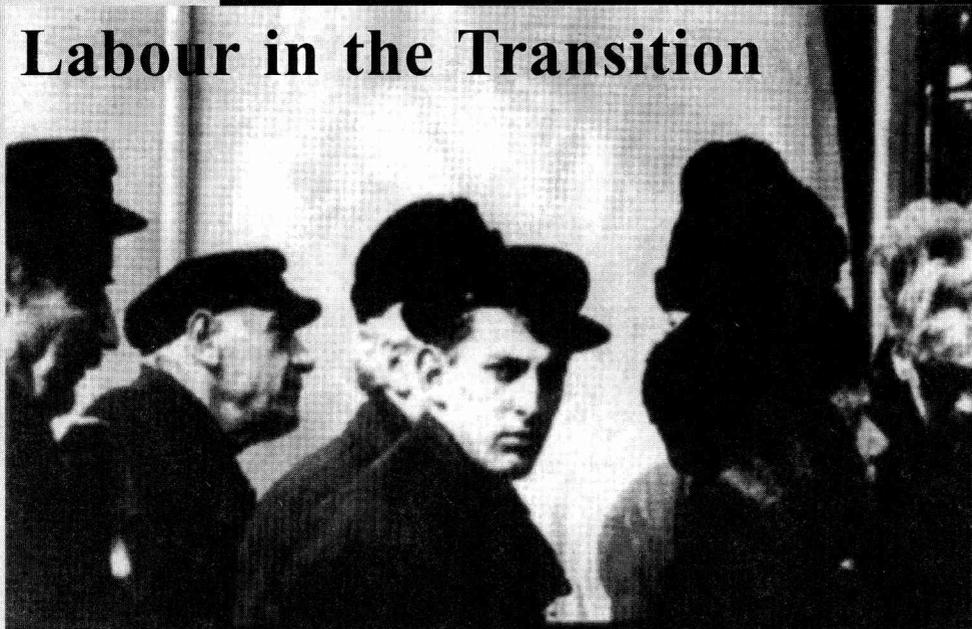


Labour Focus on Eastern Europe

Labour in the Transition



Anna Pollert The Czech Labour Movement Ten Years after 1989
David Mandel Trade Unionism in Ukraine: A Case Study **Sonja Lokar** Women in Eastern Europe **Boris Kagarlitsky** Putin's Russia
Stephen Day The Polish Left: From SdRP to SLD **Urszula Lugowska** The Polish Socialist Party and the Radical Left in Poland
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<p>Labour Focus on Eastern Europe</p>
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Noam Chomsky

The End of the Milosevic Regime

[Of the many articles commenting on the overthrow of the Milosevic regime in Yugoslavia, probably one of the most balanced is the following brief comment written by Noam Chomsky and published first on ZNet. ed.]

It's surely right that publicly the Clinton-Blair administrations are "gloating" over the outcome, and that the usual cheerleaders are doing their duty as well. That is commonly the case whatever the outcome.

But we should not overlook the fact that more serious observers - as anti-Milosevic as you can find - are telling quite a different story. For example, the senior news analyst of UPI, Martin Sieff, described the outcome of the election as "an unpleasant shock to both incumbent Slobodan Milosevic and the Clinton administration" (September 25), pointing out that [Vojislav] Kostunica "regularly denounces the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia last year as 'criminal'", "implacably opposes having Milosevic or any other prominent Serb tried as a war criminal", and worse still from the Clinton-Blair point of view, "does appear to accurately express the democratic aspirations of the Serbian people".

That's correct across the board, and Sieff is not alone in reporting it. In his campaign throughout the country and on state TV, Kostunica condemned "NATO's criminal bombing of Yugoslavia" and denounced the International Criminal Tribunal on Yugoslavia (ICTY) as "an American tribunal - not a court, but a political instrument" (Steven Erlanger and Carlotta Gall, *New York Times*, 21

Sept 2000). Speaking on state TV after taking office, he reiterated that while he sought normalisation of relations with the West, “the crimes during the NATO aggression, and the war damages, could not be forgotten”, and he again described the ICTY as a “tool of political pressure of the US administration” (5, 6 Oct. 2000).

In the British press, some prominent (and bitterly anti-Milosevic) correspondents have pointed out that “the West’s self-satisfaction cannot disguise the reality of the Balkans ... it was not the bombing, the sanctions and the posturing of NATO politicians” that got rid of Milosevic. Rather, “he was toppled by a self-inflicted, democratic miscalculation”, and if anything his fall was impeded by Western intervention: the rotten situation in the Balkans “has been made worse by intervention ... NATO’s actions escalated the nastiness, prolonged the resolution and increased the cost.

“At the very least, outsiders such as [British Foreign Secretary] Mr Cook should stop rewriting history to their own gain. They did not topple Mr Milosevic. They did not bomb democracy into the last Communist dictatorship in Europe. They merely blocked the Danube and sent Serb politics back to the Dark Ages of autocracy. It was not sanctions that induced the army to switch sides; generals did well from the black market.

“The fall of Mr Milosevic began with an election that he called and then denied, spurring the electors to demand that the army respect their decision and protect their sovereignty. For that, Yugoslavia’s democracy deserves the credit, not NATO’s Tomahawk missiles” (Simon Jenkins, *London Times*, 7 Oct. 2000).

“The kind of people who made last Thursday’s revolution” were those who were “depressed in equal measure by the careless savagery of the NATO bombing and the sheer nastiness of the Milosevic regime” (John Simpson, BBC world affairs editor, *Sunday Telegraph*, 8 Oct. 2000). Serb dissidents, to the extent that their voices are heard here, are saying pretty much the same thing. In a fairly typical comment on BBC, a Belgrade university student said: “We did it on our own. Please do not help us again with your bombs.”

Reaffirming these conclusions, a correspondent for the opposition daily *Blic* writes: “Serbs felt oppressed by their regime from the inside and by the West from the outside”. She condemns the

US for having “ignored the democratic movement in Yugoslavia and failing to aid numerous Serbian refugees” - by far the largest refugee population in the region.

A prominent dissident scholar, in a letter of remembrance for a leading human rights activist who recently died, asks whether “the ones who said they imposed sanctions ‘against Milosevic’ knew or cared how they impoverished you and the other people like you, and turned our lives into misery while helping him and his smuggling allies to become richer and richer”, enabling him to “do whatever he wanted”; and instead of realising “the stupidity of isolating a whole nation, of tarring all the people with the same broad brush under the pretence that they are striking a blow against a tyrannical leader”, are now saying - self-righteously and absurdly - “that all that is happening in Serbia today was the result of their wise policy, and their help” (Ana Trbovich, Jasmina Teodosijevic, *Boston Globe*, 8 Oct. 2000).

These comments, I think, are on target. What happened was a very impressive demonstration of popular mobilisation and courage. The removal of the brutal and corrupt regimes of Serbia and Croatia (Milosevic and Tudjman were partners in crime throughout) is an important step forward for the region, and the mass movements in Serbia - miners, students, innumerable others - merit great admiration and provide an inspiring example of what united and dedicated people can achieve.

Right now workers’ committees are taking control of many companies and state institutions, “revolting against their Milosevic-era managers and taking over the directors’ suites”, as “workers took full advantage of Yugoslav’s social ownership traditions.” “With Milosevic’s rule crumbling, the workers have taken the communist rhetoric literally and taken charge of their enterprises”, instituting various forms of “worker management” (London *Financial Times*, 11 Oct.2000).

What has taken place, and where it will go, is in the hands of the people of Serbia, though as always, international solidarity and support - not least in the US - can make a substantial difference.

On the elections themselves, there is plenty of valid criticism: there was extensive interference by the West and by Milosevic’s harshly repressive (but by no means “totalitarian”) apparatus. But I

think the Belgrade student is right: they did it on their own, and deserve plenty of credit for that. It's an outcome that the left should welcome and applaud, in my opinion.

It could have happened before. There is good reason to take seriously the judgement of Balkan historian Miranda Vickers (again, as anti-Milosevic as they come) that Milosevic would have been ousted years earlier if the Kosovan Albanians had voted against him in 1992 (they were hoping he would win, just as they did this September). And the mass popular demonstrations after opposition victories in local elections in 1996 might have toppled him if the opposition hadn't fractured. Milosevic was bad enough, but nothing like the rulers of totalitarian states, or the murderous gangsters the US has been placing and keeping in power for years all over the world. But ridding the country of Milosevic doesn't in itself herald a final victory for the people of Serbia, who are responsible for the achievement. There's plenty of historical evidence to the contrary, including very recent evidence.

It's hard to think of a more spectacular recent achievement than the overthrow of South Africa's apartheid horror, but the outcome is far from delightful, as Patrick Bond has been documenting impressively on ZNet, and as is obvious even to the observer or visitor with limited information.

The US and Europe will doubtless continue their (to an extent, competing) efforts to incorporate Serbia along with the rest of the Balkans into the Western-run neo-liberal system, with the cooperation of elite elements that will benefit by linkage to Western power and with the likely effects of undermining independent economic development and functioning democracy, and harming a good part (probably considerable majority) of the population, with the countries expected to provide cheap human and material resources and markets and investment opportunities, subordinated to Western power interests. Serious struggles are barely beginning, as elsewhere.

[This first appeared on ZNet : <www.zmag.org>.]

Anna Pollert

The Czech Labour Movement a Decade after 1989

Global, post-Communist and national questions

Specific regional and national issues need to be explored in the case of the Czech trade union movement ten years after the restoration of capitalism. How far is its experience unique, how much part of the wider experience of CEE, and wider still, of the general weakness of labour worldwide? To take the last question first, the crisis of the command economies of the Soviet bloc took place within a neo-liberal revival in Western capitalism. Declining power and legitimacy of organised labour has been almost universal in the final decades of the millennium. It would therefore be surprising if newly establishing trade unions adapting to global capitalism would be in a strong position. Employers' and financial institutions' policies towards organised labour area at best tolerant of trade unions, at worst, hostile. International labour solidarity, always a difficult aim, is constantly undermined by multinational capital's mobility and divide and rule strategy.

The labour movements of CEE have the added difficulties of operating in economies that have become subordinate to the West, ¹ inexperience with dealing with the capitalist employment relationship with its increasingly sophisticated management techniques, and a Communist workplace tradition of atomisation and individualism, and an enterprise bargaining system in which unions and managers were

partners. In the unprecedented historical transformation from 'Communism' (albeit distorted) to capitalism, the ideological problem of establishing the legitimacy of organised labour pursuing interests which are separate from capital's raises complex challenges for unions. It involves the re-legitimisation of trade unions as organs of genuine worker interest representation.

Labour movement legacies: class, nation and state

During the period when industrialisation laid the foundations of union organisation in CEE, nationalist rather than class struggles cut across history. The Czech labour movement's formative years were bound up with the self-assertion of subordinate nations against the great European empires of Germany, Russia or the Habsburgs.² The Habsburg response to the threat of Czech nationalism and the advanced working class organisation of its most industrialised parts established a distinctive tradition of state incorporation to win labour's consent. To induce nationalist loyalty, organised labour was given remarkable status in elected commissions of workers to run pension and social insurance schemes.³ Concessions to labour in this period left a legacy in which, on the one hand, institutional development of labour representation advanced, but on the other, the national question always remained a device to quell class radicalism. From the last decades of the nineteenth century through into the First Republic of 1918-38, a system of Habsburg-inherited centralised corporatism with authoritarian overtones persisted. This coexisted with a developing trade union system which was highly fragmented by craft, politics and nationality.

Thus, the early Czech labour movement developed institutions of representation, but with a tendency for national co-option co-existing with union fragmentation. In this, it differed from the Austrian labour movement from which it sprang. After the First World War, the latter became more centralised and co-ordinated,⁴ while the newly independent Czechoslovakia followed a different political and economic path. Older corporatist structures regulating insurance and unemployment remained, but unions continued to be divided by politics and ethnicity.⁵ This arguably weakened labour's power. Corporatism became a form of central control over the rank and file,

without a deepening of union organisation on the ground. And patriotism, as before, kept class issues in check. Although Czechoslovak workers joined the post-First World War revolutionary wave, with a rapid increase in trade union membership, strikes demanding land distribution and socialisation of large enterprises and banks, labour radicalism was suppressed in the name of defending the new Republic.⁶ Concessions were won, including the eight hour day and extensive social reforms, but were partly inspired by nationalism, with finance largely provided by the 'National Liberation Loan' of 1918, a fund built by the patriotic contribution of the general population. The weakness of labour as an oppositional force was manifest when the general strike of December 1920 failed and trade union membership dropped.

Czech labour movement history would be incomplete without reference to the distinctive political history of parliamentary democracy. During the brief spell of independence in 1918-38, the parliamentary democracy of the First Czechoslovak Republic was unique in CEE during this period, and it remains an important reference point in the collective memory. However, twenty years is arguably a very short time in which to deepen democratic traditions, or to establish parliament as a viable forum for labour representation. There was little real chance for the labour movement to challenge the much longer traditions of bureaucracy and authoritarianism. Democratic and liberal principles remained the domain of intellectuals and artists, and as during the Habsburg period, the middle classes led progressive movements.

