in the course of our discussions. How do you define yourself in these terms, or, more broadly, what kinds of "Marxists" exist in the Soviet Union?*

The question of Marxism is an interesting one. I don't think there exists in the West any single "brand" of Marxism which would resemble ours. One can speak of a "neo-Marxism" developing slowly in the Soviet Union—also under the influence of Western neo-Marxism. But it is a very different creature nevertheless.

As you know, we have an official and well-known ideology of Marxism-Leninism, which is, I think, not Marxist and not particularly Leninist. I can't say that the official ideology has nothing in common with Marxism and Leninism but the Stalinist idea—the idea of the Stalinist "ethocracy"—was clear. They used Marxism and they used Leninist ideas for their own purposes, creating a new ideology using Marxism simply as a raw material from which the new, opposed, in some senses anti-Marxist, ideology was made.

It is very difficult to be a Marxist in a society where the official, oppressive ideology is called Marxism—even when it isn't "Marxism" this is still very difficult. One of the main requirements of the official ideology is to make people believe that it is Marxist and Socialist: "If we are socialists and Marxists," they say, "we can just take care of everything. You simply be patient, and wait for the promise of Marxism to be realised by us, by the party." There is much sentiment that is critical of Marxism. Even among people genuinely on the side of the left, many still prefer not to call themselves Marxists simply to avoid a misunderstanding, to avoid any comparison with the

official camp.

Nevertheless, there used to be another kind of ideological dogmatism which was that of the dissidents. I don't see a lot of difference between the dogmatism of official propaganda, and the dogmatism which was "reproduced" by dissent.

A lot of dissidents and emigrés—especially emigrés—managed to work out their own brand of dogmatism which looks like a twin of official Marxism-Leninism though it is inverted, like a mirror image of the official ideology. When younger intellectuals came to understand this, there was once again a movement towards Marxism. So, ironically, it was dissidents and dissident anti-Marxists who helped us get back in touch with Karl Marx and develop an interest in his original work.

In this sense some of our sources are in traditional Marxism. Karl Marx himself, people are once again reading Marx. There is also the Marxism of Gramsci, who is fairly "traditional" in terms of the Western left. Some people have managed to acquire and read original texts by Marcuse and the Frankfurt School; others have studied the Sartre of the Marxist period: "*Critique de la raison dialectique*", for example. Aside from interest in Western neo-Marxism, people have studied Kandel and the Yugoslav self-management theorists and theorists of market socialism—Vladimir Brus, Ota Sik, and the Czechoslovak revisionists.

There are also some peculiarly Russian sources of intellectual influence: the first is Herzen. Herzen was a Russian philosopher who had the same intellectual origin as Marx himself—that is, left Hegelian. There are many parallels between them, although Marx was by far the greater. Herzen was a left Hegelian socialist but one who knew Russia very well. He had one trait that was quite unsympathetic to Marx: he was concerned with the "mission of Russia" to the world. But he was not a Slavophile in the traditional sense—not even any kind of "left-wing Slavophile". He had some interesting thoughts on the position of Russia in Europe, Russian views of the West, and the West's view of Russia. In that sense Herzen is quite "actual" for us as a thinker. I'm afraid Marx was not really just in his criticism—calling Herzen an "aggressive Muscovite" and so on—although Herzen himself made a lot of mistakes.

Another important current is what we call "legal Marxism": liberal, official ideologists who seek to integrate some elements of real Marxism into the official pseudo-Marxism.

They are trying, perhaps, to "remake" the ideology—reintroduce the original sense into it. I don't think they can succeed; the official ideology is incurable. But this is still an important step: to move from the official ideology to Marxism itself.

The document which we publish below is a reply to a leaflet which circulated in Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1985, in which "young Christians" asked the "old guard" of the opposition to

1. explain their political positions in 1968, and state whether they now think those positions were right and whether the spiritual sources of their activity are the same now as then
2. to define the essence and specificity of their political ideas, in order to bring out what is fundamental.

PETR UHL

# HUMAN RIGHTS AND POLITICAL REVOLUTION

## ESTEEMED YOUNG FRIENDS,

I very much welcomed your appeal from August of this year. There are many reasons for this, but in particular I was glad to hear that you have "a persistent and growing conviction of the existence of existential values, which give life a form and structure", and that you consider that such values will be an integral part of your life in the future. I was also very pleased by your sense of responsibility, your awareness of the necessity of "personal involvement" and your determination to find the truth and also to gain political (in the good sense of the word) experience.

As an atheist (and I hope that you will take my words in the spirit in which they are intended) you will understand that I am far less pleased by the fact that you derive these attitudes from belief in the existence of a personal god and that you believe that Truth stands outside and beyond humanity and human history. I realise that it is up to me to explain why I react in this way and why I do not consider Christianity—and also Judaism, Islam etc—to be merely alternative possible ways of life, ways which—to paraphrase the Chinese pluralistic idea—stimulate and elucidate the life and development of society, including those aspects which stand closest to my heart — that is to say human rights and a democratic system like a thousand flowers. It is, of course, true that the majority of atheists in this country are in fact agnostics, while that minority which is rock hard and resolute in its "disbelief" does not consider direct criticism of religious belief to be either necessary or proper in the light of memories of the cruel repression against the churches, and in particular the Catholic church, after the Second

World War. The most that such people feel able to attempt now is a joke or a little aside dropped in company where there is no one who might be stung by it. To be sure, this is a most sensitive area.

For myself, however, I believe that a responsible attitude to life also requires a certain clarity in questions about faith in God, religion and atheism. Christians who only half believe in God, and who observe religious forms on special occasions or for reasons of tradition are not to my taste. I prefer those who try to openly express and put into practice their beliefs and opinions. As you will see, I start off from atheistic premisses. Lukewarm and vague attitudes to the fundamental questions of life have always been repellent to me.

***Lukewarm and vague attitudes to the fundamental questions have always been repellent to me***

I also believe that it is necessary to resume the fruitful dialogue between believers and atheists—in the Czechoslovak context mainly between Catholics and Evangelicals on the one hand and Marxists on the other—which began in the latter part of the 1960s. I think that such a dialogue is important and even necessary and will remain so as long as there exists a state power which subjects the churches, religious life and even religious thought to its control. As long indeed, as there exists a state which proclaims militant atheism, but pursues the goal of uprooting religious belief not



Petr Uhl

through attempting to convince but through tireless administrative and, when necessary, police and judicial pressure<sup>1</sup>. In my view the dissemination of atheism is a matter for atheists in the same way that spreading the faith is a matter for Christians. This is not an area in which the state should intervene, either as it does now, that is through discrimination against Christians, nor in the form of propaganda, since propaganda organised by the state is already a form of pressure.

However it is not the purpose of this article to consider the question of religion and atheism; perhaps the opportunity for all this will present itself. Nonetheless I felt it important to spell out my atheistic premisses before embarking on strictly political matters, because—as we have seen—you draw “spiritual resources” for your commitment from faith in God and want to know what the spiritual and intellectual background is from which the political activity of the, shall we say, older generation of Chartists is derived.

For me, these are the same or similar values as I imagine you have. And since Marxists, like Christians, like to operate with the magic number “three”, I will divide the values which I consider to be the sources of my involvement into three groups:

1. Firstly there is human dignity and freedom. I find it hard to separate these two values. They signify for me above all equal rights in society and the utilisation of all the democratic rights and freedoms which are set down in, for example, the two international pacts on human rights. The passing of these two pacts into Czechoslovak law in 1976 was, along with the “Helsinki process” and the legal moves against members of the Plastic People rock group, one of the main impulses behind the founding of the Charter 77 movement<sup>2</sup>. Both pacts, furthermore, were direct sources for the text of the founding appeal of the Charter.

Human rights—to conceive human dignity and freedom in a broader sense—need to be formulated as precisely as possible in relation to the social conditions prevailing at a particular historical moment. The legal formulations, furthermore, must always point beyond the existing conditions, and have the effect of stimulating the further development of human rights and set examples for the future in this area. Formulated in this way, human rights have, from the Renaissance and the Reformation, and above all since the end of the 18th century, been the basic—and in extreme situations such as our own—the final arena of the social movement, in which people such as

you are involved and have any existence. This is a very complex area of social relations and relations between people. The fundamental proposition of “human rights” discourse is the notion that all people are equal, that is to say have equal rights in the most diverse areas of life, or, to put it more accurately, *have to have* equal access to rights and to material and spiritual resources. Equal access does not of course mean the same level of consumption or degree of need. Insofar as the principles of your faith allow you to see the problematic of human rights in the same or a similar way, this will be to the benefit of all and will facilitate a greater degree of collaboration between people of different ideological and religious persuasions. Christianity and socialism not only do not exclude one another, but in fact many Christians explicitly align themselves with socialism, so that a great number of Christians in the world consider themselves to be socialists (my formulation about equality expresses the most fundamental premiss of the socialist movement). It is a shame that in the Czech lands it is only the evangelicals who explicitly put forward socialist ideas, but a serious dialogue would clarify the minds of many others: it would, in fact, show that the central values and principles to which the Czech Catholics subscribe are socialist, even if they do not recognise this fact themselves. There are many misconceptions at large in this discussion. From the Catholic side, from Vaclav Benda, we meet for example a decisive rejection of something called social levelling. I have never come across this phrase before and fear that it has been created in the interests of a “just struggle” against everything to do with socialism. It has been arrived at by negating the concept of “social inequality” against which socialists (as well as others) often protested in the past, and which they still criticise today. But nobody—and certainly no socialist—has ever proclaimed the need for “social levelling”. All those who derive their political positions from the tradition of the Enlightenment, the American Declaration of Independence and the socialist movement of the past century have referred to the concept of collective (—social) *equal rights*. People who want to criticise socialism or take a position towards it must address themselves to this concept. And it is not necessary to be an adherent of liberation theology to see that it is hardly possible for a contemporary Christian to define their positions on the basis of a rejection of equal access to rights.

Nonetheless there are divergences of outlook and these will persist in

the future. I must make it clear, therefore, in the interests of a frank expression of views, that there is one point in, for example, the United Nations’ Declaration on Human Rights, which is a reference point for the basic text of Charter 77, which I reject: the right to private ownership of the means of production. I do not share the view put forward, for example, by French anarchists in the last century, that private property is always theft; nonetheless I do consider that when private ownership of the means of production means the employment of people other than the owners, and of people who cannot deal with the owners on equal terms, then private property in the means of production is a form of theft, which I cannot, in the light of my conscience, be in favour of (take note, please, Marxists also have such a thing as a conscience!). At the same time I am also unable to accept a situation where the means of production are under the control of groups other than the producers, groups which conceal their economic and political power and present the whole system to the world as socialism. This is how things stand in Czechoslovakia—of which more later.

2. The second idea that I adhere to is closely connected with human dignity and freedom and with human rights. It is the idea of the harmonious development of each individual as a precondition for the development of the social whole. This is how Marx expressed himself. I bring this up here not in order to wrap myself in textual authority, but because in this country Marxism is a suppressed political-philosophical system which has probably been subjected to more distortion than any other. It will do no harm to refer at this point to a matter on which many people are under a false impression. We will emphasise the point again: the condition for the development of the social whole is the development of the individual; if anyone asserts that, on the contrary, the free development of the personality is conditional on the free development of society (and, moreover, that a free, that is socialist, society, *automatically* guarantees the development of the individual) then they run the risk of being suspected of wanting to hear work accompanied by the song:

“We’re chopping down the trees, and the dirty old Stalinist dogs are flying to the side...”

Following the popular wisdom, the Stalinists applied—even if they did not invent—the adage “when the trees are cut down, splinters fly”. The sad truth is that, even apart from the crimes lying behind the flying splinters, the value of the

whole business of cutting down the trees is itself questionable.

3. A democratic social system, this is the third of my fundamental values. Only a democratic system involving the implementation of human rights in daily life can provide fully or to an acceptable degree the conditions for individual development and thereby for the development of society as a whole. I will return later to the question of how I imagine such a self-managing democratic society. Here I will simply note that the democratic conception which I support is based on the following premisses:

- the necessity of the progressive (however gradual) withering away of the state;
- opposition to parliamentarianism and authoritarianism;
- ideological (including political, cultural and religious) pluralism;
- democracy within the sphere of production;
- the condition that the share of direct democracy increases at the expense of the sphere of indirect democracy;
- internationalist principles a) in terms of solidarity and b) through integration and the development of perspectives for future integration.

These conceptions are very different from those commonly current. Before elaborating on them, I want to say something about their origins.

## ***I reject the right to private ownership of the means of production***

Everything I have referred to above is based on a common denominator: my conviction that life has a meaning, even if we sometimes doubt it and are unable to clearly identify or formulate it. And all my endeavours, the “inner meaning of my life”, is to help the development of life. Even leaving on one side the fact that I consider that the account which religion gives of the world and of definite phenomena is not true, it would in any case be of no assistance to me if I wrote in for things I do not understand the concept of God.

The fact that there are things which are not presently understood does not mean that they will remain beyond the grasp of future generations. And I am always ready to debate the validity of my view of life, even with believers. But since you have a concept of Truth, even if it is one that stands outside history and humanity, there is a possibility not only of a dialogue but hopefully

of common ground on political and moral conclusions. Even if I am aware of the historical basis of my value system, political conceptions and moral principles, according to which I evaluate the behaviour of other people, and even if I do not adhere to an absolute or transcendental value system, my principles and attitudes are firmly held and I will not surrender them under pressure. History—including recent history—shows us that people have suffered and died for their principles and that this has been true of many with no religious convictions or beliefs. I hold this proud and resolute determination on the part of atheists in high regard, among other reasons because it does not draw its strength from anything absolute, but simply from a consciousness of the extremes which limit human beings, their weaknesses and strengths, their vulnerability and adaptability. It also draws on a vision of history which sees progress in the multifarious aspects of the pitiless struggle to overcome crime, humiliation and oppression. And despite or perhaps because of this understanding we respect humanity, its history and perspectives and, being far removed from any desire to deify humanity, we put all our strength at the service of what some call human rights, others social progress, yet others the unfolding of civilisation or, again, the overcoming of exploitative and oppressive social arrangements. This is our common motivation, understandable also to you, as Christians.

In 1977 many of the more "political" signatories of Charter 77, including myself, were subject to the suspicion that they did not sign the Charter in total good faith, but had certain ulterior motives. We were suspected of being interested in political change rather than in human rights. The fact is that I am interested in political change but I signed the Charter in good faith. In my view a full or at least partial guarantee of human rights (as well as of a lasting European and world peace) is dependent on basic political and social changes in Czechoslovakia and on a world scale. I also think that it is a good and correct strategy for the struggle (I almost wrote class struggle — but more about that later) against the bureaucratic dictatorship to draw the attention of everybody to all the things which are legally guaranteed to us but which remain on paper. Such activity has several meanings:

1. Each demand—however modest in itself—in the sphere of human rights has an explosive or even directly revolutionary dynamic—either the authorities retreat, and meet the demand—usually trying to give the impression that this was a

product of their own initiative—in which case, however partial the concession, the monolithicity, inertia and sacrosanctity of the state power are undermined so that cracks are developed which can easily be widened; or the authorities do not give way, providing—particularly in the international arena—yet another demonstration of their rigidity, lack of developmental capacity, inability to step out of their own shadow, and also of their dishonesty and inability to keep to international agreements and respect their own laws; it is a demonstration of a lack of legitimacy.

2. Many people within the official structures as well as ordinary citizens keep track of the way the authorities react, whether they retreat or put up an inert resistance. They pass judgement on the way the authorities behave, and become aware of the ludicrous discrepancies between promise and reality. People become more critical, their consciousness is heightened and they become more interested in social questions.

3. In specific instances, such as, for example, are dealt with by VONS, but also in a series of other cases brought into the open by Charter 77, real people have benefited concretely. Another effect is the creation of an atmosphere of solidarity in which it is easier to breathe or even to bear imprisonment with dignity. It also helps in one's personal life.

Awareness of legality is strengthened by publicity. Even if the authorities do not retreat in the given case, a warning is given for the future: every similar case might end up being publicised and such information lowers the self-confidence of the authorities both in the international fora and in the face of Czechoslovak citizens. This is why reports about specific individual cases are so valuable. Even the authorities can be educated in this way and show that they are partially educable. In fact it is not rare to find cases where the authorities have retreated in the middle of a case which we have taken up; instead of 3 years a certain "delinquent" gets 18 months, or a sentence is suspended. In the last two or three years, for example, repression against Catholics has been disproportionate; its growth has been caused by the development of a Catholic *samizdat* and growing activity amongst Catholics, especially the young. Thanks to the effective way in which the Catholic milieu keeps itself informed about its own affairs, VONS is aware of the great majority of acts of repression. It is, on the other hand, only aware of a very small proportion of politically motivated cases from other milieux, cases in

the fields of culture, making of jokes, association—especially of young people, ecology, conflicts with the authorities, outspoken criticisms or even explicitly political statements. This fact has given rise to the mistaken idea, especially in other countries, that repression is exclusively or even mainly directed against Catholics. This is not to make light of the fact that there has been a significant growth in the activity of the Catholic milieu in recent years—in particular in the field of *samizdat* publications—and that this has made them the victims of numerous acts of repression. The acts of repression are indeed numerous, but—for our conditions—relatively restrained. Apart from three young people in Bratislava nobody has received a sentence which has not been suspended, and this is against a background of dozens of cases, many of them carrying possible prison sentences, and dozens of house searches in the course of which not only written material but also duplicating machines have been found. I do not want to overestimate VONS—there have been other influences at work. The international situation has changed and repression against Christians has become a Czechoslovak and Soviet speciality, given that Albania has already achieved a final solution of the religious problem. The Czechoslovak leadership and the security services which are (fortunately!) subordinated to it are increasingly compelled to take into account factors such as international public opinion, the press in neighbouring countries, radio broadcasts in Czech and Slovak, which influence the Czechoslovak population, positions adopted by governments, including socialist or social-democratic governments, pressure from Amnesty International, the Socialist International, trade unions and political parties, including some communist parties, the peace movement, and in the case of Christians, from the Vatican, the Catholic church and individual Christians and organisations (Pax Christi, IKV etc). Nonetheless, without VONS, without the Charter, without tens and hundreds of self-sacrificing people, who disseminate information and attempt to help, individual cases would not get publicised and the authorities would feel able to "make examples".

As the years have passed, I have become increasingly aware that the most important of those for me is the third point. Concrete help to specific individuals and the education of the authorities by raising concrete cases—at least in day to day activity—are more important than the political calculation concerning the undermining of the system or the "didactic" aspects of raising

consciousness and the level of political awareness. Concrete help is the best policy and if it also has the consequences outlined in the first two points, so much the better. It also carries with it definite ethics: never to do anything which you are not certain will not harm those whose cases are being taken up. Even a shadow of doubt has to carry greater weight than any possible political benefits to be gained from public exposure of a case.

And this is in a sense the Christian attitude to things, an attitude which flows from Christian morality and which has been applied in Charter 77 and VONS. This attitude has led to a reorientation from a strategy which might be expressed in the words "from human rights to political disruption of the regime and to the development of the political confidence of ourselves and our fellow citizens" to a practice of giving help to human rights in concrete cases. I began to re-evaluate my activity in Charter 77 as being the service of particular individuals, the service of humanity as a whole coming through this. Of course I still consider the political consequences of my activity—real, hypothetical or longterm—as important, but such considerations have faded into the background somewhat as motives for my activity.

Let me repeat: from the very beginning I signed the Charter in complete good faith, and I have not abandoned my political evaluation of our activity. I also hope that it will be possible to develop a free political discussion about basic and even immediate problems. The precondition for the development of the as yet undefined currents and tendencies who will take part in this political discussion is the ideological, political, philosophical, cultural, religious etc pluralism of Charter 77. This is because this pluralism is guarded and cherished within the Charter—an institution *sui generis* which is not organised around a programme and is unable to develop and apply strict democratic rules. Indeed, as a non-organisation it cannot have any rules at all. And it must be said that democracy in the Charter, as far as democratic organisation and running are concerned, is in a terrible condition. But since, on the other hand, we have drawn attention to the absence of democracy and the reasons for this absence with great urgency from the outset, Charter 77 has been a school for democracy even if in the negative sense that every step that the Charter has taken, each time a document is issued, new spokespersons chosen or meetings with foreign colleagues arranged, we come up against the non-existence of democratic rules.

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIALISM

And it is against this background that your proposal arrived asking us to set out our political opinions, and state clearly what our convictions are and what we did in 1968. Calls for a discussion are now to be heard in the Chartist milieu from various quarters. The idea of a written symposium which you put forward in your appeal deserves particular consideration.

It is also valuable that you are young people since it does not seem as if many young people in this country are interested in such questions. Personally I am also glad that you are Catholics, since until now this milieu has restricted itself to exposing specific problems rather than entering into the wider discussion. Your appeal – and this is another of its virtues – has only served to remind us of what we have been trying to do over the past seven years. Before going on to this, allow me a small excursion.

That great thinker and avowed socialist, Tomas Garrigue Masaryk taught (with a touch of irony) “his nation”<sup>3</sup> that democracy is discussion. Perhaps it would be better to say that the initial precondition of democracy is free discussion. Even from this angle – the perspective of democracy – discussion between different political currents in the opposition (that is, the oppositional, critical milieu) is very necessary, if the development of political thinking is to be facilitated. Charter 77 cannot, however, arrange such a discussion on its “own ground”, since this would look like an attempt to create a political platform or programme, and it is likely that attempts to do this would crystallise out of such discussions if they were arranged by the Charter, although this would be in direct conflict with the founding appeal of the Charter and its purpose. Such discussions must therefore take place outside the Charter, even if the latter can help, sponsor and disseminate them. The text of your appeal shows that you understand these facts well.