Politically, however, the experience of parliamentary democracy allowed workers' parties to develop. In Czechoslovakia, the Communist Party (CP) had a much greater chance to grow than in other CEE countries, which had authoritarian regimes in the inter-war period. This, of course, begs the question of what the CP role was in the anti-Nazi resistance, also the tense relationship between the local party and the CPSU.⁷ However, it is worth noting that the result of this early development gave the CP far stronger electoral support than elsewhere. Even in the post-Communist period, in the 1998 general election, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) took 11 per cent of the vote⁸ and with growing disillusion

with the post-1998 ČSSD government, it became the second-strongest party in July 1999.⁹ Yet there is no necessary relationship between CP party political support and 'left' politics - the latter being a highly ambiguous concept in the context of the CP command economy legacy.

Nationalism, union division, authoritarian corporatism, parliamentary democracy and the growth of the CP form part of the complex mosaic of experience. There is one further piece in the jigsaw. Labour's apparent strength, as visible in its relative prosperity, also disarmed it ideologically. Throughout the imperial, the inter-war, and the Communist periods, material wealth proved to be the device used by the state to win labour's allegiance. It was largely available for historical reasons, the Czech lands being the most advanced industrially, but also came after the First World War from outside help, out of the allies' political expediency.¹⁰ Some of the worst hardship after both world wars was mitigated. During the Communist period, relative affluence¹¹ led some to argue that the bargaining of prosperity for political conformity created a 'proletariat embourgeoisé'.¹² Although there was a workers' revolt in Plzen immediately after Stalin's death in 1953 which was met with Stalinist coercion, thereafter the CP under Novotny was never forced into reform by mass unrest. Revolt against the system only erupted again much later, in the Prague Spring of 1968.

The Prague Spring was undoubtedly a crucial experience in worker democracy, which should not now be overlooked in the emphasis on compliance. Workers' councils were elected in the summer of 1968, and demands for self-management went far beyond the original intentions of limited workers' participation rights and continued after the August Soviet invasion in a 'hot autumn'. But the post-1968 'normalisation' imposed tight bureaucratic control which neutralised them, and even after the 1988 State Enterprise act re-invented Enterprise Councils, these were under the firm grip of the Communist unions, the ROH (Revoluční Odborové Hnutí, the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement), and were dissolved again in April 1990. Cynicism about the 'pseudo-participation' of workers' councils, which went back to post-war factory councils, as organs for raising 'socialist consciousness'¹³ and later exercises in incorporation,¹⁴ now returned. After the imposition of post-1969 'normalisation', this

was combined, again, with providing relative economic prosperity. Political citizenship and opposition were harshly suppressed, but also exchanged for material well-being.

In sum, the economic prosperity of the highly industrialised Czech lands provided the state with the material means to offer concessions to neutralise potential opposition. Nationalism and union fragmentation had already weakened the labour movement. Moderation and state incorporation characterised the Czech labour leadership in the pre-Communist era and, during Communism, radicalism existed but was suppressed or bought off with relative affluence.

The advances enjoyed by the Czech workers were thus largely delivered by the enlightened self-interest of governments at different points in time, rather than being won through union organisation and mobilisation against the power of capital. The Czech labour movement, when faced with restored capitalism, was ill prepared, both organisationally and ideologically, for struggle.

The post-Communist labour movement

What conditions did Czech workers face with the entry of their country into global capitalism? Today, they comprise almost a fifth of the four Višegrad countries' total workforce. Out of the Czech Republic's 10.3 million population, 4.9 million are employed - twice as many as in Slovakia, more than Hungary's 4 million, but a small labour force compared with Poland's 14.5 million. The main industries are mining, chemicals and manufacturing (of which transport equipment, electrical goods and fuel processing are growth areas). Sectoral redistribution has followed other capitalist economies, with decline in industry, mining and agriculture, and growth in services. Western investment has been concentrated in the most promising sectors: telecommunications, automotives, petroleum, glass, tobacco, food and drink, retail and banks.

Czech workers began this transition with material advantages. But illusions in the free market and faith in their political leaders made this privilege more apparent than real, leaving the government largely unopposed, as it wasted the opportunities of a country embarking on the capitalist road in much better economic shape than

the other Višegrad countries. In 1989, the former Czech and Slovak Federative Republic (ČSFR) had low foreign debt, and the government was theoretically less in thrall to the IMF and the World Bank than elsewhere. In 1991, although the ČSFR suffered an almost 16 per cent drop in GDP and 25 per cent fall in real wages, it started from much more prosperous beginnings, making absolute misery less than Poland's or Hungary's.¹⁵ Employment did decline - in 1995 employment was still 7 per cent lower than in 1990 - but this was less severe than in other Višegrad countries. Registered unemployment was low at around 3.5 per cent in the first half of the 1990s,¹⁶ although climbing to 5 per cent in 1997, and 9 per cent in 2000 (Table 1).

But free market policies, obsessed with formal privatisation and rejecting a state industry policy, created an economic crisis in 1996/97, from which there has been little recovery. GDP growth, which was 3.6 per cent in 1996, was zero by 1999. Early economic advantage was both short-lived and uneven. Hardest hit were the 'monostructural' regions dependent on one industry, such as the coal mining areas of north-west Bohemia and north Moravia, the metallurgy area of north Moravia and Kladno district west of Prague, and the electronics industry in north-east Moravia and parts of eastern Bohemia. In terms of growing unemployment, regional disparities are becoming more rather than less polarised with time.¹⁷

Worker's material advantage was whittled away. Consumption dropped drastically after the political and economic crisis of 1997, and growth in real wages almost halved from the previous year. The Czech Republic joined the downward path of Hungary, where living standards in terms of private consumption and real wages continued to fall until 1997, whereas they rose in Poland and Slovakia after 1996.¹⁸

In sum, after initial material and labour market advantages in which relative falls in living standards were tolerated partly because they began at a higher level, and partly because of faith in the free market, the Czech working class faced disillusion in the second half of the decade. But after a legacy of compliance and naked oppression, a short-lived, popular, but not very deeply-rooted democracy (the First Republic) and, after 1968, one of the tightest and most centralised regimes of the Soviet-bloc, struggle was not familiar. Subsequent

economic crisis did, however, lead to some radicalisation. Nevertheless, both past legacies, and organisational and ideological difficulties continued to weaken the union movement.

Table 1. Unemployment in the Czech Republic 1992-1999 (%)

Region	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999*
Prague	0.32	0.34	0.28	0.29	0.43	0.87	2.31	2.93
Central Bohemia	2.71	3.36	2.86	2.57	2.98	4.62	6.06	6.59
South Bohemia	2.26	2.85	2.26	2.03	2.52	3.09	5.59	5.82
West Bohemia	2.08	2.65	2.24	2.16	2.66	4.38	6.36	7.09
North Bohemia	2.89	4.20	4.42	4.80	5.84	8.60	11.40	12.19
East Bohemia	2.26	2.90	2.46	2.30	2.93	4.37	6.30	6.91
South Moravia	2.97	3.85	3.29	2.88	3.45	5.31	7.73	8.38
North Moravia	3.98	6.16	5.61	4.84	5.60	7.74	11.00	12.03
CR total	2.57	3.52	3.19	2.93	3.52	5.23	7.48	8.18

*April

Source: Czech Statistical Office, April 1999

The labour movement: fragile tripartism to union decline

One could argue that the Czech labour movement faces the deterioration in its circumstances in a better organised state than its CEE neighbours. Unlike those countries where 'new' and 'old' union federations fomented a system of entrenched union rivalry, in the ČSFR the old unions disbanded in 1989 and were reformed in one major new confederation, the Czech and Slovak Trade Union Confederation, ČSKOS.¹⁹ After Czechoslovakia's split in 1993, this unified structure continued, with the Czech and Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions (ČMKOS) the main confederation in the Czech Republic, and KOZ-SR its Slovak counterpart. A further feature of the Czech union context, again different from Hungary and Poland,²⁰ was the politically non-aligned character of the unions. Although at an informal level, an allegiance between the unions and the ČSSD became stronger, the tight interweaving of trade unionism with party politics did not apply in the Czech Republic, giving the unions greater independence than in neighbouring Višegrad countries.

The fragile shell of tripartism

Most of the early efforts of the new trade union movement were at national, tripartite level. Tripartism had not grown up from below, with a mass base, so early on, bargaining was not supported by potential mass mobilisation. Yet, while labour was not a strong 'social partner', this is not to dismiss entirely some successes for the unions in early legislation: had ČSKOS, then ČMKOS been entirely accommodating, then the tripartite Council for Economic and Social Agreement (CESA) would have surrendered entirely to the government's policies to weaken labour. While there were no labour victories, compromises included the drafting of the Law on Collective Bargaining, in which the unions managed to defeat government proposals for a works council system. In the context of removing union rights of co-determination, and the abolition of Enterprise Councils, works councils were viewed as mere consultation organs which would threaten union bargaining rights. But in most other areas, including defence of the minimum wage, the unions were defeated.

ČMKOS recognised the need to involve union members in its campaigns, and succeeded in holding major demonstrations against cuts in pensions, labour market deregulation measures, and the austerity programme in 1994, 1995 and 1997. However, this was a far cry from building on union organisation at workplace level, and mobilising from here - which would arguably have had impact. Time and experience were too short at this stage. It was not until union membership decline became too acute to ignore, that ČMKOS and its member unions began to turn their attention to the workplace as the locus to build trade unionism. For the first half of the decade, 'mobilisation' amounted to calling national rallies in Prague. Some regional union activity took place, particularly in the suffering mining areas of the north and east, but this was not encouraged by the centre. As in the Habsburg, the inter-war and the Communist past, centralised control from the top was the norm. However, weakness of the trade unions cannot be laid entirely at the door of the labour leadership, or workers' faith in national-level political bargaining at the expense of dealing with management at company or industry level. The 1992-98 right-wing Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and Civic Democratic Association (ODA) coalition government, and especially Prime

Minister Klaus, were unequivocally hostile to labour. Tripartite Annual General Agreements, always only 'gentlemen's agreements', were increasingly broken and devoid of content. The last one signed was in 1994 after which tripartism became moribund. It never amounted to neo-corporatist political exchange in the sense of articulation between the top, middle and lower levels of interest representation between labour, capital and the state, which in the German or Swedish neo-corporatist context gave labour influence.²¹

There was no network of intermediate agreements between sector-level unions and employers' associations. Industry bargaining began weakly primarily because of lack of development of employers' associations, and has deteriorated further with time. Sectoral collective agreements declined from 29 in 1997 to 24 in 1999 (below 20 per cent of employees) and extension to cover companies not affiliated to relevant employers' association slumped from 191 in 1993, to 12 in 1995, and by 1996, the practice was abandoned.²² During revision of the Labour Code in 1999/2000 (largely in preparation for accession to an enlarged European Union) the unions were concerned with further weakening of the legislation upholding higher (sector) level collective bargaining.²³

In 1997 tripartism was revived as an instrument to contain rising industrial unrest in the deepening crisis of 1997. But its function remained the same, despite a change in name (the Council for the Economic and Social Accord - RHSD) and some structural changes.²⁴ No further Annual Agreement has been signed - even with a Social Democratic government.

Declining trade unionism

Union organisation in the Czech Republic suffers from the effects both of structural economic change, and management policies to marginalise trade unions, as experienced elsewhere in CEE. Union membership has drastically declined from the near 90 per cent membership of the Communist era. From 4 million members and 40 affiliated union in 1992, in 1995 ČMKOS affiliation consisted of 36 unions and membership almost halved to 2.6 million (which included retired workers). By 1998, it had dropped further to 30 unions and approximately 1.5 million members.²⁵ There is a growing non-union

sector, as well as declining membership in the unionised sector. Structural change means that employment in the formerly well unionised large, state enterprises has been superseded by poorly organised small and medium firms of 25-500 workers. In 1996, almost half employees worked in medium sized firms, a third in small companies, and below one fifth in large enterprises. Between 1994 and 1996, there was a 10 per cent density drop in medium-sized firms, a 5 per cent fall in large enterprises, while in small firms, the 16.2 per cent membership dropped further to 14.6 per cent, not only because of new, non-union firms, but because non-membership doubled from 5.7 to 10.3 in unionised firms. Membership in the state sector is now the same as in privatised companies - 37 - 40 per cent.²⁶

Collectivism, Individualism and Problems of Mobilisation

Industrial relations developments

In spite of the decline in union membership, and the ineffectiveness of tripartism, the labour movement in the Czech Republic has not been static or permanently passive. Since 1989, industrial relations has broadly followed two phases. The initial five years witnessed apparent 'social peace' with virtually no industrial conflict. However, to equate lack of action with social consent is misleading. The problem here, as for any labour movement, is transposing dissatisfaction into mobilisation -and this was lacking. Case study research indicated that optimism in the eventual success of transformation was already tainted with doubts about restructuring at workplace level on 1993. For example, interviews with workers in the retail, food and engineering industries revealed dissatisfaction with wages, and in the latter, with the restructuring process itself.²⁷

After 1995 a second phase of more overt labour movement opposition began. This can be explained by further disillusion as economic circumstances deteriorated, a growing sense of injustice, and more active calls to action by the unions. ČMKOS itself became radicalised by the government's dismissive attitude to the principle

of 'social partnership'. Its mass rallies in 1994 and 1995 against government social policy also testified to the fact that workers were now prepared to take to the streets. There was also an increase in official industrial action. This was concentrated in the public service sector - the railways, health and education - as in the rest of CEE, and centred on low pay and poor restructuring. The results varied. Usually, there were pay concessions, but no major changes in policy, and the grievances which originally activated workers merely re-surfaced later.²⁸ While the very fact of any collective mobilisation is worthy of note and cautions against dismissing labour as passive, action has been defensive, moderate and often symbolic. Token strikes and 'warnings' were often as far as opposition went, as in the case of the one hour stoppage in October 1994 by 7000 of the 17,000 direct workers at Volkswagen-Škoda against subcontracting and undercutting wages. This was defeated, with threats by the multinational that it could relocate to another low-cost country.²⁹ However, professional workers succeeded in generalising campaigns against low public sector wages and damage to the health service, with doctors starting with strike threats, and later, nurses and ambulance workers joining strikes and demonstrations in 1996.³⁰ ČMKOS's more radical role, however, remained confined to demonstrations and pleading with the government. When it came to industrial action, the traditions prioritising respectability over militancy, prevailed. When tripartism was restored in 1997, ČMKOS subdued growing calls for a general strike in favour of defending the economy.

Labour movement weakness can thus partly be explained by a common phenomenon - that of its policing by its leadership. But the problem also requires deeper analysis below the surface appearances of consent, compliance and more overt conflict. This involves examining the ideological problems shared by different levels of the labour movement (union leaders and rank and file workers) and differentiating between levels of the industrial relations process.

Ideological problems in the transformation to capitalism

At the ideological level, the difficulty for labour is in its ambiguous embrace of the transformation to capitalism. These are general problems for the post-Communist labour movement. Any radicalism

of the early dissident movement, which overthrew the CP, was occluded by free market ideology. This was arguably hegemonic for some time and is hardly surprising, given the over-arching strength of this worldview in the West - notwithstanding the rise of Social Democratic parties. Even for those in the labour movement not committed to free-market policies, the ideological dilemma is the support for change which is in favour of building capital accumulation and a capitalist class. While the Czechoslovak unions were not mass movements whose *raison d'être* was the defeat of Communism, as a leading member of ČMKOS put it,³¹ the unions are 'schizophrenic': they must 'support the reform process' but 'do not like certain aspects'. For the union Confederation itself, this became an added factor in its desire for respectable social partnership.

The reformed old unions also had the problem of carving out a new identity, new language and new aims. Lack of a distinctive labour movement project or vision creates a space for other ideologies which are not necessarily progressive for labour. In the Czech context, harking back to the bourgeois parliamentary democracy of the inter-war First Republic has been an important reference point, and while democracy is a strong central value for trade unionism, identity with successful Czech capitalism (a common theme of pride) is arguably not an inspiration for resurrecting the labour movement. A dilemma shared by other post-Communist labour movements is that the term 'socialism' is discredited. This leaves the chief aim of the labour movement as a 'decent' form of market economy, in which labour has a 'fair' share - a social democratic model on the lines of 'social partnership' Europe, or the current union revival rallying cry in the US of 'dignity at work'. Significantly, one of ČMKOS's slogans in its demonstration against social security cuts in 1995 was 'Odbory za důstojný život' (trade unions for a dignified life). Yet for those suffering major disillusion, particularly as political parties of apparent 'left' and 'right' produce the same policies, the door is wide open to the visceral calls of nationalism and xenophobia.³² Signs of this danger are suggested by a recent poll finding that over three quarters of Czech citizens did not think that building a wall between Roma and Czech inhabitants in a town in northern Bohemia was a racist move.³³

A further ideological complication for labour is the belief that

many of the problems of transformation are just to do with a hangover of Communism, rather than its mixture with the advent of capitalism. Dissatisfaction has been aimed at both the state and the old nomenklatura - at the first for the inadequacies of legislation which have allowed unbridled financial corruption, and at the second for profiteering from it (personal observation during 1995 ČMKOS demonstration, and interviews with union leaders in case studies). The view that it is Communism, not capitalism, which is the source of current corruption and mismanagement breeds illusions that once the latter is purged of the former, fair competition will prevail - an illusion fed by free-market ideology. There is also a cynical *plus ça change, plus c'est le même* fatalism, which is ultimately disempowering. To give one example, a trade union leader disillusioned with the squandering of opportunity in the engineering company, ČKD, by political mishandling and nepotism, blamed 'stari Komunisti' (old Communists) and put down the fate of the enterprise to a country which was, and would continue to be, full of 'scheming scoundrels'.³⁴ This failed to identify the political-economic processes responsible for the sacrifice of his enterprise and his members' employment, as targets for opposition.

The weakness of enterprise-level bargaining and the 'new' industrial relations

Despite the shortcomings of tripartism, at the top level, most union personnel have been recruited from outside the former ROH and are free from former habits. This is not the case at enterprise level, where most union chairs are former functionaries. The attitude of these both towards the state and towards employers is very similar to the past system of enterprise unionism.

In the first few years of transformation, the practice of partnership with management and bargaining with the state to elicit concessions for the enterprise was common. Surveys suggest that enterprise union leaders are beginning to define independent labour interests and that union-management relations are developing along 'partnership and opposition' lines.³⁵ But it is not clear what this means, and whether union leaders are really beginning to bargain with management. Case studies suggest unevenness. Czech union leaders

have not been incorporated as the 'managers of change' found in some Polish enterprises,³⁶ but nor have they successfully opposed employment reduction or the drop in real wages. Where they have been successful, as in the department store, Kotva, this has been in defending enterprise welfare, not shop-floor wages.³⁷ In other case studies (Kmart, ČKD, Staropramen breweries), union leaders have been unable to defend workers in terms of excessive working hours, or indexing wages to keep up with inflation.

A number of factors contribute to lack of success. Inexperience, combined with inadequate information from employers, has led to poor bargaining. In some cases, what is reported as 'bargaining' is little more than rubber stamping labour law and/or management dictate (Kmart); in others, agreements were made and broken by management (ČKD); and in others still, the union chair began with an unrealistically high wage demand and then capitulated to a zero increase.

In examining the bargaining process, however, we need also to analyse the employer, and the various tactics available to suppress potential opposition. Management attacked trade unionism simply by marginalising them and by ignoring agreements (where these existed). An example was the series of broken agreements in ČKD. The promised five per cent 'stimulation fund' for productivity never materialised, because the company was making a loss, and the promise in the 1993 collective agreement of pay indexation at quarterly intervals was ignored. Members of the union committee had requested their chair to convene a meeting, but had been rebuffed with the reply that the company was loss-making.

This highlights management's use of an old device of capitalist control - that of fostering worker allegiance to company success. In the context of transformation, and especially of recession, there is further pressure for workers to support their enterprise. This identification with the enterprise, particularly among union leaders, also draws on the old Communist management-union partnership, and places responsibility for loss-making or insolvency outside the enterprise.

Another aspect of current Western management techniques is the emphasis on the individualisation of the employment relationship, particularly with the individualisation of reward. In all of the case

study enterprises, an increasing proportion of the payment system was moving from collective grades (tariffs) to performance related pay dependent on individual appraisal. Added to this was a clause on secrecy: workers were forbidden to discuss their pay, and in Kmart, even the union was prevented from gaining access to information on employees' earnings. The tactical success of this individualisation policy was in the confusion and division created among workers. It reinforced the previous legacy of workplace atomisation, when the individual or small-group had been the best means of bargaining.³⁸ Now, with the end of Communism, liberal individualism, not collective organisation, was heralded as freedom. Hence, in the workplace, individual expression, behaviour and organisation were both more immediately familiar from the past, and seemed more attractive for the future, in terms of motivation and reward. Individual pay and bonuses seemed attractive to most workers, since they appeared as a break from the former nepotistic and politicised reward system. The new payment systems were further sweetened in some enterprises, such as ČKD, by being accompanied by a new time-based system, which removed the uncertainty of payment-by-results - a system still plagued by poor and irregular supplies.

Yet disorientation did occur. Early on, these management strategies met with little opposition, but as they frequently unravelling, with wage funds insufficient to fulfil the principles of rewarding performance, workers became disillusioned. Transformation had inspired hopes for a new kind of fairness, so a sense of injustice and betrayal flared when pay agreements were broken or when restructuring strategies were adopted which were clearly seen as failures. But these were not aggregated into collective interest representation. While the union leadership continued to prefer compliance with management – no doubt also trapped by enterprise failure – workers became divided by a reward system which reverted to the criteria of age and experience, rather than effort and output, as had been hoped. The process of division was often recognised, but there was neither the confidence nor the experience of democratic self-organisation to harness dissatisfaction into a collective response. Cynicism grew about new management 'fads', as parallels were detected between the old and new regimes, and habits of fear led to

passivity or prompted workers to leave rather than organise.

ČKD is an illustration. Initial concern about departing from the tariff system was voiced by a mere 30 workers out of the total 1,500. However, six months on from the first case study visit in 1993, dissatisfaction had increased. Few workers could understand why piece rates had been abolished in the first place; under the new system, personal reward for performance never materialised since there was never enough money and motivation was also lacking. Young workers could not see why they should work flat-out if they were paid on what remained effectively a time basis. Older workers complained about the upstart 'younger generation'. Disillusion set in. Performance rewards could only be given by taking away from others. Enforced secrecy became a grievance - but not one that was collectivised, since individualism seemed legitimate: 'We don't mind; the main thing is, we have to look after ourselves. Besides, envy isn't a good thing'. The sense of lack of change streaked opposition with cynicism: 'I don't want to poke my nose into other people's business. But it's absurd to have such strict penalties for breaking the rules. It goes from extreme to extreme. Ten years ago, they put up who got what as premiums on the notice board - and they called it democracy. That just bred jealousy. And now...?'. The system lowered morale without breaking the pervasive atomisation of former workplace relations: 'Rumours get going. Nobody in the Factory Union Committee suspected this new system would breed such bad feelings and mistrust' (union committee member). Intimidation was a further dimension of lack of opposition. As several workers said, people were used to being frightened, and the fear was still deep in them.

Fear was a key element of worker paralysis, particularly among the young and among women. At Čokoládovny, a Western confectionery joint venture employing mainly women, a system of placing 'yellow cards' into workers' clocking in boxes was instituted by foremen as 'warnings' over time-keeping or speed. At Kmart, workers were pressurised to work on state holidays by fear of victimisation if they did not. 'We only protested in our collective, quietly, in the corner, but there's no point. It's always the same, "If you don't like it here, go somewhere else"', (worker, Pardubice store).³⁹

At ČKD, the breach of the collective agreement created a sense

of injustice, but no serious opposition. Company insolvency, combined with individualisation and secrecy, paralysed the union: 'The unions can only "warn", there is no strength. It's hard to mobilise - because nobody knows what the next one earns', 'You can't fight a loss-making company'; 'If we prospered, that might change things' (union committee members).

Together, worker individual isolation, division and fear pose major problems for building a post-Communist collective trade union presence. But these are not necessarily seen as problems by the trade unions themselves. In each case study, both workers and union chairs felt that the 'effort bargain' and pay were not a matter for the union, but a private issue for the workers and their mistr (foreman). There is fear that trade union control over the labour process will be a return to the old bureaucratic union role where every change had to pass through the Party/union machine. Organisation and mobilisation is thus hindered by union members' own perceptions of what unions should do.

Workers and their unions

Opinion polls have found that workers no longer distrust unions because of their discredited political past, and regard them as important protection at work, rather than providers of welfare and holidays. Surveys do show, however, that unions are failing to recruit new workers, with seventy per cent of members aged over forty, and fewer than 7 per cent of members recruited since 1989. In 1995, ČMKOS perceived this crisis of membership as a result of poor information and communication to the members, who allegedly did not appreciate what unions did for them. Subsequent research commissioned to address these issues revealed deeper causes of union decline. These were associated with what unions did and the meaning of trade unionism to members.

The survey of union members and functionaries in 1996 showed that workers join unions for very similar reasons to those in western Europe: for traditional workplace defence and pay.⁴⁰ However, the finding that workers joined unions for 'support with problems at work' had a distinct meaning, dominated by a legalistic, individualistic approach to workplace protection, rather than an appeal to collective

workplace support. Eighty five per cent ranked advice and representation in handling legal disputes as the most important area of support, followed by 73 per cent rating support on grievances as most important.⁴¹ Dependence on the law could pose major problems for developing a collective base for worker representation. With a poorly developed legislative apparatus at every level of the transforming economy (including the privatisation process, corporate governance and labour law) and a weak intermediary level of collective bargaining, legal enforcement alone is unlikely to have muscle. Failure is likely to discredit the unions, and they themselves report very frequent breaches of law. Conversely, juridical success does not necessarily strengthen the process of collective bargaining, or encouraging collective organisation, if it merely relies on applying legislation.

The evidence of national union mobilisations in demonstrations, and even short strikes (mainly in the public sector), suggests a duality in trade union representation at this moment in post-Communism. At the national, and campaigning levels, collective action has taken place, perhaps because mobilisation at this level has resonances with past actions against the state, as in 1968, and with the mass movement leading to the Velvet Revolution. But this momentary political collective identity does not necessarily translate into broad collective union identity and organisation at the workplace, where the 'collective' still remains small workgroups. In mature capitalism, this took years to build. Here, there has been a gap since the Second World War.