Attempts in this direction were made ten years ago, in 1979, before the arrest of the ten VONS members. A number of short articles on the theme of “the possibility of an independent association in the countries of the Soviet bloc” were sparked off by Vaclav Havel’s essay “Power of the Powerless”. Seventeen authors contributed to the discussion. We hoped that a similar perspective would be adopted on the Polish side, because from the beginning we were interested in internationalising the discussion. However developments in Poland in 1980 meant that the Poles did not get around to writing or at least adding anything on this subject, and our texts were published in book

form by “Index” of Cologne with the title “Concerning Freedom and Power” (a somewhat abbreviated English edition came out in the summer of 1985, under the title *The Power of the Powerless*, published by Hutchinson, London). Things were delayed by our imprisonment and the subsequent imprisonment of Rudolf Battek, an independent socialist and one of the proponents of a political dialogue. Can a dialogue be developed now, and does your sensible appeal contribute to this? There are many indications that the desire for such a dialogue is present.

Before I come on to 1968 and to contemporary political problems, allow me to mention a problem which is connected both with human rights and with politics. This is the universality of human rights. The founding declaration of Charter 77, as is apparent, is a confrontation of reality with the two covenants on human rights which in 1976 became part of the Czechoslovak legal code. Both these international covenants have a universal applicability, have been formally adhered to by governments and parliaments from many countries on all five continents while their formulation also takes into account the problems of the so-called Third World. The UN Declaration of Human Rights also has a universal appeal. The final act of the Helsinki Conference, of course, promulgates human rights in a declarative form (in distinction from the international pacts which lay down legal norms). It proclaims these rights only for the USA, Canada and Europe, including the Asian parts of Turkey and the USSR. About 1,000 million people live in these regions, about a quarter of the world’s population. In the Helsinki final act the (often self-appointed) representatives of these 1,000 million people agreed on questions which do not concern the other 3,000 million who live in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The Helsinki process involves questions such as the reduction of military and political tensions, economic collaboration and business and cultural exchanges; if attention were paid in this context to the interests of the inhabitants of the Third World, whose lives, particularly in the socio-economic sphere, are dependent on the situation in Europe and the USA, then this exclusivity would be acceptable. But there is no such attention. “Regional” agreements between the European countries and the USA are justified by the fact that the USA and Europe are – from the military, political and economic viewpoints – the neuralgic part of the world. The problematic of human rights was thrown into the third basket of the Helsinki final act by the Western delegations as a

means of putting pressure on the USSR, in order to make it compliant on other questions. It is also important to recognise that this was also a consequence of the pressure of the Western press, public opinion and of democratic mechanisms in the West on the Western governments. Certainly human rights have their own regions: in the countries where the rich quarter of the world’s population lives, in the “Helsinki” north, there is less to be said about slavery, physical punishments, amputated hands, the stoning to death of women for adultery, and also less to say about utter destitution and oppression (insofar as these categories are recognised as questions of human rights by bourgeois political thought), than there is in the South, where the emphasis on the right to free artistic creation, free travel abroad, or the right to hold and disseminate all kinds of opinions might be considered as a remarkable peculiarity of some kind of Martian Magna Charta Libertatum. Anybody who wants to limit the overall struggle for human rights to the space provided for by Helsinki and wants therefore to exclude three quarters of humanity from this process, and does not speak about the problems of the South, will be subject to the suspicion that they want to us human rights merely as a means for criticising and attacking Soviet policy or even the very existence of the USSR. Because where are human rights limited in the North? Certainly in the USA (the position of black people etc), certainly in Ireland, or the Basque country and occasionally also elsewhere, but nonetheless everybody knows that the governments are the guilty party in this respect only insofar as they also are a product of a system which causes the denial of human rights in these countries or at least makes these problems so intractable. Most of the time, however, no one levels this accusation against the system and even less so against the governments. This critical stance is adopted only by a handful of embittered Marxists, who consider that the existing social system is inextricably connected with the infringement of human rights and that such infringements are an immanent, permanent and widespread feature of a social order based on private ownership of the means of production and the rule of capital. Be this as it may, these governments are being criticised, and sometimes even condemned but at the same time their evident attempts to moderate and even remove infringements of human rights is acknowledged. In the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Poland etc on the other hand, infringements of human rights are a part of everyday life and it is the state organs themselves

which are directly responsible often in direct conflict with their own laws. This is a qualitatively different thing to the occasional, hidden or hard to prove infringements of human rights in the West, especially if the subject is looked at through the optic of the bourgeois concept of human rights (I do not want to imply that this conception is worthless; quite the contrary; *mutatis mutandis* it can be used in defence of the rights of many ordinary people whether in the East or the West). Turkey ought to be added to the Soviet bloc on the list of countries where there is massive and systematic infringement of human rights; “Helsinkiite” defenders of human rights will be able to accept this proposition, knowing that criticising the conditions of life in Turkey gives credibility to the attack on the USSR and the satellite countries. It is therefore necessary to be careful if we restrict consideration of this question to the countries of the North. Such limitation can conceal not only misunderstanding but a positive intention: the struggle against Communism, and against the Soviet Union, a struggle to which it is necessary to subordinate all other points of view and all other considerations and in the interests of which it is possible to sacrifice the truth about the world and about humanity. I personally have nothing against the struggle against “Communism” (ie. the international system of bureaucratic dictatorships and tendencies towards them) and against the USSR, whose political system guarantees this unfreedom which paralyses large parts of mankind, provided that it is conducted for the right reasons, in the correct relation to other struggles and with the right aim in mind. As far as human rights are concerned, and also the whole material and cultural level, I see the relative proportions as follows.

The poverty-stricken South is getting poorer, in absolute terms and all the more so in that the population is growing, 3,000 million today will be 4,000 million tomorrow and 5,000 million the day after tomorrow. Its economic and military potential is growing, while in the last years two decades the growth of both the first and second world has been declining. The internal divisions within these countries, especially social and economic divisions, are growing and becoming sharper, so that the rich in these countries are getting richer while the poor are descending into an ever decreasing misery which is only partly moderated by humanitarian aid and by the development of health care and social enlightenment. The majority of the countries of the Third World live under dictatorships or other

(Argentina, Nicaragua, Egypt).

Although the North/South divide is not so strong that it could be identified as the main world problem, it is clear that it is a very serious problem and in the foreseeable future—perhaps in ten or fifteen years, it will become the most important problem of humanity. And human rights play an unavoidable role in it.

We live, of course, in Czechoslovakia and it is our duty to attempt to create more just conditions in our country. We are aware of the close links between our situation and that in East Germany, Poland, Hungary and also the Soviet Union and the other countries of Eastern Europe. For this reason we have sought to enter into a dialogue with independent movements in these countries, and strive for a common outlook and common initiatives. We also live in Europe, to which the Western part to which we are tied by numerous cultural, political and economic links, also belongs (Bohemia and even more Moravia and Slovakia also have strong links with Eastern Europe, beginning with the arrival of the Slavs in these lands. These connections are demagogically denied in the ideology about the “natural” closeness of Central Europe to the West, put forward by neo-nationalist proponents of the conception of “Central Europeanism”. This conception, which has been gaining strength in recent years abroad and among exiles is based on the illusion that the real or repackaged cultural values common to the various peoples who live in this region can be a significant or even the chief motor force of social development).

**Only free people can create a free society, and only a free society will be able to solve the relations between North and South**

We also therefore address ourselves to the problem of Europe as a whole. We do not always act as Chartists, whether in matters of peace and disarmament or of ecology. We must nonetheless remain conscious that the world is more than just Europe or the North and although it might seem to us that the major tension in the world is the tension between East and West or even between the White House and the Kremlin, and even if we continue to classify the main divisions within a particular society in terms of power, social relations or human

rights, we have to be prepared to accept that countries of the “Third World” are preoccupied by other problems (or by the same social problems in hitherto unknown and unexpected dimensions) and that these problems threaten to overflow the banks of the division between North and South and affect our old Europe as well. It is in our own interest to study the problems of the Third World and to understand and say something about them. Only free people can create a free society, and only a free society, creating the Europe of tomorrow, will be able in all seriousness to address itself to the solution of the relations between North and South. Let us be free today! And if this is not totally possible, then let us at least be more self-critical. We should all be aware, for example, that each of us, to the extent that the Czechoslovak officialdom takes part in international trade with the countries of the Third World, thereby participates in unjust trade, economic and cultural (including the so-called imperialism of information) exchanges with the South and thus has a share in the oppression and exploitation of the Third World. Even if it is not so striking as in the first world, our own material wealth (and spiritual poverty) and the comfort of the well-placed social layers is partly based on an unequal economic order, reinforced by supranational agencies and other imperialist mechanisms, through which the USSR and the other satellite countries quietly suck the blood of the Third World. Awareness of these facts should make us cautious when we hear people talking about Europeanism and European exclusivity. The majority of “European” conceptions (including “Central Europeanism”) are rooted in the attempt to protect and strengthen the domination of the world by the USA and Western Europe. We should have the courage to reject these schemes and expose them for what they are.

For all these reasons the founding appeal of Charter 77 emphasised that we were “united in a desire to individually and collectively concern ourselves with the problems of respect for human rights in our country and throughout the world”. Occasionally we should remind ourselves that it says “the world”. It is obvious that the centre of gravity of our involvement must be Czechoslovakia and this part of Europe. But it is equally obvious that we should from time to time pay attention to the situation in other parts of the world and express our solidarity with those who are suffering, are oppressed and are deprived of their rights. They too are on our side of the barricades, with the difference that their situation, whether from

the point of view of social conditions or that of human rights is often much worse, sometimes unimaginably worse, than ours. And we should also measure our friends in the West from the point of view of what attitude they take to the problems of the Third World, especially given the fact that such attitudes can have a directly practical significance under conditions of democracy.

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You ask me about my involvement in 1968 and whether my ideas have changed since that time, and whether I consider that the position that I had then was correct. In 1968 I was 27 years old, working as a technical school lecturer, teaching—I am an engineer—specialised theoretical subjects. I have never been a member of the Communist Party (KSC) but I considered myself a Marxist from my high school days onwards. These convictions developed out of a somewhat free-thinking atheism, which was in its turn a reaction against the Catholicism of my youth. Marxism has always meant more to me than a belief: it is a means of sceptical and critical analysis including everything which supports the development of the individual and works in the direction of guaranteeing full rights to everybody. I have always rejected apologies for the existing regime, which is why I have never been in the KSC. My critique of Soviet and Czechoslovak society was deepened by travels in Europe—in the first instance in the East—and in particular in the course of a number of holidays in France and elsewhere in Western Europe between 1965 and 1969. I increasingly found myself in sympathy with the conceptions and programme of the Fourth International, whose members describe themselves as revolutionary Marxists, or sometimes as Trotskyists. I continue to identify with this political current today. Over the last fifteen years only my attitude to the reformists has perhaps changed. Even if their ideas are alien to me and sometimes make me angry, I work together with them, as well as with non-political people with democratic ideas, especially in such fields as human rights or ecology, where it is very feasible.

In 1968 I joined a left-wing discussion circle, the Prague Club. We mainly made propaganda for the idea of social self-management as one of the alternative models for the free development of society. We addressed ourselves to the problem of the Third World in the same way as I have done in this text. Like everybody else we were in favour of democratic rights and freedom, above all of freedom of expression and assembly, for the right to strike, for free trade unions, and we de-

manded the right to form tendencies and to free discussion in the KSC. We produced *Informacni Materialy*—a journal of the same name was produced by revolutionary left exiles in West Berlin between 1971 and 1981. This discussion club, however, fell apart after the Soviet invasion. On August 21st, 1968 I was in Paris; on the 26th I returned to Prague. Throughout the autumn I took part in the student movement, mainly in the philosophical faculty, but also in the engineering faculty and in the establishment of the Action Committee of November 17th, out of which the Prague Student Parliament was born. After the November strike there arose the Revolutionary Youth Movement, which was basically a discussion club. It had about 100 members, young people, mainly students. Our discussions resulted in the production of duplicated documents which attempted to analyse the system in which we lived. The authors were mostly foreign Marxists. On the first anniversary of the Soviet invasion we distributed many leaflets; some of these—particularly a programmatic appeal—we signed in a conspiratorial manner as the product of the “Revolutionary Socialist Party”. We attempted—in a spirit of revolutionary romanticism—to construct an underground organisation based on cells. It is worth noting that, owing to the opposition of the majority (I was one of the minority) we did not adopt the principle of democratic centralism. I am thinking here about genuine democratic centralism, not bureaucratic centralism of the Stalinist type. Instead we had principles for coordination. It was with surprise, emotion, but also some anxiety that I discovered that Polish Solidarity adopted a similar organisational approach (I learnt about this with difficulty, since I was in Mirov prison at the time). Towards the end of 1969 and at the start of 1970 many members of the MRY were arrested and 19 of us were charged with subversion of the Republic. In spring 1971 we were sentenced; I received four years in gaol and the others sentences of around two years.

**I have always rejected apologies for the existing régime, which is why I have never been in the KSC**

Sometimes I recall that at that time, at the beginning of the 1970s, I was a genuine political prisoner, imprisoned for independent political

activity. Between 1979 and 1984 I was in gaol again but this time not for political activity but for involvement in the field of human rights. Nine years in gaol leaves its mark on a person for the rest of their life. However not only do I not feel hatred towards the regime, but I have consciously attempted to banish emotional considerations from my thinking in order to maintain a rational attitude. I hope I have succeeded in this. And from the other side; not only am I not broken but I still hold to my values and consider them worth fighting for.

The only full, meaningful life is one which is dedicated to the improvement of social conditions. That is to say a life in which the individual can dedicate himself to struggles and aims which he considers to be to the benefit of society. Well, with my nine years I am well placed to take part in the competition for the Blanqui award<sup>4</sup>.

Now I want to give a summary of my political views. After a study of the sources, in particular the "Writings of Petr Uhl" I have decided that the best thing will be to republish a little known synopsis of my views, which originated as the introductory section of my contribution (*The Alternative Society as a Revolutionary Vanguard*) to the collection "Concerning Freedom and Power". This outline was born in 1979 as a condensed version of a manuscript on which I worked—unsystematically and with long interludes—in the 1970s for several years. Besides myself Jaroslav Suk (living since 1980 in Uppsala) is an author of the text, and other comrades contributed to its creation. In the period of my second imprisonment at the start of the 1980s the manuscript appeared in its full form abroad, first in French and German, and later, in 1982, in Czech from the publishers Index of Cologne under the title "The Programme of Social Self-Management". The original text of the summary from 1979 has been slightly shortened and details have been corrected. Because of the passage of time, during which reality and my perception of it have moved on, and because of the way in which a text of this nature may strike young people who may be encountering Marxism as an oppositional ideology for the first time, I have felt it necessary to clarify some of the expressions. With a touch of self-mockery, the whole text is called "The Revolution according to Uhl, in 17 Points, with Commentary".

**My principles are firmly held and I will not surrender them under pressure**

I. **The social system in which we live can be defined from the economic point of view as bureaucratic centralism and from the political point of view as a bureaucratic dictatorship. It arose out of the revolutionary rejection of the capitalist mode of production and of the bourgeois political system. The social revolution was not consistently carried through, however, and was from the beginning deformed by Stalinism; it subjected the workers to a greater degree of subordination, servitude and economic dependence than under capitalism. Capitalism and Stalinism achieved a temporary stabilisation and both systems display common features: these are the control of abstract social labour and the manipulation of the labourer by the social whole. In both societies the worker has a similar position; and the same political and economic expropriation and the sense of alienation. Nonetheless the systems of bureaucratic centralism and capitalism are fundamentally different and should not be confused.**

The fact that the workers occupy a similar position within the two types of society does not mean that human rights are respected to the same extent. Especially with regard to political and civil rights, but also cultural and social, these are respected to an incomparably higher degree in the West than in the East. On the other hand the conditions of life are incomparably better in the North taken as a whole than in the South. And it needs to be understood that apart from China, which is relatively independent, and some small countries under Soviet influence, the South is basically an economic extension of the West.

The confusion of the two systems, or the drawing of an equals sign between American and Soviet "imperialism" is an incorrect, simplified Eurocentric view. The fundamental distinction is historical; Stalinism is a cancer on the system of proletarian power which was itself based on the rejection of capitalism. The perspectives for the removal of both systems are also different. And, as we are here painfully aware, there is a difference in how these two social systems affect our daily life. We should also make a comparison between the military and especially the economic potential of the two blocs, and take a look at their previous development, their acts of aggression, their dynamics and their setbacks in the sphere of power and we should try to do this with a knowledge of the real facts and above all with a cool head, without the emotion which overcomes so many people in our country when they speak about Soviet foreign pol-

icy (Soviet internal policy leaves them surprisingly calm). A consistent and unprejudiced analysis will convince anybody of the supremacy of American military and economic potential (in the non-military sphere we are talking about a power which is many times greater), and of the preponderance of American imperialism and of international capital in the economic and political spheres over the Soviet bloc. Even in military terms it is clear that the USA can annihilate the USSR more times than the other way around (The last sentence, which was originally written in all seriousness, has an absurdist humour about it, the black humour of the absurdity through which we are living, and makes the above arguments somewhat relative). The capitalist mode of production is, on account of its military-political organisation and its web of economic relations which entangle almost the whole world, the greatest obstacle to the harmonious development of humanity. The Soviet "blind alley" of Stalinism, which must be removed by revolutionary means, plays only the second fiddle in the orchestra of world politics. The sufferings inflicted on humanity by this system and the dangers which it threatens (and which we experience every day) are in a whole series of ways of a lower level than the conflicts which are being stoked up by world capitalism and imperialism, and the fact that *Rude Pravo* also talks about these conflicts should not mislead us about this.

II. **The central class contradiction is between the ruling bureaucratic centre, supported by the bureaucratic hierarchy, and the productive classes from all layers of the population.**

All the conflicts which come under the rubric of this idea have the form of a class struggle, even if the bureaucracy is only a social layer and not a class. Even within the bureaucracy, especially towards the base of the hierarchy in the enterprises, there are many opponents of centralism and dictatorship. It is wrong and harmful to look on the bureaucracy as a monolith.

Still more harmful is the idea that the KSC is "the ruling party" and the "communists" (members of the KSC) the ruling section of society. This idea is connected with the illusion that the KSC is a political party of the normal type, where members share in policy formation or even where there is inner-party democracy. The thesis of the "ruling party" is widespread, especially in the West, so that observers somewhat naively expect to see radical

changes taking place at party congresses. It is nonetheless indubitable that the Communist Party as a whole and its apparatus in particular are the most vital component of the bureaucracy, the real backbone of its power, all the more because the reach of the party extends to the other instruments of the bureaucratic dictatorship: the StB (secret police), the judiciary, the ROH (trade unions), the SSM (youth organisation), the media etc. In order to work out "who is where" we should not mistake the label (membership of the party) for the substance. Instead we should look to see who it is that supports the regime actively, what their contribution is to the regime, and whether and in what direction their influence can be applied to the solution of social problems. We say to our friends in the West that it is impossible for a democratic party to run an undemocratic society and that the KSC is more of a feudal structure with vassal-tenant relations than a political party of the kind which appeared first in France and then elsewhere in Europe from the time of the Great Revolution.

III. **The basic social contradiction is between the character of labour on the one hand and the form of control over the means of production and productive forces, and the means of distribution of the products and other goods on the other. The contradiction consists in the fact that decisions about the means of production and the productive forces and both productive and non-productive goods are centrally decided by a thin bureaucratic layer with the assistance of a strictly defined bureaucratic hierarchy, while the producers are completely excluded from the decision-making process. The contradiction is between the social character of labour and the dominant position of one social layer, which decides the use of labour in every sense. On the questions of exploitation, value, surplus value and exchange we have today only hypotheses. One of these is that the bureaucracy—as a hierarchically-organised totality—is a collective exploiter, rooted in the manipulation of the statised—certainly not socialised—means of production.**

I do not want to swamp you with a flood of economic terminology and Marxist phraseology! Investigation of the economic structure, and the identification of social contradictions and the reasons for them are a basic part of Marxism. And it is a sign of deficiency that we have nothing more than hypotheses to deal with some basic phenomena. There is a need to consider the chain of

causes and effects and to attempt to synthesise these and thereby create a plastic sociological account of Czechoslovak society. This is all the more tempting in that we live under an inundation of texts expressing feelings and containing the most diverse moral doctrines. Without serious investigation and without relevant and accurate statistics a basic sociological analysis is impossible. Nonetheless I will make some attempt at a partial analysis.

The clearest theory has been put forward by supporters of the idea that the USSR, Czechoslovakia etc are state capitalist. For them the bureaucracy is a social class. A detailed comparison of the concept of "social class" and its individual features with the functions of the social layer known as "the bureaucracy" and its specific aspects and manifestations will lead to the conclusion that this concept is incorrect (its supporters, indeed, are open to the suspicion that they have altered the facts in the interests of producing slogans which are easy to understand and can therefore attract the largest possible numbers of people. Such an approach to ideas—which is most often to be found here amongst the Czechoslovak conservative right—is socially pernicious. Demagoguery is the mother of fanaticism, and has already done much harm in history).

In this thesis I have tried to explain the form of the political and economic system; in spite of the lack of definition of this explanation, it remains clear that this system has nothing in common with socialism (the term "actually existing socialism" is a fig leaf for the system. Such terms are also used by some of the critics of the regime, especially amongst the reformist communist current. This designation has as much justification as the expression "national socialism" has as a definition of Hitlerian fascism).