The survey also investigated what trade unionists do, and how this relates to workers' responses to changes at the workplace. Job insecurity and arbitrary treatment at work were key anxieties, with 43.7 per cent of members not feeling secure at work, even in the low unemployment environment of the Czech Republic. This may be associated with the rise of vulnerable forms of work, casualisation and use of non-standard employment.⁴² Yet union functionaries' activities were not, in the main, focused on these changes.⁴³ Most of their time was spent in informing members, and negotiation on the annual collective agreement. Committee work, advice and representation on individual issues and welfare ranked next in importance.⁴⁴ Asked to list the three grievances most commonly

reported, functionaries reported with pay as uppermost, followed by management attitudes, welfare, grading, redundancies, health and safety, dismissals and overtime. Twenty per cent of functionaries reported that redundancy and dismissal were their members' gravest grievances, but these did not feature prominently in their activities. It thus appears that functionaries were only partially responding to members' needs, which left a gulf between union activity and many major worker concerns.

A conclusion from this is that if representatives were more immediately responsive to their members' concerns at the workplace, unions might be more able to show that they delivered more concrete collective gains for workers. The leadership's response to the problem of union decline as one of poor communication may be an advance, but on its own it could reinforce an efficient bureaucracy rather than build any collective identity which could challenge the legacy of atomisation, and the advent of individualising management strategies. Recruitment, retention, organisation, democratisation and building a collective presence pose the major challenge at the workplace.

Conclusions

Despite the signs of growing opposition to the impact of the return of capitalism, the Czech trade union movement has been unable to prevent the deterioration in its circumstances, or stamp its influence on the transformation process. In spite of the election of a Social Democratic government in 1998, the labour movement has failed to press for any fundamentally different course of restructuring from the free-market route implemented by the predecessor government. Disillusion is expressed in the oscillations of party political support, together with rising popularity of the CP, but there is no evidence that any political party has any major alternative policies. A menacing possibility of further disappointments could be the rise of xenophobic nationalism. Part of the labour movements' weakness is ideological: as discussed in this article, there is no alternative labour movement 'vision', other than capitalism - albeit a more humane form. In addition, as the experience elsewhere in CEE testifies, pressures by international capital leave these economies subordinate in the world capitalist order, and hem in governments' room for manoeuvre. National labour

movements can do little to press for change without the development of international trade unionism.

There are number of levels of analysis which contribute towards understanding both what is distinctive, and what is more general, about the Czech trade union movement, its potential strengths, but also its weakness. At each level, ideological and organisation problems go hand in hand. Despite early national labour movement representation and trade union organisation, union division and nationalism dampened the development of labour as a real power, which challenged the state or employers. In the inter-war period, its potential strength, both organisational and ideological, was sapped by calls to patriotism, limited corporatism and considerable material concessions. During Communism, material concessions again pacified labour, while naked repression and one of the most tightly controlled regimes of CEE quashed opposition.

In the aftermath of the Velvet Revolution, The Czech trade unions experienced similar ideological and organisation difficulties as other post-Communist labour movements. These combined with distinctive national legacies. Conservatism, passivity and illusions in a return to the successful capitalism at the turn of the century, and to the moderate bourgeois democracy of the First Republic, prevailed. Apart form 1968, there was no tradition of struggle or bargaining during the Communist period. Moderation had nearly always delivered some compromise and, with early experience of corporatism, considerable faith was placed in tripartism. It required disillusion and falling trade union membership to shift attention to lower levels of the developing industrial relations system - but time had been lost.

The union confederation remains committed to 'responsible' social partnership, and, locked within its commitment to contributing towards a successful national capitalism, is unlikely to turn to industrial militancy. Industry level bargaining remains a weak form of union power. In spite of the apparent advantage of a more unified trade union movement, the difficulties of confronting an economy in crisis, a sophisticated 'new' industrial relations and past and present workplace individualism and division have proved major obstacles to strengthening trade union power.

Although many of the barriers to building an organised labour

movement are distinctive to post-Communism, they cannot be divorced from the processes which have undermined union strength in the West during the 1980s and 1990s. The similarities in much trade union experience are striking. They include the decline of the 'traditional' male bastions of trade unionism, overt de-unionisation strategies and techniques to undermine collectivism in the workplace, the growth of a privatised and poorly organised service sector and an increase in casualisation, part-time and temporary work. Trade unions east and west are beginning to recognise the fragmented nature of the 'new' workplace and the need to attract the young, women and service sector workers. This convergence of experience also holds the potential for greater international union co-operation in devising union renewal strategies to reverse the declines in membership and build a new type of inclusive labour movement.

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Notes

1. P. Gowan, "Neo-Liberal Theory and Practice for Eastern Europe", *New Left Review*, 213 (September-October 1995): 3-60.
2. C. Crouch, *Industrial Relations and European State Traditions*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, 118. In fact, the late nineteenth century Czech (and Austrian) labour movement was split between demands for national self-determination and support by Austro-liberals and the Left of Austrian Social Democracy, for the Habsburg empire as a multi-cultural entity. Similarly, in Poland, the problem of the 'national question' in relation to class struggle and solidarity bedevilled German Social Democracy and pre-occupied Rosa Luxembourg in her insistence on internationalism.
3. Crouch, *Industrial Relation*, 85.
4. By 1925, Austria (along with Norway) had one of the most centralised labour movements in Europe, with a 'reduction in heterogeneity in the shift from Austria-Hungary to *RestÖsterreich*', although a weak shop-floor presence (Crouch, *Industrial Relations*, 134-136). After 1925, the Austrian state

continued to rely heavily on the labour movement, although the political ambiguity of labour's main political organ, the Christian Social Party, allowed later disillusion during the Depression to spawn the far-right, as Austro-fascism in 1934, and then through the *Anschluss* (ibid., 145, 153).

5. A. Teichová, *The Czechoslovak Economy 1918-1980*, London: Routledge, 1988, 14, 78.

6. Teichová, *The Czechoslovak Economy*, 65, J. Korbel, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia: The Meaning of Its History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977, 50.

7. A. Pollert, *Transformation at Work in the New Market Economies of Central Eastern Europe* London: Sage, 1999, 35.

8. K. Henderson, "Social Democracy comes to Power: the 1998 Czech Elections", *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, 60 (1998): 5-28. This compares with 32.3 per cent for the Social Democrats (ČSSD), and a combined 45.3 per cent of the three centre-right parties.

9. In an opinion poll in July 1999, the right ODS received 23.4 per cent of support, the KSČM 17.8 per cent, and the ČSSD only 16.8 per cent - half its 1998 election share of the vote (RFE/RL, July 23 1999).

10. During the First Republic, cushioning from the Depression was aided by Czechoslovakia's economic, as well as political separation from Austria-Hungary. While Austria entered post-war inflation, Czechoslovakia avoided it with currency reform and monetary stabilisation. The new state's increasing orientation towards the West, not Austria, also helped. The country's special geo-political position as a buffer against revolutionary Russia gave it a privileged provision for other aid. Britain provided long-term credit for food, which allayed unrest due to food shortages, while France extended a loan for military purposes which provided employment.

11. Until the early 1960s, exports of heavy industrial goods to Russia and its satellites paid for imports which largely made up for falling food production experienced elsewhere; real wages grew by 60 per cent from 1950 to 1960 (C. Harman, *Class Struggles in Eastern Europe 1945-1983*, 1974, 193).

12. J. Valenta, "Czechoslovakia: a Proletariat Embourgeoisé?" pp. 209-203, in *Blue Collar Workers in Eastern Europe*, ed. J.F. Triska and C. Gati. London: George, Allen and Unwin., 1981.

13. L. Cziria, "New Collective Forms of Work Organisation in Czechoslovak Economic Practice". In *New Collective Forms of Work Organisation in Eastern Europe*, ed. L. Héthy, M. Ladó and J.E.M. Thirkell, Budapest: Institute of

Labour Research, 1989, 83.

14. V. Fišera (ed.), *Workers' Councils in Czechoslovakia 1968-9*. London: Allison and Busby, 1978, 11; J. Vlačil, "Brief History of Participation in Czechoslovakia" in *Social Problems of Participation in the Changing Czechoslovak Economy*, Mimeo, Working Paper, Institute of Sociology, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, Prague, 1991.

15. A.H. Amsden, J. Kochanowicz, and L. Taylor, *The Market Meets Its Match: Restructuring the Economies of Eastern Europe*. Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 32-33.

16. The reasons include state intervention to delay bankruptcy, active labour market policies, availability of employment in Germany and Austria and a hugely expanding service sector rooted especially in a burgeoning tourist trade, particularly in Prague.

17. M. Illner, and A. Andrlé, "The Regional Aspects of Post-Communist Transformation in the Czech Republic", *Czech Sociological Review*, 2, no.1 (1994): 107-127, 118; Table 1). Among the unemployed, similar groups are disadvantaged as in Poland and Slovakia. Youth unemployment (those under 25) is responsible for about one third of the unemployed. Women are also especially disadvantaged. In the Czech Republic, they comprised 60 per cent of the unemployed in 1996, although around half the employed, and with almost twice the unemployment rate of men (for instance 4.2 as against 2.4 per cent in 1996) their *relative* disadvantage was worse than in other Višegrad countries (UNECE, *Economic Survey of Europe 1993-1994*, 1994, Table 3.4.6, p. 89; UNECE, *Economic Survey of Europe 1996-1997*, 1997, Table 3.3.5, p.118).

18. UNECE *United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Economic Survey of Europe 1995 - 1996*. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, New York and Geneva: United Nations, 1996, 75 – 76, UNECE *United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Economic Survey of Europe 1997-1998 Nos. 1 and 2*. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, New York and Geneva: United Nations, 1998, 100, 116.

19. In 1989, ČSKOS became the largest union body, consisting of 63 member organisations - 21 federal, 20 Czech- Moravian and 22 Slovak unions on industrial or occupational lines. By 1992, this had been rationalised to 40 trade unions, covering 4 million members (1992 figures). Other minor associations included: a 14-union, 100,000 strong Confederation of Art and Culture (KUK), a 50,000 strong Trade Union Association of Bohemia, Moravia

and Slovakia with old Communist Party leanings, a Christian Democratic grouping, and, as in several other countries in CEE, autonomous unions for particularly powerful groups such as train drivers.

20. Elsewhere (particularly in Poland in the case of Solidarity, but also in Hungary in terms of the sponsorship of the militant new unions, such as Liga, by a government keen to weaken the major 'old' confederation), there was major ambiguity in terms of the political party and labour interest representation role of the unions. The process of party alliances was linked with the early mass movement character of the 'new' unions; each time a new political party came into office, the role of its union ally shifted from a 'union role', to that of government partner.

21. Crouch, *Industrial Relations*, 53-55.

22. A. Pollert, "Industrial Relations, The Czech Republic. Industrial Relations Background", *European Industrial Relations Review*, 296 (September 1998): 19-25.

23. A. Pollert, "Ten Years of Post-Communist Central Eastern Europe: Labour's Tenuous Foothold in the Regulation of the Employment Relationship", *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, vol. 21, 2000, 183-210.

24. There were four levels: (1) The Plenary session, with the Government, the unions and the employers each with 7 representatives. It meets every two months. (2). The Presidium of the Council - the executive - 1 for the Government, 1 for the Union Confederations, and 1 for the Employers' Federations. (3). Working Groups (teams, working parties) to discuss individual subjects, comprising 9 members at most - 1, 2 or 3 appointed by each delegation (4). The Secretariat of the Council: the Executive Secretary and one administrative officer - responsible for administrative issues.

25. In 1997, the largest Czech unions were the metal workers' union (OS KOVO) with 459,736, the teachers' and education workers' union (173,259), the railway workers' union association (114,356), the mining, geology and oil workers' union (100,804) and the building workers' union (86,675). Most unions are medium sized, such as the union of workers in woodwork, forestry and management of water supplies (76,006), the union of health service and social care (65,372), the union of postal, telecommunications and newspapers (63,528), the textile, clothing and leather workers' union (60,523), the chemical workers' union (53,102), the union of food and allied trades (48,069), the general union, UNIOS (43,522), the shop workers' union (40,657) and the union of transport (36,657). There are also several small unions, such as

teachers in higher education (18,138), a union for hospitality, hotels and the travel sector (6,069), the fire fighters' union (6,284), the police (4,023), and several even smaller unions.

26. Pollert, *Transformation at Work*, 133-156.

27. A. Pollert "Women's Employment and Service Sector Transformation in Central Eastern Europe: Case Studies in Retail in the Czech Republic", *Work, Employment and Society*, 9, no.4 (1995): 629 – 657; Pollert *Transformation at Work* 177 – 226. The cases portrayed in the book included local and multinational companies between 1993 and 1997. They comprised ČKD, a company at the heart both of Czech engineering and of command economy over-development of heavy industry; endogenous restructuring and foreign ownership in retail (Kotva and Kmart, which was taken over by Tesco); and a brewery multinational joint venture, Staropramen, with Bass as majority owner. Most cases were in Prague, although branches of Kmart were outside.

28. A. Pollert "The Transformation of Trade Unionism in the Capitalist and Democratic Restructuring of the Czech Republic", *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 3, no. 2 (1997): 203-228.