**IV.**  
**Only after a consistent analysis of the social interrelations of different social groups and their position within the economy, culture etc does it become possible to successfully address the two basic phenomenal features of the bureaucratic dictatorship: totalitarianism and centralism, and to analyse the authority system, that is the relations of command and subordination and the persistent paternalism. It is superficial and harmful to confuse totalitarianism of the Stalinist-bureaucratic type with dictatorships developing out of other social and economic conditions.**

And not only that! The misleading nature of the terminology to do

with "totalitarianism" is clear enough from the fact that the authors who use it apply it exclusively to the USSR and the satellite countries. They are therefore able to discover that the situation in, say, Burkina Faso is, despite the existence of the military dictatorship, diametrically opposite to that in Czechoslovakia, since the former is not *totalitarian*! No doubt there is a fundamental difference, but only in the sense that I would wish the conditions in Burkina Faso on anyone.

In fact it is not possible to demonstrate the "total" nature of the Czechoslovak or Soviet political system; the central power does not in fact control every aspect of life. Orwell's 1984 has, fortunately, remained merely a warning. We must exert all our forces to ensure that tendencies towards 1984 do not become stronger; we have to oppose the regime in all instances where it tries to strengthen and spread such tendencies. In this sense slogans and theses directed against "totalitarianism" have a progressive meaning. However we must also be objective, honest and above all critical about social systems other than the one we live under. Not only is it not true that the state and political machine in Czechoslovakia control everything—and could not control everything using the existing instruments—it is clear that after the initial phase of real and enforced Stalinist enthusiasm—the real one, apart from its fanatical side I consider to have been a positive feature of recent history—those in power do not in fact *want* to control everything. This can be illustrated by the attempt to restrict people to private life, the support for consumerist attitudes and also to a certain extent by their tolerance towards marginal manifestations of independent behaviour, which are subjected to only a light control.

The black-and-white view of the world, the definition of the socio-economic and political system in which we live as "totalitarian", as the absolute evil, as the work of the devil, can certainly give strength to the militancy of many opponents of the regime, but will also—like all variants of fanaticism—exact its price. For one thing it alienates many people who are, in one way or another, connected to the regime. For another it stokes up hatred and fuddles the understanding. But above all, of course, it is a sin against the truth.

**V.**  
**The bureaucratic dictatorship and bureaucratic centralism of the Stalinist type were erected here in Czechoslovakia according to the Soviet model. The Czechoslovak bureaucratic centre, along with centres in other countries is under**

**the hegemony of the Moscow leadership, which in its turn expresses the interests not only of the Soviet bureaucracy, but of the bureaucracies of the bloc as a whole. The Czechoslovak bureaucracy is not operating under direct instructions from the Kremlin. Despite disagreements and controversies there is collaboration. The Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia are only a back-up reserve force, and do not exercise direct control over day-to-day developments.**

It is vital that we are as precise as we can about who it is that is oppressing us. The most primitive view is that we are oppressed by the Russians. But in reality they suffer from the system just as we ourselves do. Nor is there any merit in the argument that they thought of it first and do not, in any case, suffer for it, owing to a supposed lack of a democratic tradition. This is an arrogantly nationalist point of view, or in the best case is part of the "Central European Culture" ideology. This latter orientation, as has been pointed out above, bases itself on a messianic belief in the powers of cultural specificities—whether real or imaginary—and an awakening separatism on the part of a number of countries in Central Europe (including Germany and Switzerland?) as the source for the solution to contemporary problems. The bureaucracy, unfortunately, is international; it spreads beyond the Central European framework. The Kremlin, the Jaruzelski group, and all the other leading representatives of the individual states of the Warsaw Pact and the apparatuses on which they rest, apparatuses hierarchically structured from the top down, until and including the least party and state official (and in part many other of our fellow citizens) are in possession of anti-popular power. It is the same set-up from Bohemia through Russia and Kosovo to Cuba, whatever specific conflicts might erupt between different national bureaucracies. It is not possible to deduce anything at all about the system in Romania simply from observing the existence of conflicts between Moscow and Bucharest. The Romanian bureaucratic dictatorship is one of the most criminal of all that have come into being after the Second World War. It is not easy to find a way of laying the blame for this on the Russians. It is also necessary to see that over the past twenty years significant differences in the functioning and outward forms of these regimes have come into being, even if the basic features of the system have been preserved. This process now affects not only Yugoslavia, Albania and China but also Hungary and East Germany where distinct economic

and in part cultural and "human rights" sub-systems have split off from the inertly static monolith of bureaucratic power, and this is without mentioning "crisis-ridden" (= in a state of revolt) Poland. We can detect certain moves of this kind even in the USSR and Bulgaria, thus leaving Czechoslovakia as the only country consistently loyal to the conservative ideas of Brezhnevite "neo-Stalinism".

**VI.**  
**From a historical point of view it is possible to define the whole long phase of development through which the nations of Eastern Europe are passing as a period transitional between the abolition of capitalism and the introduction of socialism, the first phase of communism. It is not necessary, however, for all countries to make their way to socialism down the blind alley of Stalinism, accompanied as this was by some of the most bestial events known to humanity.**

The Europe of independent and democratic (which for me means self-managing) nations cannot be conceived of other than via the unification of East and West Europe, arising through revolutions in both parts of the continent. From the Western point of view this means the revolutionary overturn of capitalism and the destruction of the bourgeoisie as a class; this social revolution is the condition for the entry of the West European nations into the European society of the future. It is in part our responsibility to ensure by drawing out the lessons of the Stalinist experience as clearly as possible that the West European revolution does not go via a bureaucratic detour. The necessity for proletarian revolution in Western Europe, directed towards the overthrow of capitalism, is openly defended by hardly anyone, and has been abandoned by reformist Marxist and Eurocommunist forces. But nobody has been able to put forward a serious alternative for escaping from the present situation, under which the rule of capital defines the relations between nations (in particular the North-South divide), between social classes and groups and between individuals, on whom it forces consumerism, the cult of competition and moral hypocrisy. The rule of capital is a permanent source of international tension and while it continues to exist, notions about guarantees for world peace are unserious. I understand perfectly well, of course, that the relative material wealth (above all in the Northern part of Western Europe) and the relative extent of democratic freedoms and civil rights might lead to the unfree and much poorer citizen of Czechoslovakia to consider the

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notion of a social revolution in Western Europe as bizarre and incomprehensible. The future development of Western society, trapped within the limits of its socio-economic system, will show however how superficial it is to exaggerate the positive aspects of bourgeois democracy, and how misguided it is to see parliamentary democracy or even the capitalist market as the model and guiding light for the future development of Czechoslovak society, as many critics of the regime in Czechoslovakia imagine.

I regard the overturn of capitalism in Czechoslovakia after the second world war as a positive development, above all from the point of view of overall historical development and perspectives for the future. Even more: I identify to a considerable extent with the "revolutionary enthusiasm" of the end of the 1940s and the start of the 1950s, even though I am against fanaticism and the crimes of Stalinism. I am not prepared to reduce the social conflicts of that period to an expression of the evil fury of the "Bolsheviks". Quite the contrary: I find positive elements in the events of those times. I am appalled by the fact that the record of this period is distorted by falsified figures, a misleading presentation of the whole situation and the suppression of facts and elementary good faith, all with the aim of rejecting the whole of the revolutionary period as one great mistake or crime. Even this period has the right to a balanced assessment. Nor is it the case that people of about 60 who are now active in the Charter are simpletons who suddenly woke up in 1968. Even if many of them changed their views and attitudes in the sixties and even if today many—though not all—disclaim adherence to any ideology, I nonetheless feel that at the end of the 1940s and start of the 1950s they were fighting for the same things that I want now. Jan Simsa recently expressed these feelings well in an article "The Faults of the Critic", which was a reply to a base attack on Jiri Hajek in the exile magazine *Pravo lidu*. Other statements by Josef Zverina and Petr Pospichal doubtless bear witness to their tolerance and goodness of heart, but also to their lack of any understanding of the psychology and morality of the young Stalinists of those times; this lack of comprehension is especially marked in the case of Petr Pospichal. A true picture of the ten post-war years is also rendered hard to arrive at by the traumas which many protagonists of the revolution now feel about their activities—or even merely what positions they supported—at that time. Indeed in many cases the reorientation of their beliefs has led them into

adopting new illusions with the same strength as they once believed in Stalinism. But they are still the same people: fighters for a better future, people whose instinct is to stand up for the oppressed.

It is also important to add to our depiction of the postwar social revolution an understanding of the fact that, especially in the cultural and moral spheres, but also in the economic sphere, bourgeois methods were not completely replaced, but merely modified somewhat by the new regime.

The barbarism lasted for a long time; in the USSR from the 1930s onwards and in the post-war Soviet camp until the 1950s, in a diluted form it persists to this day. Because of this a comparison is sometimes made between Stalinism and Nazism and Fascism. But in reality the two arose under different conditions, and for different reasons. Furthermore, Stalinism has outlasted Nazism. Nazism launched a world war, which—partly as a consequence of Stalinist policies and lack of preparation—led to fifty million deaths. It explicitly enunciated a doctrine of force, racial hatred, and national supremacy and a policy of expansion. Inequality (or lack of equal rights) between people, upheld by force or by terrorism are also legalised by other fascist re-

gimes, such as the South African apartheid regime, which rests on a publicly enunciated policy of state terror. My wife recently defined this as codified swinishness, and the most appalling thing about it is the elevation of deprivation of rights into a legal principle. Such codification enables the regime to pursue criminal objectives: genocide, racial deportations, strategic hamlets. Basing itself on quite different social roots, both from the historical and the contemporary point of view, Stalinism concealed its brutality towards ethnic groups, its hypothetical and—rather rarely—real opponents, and its own population, and particular groups within it (peasants, ex-political prisoners) with the fig leaf of "socialist humanism" while presenting itself as the inheritor or even the realising agent of the ideals of proletarian revolution, which, as everyone knew, and could not indeed *not* know, aimed at the abolition of the exploitation of man by man and the removal of all forms of oppression. Even though Stalinism made partial efforts to legitimise its repressive policies, through the "theory" of the sharpening of the class struggle, it could never escape from its ideological origins in the proletarian revolution, since it was this which justified its existence. Over decades

it has tried to distort and deform the real content of these ideas, but to this very day it has not been able to free itself entirely. Even if it has changed into a ritual language, a sort of secular liturgical recitation—as Lubomir Sochor recently described it—which neither aspires to a description of reality or even to a serious distortion of it, nonetheless the original propositions have not been openly rejected. Perhaps it could be said that in this respect Stalinism has turned out to be more treacherous than Nazism. But it is also true that the divergence between "theory" and "practice" (as they say), between what is officially adhered to and what actually happens, has hindered and restricted the full functioning of the apparatus of repression. The Stalinists neither could nor wished to act as Nazis. On the other hand their rule has lasted for longer, to an extent even to this day. The Stalinist terror needs to be analysed in the same frame of mind as the theory and practice of the previous revolutionary (Leninist) epoch, with the phenomena specific to the civil war period, that is *sine ira et studio* (without anger or passion). This is unfortunately not a common approach in the oppositional milieu.



Petr Uhl and Anna Sabatova pictured before Uhl's arrest.

Much worse than this is the official propaganda, which is attempting to erase from the minds of the population any recollection of Nazism and Stalinism. About Stalinism nothing is said at all; on the subjects of fascism and Nazism we are given a variety of myths, in particular nationalist myths, dealing only with the directly terroristic aspects of Nazism. In the interests of the power of the bureaucracy the material roots or the philosophy of fascism are ignored, particularly when it comes to explaining the origins of the pre-Nazi variants of fascism in Italy and Spain. The fear of the authorities is that parallels will be drawn between its own methods of rule and those proper to fascism. In the process, however, the differences are also suppressed. There is a need for fascism to be thoroughly understood, especially since fascist tendencies have appeared among young people (these are much weaker in Czechoslovakia than in the USSR where there are reports of a certain renaissance of openly Nazi ideologies). This is not manifested by the use of Nazi symbolism, but through racism, the cult of strength and force, gangs with authoritarian structures, opposition to discussion and democracy, inclination towards the "leadership principle" etc.

**VII.**  
The bureaucratic layer faces a dilemma between its need to maintain the status quo and the need for social change; this is one of the causes of the crisis of bureaucratic rule. The changes are needed above all in the economic and cultural spheres, and are vital for social development and the overcoming of the growing social and economic conflicts, and are thus themselves necessary from the point of view of the maintenance of bureaucratic rule.

Although it does not have a plan or a programme, Charter 77 makes use of this dilemma, by pointing out the necessity for changes and the removal of specific conflicts.

**VIII.**  
The institutions of the system of bureaucratic centralism cannot be reformed through those same institutions. By institutions we mean the KSC apparatus, the trade unions, the satellite parties, the SSM etc; the national committees, the representative bodies, the government and the president of the Republic; the bureaucratically directed economic structure; the police, the army and the judiciary; the school system and the media; the censorship. Small improvements in the framework of the system have an importance, particularly in that they create a

**critical spirit, arouse oppositional moods and stimulate the development of structures independent of the state. Reforms or attempts at reforms have their limits, as we all know. Since every democratic or liberalising reform in the economic, political or cultural sphere runs up against the undemocratic basis of the regime and threatens bureaucratic rule, such attempts always come to a halt—or are brought to a halt by repression—as soon as they come near to touching on basic social contradictions. In this sense every reform attempt has a revolutionary character, since it exposes the illusions of reformism and sows the seeds of revolutionary consciousness.**

It is important to understand that the thesis of the non-reformability of the political and socio-economic system applies only to the institutional structures of the system. The rise of new institutions, the destruction of the old, the transformation of the functioning of existing institutions might be described as reform, but I describe it as a revolutionary process, a political revolution. The struggle is not against the institutions as such but against their present function. For me the chief attribute of the KSC, which is the centre of the existing institutional structure is its interpretation of the "leading role of the party", which amounts to institutionalising the control over society of a hierarchically organised bureaucracy, of which the KSC is the key instrument. Within the KSC the decisive power lies at the "top of the pyramid". I am not in favour of the destruction or restriction of the activities of the KSC; I merely insist that the "leading role of the party" is the limit of the existing system, and that only beyond this limit does political pluralism begin. This cannot be achieved through reforms, but only through the removal of the existing institutions, including the KSC as the "leading force", the National Front as a closed system etc.

The system has sufficient flexibility to allow for improvements within its framework. The chief meaning of the activity of Charter 77 and VONS lies in the achievement of such small steps forward. However pleased we may be with these results, however, we should not forget for a moment that the solution of the basic social contradictions still lies ahead of us. Illusions about the reformability of the system through its own institutions are detrimental and can lead to an under-estimation of the class enemy, deviations from democratic principles and even to collaboration with the regime and its anti-popular policies. On the other hand the "black and white" world

view, various Manichaean conceptions and religious beliefs in pure embodiments of evil can lead to passivity, to hatred and to a neglect of day to day work and a refusal to collaborate with people who are potential or actual allies. I hope I will be forgiven for returning—in points VII and VIII—to this question of the reformability of the regime and its rigidity or flexibility and the connected problems of putting forward demands and taking small steps in the field of human rights, which I dealt with in some detail at the start of this article. It is a theme which deserves attention, since one's attitude to the regime is determined to a significant degree by one's views on these problems. It is interesting that people who do not put the question of the reformability of the regime so sharply, will nonetheless in their positions and attitudes on specific questions show a definite tendency (in the best of cases) or even vacillate between two different attitudes towards the political system. And it is also important to note that belief in the unreformability of the system is also held by people who adhere to socialism and the left, as well as by people who adhere to conservatism or have rightist attitudes in other areas. On the other hand "gradualist" conceptions of the piecemeal reform of the regime, or of systemic convergence etc are not restricted to the relatively large ideological current of reform communism, which is itself constantly more and more ideologically differentiated.

**IX.**  
The contradictions within all areas of social life are deepening in all the countries of the Eastern bloc even if with differing intensity. The time will come when the course of development places before the societies of Eastern Europe the task of getting rid of the bureaucratic dictatorship. This social change—even if it takes several months—will radically affect all the existing power political institutions, disrupt their present interconnections and in the majority of cases their inner functioning. This is why it is necessary to call this event a revolutionary process.

I wrote "several months" a few years ago. The experience of Poland between August 1980 and December 1981, when the question of power was directly posed, shows that the revolutionary process—and its preparatory phase—can last for even longer. Over the last few years the necessity of the revolutionary transformation has been most clearly expressed in Poland. The restoration of the control of the bureaucracy has postponed this solution for a time—at the cost of

immense suffering to the Polish people.

**X.**  
The anti-bureaucratic revolution will be above all a political revolution. Insofar as it removes the bureaucratic brake on economic development it also brings about a significant change in the relations of production, and by achieving a genuine socialisation of the means of production represents the culmination of the revolutionary process which began in the 1945-1948 period. Since, however, the bureaucracy is a social layer and not a class it cannot be described as a social revolution. One of its consequences on the other hand will be a cultural revolution, since the relations between people and the relation of people to things will be transformed.

An analysis of the social consequences (and aspects) of the anti-bureaucratic revolution would consist of a definition of the social character of the—in the first place and above all—political revolution.

The "cultural revolution" is none other than what used to be referred to in Bohemia as "the revolution of hearts and minds". It is and must be considered as an idealistic concept. First me must all undergo the experience of "nравstvennii samodovletvorjenije" (moral self-satisfaction) a la Tolstoy and only then can these morally refined people transform social conditions. This is an allusion. Revolutions are made by people as they are and not by some kind of superior or future race which has decided to live "morally" or "in truth". History shows, of course, that in the course of revolutionary processes people can become more conscious, can moralise themselves. Thus both aspects — the social revolution (political) and the cultural revolution (of hearts and minds) are a dialectical unity.

**XI.**  
Force is inevitable in a revolution, but it should not, if there is proper organisation, degenerate into brutality or terror. Revolutions do not arise out of the exhortations of revolutionaries or through the indoctrination of the masses. They take place when people decide to apply force against those who have hitherto exercised force over them and thereby abandon the passivity which has allowed the whole of society to be held in servitude, servitude which is an incomparably greater source of violence than that of the revolutionaries. Revolutions occur when people can no longer tolerate oppression. This state of affairs is usually reached when the rulers are no longer able to offer any solutions to social contradiction, when these contradic-

tions adversely affect the vital interests of the broadest layers of the people and when the incapacity of the rulers is accompanied by brutality and terror. The role of the revolutionaries is to propose to the masses the best path for the future development. A part of this task must be the attempt to restrict the use of revolutionary violence to the least possible and to consistently oppose the use of terror, which in every case, even when it is inevitable from the point of view of the survival of the revolution, is a factor which assists tendencies towards degeneration.

The chief reason why the historical experience of revolutions is brought in here is because a large number of young people including amongst the Chartists have an aversion to the notion of revolution. It is interesting to notice the stubbornness with which bourgeois myths about, for example, the October Revolution in Petrograd are clung to. Even today the common ideological culture of the opposition is influenced by the literary productions of the White Russian emigration.

## XII.

**It is possible to imagine many variants of the revolutionary process, both in its internal and its international aspects. What is certain, however, is that the anti-bureaucratic revolution in Czechoslovakia can have no hope of success if it remains restricted to a single country and is not part of an international revolutionary process.**

This is too brief: what is at stake is a basic feature of development. From the very start we must act on the understanding that Germans, Poles, Hungarians, Ukrainians and Russians are our allies and that together with them—and to a significant extent also with the nations of Western Europe, who have in the first instance to resolve problems of a different kind—we will transform Europe into an association of democratic (which to me means self-managing) and independent nations. A development towards self-management and independence in one single country—as we have seen in Poland in recent years—cannot have too much hope of success, even if it is able to survive for a number of years. This should not be taken to mean that we should wait until the anti-bureaucratic revolution take place in the neighbouring countries or that we should wait for a positive development in the USSR. The anti-bureaucratic revolution has to begin somewhere and at some time. It continues to smoulder in Poland. It is a minimal duty for us to recognise the fact when a revolution has been suppressed.

We have to take account of the problems of real life and of the neighbouring nations. The bureaucratic power places whatever obstacles it can in the path of such activity. There already exist sufficient opportunities for mutual contact, exchanges of information and of experiences. Understanding often leads to friendship—to real people, to a culture, to a language and to the country as a whole. Let us visit, study, and learn the languages of our neighbours.

## XIII.

**History shows that the anti-capitalist and anti-bureaucratic revolutions are always accompanied by tendencies towards self-management, even if the main thrust of the new methods of organising social life is not self-management. Such tendencies were apparent in the pre-revolutionary movements of the Czechoslovak workers in the 1968-69 period. It will certainly also be the case in the Czechoslovak anti-bureaucratic revolution, even if there also develops a parallel and for a time dominant parliamentary system.**

This was written before 1979. In 1980 the independent and self-managing union *Solidarity*, which did not only write self-management into its appeal, but fought to put it into practice in its day-to-day activity and in its longer-term perspectives.