29. BCE (Business Central Europe), March 1995: 8.

30. Pollert "The Transformation of Trade Unionism".

31. Personal interview 1994.

32. J. Sylwestrowicz, "Capitalist Restoration in Poland: A Balance Sheet" *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, 52 (1995): 31-39, 35; M. Haynes, "Eastern European Transition: Some Practical and Theoretical Problems", *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 24 1996, 478; R. Deppe and M. Tatur, "Transformation processes and trade union configurations in Poland and Hungary", *Transfer*, 3, no. 2 (1997): 242-269, Brussels: Quarterly Journal of the European Trade Union Institute, 246).

33. RFE/RL Newslines May 26 1999.

34. A. Pollert *Transformation at Work*, 205.

35. P.O. Aro, and P. Repo, *Trade Union Experiences in Collective Bargaining in Central Europe*. (Bureau for Workers' Activities/Central and Eastern European Team), Geneva: International Labour Organisation, 1997.

36. J. Hardy and A. Rainnie, "Trade Unions, direct investment and the restructuring of Polish state-owned enterprises", *Transfer* 3, no. 2 (1997): 270-290, Quarterly Journal of the European Trade Union Institute, Brussels.

37. Pollert "Women's Employment and Service Sector Transformation", 643.

38. M. Burawoy, M. *The Politics of Production*. London: Verso, 1985; M.

Burawoy and P. Krotov "The Soviet Transition From Socialism to Capitalism: Worker Control and Economic Bargaining in the Wood Industry", *American Sociological Review*, 57 (February 1992): 16-38; D. Filtzer, "Economic Reform and production Relations in Soviet Industry 1986 - 1990". Pp. 110-148 in *Labour in Transition*, ed. C. Smith and P. Thompson, London: Routledge, 1992.

39. Pollert "Women's Employment and Service Sector Transformation".

40. J. Waddington and A. Pollert, *The Uniform Information and Communication System ČKOS: Trade Unions in the Czech Republic; A Report of Survey Results*. Mimeo, ČMKOS/PHARE, Prague: ČMKOS, nam W. Churchilla 2, 1997. The survey also showed that in the context of transformation, the campaigning role of unions has been a further attraction, where this role has focused on pay, social issues and trade union rights.

41. R. Hyman. "Institutional Transfer: Industrial Relations in Eastern Germany", *Work, Employment and Society*, 10, No. 4 (1996): 601-639, for similarities with Germany's eastern Länder.

42. Between 1994 and 1996, use of agency labour had risen by 52 per cent, of contracting out outside the Labour Code by 49 per cent, of recruitment of rural labour by 47 per cent, of part time labour by 24 per cent and of foreign labour, by 21 per cent.

43. C. Makó, P. Novoszáth, and A. Veréb, *Hungarian National Report: Changing Patterns of Job Structure, Worker Attitudes and Trade Union Activities at Firm Level: the Hungarian Case*. (Mimeo, Communication and Consultation Co. Ltd., Budapest and Centre for Social Conflict Research, HAS, 1068 Budapest, Beczur u. 33, 1995), shows similarities in Hungary.

44. Issues raised more than once a month featured grievances for 35 per cent of representatives, pay problems for 27 per cent and health and safety for 15 per cent. Overtime issues occurred monthly for only 7.6 per cent, grading for 5.7 per cent, shift work for 2.8 per cent, and staffing levels for 4.4 per cent.

David Mandel

Trade Unions in Ukraine: A Case Study

The events described below are an example of a spontaneous “revolution” that initiated a process of reform in a local union, the Union of Auto and Agricultural Machine-Building Workers of Ukraine (henceforth ASM Union). This is a rare case in Ukraine, which is probably in the deepest and most prolonged depression in the modern peacetime history of any major country. But it shows that even in the worst “objective” circumstances, an independent, union-building strategy is feasible and can yield gains for workers. It also illustrates the positive role that a progressive national union strategy (also a great rarity in Ukraine) can play in promoting reform “from below” by creating a space within the union for such initiatives.

Conditions in the factory

The Vinnitsa Ball-Bearing Factory is located in a regional capital of central Ukraine with a population of 380,000. At its high point, the plant employed 9,000 people and produced upwards of 60 million bearings a year for the ASM sector. It has undergone incorporation

but is still mostly state-owned, though the state does not play any perceptible role in the economic activity of the enterprise. Since the start of “reforms”, the work force has declined by over a half, due mostly to “voluntary” departures but partly also to permanent layoffs. In 1999, about 3300 were officially employed at the plant, but about half of these were either women on childcare leave or workers temporarily laid off for lack of work. On any given day, only 1500 people are actually working, and stoppages are not uncommon.

There was no significant movement, labour or nationalist, at the plant during the Perestroika period and the first years of independence. Management and the union remained largely unchanged. Except for its administering various social benefits, the union was irrelevant to workers, most of whom had only the vaguest idea that a new Ukrainian ASM Union had been founded in 1991. While shop committee presidents regularly received copies of the national union paper, most were not conscientious about distributing it to members, who, in any case, were often absent because of production stoppages. When workers had a problem, they went to management, ignoring the union. Problems rarely became collective. And when they did, they remained confined to the individual shop.

There was one partial exception to this picture, the polishing and assembly shop, which in 1992 elected as union shop president Pavel Tyutyunov, a young brigade leader with a strong sense of dignity and social justice. One of the few union-led protests before the 1998 “uprising”, possibly the only one, occurred in this shop over a health-and-safety issue. A contaminated liquid coolant gave off noxious fumes that made workers cough and their eyes water. When Tyutyunov complained to the shop superintendent, he promised to take measures. But it happened again, and a third time. A shop meeting supported Tyutyunov’s proposal to strike and demonstrate in the square in front of the administration building.

However, when it came time to go out, Tyutyunov had to resort to shaming and cursing: “How am I supposed to defend you, when you hide behind your machines!” As he explained, the workers found it less threatening simply to down tools spontaneously. After letting off steam and squeezing some promises out of management, they could return to work as if there had never been a strike. But an

organised, union-led strike and demonstration meant a formal affront to management, something they had never dared to do.

Protests against non-payment of wages

It was the non-payment of wages, which became chronic in 1996, that sparked the first really serious, but still entirely spontaneous, protests. The most militant were the workers in the metal-processing shop, who are strategically placed at the start of the production process to paralyse the entire plant. Their relatively small numbers (300) and their relative social homogeneity (mostly skilled male machinists and adjusters, these two professions often combined in the same person) also made it easier for them to act together. The example of this shop was soon taken up by others, but the various shops never linked up.

These wildcat strikes usually occurred only after several months had already gone by without wages. The workers would come to work and ask the shop superintendent when they would be paid. Failing to get a definite answer, they would hold an informal discussion and decide, without voting, not to work. Within a few minutes, the general director or one of his aides would come running, usually accompanied by the union president. The director would hear out the workers and then launch into a long explanation of the objective causes for the lack of money, placing the blame mainly on the government in Kiev. He would then detail his heroic efforts to resolve the problem and promised results soon. Sometimes he would order small sums paid to the workers that same day. In the end, the workers returned to work, and within a few months the scene would repeat itself.

Towards the end of 1996, with the spontaneous strikes growing increasingly frequent, a member of the plant's union committee suggested the committee formulate a unified set of demands for all the whole plant and present them to management. According to one of the participant of the meeting, this "revolutionary" suggestion caused confusion and fear. "Who will present them?" someone asked. As no one volunteered, the proposal was not supported. According to Tyutyunov, the union had always been a subordinate helper to management and the psychological barrier to shifting to a confrontational mode was just too great.

This went on for two years. Then in 1998, after a two-months

production stoppage, the workers came to the plant only to hear from management that it had no idea when wages would be paid. Again, the metal-processing shop refused to work. But this time they decided to rally the other shops. Soon the entire mass of workers had gathered at the main gates. Tyutyunov suggested they hold a meeting in the factory's club. When the general director arrived, flanked by top officials of the ASM Union's regional committee, he offered the usual explanations. But they had no effect.

Plant elects new union leader

The plant did not have a union president at this time, as the last one had become vice president of the union's regional committee. The search for a replacement - which had to have management's blessing - had gone on for three months. But all the prospective candidates refused to place their heads in the lion's jaws: given the level of mobilisation, the union could not hope to play its traditional role of "buffer"; on the other hand, none of the candidates wanted to confront management at the head of the workers.

Some of his pals from the polishing and assembly shop wanted Tyutyunov to take the job. Tyutyunov was a clean-cut, non-drinking, 35-year-old adjuster (one of the "younger" workers), who had been employed at the plant since the age of seventeen. He graduated from its technical school with a "red diploma". A highly skilled worker who genuinely loves machinery - he repairs electronic equipment on the side and has also filled in as electrician and machinist at the plant - he had no reason to be frightened at the prospect of being fired, since he could easily find better-paying work elsewhere. Before being elected shop president, he was, in his own words, "a typical worker, distant from everything". But there was one difference: his developed sense of dignity (rare among post-Soviet workers) and deep sense of justice periodically drew him into public life. If he chose to remain at the plant while so many other skilled workers left in search of a more decent steadier income, it was because of this commitment to social justice and a sense of loyalty to his "native factory."

But Tyutyunov did not want to be plant union president. The scope of the responsibility frightened him and he was not sure he could gain a sufficient grasp of the economic issues to deal as an

equal with management. All the same, his colleagues passed up a note up to the praesidium, proposing him for the post. Tyutyunov was obviously not a good choice in the view of the regional president of the ASM Union and the plant's director. The former read the note out and told the meeting that several candidates were being considered and that the plant committee would finally choose one.

This response so shocked the workers that they began to stamp their feet and whistle. One shouted: "The entire collective is here, and you want to leave the choice to the committee!?" The director was also categorically opposed to the proposal, explaining that it would be illegal for the meeting to usurp the powers of the plant committee. This comment really set the workers going: "They just don't want the guy! We're damn well going to elect him!"

Tyutyunov took the microphone to restore some order. But the director was adamant. He suggested the union president be chosen that very day, but by the plant committee. Since most of the committee's members had been elected with management's overt or tacit approval, there was at least a good chance they would not choose Tyutyunov. But Tyutyunov, who was still not eager for the job, suggested the meeting adopt the director's proposal. It was accepted, and the workers returned to work, having obtained a promise that wages would be partially paid the next day. However, when the committee members assembled that afternoon, they found the room packed to overflowing with rank-and-file members. And so, despite the secret ballot and the hostility of most of the committee members to Tyutyunov's candidacy, they had no choice but to elect him.

Rank-and-file attitudes

A month after this, the metal-processing shop was on a wildcat strike again over non-payment of wages. Tyutyunov went to the shop and asked the workers why they had not come to the union. One of the workers remarked: "Look, another boss has come!" But Tyutyunov pointed the futility of unorganised, isolated actions, that yielded no tangible results. He told them that he had not come to dissuade them from striking, but to consult with them and organise. A union meeting was held in the shop that adopted Tyutyunov's proposal to go through the legal grievance procedure and do it in the name of the entire factory.

According to Tyutyunov, his main reason for insisting on the legal procedure was to build rank-and-file support for the union: "I wanted to show them that if they didn't get their wages, it wasn't for the union's lack of trying. The economic situation really was bad, and I wanted to put a stop to their opposing themselves to the union, which they saw as part of management." But he also admitted that he was afraid that if the government came after the union for an illegal strike, as it had done not so long before, in the case of the miners, whose leaders had been arrested, he could not count on the support of the membership. "In sum, the membership did not have much confidence in the leadership, and the leadership did not believe in the support of the membership."

Following this decision, meetings were held in all the shops and a common set of demands was formulated. Upon receiving them in writing, the director was genuinely shocked to hear that he was legally bound to sit down with the union and negotiate. He asked the plant's lawyer to check the Labour Code. "Until then, management had always decided on its own when, with whom, and on what tone it would talk. They hoped to pacify the workers with the help of the local government and the higher trade union body. They were convinced they were blameless and expected the ministry or someone to solve the plant's problems."

The union demanded payment of current wages at once and gradual repayment of arrears by giving workers at the plant free food and paying their rent and communal services. During the negotiations, the union kept up the pressure with meetings and demonstrations and organised a campaign of lawsuits (which can only be individual) against the management to obtain owed wages. An enraged management posted the names of these workers on the "black" board and blamed the "greedy" workers for the non-payment of the wages of the "calm" ones. But the lists were torn down. The talks ended without tangible results, except for the distribution of some food by the plant, for which workers were forced to wait in line a whole day in sweltering summer heat. The plant then shut down again for two months.

On returning to work, the workers again gathered at the gate and demanded the director explain the situation. This time he did not

appear. There were calls to block the highway, to go for pitchforks. On the second day of the strike, the union committee met in enlarged session with over 100 people and decided to invoke article 45 of the Ukrainian Labour Code: the union's right to demand dismissal of the director for violations of the Labour Code. This was approved the next day at an extraordinary union conference, which decided to demand immediate arbitration.

The union's national and regional leadership

This move brought in the government, which was the principal stockholder and therefore the employer. The union requested that Vladimir Zlenko, then national president of the ASM Union, be included on its side. He was someone the union could count on to pressure the government and neutralise the union's regional committee, which was not enthusiastic about the confrontation.