## XIV.

**Parliamentarianism means the rule of the leadership (the directorate, the presidium, the politbureau) of one or of several political parties in coalition and does not in any way contribute to the development of forms of direct democracy which would be the means for the emancipation of society and of the individual and for the overcoming of alienation. A system of generalised—that is not only economic—self-management would comprise indirect and direct forms of democracy. Indirect, representative democracy is expressed by the workers' councils (and other councils) which are coordinated horizontally. The expression of their centralisation is the General Council which would replace the existing legislative and executive state bodies. The whole council system is founded on producers' democracy, supplemented by the territorial principle. There are numerous ideas about how to fight tendencies towards bureaucratisation or other forms of degeneration of this system of indirect democracy: immediate recall of delegates, right to activity for the minority, rotation of functions, adjustments of salaries etc. The system of indirect democracy is**

**supplemented by elements of direct democracy: referenda, at both local and national level, assessments of public opinion, control by interested groups of people over their activity etc. The system of social self-management is not an end in itself. It is possible to agree with it only insofar as it guarantees the constant growth of the element of direct democracy. The self-managing system is necessarily pluralist. Political parties, having more the form of political clubs, will put forward proposals but will not rule over society, as they do in the bourgeois political systems.**

It is wrong to approach the question of parliamentarianism from the point of view of its etymological roots (parliament = speaking out, discussion) and conclude thereby that Charter 77 is informed by a parliamentary spirit. Parliamentarianism should be discussed from the point of view of what it really is, in Western Europe, America and in other countries. Parliaments in this sense do not exist in the East, where they are simply obedient instruments of the bureaucracy, assembled on the basis of stage-managed so-called elections. It is only in name that these instruments of propaganda, which are designed to justify a system of illegally usurped anti-popular power, are parliaments (as for the Charter: not only is there, fortunately, no parliamentarianism, but, unfortunately, there are no other forms of democracy, including direct democracy or even that most fundamental prerequisite of democracy, free discussion).

My opposition to parliamentarianism—which is explained in more detail on pages 100-103 of the Czech edition of the book "The Program of Self-Management" is not only the result of my commitment to direct democracy. Parliamentarianism has a whole series of negative features: it preserves class stratifications and gives rise to illusions about participation in the running of society. Furthermore the investigation of concrete historical events and the part played in them by parliaments shows parliaments in a harsh light. Contemporary parliamentarianism does not rest on the responsibility of the deputies to their electorate or their conscience, but on loyalty to the party leaderships. Votes and attitudes are bought and sold with the resulting horse-trading and scandals. Then there is the way in which extra-parliamentary political tendencies whose "extremist" points of view are the life-blood of democracy are excluded.

From many points of view there are infringements of democracy and a denial of real ideological pluralism.

Under conditions of the rule of capital pluralism is overruled by the interests of big capital, the generalised manipulation of the population, the distraction of attention from real problems, the intentional strengthening of consumerist tendencies and all the other negative aspects of bourgeois society.

Given the fact that people in new situations turn to old symbols (and parliamentary democracy arouses much less discontent and alienation amongst the population than the bureaucratic dictatorships, which are a regression from parliamentarianism, while parliamentarianism represented progress over the surviving elements of feudalism of Austria-Hungary), it cannot be ruled out that tendencies towards parliamentarianism—even articulated in total contradiction to self-managing tendencies—will be strong in this country. Parliamentarianism is not necessarily connected to bourgeois democracy and in post-capitalist conditions many of its negative features could be mitigated. Nonetheless, in the pages of the Programme that I have referred to I stress the reasons why I would always be against it and would try to convince the population of its limitations.

Criticism of parliamentarianism is clearly justified. In some situations, however, it might be used by supporters of fascism or similar ideologies. We have to take note when we hear someone saying that parliamentarianism is mere chattering and that democracy, even representative democracy, is a luxury. People who call for government by a strong hand, for discipline and even for purity of race, and who consider that all evil comes from abroad and from alien ideas and habits, are fascists, even if they would not accept it themselves. In this context it is clear that any kind of parliamentarianism, however corrupt or inefficient, is many times better than dictatorship, whether of a capitalist, fascist, military or bureaucratic (Stalinist) type. Even so this argument cannot be used for an attempt to revive parliamentary democracy in this country.

## XV.

**Even in the initial stages of the crisis which will lead to a revolutionary process, self-management organs will arise in the workplaces—strike committees, revived or new trade unions, workers' councils. These organs face the task of linking up with the workers in other enterprises—both on a sectoral and a geographical basis—and of moving as rapidly as possible to the formation of a central self-managing body. The workers—and other citizens—also face the task of gaining control of the military structure and of refa-**

shioning it on the basis of the economic structures of the country (this involves the dissolution of the standing army and police forces). Finally, the task is posed of taking self-management beyond the limits of the economic sphere—beyond the management and collective control over the process of production—to the establishment of political bodies, and centres for the further devolution of this power, and for the most diverse sorts of popular initiative.

Both the demand for the abolition of the standing army and police and their replacement with a popular defensive militia and the demand for democratic councils are of long standing within the socialist movement ("The standing army will be replaced by a militia"—this formulation is taken from the Washington Declaration signed by T.G. Masaryk, Milan Stefanik and Eduard Benes in Paris on the 18th October 1918).

The "falling away" of power and the other things mentioned are the same as the withering away of the state. And on this point nothing needs changing in the basic ideas expressed by Lenin in *State and Revolution*. Obviously the process of the withering away of the state and the reduction in the importance of the state frontiers (as mentioned for example in the Prague Appeal) will take a long time to reach its culmination. It will require active international collaboration between all the European nations, nations both democratic (that is, self-managing) and able to exercise self-determination (that is to say, independent).

## XVI.

The moving force of development in the post-revolutionary society will be its contradictions. Beside the above-mentioned antagonism between parliamentarianism and self-management in the political sphere, and between technocratic and productive-democratic tendencies (in the economic sphere) there will be a struggle between nationalist and internationalist concepts, diversity in the sphere of fundamental beliefs—over questions of consumerism and ecology, demarcation disputes and problems of particularism of groups of producers etc.

It is worth remembering that the contradiction between technocratic and self-management tendencies came to the surface in the last (economic) document of the Charter of November 1985. We should also always remain aware that there will not be one single view on the future development; on the contrary the existing ideological pluralism which we should defend tooth and nail and the much richer ideological plura-

lism of the future are the guarantee that the greatest possible varieties of conceptions will be put forward, which will allow the best way forward to be found.

The contradiction between nationalist conceptions, related to feelings and references to the nation, the homeland and the nation state, and internationalist conceptions, which point out the need for international solidarity and the collaboration of all the oppressed has also found expression within the Chartist and oppositional movement. To a large extent this is a matter of the generations: young people do not tend to be nationalist. Nor are the Catholics, I am pleased to say.

As for an "anti-consumerist" ethic and on ecological questions, we can learn a lot of good lessons from the activities of the independent and oppositional movements in the GDR. It is necessary to raise these issues in connection with political problems. Demands for a "return to nature" and a radical lowering of levels of consumption are reactionary utopias. More and more often we hear justified demands raised for breathable air, good drinking water and food free from toxic contamination. The waste of resources and problems of consumerism are interrelated with one's whole outlook on life, and with one's education both at school and within the family.

## XVII.

How things develop in the future depends not only on the relative tolerability of living conditions and on the international situation but also on the day-to-day activity of each and every one of us. And this depends not only on our abilities, education and outlook but also on our determination and will to change social conditions in which we live. Contemporary social consciousness will have a significant influence on the quality of this future development.

(Prague, November 1985, new edition with additions, April 1986)

Translated for Labour Focus by Mark Jackson. © Copyright of original Czech text by Petr Uhl and Palach Press

### Author's footnotes:

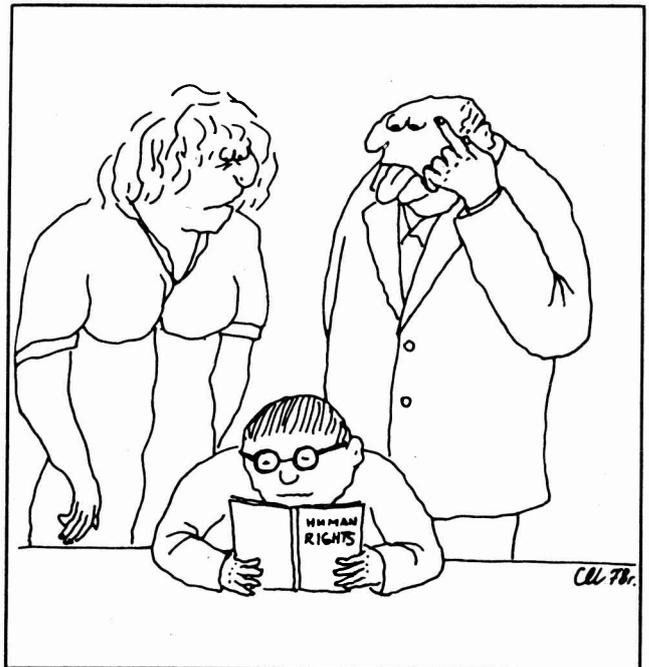
1. These phenomena and the effect that they have on the growth of religiosity have recently been dealt with in an interesting article by Erika Kadlecova.
2. The current description is "citizen's initiative". I do not think this a very fortunate turn of phrase, given its smack of the sometimes

reactionary campaigns of the "Bürgerinitiative" in West Germany, Switzerland etc. It should rather be described as a form of "permanent civil activism". Despite its small numbers—and the even smaller numbers of its "active core", Charter 77 is a movement for human rights, and therefore I consider the word movement, given the dynamic of our activity, to be the most accurate description, especially given its non-organised and spontaneist mode of operating (the ROH—revolutionary trade union movement—the official party-controlled trade union) has caused semantic disorientation over the use of the word movement).

3. This calls for a footnote! Since the 1960s I have heard people claiming that the Czech nation has such a need and a longing for democracy because it has an old and strong democratic tradition, even in comparison with other European nations. The argument can find a little bit of support in the period of the First Republic when there were fascist and semi-fascist regimes in many European countries. But the fact is that until 1918 the Czech nation knew nothing of democracy in the modern sense of the word and the short period of twenty years between 1918 and 1938 cannot have left such strong traces in the popular consciousness. The fact that there was a fairly liberal atmosphere for forty years before the First World War cannot be put on the same plane as democracy. General suffrage was introduced in Cisleithanian Austria in 1907, and only then for men over 24 who had resided in the same place for more than a year. Furthermore, this applied only to the Vienna parliament. The regional

assemblies, including the assemblies of the Czech Lands remained virtually feudal. Does anyone remember that general suffrage for men over 21 was introduced in Bulgaria some ten years earlier, at the time of the liberation? Who amongst those who applaud Czech democratic traditions remembers the centuries-long experience of those European nations who went through the Reformation? What shall we make of Polish democracy, a democracy which was almost a direct democracy in some respects, but which involved only ten percent of the population? Who, blinded by superficial nationalist prejudices, remembers the democratic traditions of Southern Europe—in Ancient Greece and Rome, or in France after the Enlightenment and the Revolution? When does anyone call our attention to the elements of democracy in the *zadruga* of the South Slavs or the Cossack military and social organisation? In fact the Czechs (and the Slovaks) do not come out especially well from a balance sheet of democracy in European history. The Hussite revolutionary movement, which had a beneficial influence on society until 1620, gave rise for fifteen years to strivings towards democracy, but although this was a spectacular development, it was also short-lived. The same is true of 1918-1938. The postwar symbiosis of Stalinism and bourgeois democracy (1945-1948) was a parody of democracy.

4. Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881), French revolutionary and proletarian leader in the 1848-49 period, spent 36 years of his life in the prisons of the French bourgeois state.



The recent joint declaration of democratic oppositionists from five East European states (see our last issue) underlined the growing need and desire to transcend national frontiers in the pursuit of common goals. LABOUR FOCUS ON EASTERN EUROPE, committed to internationalism in the struggle for socialist democracy East and West, asked Wolfgang Templin of the East German "Initiative for Peace and Human Rights" to give his views on Petr Uhl's essay.

WOLFGANG TEMPLIN

# ON PETR UHL'S "HUMAN RIGHTS AND POLITICAL REVOLUTION"

**P**etr Uhl's essay "Human Rights and Political Revolution" coincides with the first attempts in the GDR to develop a distinct human rights activity within the framework of the peace movement. Uhl's communication of his experiences of ten years' activity in the Charter and his positions as a socialist will aid our own deliberations and discussions. The text is not as yet available to the various groups and circles here but that will change soon and we are hoping for reactions and comments. Here I want to introduce some initial and provisional thoughts concerning our common and different experiences on the subject of human rights and social criticism.

## Divided nation

In contrast to Czechoslovakia and Poland, there was only one significant reaction in GDR society to the beginning of the Helsinki process. The Helsinki Agreement was received as offering the possibility of legal emigration to the Federal Republic. To the present day a growing and unending chain of applicants for exit visa sees the chance of a freer, self-determined life not in the democratisation of one's own society but in the leaving of this land. All activity in the GDR thus assumes an air of instability; continuity, let alone a tradition of independent social movements do not arise. For most, leaving does not only mean the crossing of a frontier that divides a still existing nation. The social reality in both German states is by now so disparate that such a break in one's biography and the new experiences in the other state almost always lead to estrangement. This experience creates disappointment, resignation and sorrow in the GDR. For this reason, the emigration problem is scarcely come to grips with in the peace movement and rather tends to be considered taboo.

Apart from this negative continuity there have barely been any real attempts to strive for human rights in and for the GDR. Intel-

lectual groups and circles which existed as an expression of independent thinking, at best admitted the question of human rights as a conversation topic but not as a problem of action in solidarity. In the milieu around individual prominent oppositionists, such as Biermann and Havemann, there were attempts to overcome this limitation but without success in the 1970s.

## Peace movement

The introduction of military education in the polytechnical high schools of the GDR and the preparations for a new conscription law towards the end of the seventies triggered numerous protests within the protestant population. The initiative for a social peace service heralded the beginning of an independent peace movement. The NATO dual track decision marked the end of the period of détente and the now increasing international rearmament efforts were reflected in tendencies towards a growing militarisation of social life in the GDR. Fear and concern stand at the inception of the GDR peace movement. The reduction of enemy images, peace education and trust-building measures were discussed. Only rarely, as in the Berlin Appeal, were these discussions put in the context of political considerations and measures. Although the breadth of topics and the number of activities quickly grew and ecology groups, women's circles and Third World groups came into existence, these were only superficially linked with each other. More general questions about the internal development tendencies and conflicts of GDR society, the social inequalities and the lack of democracy in one's own country remained largely unconsidered. This was a result of both the influence of church policies and the well-meaning naivety of many peace activists.

In large parts of the peace movement this is still the situation today but there have also been attempts to develop a different concept of peace out of the negative experiences, one which can be founded upon social criticism and theological arguments. Peace under-

stood as synonymous with a society of justice and solidarity which can only be realised through a radical challenge to, and overcoming of, peace-threatening social structures and systems. The peace movement politicises itself not in the old bureaucratic and institutional sense, it gains a new dimension as a non-violent movement for alternatives and radical change. The questions of justice, democracy and human rights are thus no longer mere extensions and outgrowths of the peace movement, but rather part of its core content. These conclusions are still very controversial within the peace movement, but they form the foundation of the first steps in the development of a human rights activity in the GDR. In comparison to the Charter and Petr Uhl's positions a number of differences appear which can be of importance for our future work and for the mutual learning from each other. Let us begin with the question of atheists and Christians:

## Practical pluralism

Many activists in the GDR see little use anymore in this traditional counterposition. They are, of course, influenced by a certain tradition but their own experiences have hardly confirmed and reinforced their will to stick to this unflinchingly. Joint activity in solidarity and the experience of working with one another have led beyond mutual tolerance and understanding to a more critical and conscious approach to one's own philosophy and value system. It need not be a symptom of weakness or wetness to probe one's own formation for its narrownesses and deficits and even question them. The problem of human rights illustrates this particularly clearly. Neither the traditional Christian-theological, nor the liberal, nor on the other side the scholastic Marxist explanation can, taken on their own, do justice to the origins, the validity and the binding force of human rights. This does not constitute an argument for a cheap synthesis or a half-hearted relativism. What matters is to avoid putting up prohibition and "no entry"

signs, or illegitimately prioritising one's own position, before a common activity. In this respect at least, we do have a long and bad tradition in the GDR. Any discussion which does not arise from a common engagement in the struggle for the defence of human rights can easily become an academically-detached or politically scholastic one. The

practical pluralism of the Charter and of other human rights movements in neighbouring countries should be an example to us.

A Marxist and materialist position on human rights, such as the one put forward by Petr Uhl, always meets the objection that this approach does not allow room for the

individual, his indivisible responsibility, individual conscience and guilt. Marxists as persons may be granted this capacity, but the philosophy is supposed to be deficient in these values. Uhl answers this and I do not share that objection either, but I do see good reasons for scepticism towards the established Marxism of the communist party tradition. Here the substance of human rights is being denied in a historical construct which leaves room only for objective laws, their recognition and utilisation. Subjectivity and praxis are turned into an adjunct of history. The party as the organ of knowledge and political action legitimises every mistake, even crime, with the higher blessing of the Historical Mission. There is no space here for individual dignity and responsibility. This practice has about as much to do with the libertarian and emancipatory character of the socialism Marx stands for as the inquisition with the gospel. The roots of this mode of thought are reaching deep into the socialist movement and render its simplistic critique as a distortion or deformation inadequate. The social-revolutionary power of socialist attitudes and values, the productive approach of Marxist thought can only become effective through a decisive break with the theory and practice of the countries of "actually existing socialism".

**"CHARTER 77 A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION"**

Initiative Peace and Human Rights, GDR

**Ten Years of Charta 77**

Dear Friends,

when Charta 77 came into existence ten years ago, there were many sceptics who granted it only a short life expectancy. Too strong would be the pressure from the state power and the paralysis of society. You have survived the imprisonment of the spokespersons and of many signatories, open and concealed repression, and the tactic of blanket silence. The Charta did not become a mass movement, nor could it prevent all violations of human rights, but it developed into a political and moral authority, even internationally. Problems and grievances raised in its documents and statements found an echo in society and had to be addressed by the state, too, sooner or later.

For us the existence of Charta and other human rights movements in Eastern Europe has been, and still is, an encouragement and a "source of inspiration". At the beginning of independent human rights activity in the GDR there was often the accusation of wanting to copy Charta 77. Given our conditions, that was neither possible nor intended by us. In the GDR, human rights activity has emerged as a distinct component of a broad, independent peace movement. Many common aspects of our countries, however, make it possible to mutually assimilate important experiences from our working principles. Among the most important of these for us are:

- The indispensable openness and publicity, as human rights cannot be bargained over or be made the object of diplomatic manoeuvres in secret negotiations. The development of self-help and the solidarity of those concerned will overcome the old politics of leaving things to representatives. Of great importance in this context is national and international publicity.
- Pluralism as a supreme value is indispensable for the realisation of fundamental human rights. Here, too, people with different political and philosophical attitudes get involved. The tension between different approaches to the question of human rights is a productive one and should not be destroyed by a debate over principles with the intention of homogenisation. The democratisation of our societies will be a road of common searching and learning for which there are no models and recipes.

We wish you strength for your continued work, and a closer collaboration in solidarity despite the frontiers which are almost sealed for us.

For your and our freedom

Members of the Initiative and Friends of the Peace Movement

**30 original signatories**

Spokespersons **Wolfgang Templin, Ralf Hirsch, Peter Grimm**

**Solidarity and self-help**

Petr Uhl, with his life and the long years of his imprisonment, stands as an example for this break and has for many of us accompanied the time of our own decision. But in the second part of his essay, where he addresses the problem of political revolution and deals with the fundamental social forces, contradictions and development tendencies of our societies, I detect an element of leftist wishful thinking shining through. The problem is not the leap into the political overview, but the fixation upon certain ways of political struggle and form of political organisation.

Any independent social activity in our countries, if it reaches a certain level of determination and commitment, is soon confronted with the *totality* of domination and repression which embraces all spheres of our society. If the reaction then is not to be resignation of the flight into private life or the other Germany, the question of one's ability to act and of the prospects for social change are posed. Even an activism which rejects systematic analysis and theory will, if it is not to be inconsequential, reflect one's own efforts and experiences. A scepticism towards any kind of reliance on others and piece-meal relaxations from above is common to all attempts at developing active solidarity and self-help from below. From this point of view, the democratisation of society will neither be granted through re-

form from above nor can it be expected to result from a "classical" revolution, an insurrection. Catastrophic developments such as the economic collapse in Poland and its well-known consequences are not ruled out by this, but they only mark the extremes of a profound process of change and transformation in our societies, with the chance of developing multifarious forms of social self-organisation and parallel structures in all spheres. It is in these that the origins of a new type of democracy and new values express themselves.

In the GDR, of course, this evolution is as yet barely in sight, but it is in its neighbouring countries. The experiences of others cannot be copied but they significantly advance one's own learning process. The proximity of the Federal Republic and the instructive influence of the Western media, as well as close contacts with the Greens and parts of the Western peace movement did not allow illusions in the possibilities of parliamentarianism and bourgeois democracy grow too big among us. Without explicitly labelling itself as socialist, our engagement

in peace and human rights activity is radically democratic and oriented towards the real socialisation of the decisive economic processes. A concept of progress like the one traditionally supported by the socialist and workers' movement, which gambles everything on industrial growth and unrestrained increases in consumption, meets with increasing scepticism.

Is it only the green-alternative concepts that remain as a framework of orientation? That need not be a disadvantage, as long as the decisive features of a better society constitute the common aim of all involved.

The tenth anniversary of Charta 77 finds Czechoslovakia in a latent crisis. Speculation over the succession to ailing President Gustav Husak coincides with uncertainty over the new course in Gorbachev's Moscow. Our correspondent reports.

ANDREW CSEPEL

## **ONE EYE ON HUSAK AND ONE ON MOSCOW**

**I**t was Eduard Shevardnadze himself who made the most interesting observation of all during his visit to Prague in the first week of February. He pointed out that it had been almost twenty years since a Soviet Foreign Minister had visited Czechoslovakia and that it was high time for the Soviet authorities to acquaint themselves with the situation in Prague.

Just before Shevardnadze's arrival, Prime Minister Lubomir Strougal had finally launched a massive public attack on the state's economic mechanisms. Strougal had been acting cautiously until then, expressing his harshest criticism behind the closed doors of the Politbureau. Publicly he has recently used more measured language.

But it was not only Strougal who exploited the rare privilege of Shevardnadze's visit to express himself in an uncharacteristically frank tone. The usually circumspect Foreign Minister, Bohuslav Chnoupek, weighed in with his sycophantic version of that novel Czechoslovak rhetorical form, the election speech. He spoke in effusive terms of the changes underway in the Soviet Union: "Thanks to the consistent course of democratisation of both domestic and foreign policy the prestige and the name of the Soviet Union have found such an echo among our people that it is hard to find a comparison."

### **Election speeches**

It was Jan Fojtik, the candidate member of the Politbureau and Central Committee Secretary for ideology, who started the trend of

making election speeches last October. At a conference on ideology held in Plzen he took issue by name with Zdenek Mlynar in discussing glasnost, economic reform in Czechoslovakia, 1968 and a number of other slightly risqué topics with an unusual confidence.

Since then Fojtik has broken yet another taboo by entering into correspondence with the Charter 77 signatory and former journalist, Jiri Dienstbier. The latter responded to Fojtik's Plzen speech with a detailed critique of his former comrade's present position. Astonishingly Fojtik wrote back, taking up the debate accusing Dienstbier of lacking "revolutionary resolution" and ultimately "standing on the other side of the barricades". Fojtik's argument was predictably specious but his decision to even acknowledge Dienstbier's letter, let alone answer it, has excited a number of people in Prague.

Perhaps to prove that post-Gorbachev any position can make a positive contribution to the debate, the grand old man of Czechoslovak neo-Stalinism, Presidium member Vasil Bilak, chipped in with his contribution on February 10 during a meeting of the Central Committee's ideological commission which had met to discuss the higher education system of all things: "There are those among us who are agitating for a 'new politics'... We know what they are about. They want to exploit the changes going on in the Soviet Union and at the same time conceal their anti-socialist, anti-people activity." Bilak's basic message was that Gorbachev and glasnost bear no relevance to the situation in

Czechoslovakia.

The gloves are now off in the Czechoslovak Presidium. Were it not for President Gustav Husak's terrier-like grip on power, one could almost be excused for thinking that a change is about to take place. However, none of the rivals for the position of

First Secretary when Husak goes for reasons of death or senility can afford to relax their efforts in staking their claim.

Two years ago it looked like a straight three-cornered fight between Strougal, Bilak and Milos Jakes, the brutally ambitious Czech Presidium member responsible for economic questions. But candidates for the post have now begun to multiply. Fojtik is the most persistent newcomer, who has taken over the responsibility for ideological questions from Bilak, although he is not a full presidium member. Other rumours have suggested that Jindrich Polednik, a young, honest but apparently unintelligent teacher from Ostrava, will be catapulted to glory because he is the most acceptable representative of the younger generation within the Central Committee.

### **Federalisation**

Most people believe that Bilak is out of the running, due to age and his almost complete personal isolation within the leadership. In his stead Husak has now bestowed favour upon Jozef Lenart, the Slovak Party's First Secretary and member of the CPCz Presidium.

For Husak Lenart's great attraction is his nationality. Slovakia has come a long way

since the constitution was changed on January 1st 1969 to accommodate the federalisation of the country, the only part of the 1968 Action Programme which was realised. The standard of living in Slovakia has increased dramatically while Slovak officials buzz around the ministries and Party Secretariats in Prague. It is generally recognised that if either Jakes or Strougal, the former in particular, became First Secretary, then Slovak influence in the capital would be seriously eroded. This would mean a premature end to Husak's life work, the promotion of Slovak interests in the Czechoslovak state, and he is not prepared to see it just fade away without a fight.

But of all the applicants who are frantically waving their CVs about for the benefit of the leadership of the CPSU, there is none able to compare with the single-mindedness and calculation of Milos Jakes, who without a doubt would be the betting favourite if a book were to be opened on the succession.

Jakes has sensibly spent the last year cultivating in his egregious style people close to Gorbachev in the Soviet leadership. In the USSR Jakes is regarded as Czechoslovakia's leading representative of economic reform. He is the only Presidium member, Husak aside, who has spent time with Gorbachev alone. Using his position as the Don Corleone of Slusovice, Czechoslovakia's model collective farm, which is computerised, rich and influential, he has received leading reform economists and sociologists from the Soviet Union, including the director of the Novosibirsk institute, Abel Aganbegyan.

What Jakes' Soviet friends seem to overlook is his consistent blocking of all reform measures proposed by Prime Minister Strougal. Time and again, Jakes has proved in the Presidium that his commitment to reform is merely pragmatic. While there are indications that Jakes would introduce a mild programme of economic reform were he elected First Secretary, his primary aim would be to consolidate his own power. Although loathed by Slovaks, his client network in the Czech party is unrivalled.

### Economic reform

If the left in Czechoslovakia or Western Europe has any preference in the struggle over succession then it must be for Lubomir Strougal. The Prime Minister's credentials as an economic reformer are beyond doubt. In speech after speech, he has railed despairingly at the chronic structural problems of the economy. His plans for a widespread decentralisation of the decision-making within the economic structure are neither a panacea nor are they relatively very radical. But they are reasonable and of the possible approaches put forward to alleviate the economic crisis, Strougal's are the only ones with any intellectual calibre.

But perhaps more important than this would be the political consequences of

Strougal's election. He is no political liberal, but he supported the 1968 reform programme out of conviction. He has become the model East European technocrat—anything that gets in the way of the smooth running of the economic mechanism is a bad thing. Czechoslovakia has a worsening reputation within COMECON because of the declining standard of its export consumer goods, and a lousy one in the West because of its human rights record. A careful study of Strougal's speeches reveals that he only very rarely refers to "anti-socialist forces" or "subversive elements". He avoids attacking Charter 77 wherever he can, because repression against Charter complicates Czechoslovakia's trading relations with the West. It is perfectly possible that as First Secretary, Strougal would begin to disarm the influence of the police which at the moment is often decisive. Strougal's great drawback is that he enjoys little support in the party. As Prime Minister most of his client network lies within the state apparatus.

The renewal in the CPSU has quite clearly altered the political contours in Czechoslovakia. For the moment it is impossible to say with any accuracy whether this is to the good or not, although hopes are rising slightly.

However, it is not only in the party that Gorbachev is causing excitement. The release of Sakharov in December and scores of other political prisoners in February has sent shock waves throughout the whole population. A large group of Charter signatories believes that Gorbachev represents a real break from the past practices and offers hope in the long term for Czechoslovakia. The attack on Brezhnev, the ideological godfather of the present Czechoslovak regime, published in Pravda at the time of Sakharov's release and reprinted (under duress, one suspects) in Rude Pravo a few days later was welcomed by many. The population as a whole delight in the plethora of rumours circulating about the government banning certain editions of Pravda from entering the country because some articles are too radical.

A visit to Prague, which is as depressed and miserable as ever, may prompt the observation that all this speculation is idle. But this would be a grave mistake. Behind the apparently ossified exterior of life in the Czechoslovak capital, dormant political organisms are beginning to toss and turn a little. It would be a grave mistake not to be alert when they finally wake up.



## DEFEND JAN DUS!

The Czechoslovak government's attitude to the Gorbachev liberalisation programme remains unclear. There is considerable evidence that powerful forces within it are opposed to it. A particularly striking illustration of this is the recent arrest of the evangelical priest and Charta 77 signatory Jan Dus. Born in 1931, Dus was a pupil of the left-wing Czech theologian J.L. Hromadka, from whom, according to a statement issued by his defence committee 'he took the vision of the realisation of the great social dreams of the past in a socialist society'. Since 1968 Dus has been a persistent critic of the gulf between Czechoslovak legal theory and practice.

He is presently charged under Article 98 of the Criminal Code, which deals with subversion of the Republic and carries a maximum sentence of eight years. The charge originates in protests which Dus made on behalf of a friend, Herman Chromy, who had been framed by the secret police. Also brought up against him is his alleged possession of, and communication with, emigré journals, including the right-wing *Svedectvi*, published in Paris by Pavel Tigrid. In an exchange with an interrogating officer, Dus is reported to have remarked that 'Tigrid is an honest opponent of the KSC (Communist Party). The dishonest police are much more dangerous for the KSC than its honest opponents'.

Readers of *Labour Focus* can send messages of support to Jan Dus, UNV- Praha-Ruzyne, 160 000 Praha 6, CSSR or to his wife: Anna Dusova, Skolni 1, 277 11 Neratovice-Libis, CSSR or contact the defence committee for further information: c/o S. Karasek, Segantinistr. 154, CH-8049, Zürich, Switzerland.

Mark Jackson

DAVID HOLLAND

# THE POLISH "CAT AND MOUSE" GAME

Since martial law Poland has been in a kind of stalemate between the government and the opposition. For the authorities, the short-term goals of "normalisation" were achieved relatively quickly. Martial law was imposed very efficiently. The institutions of party and state and the facade of official life was salvaged. The professional organisations (the journalists, the writers etc) were gradually reconstituted on a new basis with reliable leading personnel. Elections have been held (or "voting" as the Poles prefer to call them) at local government and parliamentary level, with a minimum of disruption from opposition calls for boycotts<sup>1</sup>. The 10th Party Congress, in June 1986, seemed to register a further strengthening of Jaruzelski's position. Establishing credible and officially acceptable trade unions to replace Solidarity was an uphill struggle. All the same, progress has been made, with the national congress of the "re-born" (POZZ) trade unions in November 1986 and the gradual shift of control over patronage and representation in the workplace to the neo-unions, even where they have failed to enrol a majority of the workforce.

The longer-term task of winning social acceptance and coopting a wider circle of collaborators has proved a stickier one. Reading the official press can create the impression that roaming the streets of Poland are hundreds of regime spokesmen, grabbing passers-by by the lapels to engage in conciliatory dialogue. But reality is rather different.

## Amnesties

There have been successive and wide amnesties for political (and other) prisoners. Such moves are an argument in efforts to win Western credits and a demonstration of political strength and self-confidence at home. The carrot of amnesty is, however, accompanied by the stick of continuing police pressure on opposition activists. The latest amnesty, for example, was preceded by thousands of formal "warning" interviews by the security police with suspect persons, often held in the workplace in front of the boss. In the Polish game of cat and mouse, the opposition was quick to respond. After the 1984 amnesty, Walesa immediately called a meeting of Solidarity's national commission, previously made impossible by the detention of many of its members. A similar effort to emerge into aboveground, legal activity greeted the September 1986

amnesty. Nevertheless, the release of several hundred political prisoners was a self-confident move on the part of the authorities, especially since among those released were important opposition leaders such as Jacek Kuron, Zbigniew Bujak and Wladyslaw Frasyniuk.

A similar ambivalence in policy characterises the treatment of the academic community. Its strong political hostility to the government is tolerated, together with a degree of limited academic freedom. Persistent attempts to woo figures with a reputation for independence are coupled with judicious measures of repression and intimidation. The liberal law on university autonomy, framed in 1981 and actually introduced in 1982 (!), permitted the election of politically inconvenient university officers. It was therefore amended in July 1985 to ensure ministerial control of senior appointments and provisions such as the administration of a loyalty oath to new appointees. About eighty senior academics lost their jobs at the end of 1985, including the Rectors of the Universities of Gdansk and Poznan and of the Warsaw Technical University. The risks of resistance are thus made clear without resort to the kind of massive purge that would be necessary to decisively curb the independence of the intelligentsia and cause international scandal.

In the workplace, too, the drive to intensify labour discipline, improve productivity and reassert authority relations, has had to be tempered with caution. Strikes, disputes and the use of workers' councils by the opposition, have met with a mixture of repression and accommodation. The second term of most workers' councils began in 1985, with fresh elections. Solidarity groups in factories have continued to be able to intervene in them successfully, sometimes for the first time (e.g. Boleslaw Bierut Steelworks). It is also possible to find examples of vigorous attempts by workers' councils to oust the director through referenda, the press and the courts (Stokbet in Wrzesnia<sup>2</sup>). The task of rebuilding a presence for the party in many workplaces has proved even more difficult than establishing the neo-unions.

On the other hand, draconian new measures in labour legislation, initiated in 1986, make dismissals easier and introduced a range of financial and other penalties for workers changing their jobs, voluntarily or otherwise. The effective withdrawal of the

five-day week, partially won in 1980-81, and other special "regulations for overcoming the crisis", have been legally extended until 1990.

## Economic reform

The economic reform remains a central question, since the prospects of recovery, improved living standards and political stabilisation, all hinge on the need to qualitatively improve economic performance. While the party reaffirmed its commitment to the reform at its Xth Congress, Jaruzelski admitted, however, that no breakthrough in efficiency had taken place. Supply shortages and bureaucratic intervention in detailed enterprise decisions continue the practises of the hyper-centralised system. "Self-financing" has tended to mean the replacement of ministerial control by administrative intervention from the banks. There have even been distinct moves to completely revamp the concept of the reform by introducing giant combines, which would obliterate any room for enterprise autonomy or workers' self-management.

The stiffening breeze of reform from the Kremlin clearly strengthens the hands of the Polish reformers. Support from this quarter, however, increases the likelihood of a narrow, managerial, technocratic reform, as opposed to the original conception of marketisation, decentralisation and a large role for workers' self-management. Given the social costs of an effective reform (in higher prices, redundancies, closures and greater income inequalities), the tacit support from genuinely representative social forces can only be won by some degree of democratisation. Although political risks attach to the toleration of independent-minded workers' councils, failure to deliver improving living standards may carry with it even more serious risks of political explosion in the future. The present Five Year Plan to 1990 provides for a very marginal improvement in real living standards of 3-3.5% and Poland also remains burdened by nearly 30 billion dollars of foreign debt.

The latest venture aiming at political dialogue has been the launch of the Consultative Council on 6th December 1986. Energetic attempts were made to win independent participation from, for example, the Catholic intelligentsia, but with limited success. The main catch for the Council is probably Wladyslaw Sila Nowicki, a leading defence lawyer in many political trials. Jan

Szczepanski, the sociologist and Jan Kulaj, a compromised former leader of Peasants' Solidarity, are other members. There is no formal representation of the Church and most independent public figures have boycotted it.

## The Catholic Church

The regime continues to cultivate the Church and to find a relatively willing partner in Primate Glemp. Jaruzelski recently visited the Vatican and another papal visit to Poland is said to be under discussion. The major setback in relations with the Church has been the final abandonment by the Primate, after years of protracted negotiation, of plans to establish a Church Agricultural Fund, to support private farming with hard currency from abroad. It seems to have proved impossible to agree to terms for such a potentially major source of economic patronage and power. At the same time, the Church continues to be a symbolic and sometimes physical haven for the opposition. Masses on important Solidarity and national anniversaries may be addressed by opposition leaders and followed by demonstrations from the Church doors. Major religious events, such as then remains the ustencv. The main Warsaw opposition paper, *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, recently counted 930 underground titles, of which it knew 400 to be still in print. These included 34 titles aimed specifically at youth<sup>3</sup>. Some of these journals have sustained themselves over hundreds of issues (e.g. *Z Dnia na Dzień*—From Day to Day, already at 400 issues a year ago).

Politically and organisationally, however, the opposition is fragmented and weak. Solidarity's underground inter-factory, regional and national structures have become shadowy bodies, without significant political weight since the arrest, in May 1986, Zbigniew Bujak, the most authoritative Solidarity leader, who directed Solidarity's underground "Provisional Co-ordinating Committee" for five years following martial law.

## Solidarity goes public

However, the release of Bujak, Frasnyniuk, Boruszewicz and Jedynek created the possibility of constituting a public leadership for Solidarity. The National Provisional Council of Solidarity was accordingly launched in a statement by Walesa on the 29th of September 1986. It aspires to act openly, voicing and defending the positions of Solidarity, and offering itself as a negotiating team to the authorities if they wish to demonstrate the seriousness of their incessantly proclaimed goal of promoting national dialogue.

The launch of the National Council was immediately followed by what appeared to be spontaneous, similar moves at regional level, accompanied by the emergence of

various Solidarity figures from hiding, to resume an open role in public life with the new open councils (e.g. Marek Muszynski and Jan Andrzej Górnaj from Lower and Upper Silesia, and in Warsaw, Wiktor Kulerski and Jan Litynski). Clearly it would be very difficult for the authorities to take fresh prisoners, just as they were demonstratively opening the jails. Open regional councils were proclaimed at a variety of centres, often accompanied by press conferences and large meetings of representatives from local factories (Warsaw, Kielce, Krakow, Gorzow Wielkopolski, Radom, Poznan, Lublin, Opole, Pila and Upper Silesia).

Some of the first activities of these open Solidarity councils—protests on the use of asbestos (Konin) and on the noise and disruption caused by military aircraft (Pila)—underline two important themes coming to prominence in the Polish opposition: ecology and a new peace movement.

## Ecology

Concern over the catastrophic environmental conditions in some parts of Poland is extremely widespread and has obviously been spurred on by the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster. The Polish episcopate and the TKK Solidarity leadership body have both made public declarations concentrating on the environment during 1986. The newly emerged *Freedom and Peace* movement has also taken up ecological demand and, for example, organised a demonstration demanding the closure of one of Poland's notoriously "dirty" steel mills, near Wroclaw. Dozens of supporters faced heavy fines as a result<sup>4</sup>.

The development of the energetic and courageous *Freedom and Peace* movement is an event of great interest, in a country in which the prevalent attitude to Western peaceniks has been one of scorn, even amongst politicised opposition circles. As might be expected, the focus of a Polish peace movement is on the military role of the adjacent superpower, the Soviet Union. Although they have therefore differed with the West German Greens on defining the Soviet Union as "the most dangerous totalitarian force in the world"<sup>5</sup>, the most important thing is that such discussions, with END and with the Greens, are taking place at all.

*Freedom and Peace* was initiated by Marek Adamkiewicz's refusal to take the military oath. This initiative attracted support and dozens of instances of refusal to enter military service followed, apparently undeterred by an extremely firm response by the authorities, in the form of fines and prison sentences. Hunger strikes, petitions and demonstrations have been organised in Warsaw, Wroclaw, Gdansk and Szczecin.

*Freedom and Peace* has declared its goal as the demilitarisation of central Europe and the creation of a nuclear-free zone "hand in hand with the democratisation of the coun-

tries of Eastern Europe". Adhering to non-violence, the movement has declared its support for national liberation struggles and the emancipation of ethnic minorities. The activity of this group is also a significant indicator of the collapse of the traditionally high prestige of the military in Poland, following martial law.

Polish political life continues to be a game of positional warfare, with the contenders, like cats watching a mouse hole, waiting tensely for any opportunity to exploit. They operate under great constraints. So far the regime has failed to effect a "Kadarisation" in Poland. It has neither destroyed opposition, nor seems to be sufficiently committed to economic reforms that might promise pacificatory rising living standards. The stage seems set for a fresh explosion of discontent at some point in the not too far distant future.

## Footnotes

1. In the last elections to the Sejm, the authorities claimed a turnout of 98.87%. Solidarity claimed 60%.
2. *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, 12 December 1985. *Bulletin of the Information Centre for Polish Affairs*, 16 January 1986
3. *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, 16 January 1986
4. *Dziennik Polski*, 19 January 1987
5. *Information Centre*, 20 March 1986



One of the most ambitious East European samizdat publications for many years appeared in Poland at the end of 1985. "The Poland Report—Five Years Since August" provides a comprehensive survey of Polish national life in the five years since the Polish August of 1980.

DAVID HOLLAND

## EMPTIER PLATES AND BIGGER TRUNCHEONS

It was commissioned by Lech Walesa and is prefaced with an introduction by him. It was written by an anonymous team of Polish academics and produced "with the help of funding from the French trade unions". Its appearance marked something of a milestone even for Poland's fertile underground publishing scene. The first edition of the Report was in 20,000 copies and there have been reprints.

It is a wide-ranging document of unprecedented length and scope, running to 160 pages in the characteristic miniscule typeface of underground publications. It surveys in turn the law, the economy, living conditions, the health service, education, the environment, academic and scientific life and Polish culture.

The Report makes grim reading—a tale of political repression, economic stagnation and continuing immiseration, coupled with the reckless waste of national resources by an unaccountable bureaucracy. Walesa observes in the introduction:

"... we are returning to the pre-August situation: only with our plates a bit emptier and their truncheons a bit bigger."

### Pragmatic nationalism

In the face of this situation, the authors reaffirm the constructive, pragmatic and positivist attitude so characteristic of some species of Polish nationalism—especially amongst the intelligentsia. The defiant fundamentalist spirit of the Solidarity movement in 1980-81 is missing here. Such an attitude today, the authors consider, would be tantamount to national suicide. This fear runs through the report—a fear of isolation and "Sovietisation", of the destruction of the vitality of Polish life, of apathy and subservience. Against this threat, these Solidarity intellectuals proclaim the need to:

"think and act in a way which will unite the struggle for freedom and independence with the capacity to widen the limits of the possible."

It follows from this attitude that the Report strongly supports the decentralising, market-oriented economic reform with which the Polish authorities continue to temporise. The same goes for enterprise workers' self-management bodies, established in compromise legislation hammered out with Solidarity in 1981. Although their scope is very limited, a minority of them continue to show signs of independence. Some of them are run by former Solidarity activists and operate as para-trade-union bodies.

### "Socialist jaundice"

There is a wealth of informative material on Polish social conditions in the Report. For example, the dire Polish housing crisis shows no sign of easing. The Report estimates that one third of Polish families live in shared accommodation. The increase in social inequality is discussed, arising from the now well-established inflationary spiral, from which low income groups are least able to protect themselves (the Report calls for a time-lagged indexation of incomes).