Zlenko's position was clear: The union had to hold management responsible, whatever the "objective" circumstances. "The workers were hired to produce ball bearings and they do that skilfully. The board of directors and management's job is to make sure the plant is well supplied and sells its products. Though they are incapable of doing that, management nevertheless claims high salaries for itself, more shares in the company, personal cars and other benefits. They blame everything on the workers and the government, on anyone but themselves." Before the arbitration began, Zlenko made a point of personally meeting with the workers in all the shops. The entire conflict was later written up in the union's national paper (the only national union paper in Ukraine).

Under the circumstances, the union's regional leaders could hardly side with management against their own local union - a not so unusual phenomenon in the ex-USSR - but they were uncomfortable with this first ever union-organised labour conflict in their jurisdiction. After his election, they took pains to advise Tyutyunov to be less "emotional", not "go overboard", and regularly to attend managerial production meetings: "After all, a union leader has to understand the economic situation of his enterprise."

The union conference that had voted for arbitration, also decided that nothing would be signed unless it was submitted first to

the membership. The union negotiators went back four times to consult the membership. In the end the union had to step back from some of its demands, but “this was not,” as Tyutyunov observed, “the decision of the union committee, but of the whole union.” Such genuine rank-and-file involvement in decision-making is extremely rare in Ukrainian and Russian unions.

Wages began to be paid more regularly, though only half in cash, the rest in food and services. The arrears were also gradually paid by the plant through its assuming workers’ debts for rent and utilities. The general director was replaced. The new one arrived clearly understanding that “the union at the Vinnitsa Ball-Bearing Plant is not a Soviet-type trade union, not a ‘transmission belt’ that turns in whatever direction management points. He knows that it is an independent organisation of workers, and management’s attitude to the workers and the union have totally changed.”

The shop committees and the rank-and-file base

But there is still a long way to go for the union to become an organisation of workers rather than a leadership acting on behalf of mistrustful, passive workers. Spontaneous revolts often do not result in deep, lasting changes in union practice because the formal or informal leaders that they bring to the fore fail to appreciate the importance of consolidating the active base of the union.

At the Kiev Motorcycle Factory, for example (also the ASM Union), a spontaneous rank-and-file movement in 1997 over unpaid wage also ousted the union president and the director. But the new union president, O. Onoprienko, until then a rank-and-file worker, saw his main priority in obtaining credits and orders for the factory. This really was a condition for the factory’s continued existence and its ability to pay wages. But Onprienko was soon spending much more time with the new director and in government offices than in the plant’s shops. When wages were not paid, he would join management in explaining the objective difficulties. Rumours (false, as it turned out) began to circulate about favours he was receiving from management. Criticism at union meetings became increasingly harsh, as former allies and supporters turned against him. Twice Zlenko had to persuade Onoprienko to retract his resignation.

Zlenko himself refused Onoprienko's requests to accompany him in his lobbying efforts for credits. According to Zlenko, that was management's job; the union's job was to pressure management on behalf of the workers to provide work and decent wages and conditions. Zlenko did not doubt Onoprienko's good faith, but he saw a link between his readiness to fill in for an inactive management and his strong Ukrainian nationalism. However that may be, what happened at the Kiev Motorcycle Factory has been repeated at other Ukrainian and Russian plants.

Tyutyunov, on the other hand, made consolidation of active rank-and-file support for the union his top priority. He did not find any easy solution. On the one hand, the struggles had changed the workers: "It is very clear that the worker today is not the same as five years ago. He is afraid, passive, but not the same. He understands certain matters; he feels that he can defend himself, at least in that spontaneous way." But Tyutyunov was bothered by the workers' continued tendency to bypass the union in resolving their problems with management.

This had a lot to do with the inactivity of the shop committees, the weak middle link in most unions, that is supposed to be in constant daily contact with the rank and file. Tyutyunov held the traditional weekly "seminars" with the shop presidents, but these did not give him a clear picture of the mood and concerns of the workers in the shops. Nor did the information he presented find its way back to the rank and file. "My goal is to inform the workers through our union organisation about what the union is doing about work, wages, conditions. But I know this does not happen even now. The shop committees aren't functioning. It's as if they are not there. I've suggested that the shop presidents meet on their own to discuss common problems, but nothing happens. I've asked them why they don't hold union meetings in their shops after work or during the lunch break. Their members could mandate them to raise issues with me, or else I could attend the meetings, anytime. But I can't get them to change. And the workers still prefer to stop work spontaneously and discuss things informally among themselves, rather than to meet with the shop committee and work through the union."

Tyutyunov did force the shop presidents to hold genuine

accounting and election meetings. In the past these had often been mere formalities, with the superintendent picking a new union shop president when that was necessary. Tyutyunov made his own presence at these meetings obligatory. He also planned a series of meetings in the plant's club with the workers of the different shops. "It turns out that I'm doing the work of the shop presidents. But these meetings are important. At the big union conference people are often hesitant to speak out or ask questions. In the shop, people are more open. And the questions can be very sharp and catch you off guard. But I come knowing the problems are complex and the discussion will be tough." Another reason for his wanting to attend the shop meetings was to influence the choice of representatives in the plant committee (new elections were held at the end of 1999), most of whom had been hostile to his election.

Despite some progress with the rank and file, the efforts to revive the union committees have not yielded much results. According to Tyutyunov, in the end it is really up to the workers themselves. The few shop presidents, like the one in the metal-processing shop, that do enjoy the confidence of the workers do not necessarily have special qualities. But they are under constant pressure from the workers. Tyutyunov rejects the claim of the alternative unions (formed after 1990 and usually tiny) that say the very structure of the old unions are bad and thus justify their splitting off. "It's the active involvement of the workers that breathes life into the structures. That is my deep conviction. Sure, those in leadership positions have to organise, inform, lead. But in the end, you can't force workers to be active. It depends on themselves." In addition, the alternative unions have no political clout because of their isolation and small size.

Besides attending shop meetings, Tyutyunov has tried to strengthen the direct flow of information between the plant committee and the rank and file. He negotiated with management the acquisition of a photocopier in partial payment for dues owed the union. Although a regular bulletin is financially out of reach, Tyutyunov adopted the practice of dealing with management as far as possible through written documents, copies of which are posted in the shops.

At the meetings in the shops, Tyutyunov has fought against the workers' traditional view of the union as an alien body financed

out of their wages but for which they themselves bear no responsibility. "You elected me plant president," he would tell them, "but do you really think I can solve your wage problems for you by myself? What should I do - take the director by the scruff of his neck and bang his head against the wall a couple of times? Do you think that will make him pay up?" "That throws them into confusion," Tyutyunov explained, "and gets them thinking: 'Yeah, how can one person do it?' I tell them that I do have a certain role as elected leader, but they are many and don't want to do anything. When I see they've digested that, I move on to suggest that at least they could get together to write a formal request to the union detailing their problems. Why ask for that in writing? Because when the director sees me aggressively pursuing some issue, he has the impression that I'm the sole cause of his trouble. Get rid of me - as he tried to do in the last elections - and things will quiet down. At most there will be spontaneous strikes, which management finds easy to deal with: make a speech, promise something and walk away. Sure, wildcats are not exactly fun for them, but it's better than organised resistance. If I have something in writing from the workers, I can just put it down on his table for him to read."

This approach has begun to pay off. Tyutyunov tries to include all the workers in the collective agreement campaign, which used to pass unnoticed by the workers. Now, the union posts a copy of the branch agreement (which sets minimum standards) in all the shops, along with the plant committee's proposals for the local collective agreement, and ask for suggestions from the workers.

One of the unions proposals, a concession to the plant's financial troubles, was to raise the wages at the plant to the level of the branch agreement in three stages, rather than at one go. This prompted a letter from one of the shops, addressed to "the union" in general, complaining of "conciliationism" and laying out the workers' dissatisfaction on a series of issues, including the union's failure to organise any protest against recent rise in the price of bread, the staple. Even more unusual than the letter itself was the fact that the workers had dared to sign it individually, something that could not have happened two years ago.

Weak managers but weaker unions

Tyutyunov took the letter as criticism of his own work, but he nevertheless let the director read it to show him the pressure he was under from his membership. The director was so stunned by the letter that, by his own admission, he did not sleep for two nights. "That was the effect of one signed letter from workers. A strike couldn't have made that impression." This may seem rather strange to a Western reader, but it illustrates the striking situation in Ukraine, where extremely weak managers and owners wield almost absolute power over workers, only because their weakness is surpassed by the workers' disunity and sense of impotence.

Things are thus beginning to change at this plant: workers are beginning to identify with the union, to take an active and personal interest in it. Tyutyunov invited representatives of the shops to discuss the letter and learnt that its authors did not have him in mind, since they realised the local union's power to affect the situation was limited. They were especially critical of the union at the regional and national levels and of the Federation of Trade Unions for failing to organise effective resistance against the government.

The letter also served to open up debate in the regional committee, whose composition had changed as a result of a resolution of the union's Central Committee that half the members of regional committees be rank-and-file workers. The aim was to end the practice of regional committees made up exclusively of full-timers. When the letter was mentioned at one of the regional committee meetings, the president of another local proposed that it be read out loud. One of the new worker delegates made the suggestion that the regional committee endorse the letter and send it to the higher levels. This proposal did not gather a majority, though the letter was sent to the national union and the regional and national federations with the request that it be published.

This incident shows how reform from below can create pressure for change at higher levels of the union movement. The problem is - and this is Zlenko's tragedy as national leader - that unions like that at the Vinnitsa Ball-Bearing Factory are few and far between. The changes that have occurred in the union are a combined result of far-sighted, principled, courageous leadership, a relatively active

membership that has been transformed through struggle, and the support of a progressive national leadership. Zlenko made a point of inviting Tyutyunov to the few educational activities (for lack of resources) the national union was able to organise.

But otherwise the local union is isolated. The regional leadership views Tyutyunov as an emotional troublemaker who puts them in the uncomfortable position of having to confront directors and, in general, causes them a lot of extra work. When management tried to get rid of Tyutyunov during the union elections at the end of 1999, and Tyutyunov asked for the support of the regional leaders, the only reply was: "Whatever happens will happen." When the regional president had a chance to send a union activist on an educational visit to Canada, he chose a Soviet-style plant vice president who was about to retire and had never even dreamt of conflict with management. "If a local union is doing its job," remarked Tyutyunov, "then the regional leaders are forced to confront management. That's why they constantly advise me to take management's situation into account. But if the union shows understanding to management, who is left to show understanding for the workers' situation?"

The union's gains are modest when viewed against the workers' needs. But they are nevertheless significant in the general context of Ukraine. In 2000 the in-kind part of wages was reduced to 40 per cent. Stoppages were paid at 60 per cent of the wage. But the union's main achievement was fostering of the workers independence vis-à-vis management, their sense of dignity as workers and their potential to influence their conditions when they act together. These are gains that will show their true value when (and if?) conditions in Ukraine start to improve. ●

Russian Labour 2000

*[We publish below a translation from **Le messager syndical**, a French information bulletin on the labour movement in Russia. The translation is by **David Mandel**.]*

The Union Messenger Information Bulletin on the Labour Movement in Russia No. 2, July-August 2000

News briefs

Wage Arrears.

After a significant decline in the spring (around election time), the volume of wage arrears is again on the rise in a large number of Russian regions.

Fusion of two Confederations.

The two main confederations of new unions, the Confederation of Labour of Russia and the All-Russian Confederation of Unions, have begun a process that is to lead to fusion. This is a response to the realisation by many leaders of the new unions of the negative effects of division. The creation of a united confederation would increase the weight of the new unions vis-à-vis the Federation of Independent Trade Unions (to which most of the unions inherited from the Soviet period are affiliated), which has been monopolising union representation at the national level. It also seems that unification is one of the conditions

for acceptance into the ICFTU.

The “Social Programme” of the Russian Government

In an interview to the daily *Komersant* (June 21, 2000), Evgenii Gontmacher, head of the Dept. of Social Development of the Ministry of Labour, summed up the “social programme” of the Kasyanov government, appointed by Putin in May, in the following phrase: “It is indispensable that we transfer social spending from the state to the citizenry.” This “transfer” involves medical care, utilities, whose prices to users are to fully cover costs within two years, an increase in the pension age, the development of private pension funds, and the lowering of employer contributions to the various social funds.

Single Social Tax.

During its spring session, the Duma adopted a law creating a “single social tax” to replace the present employer contributions to the various social funds. This was presented as a simple technical measure: the state is best suited to collect these funds. But in reality it is a move to curb the autonomy of these funds.

In 1991, four social funds were created: pensions, medical insurance, unemployment insurance and welfare. They were independent of the general state budget. The state’s role was simply to make sure that the enterprises’ paid. (In the Soviet Union, social spending was part of the state budget, while the unions disbursed the money.) The total enterprise contributions to the various funds were set at 38.6% of the wage bill (pensions - 29%, health insurance - 3.6%, unemployment - 1.6%; welfare - 5.4%). In addition, 1% of income tax was given to the pension fund. Until 1993 these funds were under the supervision of parliament, which, in response to the galloping inflation, voted to index pensions. After Yeltsin’s coup d’état against parliament in the fall of 1993, the government took direct control of the funds, and its first measure was to suppress indexation of pensions.