The Polish health service is under heavy pressure. Starved of funds, hospitals are liable to run out of the most basic articles, such as plasters, antibiotics, vitamins or anaesthetics. The chronic shortage of disposable hypodermic needles, in common with much of Eastern Europe, has given rise to high rates of hepatitis, the so-called "socialist jaundice". Moreover, the "traditional" Polish plague of alcoholism has been compounded in recent years, with the rising price of vodka, by an explosion amongst young people of addiction to the filthy, locally produced opiate known as the "Polish cocktail". This is also administered by needles. And the first cases of AIDS are now being officially admitted in Poland.

### Ecology

The strong interest in Poland in the ecology movement is well represented in the Report. This interest is fuelled by the fact that Poland arguably has the most threatened natural environment in Europe. Pollution levels in air, soil and water have reached the threshold for regional ecological catastrophe. This is especially true of Upper Silesia, where dying forests accompany unusable agricultural land and respiratory diseases amongst children aged eight to ten run at nearly three times the alarmingly high national average of 11%. All this has been compounded, since the Report was written, by the latest unwelcome gift from the East, the radiation cloud from Chernobyl.

Those resisting the British education cuts will feel some sympathy for their Polish colleagues, who face a catastrophic squeeze. Numbers of students in higher education threaten to halve compared with the early 1970s. Western books are virtually unobtainable for normal study purposes. The real incomes of Polish academics have fallen by 30 to 50% in 1980 to 1985. At the same time they are faced with the constant threat of political purges, though this is admittedly an inconsistent affair of harassment rather than wholesale repression.

Familiar complaints are voiced about conditions of work, such as authoritarian management, diminishing opportunities for promotion of young workers, the corruptions of official patronage and the destructive impact of the nomenklatura appointments system on the quality of management.

### Industrial accidents

More startling is information about industrial accidents and disease. Official figures document an increase of 74.6% in industrial disease 1973-83 as against 1963-72. Investigations in 1981 also revealed work with asbestos being carried out at many times "permitted" levels. There are also allega-

tions on the concealment of industrial accidents, especially in the mines.

Set against the abuses of official Poland is the political opposition and its remarkably comprehensive underground publishing network and that equally distinctive Polish institution, the Church. The Report points out defiantly that the Church continues to operate an enormous educational apparatus outside the formal schooling system. There are, for example, more catechism centres than primary schools. The struggles by Polish school students to retain crucifixes in their classrooms have been widely reported

abroad. These clashes are profoundly expressive of the symbolic opposition between the Church and official ("alien") culture.

Some of the distinctively Polish and Catholic notes hit by the Report may raise sceptical eyebrows amongst Western readers, especially those on the left. For example, there is the strong defence of the work ethic as a national value, the defence of the central values of family life, or the omission of any mention of the position of women (except to regret the high incidence of abortion). However, apart from a wealth of detailed information, which it has been possible to quote

only a few examples of here, the Report is extremely revealing of the real attitudes and values held by much of the Polish opposition. It should be required reading for the Western student for this reason. Moreover, the Polish people have every right to develop their own view of the world and to determine their own future. They deserve our solidarity in this difficult struggle.



GYÖRGY KRASSÓ

# WRITERS IN REVOLT

**T**he General Assembly of the Hungarian Writers Union is held every five years. Its last meeting, in 1981, coincided with the Jaruzelski coup in Poland, but the emotions were expertly calmed down by the liberal Guörgy Aczél. Since then, however, the growing economic difficulties of the regime have brought about a shift towards the hard-line conservatives in the party leadership, with the clumsy János Berecz taking over the reigns of cultural policy. Three literary journals – *Mozgó Világ*, *Liget* and *Tszatáj*—were banned and writers like Sándor Csoóri, István Csurka and Gáspár Nagy silenced. Not surprisingly, last November's assembly proved a stormy affair.

## Threats

A declaration signed by 114 authors denounced the repressive measures, and in the course of the two-day debate one delegate after the other spoke out against the silencing of their colleagues and the blacklist system. Berecz retaliated by threatening, behind closed doors, that the state could "speak in another language, too", but the assembly refused to be intimidated. In the secret ballot for the union's governing board, the great majority of members loyal to the party leadership were voted out and new, critical-minded candidates elected in their place.

As in 1981, the situation could probably have been salvaged by the authorities by persuading the union leadership to coopt additional members, but this time the regime went on the public offensive, organising a small wave of resignations and declaring, in the party's central organ, the union as unrepresentative of Hungarian writers. The imposition of a new statute and even its disbandment were aired. But only 27 out of 612 members resigned, and the new union leaders received an unexpected boost with an invitation to Moscow from the Soviet Writers' Union which the Hungarian party leadership was unable to get withdrawn.

## No storm in the teacup

The most likely eventual outcome is still compromise—the writers making some declaration of loyalty and the party settling for a war of attrition. Yet this was no mere storm in a teacup: the dispute has transcended the narrow confines of the Writers' Union and become the subject of nationwide debates. The underground press of the democratic opposition has published the statements of dissenting writers, and one of the regime's public counterattacks – István Szerdahelyi's "After my resignation" (*Elet és Irodalom*, 30th January 1987)—broadened its target by including the unofficial youth circle *Vox Humana*, whose journal had released the names of the new Writers' Union leadership. On February 4th the flats of Zsolt Keszthelyi and József Talata of *Vox Humana* were raided by police and Keszthelyi, aged 23, drafted into the army a few days later. This was followed on the 25th February by his arrest when he refused to serve as the first Hungarian conscientious objector not to claim religious motives: he would not, he said, serve in armed forces which are not under the control of a freely elected government. He has immediately become a *cause célèbre*, with prominent dissidents protesting against his arrest in a joint declaration.

So we are not merely witnessing a narrow, esoteric union debate, but yet another symptom of the ever growing alienation between regime and society. Among the charges levelled against the writers by Minister of Education, Béla Köpeczi in the 31st January issue of *Népszabadság* were the allegations that they wished to interfere in political decision-making and did not agree with the official evaluation of the 1956 revolution. The same charges, however, could be made not only against a few hundred writers but the vast majority of the Hungarian nation.

# THE LESSONS OF THE HUNGARIAN OCTOBER

MICHELE LEE writes:

While it is right to identify *Labour Focus* with the Hungarian workers' aspirations in October 1956, there is no reason to succumb to revolutionary romanticism, which is what happened in the editorial of Vol.8, No.3.

First, on the question of the Paris Commune. That the Paris uprising was bound to fail is a view held not only by "detached historians whose professional ethos is to be wise after the event". It was also held by Marx, under whose supervision the General Council of the First International advised the Paris workers against the temptation to take power in the city.

True, after the bloody suppression of the Commune, Marx came vigorously to its defence; he did so not just to express his solidarity with workers in struggle, but also and above all because the experience of the Commune provided a new insight into what workers have to do to establish their class power. "The new feature is that the people, after the first rise have not disarmed themselves and surrendered their power... but have taken the actual management of their revolution into their own hands... displacing the state machinery, the governmental machinery of the ruling classes by a governmental machinery of their own." (*First Draft of "The Civil War in France"*). But for this very reason, comparison of the Hungarian October with the Paris Commune is quite inappropriate. It would have been more to the point to stress the fundamental difference between the two events. Unlike the Communards, the Hungarian workers did *not* take "the actual management of their revolution into their own hands". Precisely by not displacing the existing governmental machinery with their own, based on factory councils, the Hungarian workers ensured their defeat this is the essential message of the Hungarian October.

Their defeat sprang from their political (hence also organisational) weakness. It is no good arguing that "the poorly-armed and ill-organised workers, intellectuals and peasants of one of the smaller European countries" could not hope to defeat "the might of the Red Army"; nor that the timing was somehow wrong, since "the entire continent was locked in Cold War between the two hegemonic powers equally hostile to the idea of socialist democracy and national self-determination". For each of these statements begs a question in turn. In the first place, Hungary had sizable armed forces of its own, and small countries have on occasion shown themselves perfectly able to withstand armed intervention by a stronger power. Secondly, in 1956 the Cold War was already on the wane, while the West was preoccupied by Suez and the Kremlin knew it would not intervene. Moreover, far from being "ill-organised", the workers controlled factories throughout the country, under conditions described by the editorial as "the most advanced example of Stalinism in its death throes". Nevertheless, albeit at the price of considerable bloodshed, the Hungarian October ended in nothing more than "adjustments of the inter- and intra-state relations bequeathed by the Stalin era".

Surely the secret of the Hungarian workers' defeat in 1956 (the defeat of a potential anti-bureaucratic revolution) lies precisely in the fact that their organisation and politics did not aim at constituting "a true regime of workers' power"? This being so, the Hungarian October—contrary to what the editorial claims—cannot be seen as containing "all the essential features" for future socialist advance in Eastern Europe and beyond.

As they came into existence, factory councils in Hungary 1956 were seen as expressing solely the *economic* power and interests of the workers, unity on this basis being preferred to *political* differentiation and organisation. As Töke recalls in the same issue of *Labour Focus*: "When the workers' councils were formed, great care was taken that no party-political views should prevail, but that exclusively the interests of the factory, suitability and technical skills should be taken into account". Political decision-making was left to the parties of the 1945-7 coalition: "the composition of Imre Nagy's government seemed to offer sufficient guarantees"! This sentiment was fully returned by the government, which maintained (to its final undoing) only a tenuous relationship with the councils, insofar as it was aware of them. In other words, what presided over the decomposition of the Stalinist order was not "a dynamic of self-determination" (unless one reduces this to a purely national dimension—though even then the question remains of *who* was expressing *what* national interests), but a power vacuum: a complete disjuncture between the real (albeit untapped) force resting in the workers' councils and a powerless "governing" instance: the cabinet of Imre Nagy which,

weak and internally divided, ended its turn in office with such empty gestures as appealing to the United Nations and announcing that it was quitting the Warsaw Pact.

It was only after the fall of this government, with the second Soviet intervention in full swing, that the workers began to centralise their organisation and act as a political body. Now that "the country had no responsible leaders", "it seemed necessary that the Central Workers' Council should fulfill political functions, because there was no organisation that could have been entrusted with the representation of the workers" (Töke). There was a new understanding that the concentrated pressures of a *National Workers' Council* must be brought to bear upon the illegitimate Kádár government to respect workers' demands: a socialist economy based on workers' councils; a multi-party system and free elections; democratic and trade-union rights; the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the country. Such a programme could, of course, be fulfilled only by the workers claiming for the National Council the legitimacy of the revolution. Yet this step was not even contemplated.

On 4 November, nevertheless, there were only two powers in Hungary: that of the Hungarian workers, sheltering behind a nation-wide framework of factory councils (which often took over municipal control as well), and the Soviet army. But instead of negotiating directly with the Soviet military commanders on, for example, the withdrawal of their troops (this, rather than withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, was the really vital demand), the workers chose instead to present their demands to Kádár, thereby recognising the new government (the essential Soviet solution to the October crisis) *de facto*. As Töke recalls, the Budapest Central Council delegates "told Kádár that they intended to form a national Workers' Council, but had no intention of doing so behind the government's back... and wanted the Kádár government to send their representatives also". However, if Nagy's government had ignored the workers' councils, that of Kádár set about suppressing every vestige of independent class power: the Budapest Central Workers' Council was dissolved on 8 December.

The actual limits of workers' power in Hungary in 1956 lay not mainly in their "ill-organisation" or "the might of the Red Army", but in their conception of the place and the role of the working class in a post-Stalinist (or non-Stalinist) order. It is, therefore, worth recalling here what kind of new Hungary the Budapest workers envisaged (Töke is again the source). There was to be a National Assembly—"a regular Parliament"—elected by universal suffrage and representing various parties, which would legislate on all matters not pertaining to the economy. Economic affairs, on the other hand, would be under the competence of a second chamber, elected from the factory councils. The fusion of these supreme political and economic instances would be affected at the level of the government, drawn from the two chambers and responsible to each. In the new Hungary, in other words, not only were the legislative and the executive instances to be separated, but also the economy was to be separated from the rest of the society, and it alone given over to direct control by the producers. Such a conception of a socialist state draws on both the social-democratic and the economist or syndicalist traditions in the working class movement (as far as the latter is concerned, moreover, it can be articulated by factory councils as by trade unions). Far from being unique to the Hungarian workers of 1956, it has with variations surfaced repeatedly throughout the last hundred years—as at least one of the contending options—at moments of heightened class struggle, in the East as in the West, in Poland in 1980-81 as in Germany in 1918-19. It is, of course, very far from Marx's vision of the proletarian state.

The aim of this intervention is not to criticise the Hungarian working class back in 1956: it was a young class, with weak socialist traditions, groping towards a new society in a country where the overthrow of a singularly reactionary bourgeoisie had come about, not through its own efforts, but thanks to the advance of the Red Army—something for which Stalinism continued to take full credit. The aim, rather, is to draw attention to the problems of political revolution in the East, in which (as in Hungary in 1956) factory councils will provide the necessary foundation of working-class power, but in which (unlike what happened then) they will come to express not only the economic, but also and above all the political will of a class bent on displacing the bureaucratic governmental machinery by one of their own.

## GÜNTER MINNERUP replies:

The point of the editorial was not to uncritically glorify the Hungarian revolution, and it is difficult to understand the charge of "revolutionary romanticism" unless one reads into the analogy with the Paris Commune something which was clearly not there. The theme of the two paragraphs in question was the assertion that history is not always on the side of the victors in any particular battle, and that momentous defeats like those of Paris 1871 or Budapest 1956 can indeed "offer a first glimpse of the shape of things to come and serve as the inspiration for the struggle of future generations". Nor is it argued, as Michele Lee suggests, "that the timing was somehow wrong": the swipe at being wise after the event was merely to underline that, from the perspective adopted in the editorial, the question of whether or not the Hungarian workers were doomed to be defeated is quite irrelevant.

Michele takes me to task for seeing the Hungarian October as containing "all the essential features" for socialist advance in East Europe and beyond. Again, what the editorial actually says is that "in all its essential features, the Hungarian October has set the agenda for the future of socialism in Eastern Europe and beyond". The difference is one between asking the questions and giving the answers to them. Hungary set the agenda by revealing in action, for the first time, the essential interplay of all the key factors in the crisis of Stalinism: the preparatory role of the intelligentsia, the sharp public divisions in the party, the crucial entry on the political stage of independent organisations of the working class, the roles of the church and of nationalist currents, the confrontation with Soviet intervention. Neither before, nor after 1956 did all these elements come together again in a similarly exemplary open revolutionary crisis — not even in Poland.

Lee quite properly stresses that the Hungarian workers were seriously handicapped in their struggle by the inadequacies of their political conceptions. But how could it have been otherwise, and will it ever be different? There are, broadly speaking, two schools of thought on the anti-Stalinist Western left concerning Eastern Europe: one which despairs over the ability of the atomised masses to force change from below against the mighty apparatuses of repression, and is therefore desperately looking for reformers at the top; and one which dreams of a classical revolutionary insurrection in which the workers, led by a neo-Bolshevik general staff, take on the bureaucracy in tidy battle formation. Michele's observations resemble the latter school of argument, and therefore strike me as rather sterile. Not "wrong", because that sort of argument is rarely "wrong" in the abstract, but rather — well, sterile.

For the problem is that in any conceivable real situation, the great majority of workers in any East European country will inevitably have "false", "naive" or "inadequate" conceptions of what the conflict is about and how it should be fought. There will inevitably be "illusions" in reformist wings of the party, in church leaders, even in the West, just as there will be the desire to maintain unity by avoiding divisive political issues, to show responsibility by concentrating on immediate economic aims. How could it be otherwise after years of atomisation and passivity, when it is probably either an acute economic crisis or the opening up of deep public divisions in the party and state leadership which brought the workers onto the political stage in the first place? Once this reality is grasped, the most striking feature of the Hungarian revolution is not the failure of the working class to understand "its historical tasks", but rather the speed with which it advanced to the creation of the workers' councils and the first steps towards formulating a political programme of its own after the second Soviet intervention. This process was brutally cut off by the repression that followed.

Circumstances were quite different in Czechoslovakia 1968 and Poland 1980-81, but again the workers did not enter the political stage as a ready-made revolutionary formation armed with a programme for the seizure of state power, but rather more haphazardly in response to the political ferment created by the reforms from above and, eventually, the Warsaw Pact invasion (Czechoslovakia) or (in the case of Poland) an acute economic crisis and government measures perceived as a frontal attack on working class interests. In Poland the period of mass independent working-class activity lasted far longer than in Hungary, let alone Czechoslovakia, and for the first time a huge workers' organisation with its own propaganda apparatus and legal delegate conferences came into existence. Yet it never "even contemplated" a revolutionary seizure of power and eventually faced Jaruzelski's coup in a state of even worse ideological disarray than that of the Budapest councils in November 1956.

Is there a lesson in all this, and what is it? I rather suspect that there is, and that it is not what Michele Lee thinks it is. If she can speak of the Hungarian workers in 1956 as "a young class, with weak socialist traditions, groping towards a new society", then what of the Polish, East German, Czech or even Soviet working classes of today? Where are their *living*

socialist traditions which one can build on? Their absence, however, does not mean that there is a vacuum which can quickly be filled with a revolutionary programme as soon as an independent organisational infrastructure — be it councils, be it a trade union — appears on the scene, like an empty jug waiting for the red wine. For those involved are real people, not historical abstractions, and in their heads there are real ideas, not vacuums: naive and inadequate ideas perhaps, but ones that relate to whatever are perceived as the real forces in society, and ones that need to be tested out in experience before they will be reshaped and replaced by new ones.

Unfortunately the opportunities for such experiences have been rather sporadic so far, and tended to be cut short by repression. But they will be back, and in conditions which will allow a higher level of political maturity and clarification to be reached. Both reformism from above and spontaneous eruptions from below will play their parts in this, but most likely in the form of increasingly protracted political crises rather than cathartic acts of bureaucratic self-democratisation or revolutionary insurrection. The key to the eventual outcome of these crises may, in any case, lie in the Soviet Union or even Western Europe rather than in Budapest, Prague or Warsaw. Meanwhile, the agenda set by the Hungarian revolution remains on the table.

Further contributions to this debate are invited

György Petri\*

### On the Twenty-fourth Anniversary of the Little October Revolution

Uncle Imre. Uncle Pista and Co.  
corrected the world's course just a  
tiny bit.  
They were hanged or locked up.  
(Uncles Mátyás and Ernő buggered  
off  
to Moscow. And the rest of them  
shall be nameless.)  
"We'll never die!"

The total number of corpses —  
and that includes both residents and  
intruders —  
is estimated at somewhere between  
three  
and thirty thousand. The figure is  
hard to verify so long  
after the event. Many vanished.  
Many were made to vanish.  
Some people were put on the rack  
of forgetfulness.  
Some people were put on the rack.  
Reality always reckons without  
herself.

Would she get her sums wrong?  
Settle her accounts?  
A unified and indivisible entity  
she failed her eleven-plus  
has never properly learnt to count.  
I say just two numbers:

56  
68.

You can add them, subtract them,  
divide or multiply.  
Your innumerable doctrines,  
baseness is their basis,  
have failed, are bankrupt.

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# HOXHA, THE "ARTFUL ALBANIAN"?

by Arshi Pipa

*The Artful Albanian: The Memoirs of Enver Hoxha.* Edited and introduced by Jon Halliday, Chatto and Windus, London, 1986. Pp. 394.

The work consists of selections from Hoxha's six memoir books: *Albania Challenges Krushchev Revisionism* (1976), *Imperialism and Revolution* (1979, 2nd revised ed.), *With Stalin* (1979), *Reflections on China* (2 vols, 1979), *Eurocommunism is Anti-communism* (1980), and *The Anglo-American Threat to Albania* (1982). It has six chapters, the first of which is concerned with Hoxha's memories of the situation in Albania after the country's occupation by Italy (7 April 1939); the last chapter contains Hoxha's comments on the mysterious death of Mehmet Shehu, the Albanian Premier (December 1981). Editorial explanatory notes (in smaller type) preceding excerpts, or inserted among them, provide chronological continuity and some unity to the selections "dealing almost exclusively with external relations" (Editor's Introduction). The introduction (pp. 1-17) also discusses briefly a few important internal problems, such as the economy, the position of women and religion, which are not considered in any depth in the six books in question, because Hoxha's motivation for writing them was his ambition to secure himself a seat in the pantheon of the greatest exponents of Marxism. The work includes a chronology of major political events, two appendices (one on the Kosova question), biographical notes, and an index of mostly geographical and proper nouns.

## Brutal monster

The editor's judgement on Hoxha, developed in his introduction, is found in nutshell in the book's title, "artful" meaning both 'ingenuous' and 'tricky'. The ambivalence of the term is varied in a series of oppositional pairs. Hoxha "writes about his enemies as real people even when the framework is that of a fairy tale", "discusses his own cult in a way that is partly disingenuous but also partly reflects the real situation", "applies blatant double standards" twice, "combines his intelligence and power of observation with brutal frankness", "is both unusually frank and mendacious". His trickery is illustrated by many an example: he avails himself of "self-serving bombast and evasion", his "alleged ideological purity ... serves as a

convenient cloak for nationalism", "fails to give due recognition to the sizeable sums of aid" given by the three communist countries that were Albania's allies, his "claim to have kept notes throughout his career" is dubious for the war period, and "there are gaps of up to nine months" in his *Reflections on China*. The author also praises Hoxha's ingenuity: his "power of observation" is "shrewd", he has an appreciation of "genuine love", excels the "crashingly boring" leaders of East European countries, is "far too intelligent" to be compared to "most other Third World leaders," is "well read," and "the range of references in his memoirs is not what one would expect from a Balkan ex-Muslim Stalinist". Hoxha "was not just 'quite' cultured, he was very cultured".

The "artful" of the title could thus be read as "ingenuous in trickery." Yet Halliday dwells on another aspect of Hoxha's character, his 'brutality'. "He shared Stalin's quality of brutality...", "almost delighting in his own brutality". "Hoxha's path to power, and in power, was littered with the corpses of his old foes, and his old friends". "Hoxha's brutality is reflected in the curious combination in his invective ... a rather colloquial and even lively invective of Albanian tradition, and grafted on the top of this (like his Marxism-Leninism) the vicious but much stodgier tradition of Vyshinsky and the ritual Communist-type denunciation of enemies".

The reader could ask at this point whether or not "stodgy" and "vicious" brutality can be reconciled with "far too intelligent" and "very cultured". The answer is suggested by the author's quoting (approvingly, it seems) a sentence in Krushchev's memoirs, in which he called Hoxha and his then top colleagues, Shehu and Balluju, 'worse than beasts — they're monsters'. Halliday cites proofs of Hoxha's brutality. Liri Gega, a former Politbureau member, was "shot while pregnant" as a Yugoslav agent. Liri Belishova, another Politbureau member and Nako Spiru's widow (he allegedly committed suicide) "was apparently strangled" because of her pro-Soviet stance. A passage from Hoxha's *Albania Challenges Krushchev Revisionism* spells out Hoxha's "vicious" brutality. It is about General Panajot Plaku, who escaped

to Yugoslavia to avoid the fate of Liri Gega and her husband, General Dali Ndreu:

"He is a traitor", I said, "and if you accept him in your country we shall break off our friendship with you. If you admit him you must hand him over to us to hang him publicly".

"You are like Stalin who killed people", said Krushchev.

"Stalin killed traitors, and we kill them, too", I added. (206)

According to the Webster Third International Dictionary, a monster is "a legendary animal usually of great size and ferocity that has a form either partly brute and partly human, or compounded of elements from several brute forms". Since intelligence and culture are human attributes but brutality a characteristic of brutes, Hoxha would fit the former alternative. In other words, he is the modern incarnation of Machiavelli's centaur.

## Bohemian intellectual

Halliday's title is thus euphemistic. What it means is that "the Albanian monster", more precisely, "the handsome Albanian monster", Hoxha being "very handsome, and very charming — to both women and men". Handsome indeed he was, and elegant, too, even in his military uniform, with his cap slightly tilted on one side. His civilian dress was impeccable, his trousers well-creased, his *gilet* showing under his jacket, and his Borsalino hat (the Italian variety of Fedora) over his well-groomed head. Leigh White, an American correspondent who talked to Hoxha in the Fall of 1945, when diplomatic relations between Albania and the United States had not yet been broken, describes him as follows: "He is a large, ungainly man, with broad hips, narrow shoulders, and deceptively soft brown eyes. If he were not so fat, and if his body were more masculine, he would be extremely handsome" (*Balkan Caesar*, 1951, pp. 160-61). At the time Hoxha was indeed somewhat fat. Yet the correspondent exaggerates in portraying him as effeminate, perhaps because he was unfavourably impressed by his "well-manicured hands" (*ibid*, p. 162).

Habits such as these could be (and have been) attributed to his French education. One must also consider that Hoxha joined communism later than other comrades, when he was past thirty. Until then his life had been that of a middle class bohemian intellectual. Having graduated from the French Lyceum of Korça, he obtained a state scholarship to study natural sciences at Montpellier. He was there from Fall 1930 to March 1934, according to the official Encyclopedic Albanian Dictionary (1985). Having lost his scholarship, probably for not being in good academic standing, he goes to Paris, where he lives on random jobs, "attends lectures at the Law School ... and establishes ties with the organ of the Central Committee of the French Communist Party, L'Humanité". Hoxha moved from Paris to Brussels, where he worked "as the only employee of the Albanian Consulate in Belgium" (EAD) (Halliday: "as private secretary to the Albanian consul there"). He was fired from his job because of his "revolutionary viewpoints" (EAD). From the same source we learn that, upon his return to Albania, Hoxha was first hired as "a temporary instructor" of French at the Tirana Gymnasium, and then appointed as "professor" (read instructor) of French at the Korça Lyceum. It is hard to believe that a person, fired as a "revolutionary" by the Albanian government in the Spring of 1936, could be hired as a regular teacher in April 1937 in Korça, then a hotbed of communist activity. These were the years when the Minister of Interior was Musa Juka, a person most devoted to the King and notorious for his anti-communism. It was he who "in November 1936 ... organised the brutal persecution of communists and all progressive elements" (*History of the Party of Labour of Albania*, 1982, p. 37). Hoxha was not among the arrested. These were also the years when civil war was raging in Spain, and quite a few Albanian communists were fighting in the International Brigades. One of them was Mehmet Shehu, later Hoxha's collaborator and friend, and Premier of Albania for no less than 27 years, until he was pushed to commit suicide when Hoxha accused him of being a traitor to the nation and an imperialist superagent. Shehu was no better than Hoxha as a "monster" of cruelty, to use Krushchev's term. Yet, at about the same time, when Shehu was fighting fascism in Spain and later a prisoner in a French concentration camp, Hoxha was teaching French in King Zog's Albania. And perhaps it is not inopportune to add here a note that tells the kind of a teacher he was. A student of his at the time, now a physician in the United States, has told me that during examinations Hoxha would stand upon his desk to make sure that his students would not cheat.

Halliday remarks that "enjoying invective", as he did, is "a dangerous and com-

mon trait among middle-class intellectual Marxists". To Stalin Hoxha was a downright "petit-bourgeois" (Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, 1962, p.146).

The second point I should like to make is what sort of Marxist intellectual Hoxha was. He did not graduate from the University of Montpellier, where he lived for more than three years — more than the usual period of time needed for obtaining a *licence*. The official EAD does not say that he lost his scholarship because he wrote articles against King Zog. And once back in Albania, there are no signs that he wrote any articles in the progressive or left-oriented journals of the time. As Secretary General of the Party (1941-85) and Premier (1944-54), he had to present reports to the Central Committee and the Party Congresses, to deliver speeches in political meetings and cultural



Albanians passing Hoxha poster

conventions, and occasionally to write articles in the Party journals and newspapers. His collected works, which began to be published in 1968 (46 volumes until 1985), is a collection of this kind of stuff. His first 'theoretical' work, *Imperialism and Revolution* (1979), appeared ten years later: Hoxha was then seventy. The work, considered as his 'theoretical' masterpiece, contains passages such as the following:

*When we saw that this Cultural Revolution was not being led by the Party but was a chaotic outburst following a call issued by Mao Tsetung, this did not seem to us to be a revolutionary stand (390).*

*Our party supported the Cultural Revolution because the victories of the revolution in China were in danger (392).*

*Of course, this Cultural Revolution was a hoax (ibid).*

The work, a pot pourri of "theoretical" banalities, journalistic clichés and vituperative language, teams with double-dealings and contradictions such as the one just quoted. In *The Titoites* (1982), his "literary" masterpiece, he tells an amusing story. During the talks with Yugoslav experts about the Yugoslav-Albanian Economic Convention, which included the equalisation of the currencies, Nako Spiru, the Albanian Minister of the Economy, found himself stranded, and called on Hoxha for help. Hoxha confesses — one of his few concessions to frankness — that at the time he knew no more than his Minister of the Economy did about economic problems. Therefore

"... I completed a real course for the 'intensive assimilation' of problems of economy. For whole days and nights I read that literature from Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin that I could get hold of in French, which dealt with problems of the economy." He then wrote to Spiru: "Tell them that the different levels of economic development of the two countries do not provide possibilities for a fair and realistic equalisation of our lek with dinar". (316-17)

### Appallingly shallow

The anecdote shows Hoxha's cultural level at about forty. He had to bother the founders of Marxism and Marxism-Leninism to come out with an answer which he could have easily found by consulting a textbook manual of political economy. Had he read Marx previously? Probably not. Nor did he, as it seems, read him later. His minimal references to him in his "theoretical" works are those of a freshman first exposed to an Introduction to Marxism course. It would seem that Hoxha is the kind of "Marxist intellectual" who has not read Marx. And if we grant that he read him in his old age, when he began to dabble in Marxist-Leninist theory, he certainly would not and could not understand him. Therefore to say, as Halliday does, that he was "well read", is more than an exaggeration, it simply is not true. He was in fact unread, something his appallingly shallow writings abundantly show. And because he was unread, he never learned how to read other people's writings, let alone to analyse them. In his *Eurocommunism is Anti-communism* (1980), there is a passage where he inveighs against the French Communist Party for keeping the working class from joining the May 1968 uprising. The target of his anger, however, is less "the pseudo-Marxist" Georges Marchais than Aragon, the communist poet. In his report to the 22nd Congress of the FCP, Marchais had included a poem by Aragon taken from

*Elsa's Fool.* Hoxha cites the following lines:

... Will there always be prisons and torture always massacres in the name of idols a mantle of words cast over the corpses a gang in the mouth and nailed hands?

But a day will come with orange colours ...

Hoxha reads 'idols' as meaning "Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin", and then, referring to "orange colours", he adds: "This is Aragon's way of saying that he and his party have abandoned the red colour, communism" (230). Hoxha, like the fighting bull in the arena, sees only red. His zealots in Albania, who have lately discovered poetic treasures in his memoirs, may wish, I suggest, to consider him also as a literary "critic". Just as he is blind to colours other than red in his abuse and insult, Hoxha is deaf to "genuine love", too. A person whose "path to power and in power was littered with the corpses of his old foes, and his old friends", cannot possibly have an appreciation of love.

**Inveterate liar**

While praising the editor of *The Artful Albanian* for his painstaking compilation of Hoxha's memoirs in one volume, his elegantly comprehensive introduction, and his scholarly notes, I must disagree with some of his oxymoronic characterisations, such as the one in which the hero is described as "both unusually frank and mendacious". To me

Hoxha was only occasionally frank and mendacious as a rule. I would call him, sparing understatement, an inveterate liar. Even official Albanian scholarship, which is not famous for being objective, has felt the need — now that he is dead — to correct his arrogance. The Albanians have an epithet for people like Hoxha: *gjysmak*, 'half-educated'. The word is usually attributed to persons whose education remains incomplete. This generates in many of them an inferiority complex, which extremely selfish and unscrupulous *gjysmak* try hard to overcome by posing as superior beings. A person of this ilk will thus become a "good actor", as Halliday calls Hoxha, i.e., dishonest ("evasive"). And if these cultural and moral dwarfs happen to possess a big voice ("he had the doggedness to go on and on until he wore his opponents down"), they will, by dint of silencing other people, end up believing they are giants. They thus lose all sense of measure, get purblind to distinctions, speak and write in "black and white", while their praxis becomes fraudulent and violent — and bloody, too, if they manage to become dictators.

There are two reasons for Halliday's use of superlatives in describing Hoxha's intelligence and culture. One is prompted by his comparing him to the "crashingly boring" leaders of East European Communist countries. The other reason is more complex. As

an educated citizen of a once dominant nation that has developed a superiority complex manifest in the ironic twist of its language, Halliday is both fascinated and amused by this "Balkan ex-Muslim Stalinist" who managed to liquidate all his rivals while playing carom billiard with the destiny of the Albanian nation. Both reasons induce a portrayal of the hero larger than life. Had Halliday known Zog better, and compared the dictator to the king, he would have found that the Hoxha phenomenon is not unusual among Albanians. Esad Toptani is another example. The list, of course, could be longer.

This brings me to my last point. The author has consulted a considerable number of UK citizens who have known Hoxha personally or have been involved in Albanian politics. These persons may well have provided relevant information. But would it not have been opportune to consult the Albanian press in exile? Unilaterality is bound to lead to errors. One comes closer to truth by way of comparisons.

The cover of the book shows a smiling Hoxha in his old age, dressed impeccably as usual, except for wearing, instead of his Borsalino hat, a worker's cap, which seems to be cut from the same fine fabric as his jacket and vest. I would have preferred him with his Borsalino. Yet, looking closer at the picture, I discovered that the red badge on his jacket's flap reads "1 Maj"... I concede that in this case irony works better than sarcasm.



# HISTORY SHROUDED IN MYTHS

by Victor Haynes

Bohdan Krawchenko, *Social Change and National Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Ukraine*. London: Macmillan, 1985.

**T**oday, in the United States and Canada, the Ukrainian question has come to the forefront in the context of the hunt for former Nazis. In 1979 the American Government formed the Office of Special Investigation to investigate alleged war criminals residing in the States. In Canada, on 7 February 1985, the Government formed the Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals to decide whether a similar investigatory agency was needed. The existence of OSI and the Commission has provided the opportunity for many people, some well meaning, to make the most outlandish attacks on individuals and organisations. On one side stand the Jewish organisations spearheaded by Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal and backed by the World Jewish Congress and the equivalent national organisations. This powerful lobby with its enormous media and government influence, has set the agenda of the debate on alleged war criminals. Though there are many voices, the message is clear; they accuse hundreds if not thousands of post-war emigres from the Baltic States and the Ukraine of war crimes. Furthermore, they accuse these highly politicised communities of giving refuge to murderers of Jews. Their main focus is on the nationalist Ukrainian community. Lists of hundreds of names with no accompanying evidence are being passed to the media and the governmental investigating bodies, who are working flat out to investigate those listed. Recently in the States, this campaign has come to a head when a leading Ukrainian emigre politician who led the anti-Hitler and anti-Stalin resistance in Ukraine during the war was accused of being a Nazi (Joe Conanson, "To Catch a Nazi," *The Village Voice*, 18 February 1986.) In the background stands the Soviet Government, which is providing names and all kinds of allegations. On the other side stands the beleaguered nationalist Ukrainian community. Waving very little media and governmental influence, it is stewing in frustration. The anti-Semites among them, who have had very little influence (contrary to the popular Jewish myth that all Ukrainians are anti-Semites), are now gaining influence. The relentless media campaign, combined with indiscriminate official investigations, has

created a climate of hatred on both sides.

## Controversial questions

This is why it is important now to ascertain the facts about Ukrainians and Ukraine. The Jewish question is far better understood than the Ukrainian. Israel, 'refuseniks', and the Holocaust, are almost daily news items. The Ukrainian problem is seldom if ever mentioned. For most Western people and even those living in Eastern Europe, it is shrouded in myths. Most of this is due to the propaganda produced by the Soviet and Polish Governments. It has its effect on academics and journalists, not to speak of Jewish organisations, and even more so on people who are looking for an accommodation with the Soviet regime. So deeply ingrained in the minds of Jews is the myth that Ukrainians are anti-Semitic that it seems no amount of history, facts and logical persuasion will convince them otherwise. The result is that in the West the Ukrainian national liberation struggle is portrayed as anti-Semitic. In Poland the government has expended an enormous amount of effort since the war to instil the belief in every Pole that the main aim of the Ukrainian liberation movement during the war was to help the Nazis kill Poles. The Soviet Government has spared no effort to discredit it.

We are addressing ourselves to a large problem, for Ukrainian society, though one of the least understood in Europe, is one of the largest. Ukrainians, according to the recent Soviet census, number well over forty million people. This makes them the second largest nationality both in the USSR and Eastern Europe, and about the sixth largest in Europe as a whole.

Most political tracts about Ukrainians from every quarter are controversial. Didn't the Ukrainian political parties support the Germans during World War 1? Didn't Lenin and the Bolsheviks forcibly deny the Ukrainians the right to self-determination? Didn't the Ukrainians carry out a holocaust during the 1917-21 Revolution? Didn't the Bolsheviks under Stalin kill a quarter (4 to 6 million) of the Ukrainian population? Didn't Ukrainians support Hitler and participate in the killing of Jews? Didn't the Ukrainians

wipe out tens of thousands of Polish villagers during the last war and help put down the Warsaw uprising? Wasn't the Ukrainian resistance the only political movement which fought both the forces of Hitler and Stalin? Haven't Ukrainians been for three centuries economically exploited by their neighbours, in particular the Poles and Russians? What is the extent of popular opposition in Ukraine today? Aren't Ukrainians now the largest oppressed nationality in Europe?

These are the sort of questions which most commentators on the subject ask. The nature and history of Ukrainian society is seldom if ever tackled. What is missing is a presentation of the overall development of Ukrainian society.

Krawchenko's book deals with the development of Ukrainian society from the seventeenth century to the present. His thesis begins with how the Russian Tsarist State gained influence and then dominated Ukraine. It ends with the fall from power in 1972 of Petro Shelest, the head of the Communist Party of Ukraine.

## Liberation movement

Krawchenko captures the essence of the pre-revolution Ukrainian society in the first sentence: "On the eve of the First World War and the Revolution, Ukrainians were a people who had not yet developed a crystallised national consciousness and whose emergence to the stature of nationhood seemed like a distant goal". Krawchenko places the blame for this backwardness on Russian Tsarist policies which caused Ukrainians to deteriorate from a complex medieval society to a peasant caste at the turn of the last century. Ukrainian society entered the modern era lacking a defined working class. Light industrial production was the almost exclusive preserve of the Moscow industrialists, while heavy industry was almost exclusively owned by French and Belgian companies.

Ironically, such a underdeveloped society found itself in one of the most developed capitalist areas of the Russian Empire. Its economy dominated the Empire's internal and external markets in foodstuffs, metals and coal. Krawchenko explains how it was that the big industrial capitalists were mostly

French and Belgian. The industrial intelligentsia were mostly Russian, as was the cultural and educational intelligentsia. Industrial workers, especially the skilled metallurgical workers and the coal miners, the backbone of the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, were in the majority recent Russian colonists. Ukrainians, who comprised almost eighty percent of the population, were almost all peasants. "Before the revolution and for decades after, Ukrainian was synonymous with peasant".

Because of their peasant status and national oppression Ukrainians entered the modern period as one of the most illiterate people not only in Europe, but also in backward Russia. The Tsarist regime didn't allow Ukrainian schools, newspapers or theatres.

In February 1917, Ukrainian society had only a thin layer of urban intellectuals. The villages had hundreds of thousands of semi-literate community leaders. It was the small urban Ukrainian intelligentsia holding as many different political views as existed in Europe at the time, who attempted unsuccessfully to forge such a backward society into a modern European state. The more developed nationalities within Ukraine, combined with support from outside were to defeat this Ukrainian liberation movement, but only militarily. Politically, in November 1917, the Ukrainian political parties won the war. The peasants as a class supported them almost exclusively. Though no independent Ukrainian government emerged, the Kerensky Government conceded the creation of the Ukrainian Central Rada. Lenin agreed to the formation of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. Both were set up as regional administrative centres of the respective central governments.

The Ukrainian political parties and their following wanted an independent government in federation with Russia. Two months before they were overthrown by the Bolsheviks, they polled over sixty percent of the ten million votes cast in the Ukraine in the Constituent Assembly elections in 1917. The Bolsheviks received less than a million votes but were the majority party among the industrial workers in the Ukraine. After 1917, when the urban Ukrainian intelligentsia was cut off from the villages by competing foreign armies, the villages threw up hundreds of new leaders, or war lords, as the intelligentsia branded them. They were nationalists like Zelenyi, anarchists like Makhno and pogromists like Hryhoriv. Whatever the political colour of the armed peasant movement, they held in common the view that the Ukraine should be "independent" of "foreigners". The revolution in Ukraine, a non-stop frenzy of bloodletting, ended in 1921 with a famine and the economy in ruins. Krawchenko gives a figure of one and a half million killed on the territory of the Ukraine during World War I and the civil war, and a million during the famine.

### After the revolution

Krawchenko characterises the 1920s under Soviet rule as a decade of all-round development of Ukrainian society, bringing it to the brink of social equality with Russian society. He illustrates how the revolution broke the barriers which kept Ukrainians confined to the land. Indeed, by the end of the 1920s there were twice as many Ukrainians in the urban areas than before the revolution. In 1925, the Russian Bolsheviks conceded the Ukrainisation of urban society, i.e. schools, newspapers, public offices, and the party itself. By the end of the 1920s it looked as if the "peasant caste" which lost the civil war was liberating itself.

From 1925 the Bolshevik Party ukrainianised itself rapidly in order to stabilise its regime. "In 1925, 10 percent of the central party press was published in the Ukrainian language. This reached 100 percent by 1929". The weight of Ukrainians in its ranks increased from 23 percent in 1922 to 52 percent in 1927. The percentage of Ukrainians in industry increased even more dramatically to almost fifty percent by 1929 compared to an estimated twenty percent during the revolution. Ukrainian began to dominate the media.

The twenties also saw a revolution in education as Ukrainian became the dominant language in education: "... by 1927, 82 percent of schools were ukrainianised and 76 percent of the total number of pupils in the republic were attending Ukrainian-language schools". In the urban areas, Krawchenko reports, half the schools operated in the Ukrainian language, with 42 percent of the total enrolment. This was a revolutionary achievement: there had been no Ukrainian schools anywhere under Tsarism.

The 1930s, however, were to be the most traumatic years ever experienced in peacetime. Stalin's sudden lurch towards a ruthless policy of centralisation and industrialisation caused unprecedented loss of life. What happened? Here matters become very controversial as sources are scarce. Firstly, starting in the late 1920s and continuing until World War II, there was an all-out attempt to eradicate the Ukrainian intelligentsia. It is estimated that 80 percent of the Ukraine's writers and creative intelligentsia was killed. Tens of thousands more were "eliminated" from the party, schools, publishing houses, etc. Russification again began to take hold of every sector of society. The arrests and killings had two peaks, in 1937 and in 1933. In the latter year (and this is the most controversial affair) about 4 to 6 million Ukrainians died from unnatural causes. Krawchenko cites figures which suggest that genocide was practised by the state on an unprecedented scale. In the period between 1926 and 1939, the number of Ukrainians in the Ukraine remained static (28.3 million in

1926 and 1939), while in the USSR as a whole there was an absolute decrease of the Ukrainian population from 31.2 to 28.1 million. At the same time, the USSR had a 16 percent population increase. A large body of eyewitness accounts, including those from recently declassified British government documents, point to the Soviet government as the perpetrators of the famine in the Ukraine. How and why it happened, and how many died, will long be debated. The only thing that is clear is that the Soviet government could have averted the famine by not exporting food. According to documents in the British archives, in 1932-33 the Soviet Union sold enough food to Western Europe to feed over seven million people for a year. In this way Moscow was able to buy industrial goods in the west, get rid of an undesirable population and starve a whole people into submission.