The adoption of the new tax code, under which social payments are defined as a tax, is a first step to reintegrating the social funds into the general budget. The establishment of a “single social tax” is another step in that direction. The consequences of this trend have

been denounced by the unions, which argue that:

- * There is no guarantee that the state will actually allocate all the sums collected to the social funds. (During the first war against Chechnya (1994-1996), the government used part of the pension fund to finance the war.)

- * There is no guarantee that the total sum collected will be distributed to the funds in their respective proportions.

- * Following a general government policy, employer contributions have been reduced from 38.5% to 35% of the wage bill. In addition, the 1% of the income tax that until now had been given to the pension fund will remain in the general budget.

- * The big winners from this operation are the enterprises: not only are their payments simplified, but the sum is reduced.

Gontmacher revealed to Komersant a series of new measures directed against the social funds. The main target is pensions. The government has been conducting a systematic campaign in favour of private pension funds. The positions of several unions (beginning with the Independent Union of Miners) on this matter is, to say the least, ambiguous.

Reform of the Labour Code

Debate on the government's draft of a new Labour Code, which was scheduled for spring session of the Duma, has been put off until December 2000, since the government wanted to give priority to tax reform.

The Labour Code inherited from the Soviet period is still officially in force in Russia, though in practice, it is often not applied. The widespread non-payment of wages is only the most flagrant violation.

The declared aim of the government's draft code is to bring labour legislation in line with "the requirements of a market economy." In other words, employers will have all the rights, whether this be in the area of salaries, work conditions, layoffs or dismissals. The legal length of the workday will be increased from 8 to 12 hours. The government's draft authorises, without any time limits or stipulations concerning pay, unilateral reduction of work time, transfers, replacements, temporary employment. The legal rights of women

workers, which are strong under the existing code, are undermined. Employers would receive the right to maintain files on their employers' political opinions, union allegiance, etc. And the role of unions would be reduced almost to nothing. In particular, employers would not longer need union consent for lowering or suspending salaries, for changing work cadences and norms. Union officers would lose all protection against dismissal and other repressive measures.

The unions, all of which oppose the government's draft, have not been able to mount a unified campaign.

The May 19 protests organised by the Zashchita and Sotsprof (a minority current of the new unions) federations took the form of picketing, meetings, demonstrations, and protests letters in half of Russia's regions. They involved, according to the organisers, 300,000 people. Neither the Federation of Independent Trade Union (FITUR, successor to the Soviet-period unions), nor the two main confederations of new unions participated in the protests.

In response to the government's draft, the unions have come up with two alternative draft codes of their own, one defended by FITUR and a part of the Confederation of Labour of Russia, and the other (the so-called Avaliani-Shein draft) backed by Zashchita. These alternatives diverge on two issues: the extent of workers rights vis-à-vis employers and the organisations authorised to represent workers.

On the first point, FITUR's draft is characterised by vagueness on several matters, especially the rules governing wages and labour "flexibility." It would allow late payment of wages or wage reductions as long as the unions were informed beforehand. The same is true for wages in kind and part-time work. The draft would allow individual contracts for limited periods of time that could violate the collective agreement. Zashchita's draft offers solid guarantees for workers and would establish a system for monitoring application of the Labour Code and collective agreements. It would regulate closely the forms of wage payment, indexation, the minimum wage and compensation for management-initiated production stoppages. Payment in kind would be forbidden.

The differences are even greater on the issue of who can represent workers. The FITUR draft would limit this right to unions, while Zashchita's would give equal representation rights to other

collective bodies, such as workers' councils and work-collective councils.

Milestones in the Russian labour movement

The "Picket" in Front of the White House, June-October 1998

Certain mobilisations of the last ten years represent important milestones in the renewal of the Russian labour movement. Among these were the first big miners' strike in 1989, the strikes of teachers and medical personnel in the spring of 1996, and the "picket", or pitched workers' camp, in front of the White House (the government building) during the summer and fall of 1998. It was an initiative of certain sections of the Independent Miners' Union (IMU). And it was important for at least two reasons:

- * it was the first break with the corporatist apolitical stand of the majority of new unions (the main one being the IMU)
- * for three months, it provided as space for discussion and solidarity among workers from different plants, regions and economic sectors.

The situation in the various coal basins in Russia was dramatic in the spring of 1998: mine closures (one third had already been closed), wage arrears, large-scale diversion of funds earmarked from reconversion of the economies of the mining regions. Anger at the government was becoming massive among the miners, who had been the favourite children of the new regime and had themselves done much to bring it to power. Now they felt abandoned. A first mobilisation, known as the "rail war", took place that spring. Beginning with Eastern Siberia and spreading to other regions, miners blocked main rail arteries, forcing the government to retreat and make new commitments to the coalmining sector. But these commitments soon proved to be empty. And so, in June, the IMU sections of Vorkutsa (far North) and Rostov took the initiative to set up a permanent "picket" in front of the government building in Moscow.

The organisers were categorical: the "picket" would stay until all the demands were met. And the first demand was political: Yeltsin had to resign. In their June 15 appeal, the organisers declared: "The miners are prepared to be the crystallising centre for the efforts of all social strata and political currents who are seeking to replace the

current regime by peaceful means.” Envoys were sent to different regions and enterprises to call workers to support and join their action. Morning and evening, dozens of miners camped in front of the White House banged their hard hats in unison on the pavement to signal their struggle.

Within a few days, the “picket” became a real tent village. Slogans and posters were everywhere. An elected committee was responsible for day-to-day functioning; alcohol was banned. The Moscow city hall supplied toilets, and neighbouring plants invited the picketers to use their washing facilities. The population of Moscow showed great solidarity, bringing food and medicine. Organisations, such as Labour Russia and the Workers’ Communist Party of Russia, were especially active in providing material support.

During the whole summer, individual workers and delegations of workers arrived from all regions. Many who had been trying until then to struggle in isolation, found each other in this collective space. Each day more than 300 people participated in passionate discussions and felt the incredible power of worker solidarity. A permanent discussion forum was set up along with a co-ordinating council that published all sorts of documents. The idea of an all-Russian strike committee was broached and a platform of demands was being formulated. “Pickets” arose in other cities, the most important in terms of mobilisation being that of Yaroslavl. In Moscow, Yaroslavl and other cities, preparation began for a rail “blockade” of Moscow.

This initiative of the lower levels of the miners’ union met mixed with responses from the main union and political forces. The IMU leadership rallied to it. A. Sergeev, then IMU president, announced his resignation from the President’s Council. (He did not carry it out.) FITUR gave very limited support, mainly through the voice of its affiliated Union of Workers of the Mining Industry.

The government watched this crystallisation of discontent, shown regularly on television, with growing worry, especially after the financial collapse of August 1998. The government of Prime Minister Primakov restarted negotiations with IMU leadership almost as soon as Primakov was appointed. The IMU leadership expressed its position thus: “Either Boris Yeltsin resigns or the miners get a lot of money.” At the end of September, a protocol was signed with the

IMU leaders that met only the particular demands of the miners. IMU leaders told the “picket” activists to go home. On October 5, two days before a day of protest called jointly by FITUR and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, almost all of the miners left the camp. Early in the morning of October 10, special forces of the Ministry of the Interior “cleaned out” what remained of the camp, putting workers from the provinces on trains.

Two years later, the “picket” in front of the White House remains an essential landmark in the renewal of the Russian labour movement. It was through the “picket” that the matter of collective, solidary worker action at the national level was posed. On the other hand, any assessment of this “workers’ summer” has to be contradictory, and first of all an assessment of the role of the miners, and not only the leadership of the IMU. The slogan from the start - “Russia with the miners” - did not translate itself into a broadening of the struggle in other sectors. What was really being asked of the other workers was basically to support the miners and their demands. But from August, many workers expressed real disappointment in what they saw as arrogance of the miners who wanted to focus the entire movement on themselves. Some, like the representatives of the Rostsel’mash combine plant, even left the “picket” in August and attempted to create a network of enterprises in struggle, especially with the Yaroslavl group. It was really in Yaroslavl, where the mobilisation was the most rooted in the enterprises and in the city as a whole, that the protest of the summer of 1998 has had the most durable effect: the workers’ organisation won the right to have three non-voting representatives in the regional government to defend their rights and demands.

Extracts from The Appeal to the Citizens of Russia, July 8, 1998

Today in Russia, miners, school and university teachers, doctors, students, workers, technicians, engineers, researchers are on strike and have launched mass protests. They are demanding an end to the anti-popular reforms and the resignation of Boris Yeltsin. We are in complete solidarity with them...

We demand of the two houses of parliament that they change the Constitution in order to end the dictatorial presidential regime, to re-establish genuine democracy and legislative control over the executive branch.

We demand that wages not be lower than the living minimum.

We demand an end to the destruction and selling off of the intellectual and technological potential of the country.

We demand an end to the privatisation of strategic sectors of industry and of the energy sector and a strict review of the privatisations that have already occurred to determine their legality.

We demand that the pillaged property be restored to the state...

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Boris Kagarlitsky

Putin's Russia: The Oligarchs, the Labour Movement and the Chechen War

[Boris Kagarlitsky was in London for a conference in October 2000 and Shelia Malone and Nicolas Kapracos interviewed him.]

What do you think the Putin government represents?

In the previous period under Yeltsin, the main goal of the ruling elite was to privatise government property and divide it among themselves. In order to do this they needed, both ideologically and institutionally, a liberal permissive regime.

But it was not just that they hid the real value of the enterprises which were privatised at about 1 per cent of their real value. It was also about denying the real value of the Soviet experience and the society which had existed by saying everything which was build in the Soviet period, politically, materially and morally has no value; the real values are in the West., so everything we have in Russia has no meaning, value, importance, so we shouldn't care about losing it.

Now the Russian post-Communist capitalism has reached a new stage - everything is already stolen and basically divided between the oligarchs. The main problem now is not stealing or taking something away from the people, but preserving this stolen property.

In that sense the regime necessarily had to move from some kind of liberal, Westernised stage in its development to a conservative nationalist stage of development. So first of all you need a real police state to protect the interests of the new elites, to protect their property and the hierarchies which emerged out of the previous stage.

Secondly, it's about nationalism and national unity. Because you have to establish certain rules and solidarities within society to preserve it from falling apart. Because when you rob the population of everything and you have 4 per cent of the population having more than 80 per cent of the wealth of the society, something is needed to pull the population together, to prevent it rebelling.

Nationalism is sometimes presented demagogically as anti-Western. But in practice it's not because, although some Russian leaders make noises about being independent from the West, on every important issue they do whatever pleases Washington.

The real essence of Russian nationalism is not fake noises but their racist attitude towards national minorities. Because to consolidate nationalism you have to consolidate it against someone and something - mainly national minorities inside Russia. This is very much what Putin is doing.

Putin has made three things very clear: Firstly, not only is privatisation not going to be reversed, but oligarchic capitalism will be perpetuated. Secondly, the new wave of liberal reform is going to start with the so-called new team of reformers around German Grev and Andrei Leonov, his closest advisors. That is very important because, in 1991-1992, Yeltsin tried the first wave of new liberal reform, which actually led to enormous confrontation with the Supreme Soviet, the parliament. Sometimes in the West this is interpreted as a sort of resistance by traditionalist bureaucrats to the new liberal team of Yeltsin. In fact, most of the confrontation was not between Yeltsin and the Communists, who played a very minimal role in the events of 1993. The main confrontation was rooted in popular resentment and resistance to the new reforms. The Supreme Soviet was forced to shift its position because of this. And it ended, as you known, with the coup d'état in October 1993, with about 1500 people being killed in Moscow during the days of "Black October".

So Yeltsin learned his lesson and, in the period 1994-8, although

they continued the neo-liberal transformation, it was slowed down. Then the Primakov government in 1998-9 really tried a kind of social-democratic correction to the neo-liberal reform - which was economically quite successful but failed politically. They wanted compromise, even though it was very clear that the other side didn't want compromise. That led to political collapse and Primakov was sacked as Prime Minister and then failed in the elections the following year.

Then Putin comes along with a new wave of reforms. In the West some say there is a conflict between Putin and the oligarchs. But actually there is no conflict between Putin and the oligarchy as a collective, but only between Putin and individual oligarchs. In the Russian oligarchy relations are very personal. So, once the president was replaced, so were some oligarchs, because their economic power was very much a function of their political power.

So there is a struggle now by some people in the Putin administration, and by Putin himself, to replace particular oligarchs. So, for example, they now want Beresovsky to have less influence and Guzinsky, head of the biggest media holding, will be forced to resign. At the same time, there are new people coming in, like the banker Vladimir Kogin, who is part of Putin's St Petersburg entourage. (Yeltsin was from Moscow). But the structures of the oligarchy will remain the same, just a change of names at the top. Their property structures will not be undermined, nothing will be confiscated, no power taken away from their institutions

With Putin's reforms, maybe the pensioners and some poor people are going to get a little more money, but state subsidies are going to be taken away. Housing is going to be commercialised. The pension system is also going to be restructured and based on individual insurance contributions. Heating, gas and electricity will be completely marketised. At the moment, for example, the state owns the biggest stake in the Russian electricity monopoly. They will sell off the most profitable bits of the company, mainly to foreigners, which will probably mean that electricity will be diverted to other countries. Anatoly Chubais, head of the electricity company, a key person in the first wave of reforms, has said: "There will be no electricity for those who don't want to pay, no heat for those who cannot pay." So if you

cannot pay for fuel you will freeze or starve to death next winter.