Krawchenko's chapter on World War II is the shortest and the least illuminating. It starts with the Stalin-Hitler pact and concludes with the near-annihilation of civilised society by the end of 1945.

*It (the Ukraine) was the largest Soviet republic which the Germans occupied in full, and it was held longer than parts of Russia which they were able to seize. In the course of the conflict 6.8 million people were killed, of whom 600,000 were Jews and 1.4 million were military personnel... In addition, over two million citizens of the republic were sent to Germany as "slave labour". By 1944, when the German armies were cleared from Soviet Ukrainian soil, the republic was literally in ruins. Over 700 cities and towns were destroyed — 42 percent of all urban centres devastated by the war in the entire USSR — and over 28,000 villages."*

The author hardly touches the controversial question of what happened to the Ukraine's two million Jews between 1939 and 1945. He states that the "genocide of Jews is so well-researched that it need not be discussed here". However, what is not researched is how the Ukrainian Jews got to the concentration camps. On the available information we do not know how many Jews fled the Ukraine before the Nazi invasion. We do not know how many survived the holocaust. Nor do we know how much help the local population gave the Nazis in arresting the Jews, or the protection they gave to the Jews. The view that the Ukrainians supported the holocaust is a myth as they were themselves among the Nazis' main victims. As so little is known about events, many people feel they have a licence to make up fictionalised scenarios. What is needed is more serious research, not a blind witch-hunt as is occurring today in North America.

It is not easy to research the Ukraine's history recent or past, as Krawchenko's book illustrates. Many of its deficiencies are due to Soviet censorship, closed archives, and the fact that many materials have been lost for-

ever in wars, famines and revolution. Despite these problems, a huge amount of source material is available, especially from the revolution and the 1920s. Krawchenko should be congratulated for taking most of the published sources at hand and presenting a coherent analysis of the development of Ukrainian society. His analysis of the post-World War II period up to 1972 is also very illuminating: while it has not been reviewed here, readers would be wise to consult it if they want to understand the Ukraine today.

CAN'T GET  
PRAVDA?

There's  
always...

## Labour Focus on EASTERN EUROPE

has for ten years provided an unrivalled coverage of events and movements in the Second World. Since it first appeared a decade ago, *Labour Focus* has established itself as an indispensable source not just for specialists, but for anyone wishing to be informed about current issues and key developments in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

*Labour Focus* is an independent socialist journal committed to the struggle for democratic rights as an integral part of socialism. At the same time it is firmly opposed to the Cold War and Western military pressure.

Our first concern is to help establish a dialogue between socialists East and West, by translating and publishing a wide range of contributions and documents from Eastern Europe itself. We carry analyses of political events; interviews; debates; reports on opposition currents; book reviews. Coverage is being expanded to include regular contributions on East-West relations, and occasional articles on non-capitalist states outside our chosen area.

Each issue features a special section on topics such as *Human Rights and Socialism and Eastern Europe and the German Question*. The 70th anniversary of the Russian Revolution will be marked by a special issue analysing the prospects for change in the Soviet Union.

*Labour Focus* is published three times a year. Recent issues have included articles by, or interviews with:

Rudolf Bahro, Tamás Bauer, Tamara Deutscher, Jiri Dienstbier, Paul Foot, Jürgen Fuchs, Fred Halliday, Eric Heffer, David Holland, Roland Jahn, Jacek Kuroln, János Kis, Zbigniew Kowalewski, György Krassó, Michele Lee, Bill Lomax, Ben Lowe, Oliver Macdonald, Roy Medvedev, Zhores Medvedev, Günter Minnerup, Anna Paczuska, Dusan Pirec, Arshi Pipa, Sándor Rácz, Jaroslav Sabata, Jadwiga Staniszkis, Bolek Sulik, Wolfgang Templin, Edward Thompson, Ferenc Tóke, Zdena Tominova, Petr Uhl, Henryk Wujec.

No serious student of Soviet and East European affairs or political activist can really afford to be without *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*.

### REACTIONS TO GORBACHEV IN EAST BERLIN

Our readers will be interested in the following brief article which first appeared in the West Berlin daily *Die Tageszeitung* on the 10 February this year:

There have rarely been so many friends of the Russian language here as during the last week. Already before the plenum in Moscow the tension had been rising. Then the first correspondents' reports and agency releases about the Gorbachev speech got everyone going. Strong words on the state of the economy, slovenliness and corruption in all fields were hardly anything new, nor even the verbal call for more self-government and democracy. Neither was it the first time that Brezhnev's style of leadership was criticised. What attracted attention was the severity and bitterness with which Gorbachev spoke about the party apparatus, the last years of the Brezhnev era and the retardedness of the ideology on the level of the thirties and forties. Also the concrete and even, by Soviet standards, radical nature of the proposals for a democratic system for the election of state and party organs and the development of economic democracy came as a surprise.

Somehow this time the central organ of the SED, *Neues Deutschland*, must have had difficulties with translating the voluminous speech. Reaching for it the next morning in order to study the authoritative documents, one found only a greatly-abridged and, through the method of indirect quotation, imprecise version of the Comrade General Secretary. Even so the severity of the criticism and of the consequences announced was unbelievable for GDR readers. Many of course tried to obtain the original text from the CPSU's party organ *Pravda*. But where *Neues Deutschland* had problems with the translation, its Soviet fraternal organ had problems with distribution. *Pravda* was nowhere to be found. The clever ones phoned Russian friends or interpreters but even there copies were rare. It became clear from the reports about the plenum, the published text and all further information that the momentum and speed of the modernisation strategy on which Gorbachev stakes everything are in danger of being stalled by the inertia and resistance of the middle layers of the apparatus.

### REFORM OR COSMETICS?

In the GDR there are many hopeful views which see in stormy Mikhail and his allies not merely pragmatic modernisers but even classical reformers who want to clear the path for a comprehensive democratisation. But perhaps this is governed by wishful thinking. For neither the return of Sakharov nor the release of many dissidents and the change of course in Afghanistan can be explained solely with noble intentions. The motivation could also be a clear political realism in seeking to maintain the power structures—system cosmetics, in other words. At any event, however, it represents a step forward.

Nobody concerned with politics in the "fraternally allied countries" should allow the happenings in the party apparatus to obstruct his or her view of Soviet society as a whole. For it is here that it will, in the final analysis, be decided whether or not Gorbachev is going to come up with a concept which allows for the free unfolding of the social forces. If there were to be a resonant echo from the population, there could be a chance of propelling the reform process beyond the limits of technocracy and party dominance. Perhaps this is wishful thinking—but it is better than placing one's hopes on the new tsar.

W.T., East Berlin

## BOOK BRIEFINGS

Richard Stourac and Kathleen McCreery  
**Theatre as a Weapon**  
Routledge & Kegan Paul, £30

**T**hey don't take theatre seriously in this country", said a veteran member of the Workers' Theatre Movement in Britain, referring to the British Communist Party's attitude to its cultural arm in the 1920s and 1930s. Yet Lenin had stated that "Theatre is a weapon".

"Theatre as a Weapon" draws on a wealth of sources to chart the origins, development and eventual decline of the workers' theatre movements in the Soviet Union, Germany and Britain between 1917 and 1934. The political conditions which demanded the creation of each were inevitably different: the need to agitate for the spread of the revolution in the USSR; in Germany, the need to strengthen and maintain working-class resistance in the wake of the November revolution and in a climate of growing economic crisis; and in Britain, the need to fight disillusionment and attack class collaboration following the sell-out of the general strike by the labour leaders in 1926.

The development of each, to different degrees and in different ways, was fraught with contradictions. It was a constant struggle to improve the political impact of the work, to assess to what extent the new content required rejection of old forms, to evolve a theory and practice for workers' theatre which would ensure that its audience would be roused to action, "shown the political tasks".

The conflicting arguments thrown up in each country are not simply matters of history but, as the authors point out, of continuing relevance in addressing the problems faced by workers' theatres wherever they operate today. The three specific movements here may have been born out of quite different conditions, and may have had quite different theatrical histories to draw upon or spurn, but what is most striking is the extent to which they encountered similar problems and engaged in similar debates. Can theatre be an effective means of agitation? In spite of initial party scepticism and lack of support, it was often proven that it could. Theatre could sell papers, and increase party membership, and inspire striking workers to stand firm, where dry speeches would not have been so successful. What style of presentation is needed to achieve this, what skills are to be encouraged? At what point must purely agitational theatre give way

to the theatre of propaganda which aims to present "the X-ray picture of society and social forces" required to raise working-class consciousness in preparedness for revolutionary action? Can this be done without recourse to bourgeois theatre forms? Piscator proved that it could.

This is a valuable book. It is a pity, however, that the authors didn't take more account of the issues debated by the theatre workers they investigated when applying themselves to the communication of their own excellent information. The book is not easy to read. The source material is often exciting, particularly with regard to the chapters on Germany where workers' theatre came nearest to achieving its aims, under the worst conditions of oppression. It is here that the reader is given the clearest idea of the depth of the debate and its impact upon the practice engaged in by proletarian theatre activists. For much of the book, however, in their attempt to leave no sketch undocumented, no anecdote left out, Stourac and McCreery have allowed their own relationship to their material to become buried and less coherent than it could have been.

**Eileen Pollock**

Anna Swir  
**Fat Like the Sun**

Translated by Grazyna Baran and Margaret Marshment  
Introduced by the Raving Beauties  
Illustrated by Jola Scicinska  
The Women's Press, £3.95

**A**нна Swir is the pen-name of Anna Swirszczynska, Polish poet, playwright and short story writer, who died in Kraków in 1984. *Fat Like the Sun* is the first full-length translation of her poetry to be published in Britain, including poems from the two collections *Wiatr* (The Wind) and *Jestem Baba* (I'm the Old Woman). I first read these poems in the Polish original on photocopied sheets lent to me by a friend, Swirszczynska's books being sold out in Poland. I read them all without stopping and then started at the beginning again, unable to put them down. So it's a pleasure to see them translated into English and made available to readers here.

Grazyna Baran and Margaret Marshment have succeeded as translators in recreating the direct, economical and very colloquial language used by Anna Swirszczynska which makes her work so accessible and refreshing to

read. They also capture the tongue-in-cheek humour and irony which are also an integral part of her style—and of her feminist perspective. Angry, lucid, ironic, tender and compassionate, these are poems unmistakably written from a woman's point of view. They are also completely free of literary pretentiousness. But don't be fooled by their simplicity, as each one is carefully crafted.

The book is divided into three sections. The first of these, "Three Loves", deals with love between women and men. It charts a personal struggle for independence and balance, with descriptions of the extreme both of intimate passion and alienation, from self-affirmation to self-hatred. Fortunately Swirszczynska's humour and down-to-earthness are never far away, with poems such as "I Sweat and Puff", where she seems to be debunking the whole myth of romance, or "The Large Intestine" and "An Iron Comb" where she laughs at the seriousness with which we take our loves and lives. She has the gift of being funny and poignant at the same time.

In "Mother and Daughter", the second section of the book, the tug of war between the need for independence and the need for closeness takes place in the context of mother-daughter relationships and their definition in patriarchal society. "Where will I summon the strength to resist her, weak as she is?" (Motherhood), "I gave my child flesh and blood/. . . I gave days and nights by the thousand/. . . but my child bears/the surname/of a man" (Patriarchy). Swirszczynska conveys the ambivalence of her feelings about motherhood, yet at the same time the depth of her love for her own mother and her daughter are expressed with unequivocal strength. "When my mother was dying/I held her hand./When she died I burnt everything/her hand had touched./Only my own hands/I couldn't burn" (Her Hand).

The final section, "I'm the Old Woman" extends Swirszczynska's vision to the lives of other women. The picture she paints is harsh, whether it is of the contempt with which society treats ageing women, male violence women encounter in "family life", a working woman's sheer physical exhaustion or of a woman's powerlessness at the hands of male doctors. Yet alongside this blunt presentation of the facts runs Anna Swirszczynska's feeling of tenderness for other women, for her "sisters in the gutter", old and young women, mothers, daughters, peasant women and women workers. This tenderness is what makes her writing so powerful and so moving. And while she shows us

how women are victimised, the women in her poems are not simply passive victims. They possess dignity and beauty, and also "rebellion" like the old woman carrying it "behind the orbs of her eyes/. . . in the bone reliquary of her skull."

*Fat Like the Sun* is illustrated by Jola Scicinska, a London-born Polish artist specialising in the traditional Polish peasant art of paper cutting. Her lively, clear images with their earthiness, boldness and warmth provide a fine compliment to the poems. The book is also introduced by the Raving Beauties, a three-woman team of actress singers promoting women's poetry and in whose book *No Holds Barred* some of these poems were previously anthologised. It is well worth going to hear their performance of Anna Swirszczynska's poetry in translation.

**Maria Jastrzebska**

David Turnock  
**The Romanian Economy in the Twentieth Century**  
Croom Helm 1986

**W**ho loves Romania? Ever since what David Turnock calls its "declaration of independence in 1964" when it refused to subordinate its development to Soviet interests Romania has been Western imperialism's favourite Eastern European thorn in the Soviet side. Readers of this journal, on the other hand, will also know of its outstanding record in repressing its own workers, women and minorities.

These issues are, of course, linked. Successive leaderships have tried to drive the country forward and this has necessitated crushing any opposition. But this policy is not new. Romanian history is a fascinating laboratory for analysing the central issues debated about Eastern Europe by socialists and it is a laboratory which shows that there is rather more continuity with the pre-communist regimes than some like to imagine.

Romanian independence, for example, has always required different sections of the ruling class to be quick on their feet. The country was formed in the mid-nineteenth century by deft links with France and Russia to free the land from its Turkish overlords. It was doubled in size in 1918 after the government had waited until 1916 to see which side looked the best bet to win the First World War. Then the inter-war years saw much ducking and weaving between the West,

Germany and Russia before a jump was taken to Hitler and then, just in time in 1944, back again to the winning side. The post-1945 leadership has therefore had good teachers.

The same applies to industrialisation. From the late nineteenth century Romania tried to build its own version of "capitalism in one country" — what was called sheltered industrialisation "by ourselves". The problems of this policy in the inter-war years gave rise to a fascinating development debate much ahead of that in the West and this was openly drawn on by Communist Party planners and economists when the name of the game was changed to "socialism in one country".

The communist state did have one advantage, though. Previous governments had had to walk on a tightrope between the different interests in their industrialisation policy and especially against the peasant majority. But as Turnock notes, "peasant states could only become prosperous once they ceased being peasant states". As in Russia collectivisation solved this difficulty by firmly putting the peasants in their place but even here Turnock also suggests that elements of later agrarian change had been anticipated in earlier Romanian history.

Post-1945 industrialisation has brought the Communist Party leadership rich rewards. Economically Romania is still relatively weak in world terms but not the Third World country it likes to portray itself as to win concessions in the West. Although development has been uneven in 1978 industrial employment overtook agricultural and the priority steel sector now produces a higher output per head than either the USA or the USSR.

But the real benefits have been political. Before 1945 the Romanian CP was the weakest in Eastern Europe with perhaps a thousand members. Dependence on Russia was obvious. Industrialisation pulled intellectual and professional groups into the party and closer to the leadership as they delivered growth and upward mobility. Add a dose of nationalism in which even Vlad the Impaler appears as a respectable Romanian and you have the social and political base for Romania's foreign policy.

A detailed economic history of Romania connecting the different period of its history should therefore be very welcome to socialists. But David Turnock writes as an historical geographer and his book uneasily combines straightforward economic history with a regional analysis of the geography of

development. This leads to a squeezing out of some central issues. There is too little of the inter-war economic debate. The pioneering nationalist economist Manoiilescu who developed a theory of unequal exchange gets a single mention. But he does better than the working class who only appear as employment figures. Post-war forestry and wood processing gets, on the other hand, more space than the steel industry!

This then is a book for specialists who will appreciate its detail. More general readers may well feel that they have to stay with other Western accounts which attempt to use\* Romania to test their own conventional theories like "modernisation". This is a shame because what Romanian history needs is a well-informed critical analysis which is not afraid to confront the possibility that the differences between the policies of the Communist state and its predecessors may be ones of degree rather than kind.

Mike Haynes

George Sandford  
**Military Rule in Poland? The Rebuilding of Communist Military Power 1981-1983**  
 Croom Helm, £22.50  
 Colin Barker  
**Festival of the Oppressed: Solidarity, Reform and Revolution in Poland 1980-1981**  
 Bookmarks, £4.25

It is noteworthy that in the huge literature on events since 1980 in Poland, relatively little attention has been paid to the specifically *military* aspects of the State-Society conflict. An attitude shared by many people in both Solidarity and the authorities, until the advent of Martial Law at least, was respect for the army. In support of this view Sandford quotes a public opinion research poll, carried out in May 1981, which found that the army ranked third behind the church and Solidarity in public trust and confidence. The core of Sandford's book addresses directly the military dimension of what he calls the "Polish Rondo": beginning with an account of the evolution of Polish military structures since the turn of the century, Sandford goes on to describe in detail the military's role in the events of 1980-81, the imposition of martial law and subsequent Jaruzelskian "normalisation" of the country, culminating in the lifting of martial law and the amnesty of summer 1983. Two factors worth bearing in mind are emphasised: the extent to

which Jaruzelski *et al* operated within the general framework of civil-military relations in a Soviet-type society, a framework characterised by Sandford as "the formation of a symbiotic civil-military authority forming its own consensus, although disputing individual issues"; the specific developments within the Polish military away from the direct Soviet control of the army enforced at the end of World War Two, towards what by the 1970s he characterises as "a striking degree of political autonomy". The end product of this latter tendency was the military's assumption, after the declaration of martial law, of key positions of state power to form what he calls "an alternative set of politico-administrative leaders to the civilian apparatchiks". Sandford's analysis of the military's role in the events of 1980-81 is particularly interesting: the problems of dealing with potentially pro-Solidarity conscripts, Soviet military pressure during early 1981, Jaruzelski's increasingly stern attacks on "reformist" currents in the party after the extraordinary Ninth Party Congress, and military preparations for martial law from September 1981 onwards are all chronicled in detail. Explaining the apparently paradoxical outcome of the Ninth Congress in terms of a radical new programme and promises of real reform, but no change in *top* party personnel, Sandford comments interestingly: "The Kremlin is most concerned with reliable personnel and not with reform slogans. The fiercely *realpolitik* Polish communist elite understood this basic fact very clearly: (it) was one of the main lessons they had drawn from the Czechoslovak debacle".

This last statement gives some indication of the general tenor of the book. Whilst fiercely critical of the Jaruzelski regime, Sandford also takes Solidarity to task on several counts: it is variously criticised for "refusing to accept the leading role of the party" and "resisting incorporation into the system"; Jacek Kuron's argument for the possibility of the Soviet Union accepting the "Finlandisation" of Poland is dismissed as "absolutely incredible". At various points in the book Sandford indicates strong "realist" sympathies for the brand of "reformist" Communist politics that existed in Poland between 1956 and 1980: he describes this as "an ideologically hybrid form of authoritarianism which allowed what by Soviet standards was a considerable degree of political and social pluralism". Yet it was precisely this form of government that so many Poles implicitly rejected by joining Solidarity in

1980. Running through the whole book in fact I detect a basic lack of sympathy for the aims, objectives and outlook of the Polish opposition. This comes out most strongly in Sandford's somewhat cursory concluding chapter on "Walesa and the Underground". Here he paints a picture of a movement reacting with stunned impotence to the declaration of martial law, retreating into an "emphasis on moral values" which he claims caustically "is always the recourse of the weak and defeated" and generally fading into political insignificance. I might be more persuaded by Sandford's argument if he showed a grasp of the fascinating unfolding opposition debates on such issues as the creation of "civil society" (a key theme for the East European opposition generally), economic and social reform, the role of political ideology and parties in a social movement, and international relations as expressed in, for instance, the intensifying dialogue with the Western peace movement. He mentions almost none of this (partly hampered by the fact that his account stops at 1983) yet they seem vital to understanding the "lessons of 1981" for the future as the opposition regroups its forces for the years to come. The primary scope of the book, as Sandford, to be fair, makes clear from the start, is an analysis "of the party-military elite's role in the Polish drama". By way of self-justification he offers us the historian E.H. Carr's dictum that "history is about winners". Difficult to disagree with in general perhaps, except that in the country his book deals with the "losers" have a trying habit of refusing to concede a knockout: and it is surely precisely *this*, along with other "idiosyncracies" as Sandford calls them, that makes Poland such a fascinating country.

Colin Barker's new updated version of a book he co-wrote five years ago looks at Solidarity from a different, somewhat more radical perspective. He describes the events of August 1980 to December 1981, with particular emphasis being given to the "radicals", notably the "self-management" movement within the enterprises. Barker argues that the main reason for the union's "defeat" at martial law was not, *pace* Sandford, its failure to take the possibility of reforming the system from within seriously, but on the contrary that wooed by spurious notions of "self-limitation" it failed to pose a genuine revolutionary challenge to Poland's Communist elite. I detect two major shortcomings in Barker's argument for this view. First, it seems inadequate to argue that the Polish