The third element of Putin's policy is the police state. There will be increased daily policing of Russians; the powers of the police over an average citizen will increase dramatically. At the same time, the capacity to resist the state or the employers legally will decrease.

So we have these three pieces of legislation now passing through the Duma - the Administrative Code, the Tax Code and the Labour Code. This is a systematic political attack on working people.

Let's start with the Administrative Code, which allows the police to do almost everything they want. So, for example, you cannot walk on the streets without having a passport. This is an attack on guest workers and immigrant workers and limits the capacity of people to move around the country, because they have to register with the local police. They have to work where they live.

This doesn't mean that people will stop moving after jobs but they will be turned into illegal immigrants inside their own country. This means that people will not go on strike, nor resist their employers, because if you have a quarrel with your employer, he just calls in the police who will immediately arrest you.

Next there is the famous new Tax Code, already in place, which means that from the first of January there will be no progressive taxation in Russia, just a flat rate of 13 per cent for everyone. Existing taxation hasn't been all that progressive - it has hit the middle class rather than the rich. Today a person on \$500 a month will pay 3 times more proportionately than the person on \$100. But in future the person on \$10,000 will pay the same as someone on \$500.

They claim the new rate will help the middle class. However, the middle class is usually paid in black cash anyway. But it creates enormous tax benefits for the rich, because even if you go from 30 per cent to 13 per cent it's a 17 per cent gain. And even if these people reveal only a small percentage of their income to the state, nevertheless, on this percentage the tax advantage is incredible. At the same time, business taxes are being lowered. And that means poor people have to pay a bigger share of state taxes and income.

This anti-working class orientation of the legislation culminates in the new Labour Code. This de facto abolishes the eight-hour day and reintroduces a twelve-hour day. For the first time in modern history,

there is a retreat from the gains of eighty years ago. And to make us feel happier, they say the introduction will be gradual. So if you're in a company that still has an eight-hour day, when your contract expires, the employers can introduce a twelve-hour day.

In a country with high unemployment and weak unions and a lot of people working illegally, there is no way for people to resist legally, because they will be sacked. The Labour Code gives employers almost total freedom to hire and fire. It almost abolishes the presence of the unions at the shop floor level but it doesn't touch the powers of the trade union bureaucracy at the top. Here everything stays as it used to be because the trade union bureaucracy at the top is no danger for the elite, on the contrary, they co-operate quite closely. The attack is basically on the grassroots, on the basic structures of the unions

How has the working class resisted, especially as regards privatisation?

The labour movement is in decline because it was badly defeated in 1993. In 1998 there was a sort of revival with the so called rail war, when people started blocking the railways. Then Primakov was elected - a left of centre government - and people went back home, expecting him to deliver. The situation did improve a bit. He managed to put pressure on the enterprises to minimise wage delays from an average of 4-6 months to 2-3 months.

Then, under Primakov, the price of oil rose to \$18-\$20 a barrel. He also forced the oil companies to bring more of their dollar income into Russia. This influx of money allowed the government to solve two money problems simultaneously - to pay wages and keep fighting the war in Chechnya. So the Russian elite now felt strengthened and didn't need Primakov any more. This was one of the reasons why he was sacked in 1999.

But the labour movement had been demobilised because it expected him to deliver - and the demobilisation lasted long after he went. So the hopes invested in the labour movement by many on the left in 1998 proved to be wrong.

But now, in the last months, we see a new tide approaching. People are starting to organise at a grassroots level on a cross-

sectional basis. The new Labour Code is a very good challenge for the trade union movement. Then there was the development of the alternative union, Zashita, a new phenomenon. It is still very small, no more than 30,000 members. But it is growing quickly, tripling its size in the last three years.

Zashita has discovered a strategic role in the movement - to be a vanguard union - not in the old Communist sense that you are the vanguard with the best ideology, but basically you begin the struggle, you engage in the battle on a very important issue, and you provoke the other unions, bigger and probably less radical, to follow.

They wanted to pass the Labour Code in the spring, but have had to delay it at least twice, because of growing resistance. There have been cases where people won particular strikes, and court cases, and the famous one where people won against McDonalds . People tried to unionise at McDonalds and everyone was sacked immediately. But then they went to court and surprisingly they won against McDonalds. This is important symbolically - people can point to these victories to show that the movement can achieve results.

And finally 1 December 2000, the Day of Action against the Labour Code, will be an important challenge. On 1 December the Duma will vote on the Code. The alternative unions are organising all sorts of events including strikes, pickets, sit-ins, demonstrations. And it looks like a lot of people from the official unions will join in, including whole branches, although the official structures have not backed the event so far but pretend it does not exist. So it is very important in terms of showing the new emerging unity from below.

I think some of the "liberal" press will give at least moral support to the action because there is such a clear attack on the most basic achievements of working people and the Code also undermines basic human rights.

The war in Chechnya has been called "Putin's war". Can you talk about its origins, the reasons why it is continuing and the likely outcome?

The casualties are much higher now even than in December 1999, during the storming of Grozny. The Russian army is in real trouble -

their casualties are increasing while the Chechen ones are negligible. Russian troops control the fortifications and checkpoints, but when they try to move a column with supplies on the roads they risk ambush. Then they retaliate, not against guerrilla targets but civilians. So now the villagers want the guerrillas to come to their villages because it is safer. This also means people are joining the guerrillas.

In Chechnya it's much safer, especially for a male, to be a guerrilla than a civilian. You have a gun and the military will treat you with some care and there are people around you to protect you. So the guerrillas are increasing their power.

In the first war there were no guerrillas in the north - they were either in the South in the mountains or in Grozny, in the centre. The north is the plains, difficult for guerrillas to operate in, and the population is more mixed, with Russians, and the Chechens themselves very Russified. In the Soviet period, much of the Soviet-Chechen elite came from this area.

Now there is strong guerrilla support in the north, in protest against the behaviour of the Russian army. But actually the pro-independence feeling in Chechnya today is at its lowest point. The main motive for the war on the Chechen side is self-defence.

On the Russian side, they are afraid the army will not survive the winter - they do not have enough clothes and ammunition and the roads are not safe and the skies are not clear enough for the aircraft. Secondly, they are afraid of a massive Chechen uprising in the spring. Not because the guerrillas are popular, but because the Russian army is even less so.

Can we go back to the reasons for the war, its prolongation and outcome?

The war was started in order to consolidate a nationalist ideology. Russia needed the war to consolidate against "the enemy", as "one fighting nation". It was very much linked to racism, a new understanding of the Russian state, i.e. not of all citizens, but of ethnic Russians, and religiously of Orthodox Russians. And one of the justifications for the war is the fight against Islam.

The war was also necessary to create the conditions for Putin

to be elected, even through electoral fraud. There was massive electoral fraud reported in the Russian press but ignored by Western sources.

In that sense, the war was a double success for Putin because a new state identity was established and Putin was elected. The nationalist hysteria was a success because many people sided with the government on a nationalist, racist basis. This very much undermined the left. It also completely destroyed the nationalist opposition, because the government itself is nationalist.

The problem, however, is that the war is lost. All the political aims were achieved but the war militarily is a complete disaster. Now they don't need the war any more and they are seriously thinking about how to end it. The military too want to end it, even those who have made money, because their deals with the guerrillas are unstable and can be reversed if the balance of forces changes.

It is a very medieval situation, like the Thirty-years War, when people fought each other and then made deals but still kept fighting. The military now feel that they are getting weaker and there is strong pressure to end the war. However, the government cannot stop the war without acknowledging one of two things. Either it must acknowledge military defeat or that the war had nothing to do with their officially proclaimed aims.

Can they find a solution, as in the first war, by negotiation?

They can, but this time negotiation will be seen as a defeat. They started this second war with the slogan that negotiations had failed, that they couldn't negotiate with the Chechens. Then there is the question of what sort of settlement the Chechens would accept. Nothing less than the withdrawal of the troops and some kind of compensation will do because Grozny was destroyed. But the Russian state is not really interested in serious compensation.

However, even if the Chechens are gaining militarily, it does not mean they have the recipe to win politically, because an independent Chechnya is a very dubious concept. Firstly, there is a big question as to whether it is viable economically, socially and culturally. Secondly, it is not certain that this has the support of the majority of the population. It is one thing to want the troops out, but

another to want a fully independent state. Chechen independence was not very strongly supported under the Dudayev republic and even less under Maskhadov.

I think this is a dead end for both sides. On the one hand, the Russians cannot win the war but they cannot keep the Chechens under their control. On the other hand, the pro-independence forces do not have the political base in Chechnya itself to run their country if the troops are withdrawn.

I think they will be some kind of compromise with the Chechen warlords, who will run the Chechen republic but some kind of Russian protectorate status. The problem is: what will be the political price? Half a million Russians have already gone through the Chechen war. These people will come home and will say, why did we fight there for two years, losing so many people and killing so many people? What was the purpose? And they're told, well, we made a deal. So then there will be an enormous political bill presented to the Russian government, including from the military, when those who are not corrupt will challenge those who are.

Might an Islamic regime be possible?

The Chechens are deeply divided between those who want some kind of Islamic regime and the rest. There are three divisions actually. The Wahabi Islamic faction wants a Saudi-style Islamic state with Sharia law. Then there are the traditionalists who interpret Islam differently and support the clan system, the clan elite and common law of the Chechen tribes. The third group is the secular Chechens, mostly from the north..

Under Dudayev, the first period of de facto independence, the country was run by the northerners, who tried to have some kind of political power base in the south, amongst the traditionalists there - a compromise between the traditionalist clans and the northern elites, the modernisers. But it failed.

The modernisers tried some concessions, for example, Dudayev's famous decree prohibiting girls from attending school after the age of 11. However, at the same time, Dudayev did everything possible to prevent his decree being carried out. They never enforced

it in the north, so people just ignored it. They also introduced private schools for girls anyway, which had public support and funding. Then under Maskhadov - who is a very good military man, but no politician, things started to retreat even further.

The Wahabis now moved in, complicating things even further because they were against both the secularists and the traditionalists. They gained influence because they were anti-elitist, anti-traditionalists. For example Balayev, who was a famous guerrilla leader originally more associated with a left wing approach, moved towards the Wahabis and finally joined them. He moved away from his original clear internationalist positions - for a multicultural, secular state and equal rights. He had issued a famous statement saying we should do everything to prevent Russians leaving Chechnya, because they are also Chechen citizens and have the same right to this land. But in 1997 he moved to the Wahabi side. This demonstrates the weakness of the left. The Wahabi was the only available ideological alternative to the struggles between the secular and the elites.

Do women fight with the guerrillas?

Yes, a lot. But more in the first war. In the second war, less, because it is much harder physically to survive, especially if you are in the core guerrilla contingent - not the fighting, but the winter and the hardships of daily life. The increasing influence of the Wahabis and the traditionalists also makes things more difficult for women. Originally, Maskhadov clearly tried to gain a power base among women, presenting himself as someone who could defend their rights against Islamicisation. He was elected first and foremost with the votes of women. To gain the votes, he used a specific oriental voting technology. Men were not allowed to enter the polling stations together with women. So women voted first and only after the women had voted were the men allowed in. And this was not to do with Islamic discrimination against women. On the contrary, if women had gone to vote with their husband, brother etc, there would have been a moral pressure on them to vote the same way. But this way, they went separately and voted independently, deciding for themselves.

Maskhadov is a progressive nationalist, Maskhadov and

Dudayev were very much within the Soviet tradition, former officers, generals. And they wanted to keep the same rules for women as they had under the Soviet period. But now Maskhadov is facing the growing influence of both the Wahabis and the traditionalists. So to combat the Wahabis, the traditionalists will probably make some compromise with the secularists against the Wahabis. Because the secularists did less to undermine the clan structure than the Wahabis do.

But the Russian government is now trying to do a deal with the secularists. They see the Wahabis as the main danger. And if you want to achieve some stability, all three sides must be involved in the compromise in the long run. But the main victims of this compromise may be women. Because even as regards the secularists, women may be the issue on which it is easiest to make concessions. ●

Sonja Lokar

The Situation of Women in Eastern Europe: Five Theses

The introduction of the free market economy in Eastern Europe, along the lines dictated by the IMF and the World Bank, has not only squeezed women out of “secure” employment, it has also driven more women than men into poverty. The political representation of women in the parliaments of Eastern Europe has also declined dramatically. Many of the measures that promoted gender equality in the days of “really existing socialism” have disappeared over night, for instance, liberal abortion laws and state financed nurseries. But women are beginning to organise themselves.

Thesis 1. *Transition means globalisation. In Central and Eastern Europe, however, globalisation means re-colonisation.*

The transition is defined as the process of transformation of a state-directed economy into a market economy. Undemocratic systems and single-party systems have been replaced by a multi-party parliamentary system.

The fact that the transition process is also a process of globalisation is something that is not so clearly part of popular

consciousness. Globalisation has been defined as:

“.. the penetration of national territories by multinational corporations and transnational networks for the purpose of providing goods, services, financial capital and symbols. It means an increased mobility of capital, goods and labour. Globalisation also accelerates the liberation of economic, scientific and technological forces from national political control. Freeing themselves from the restrictions imposed by national borders, these forces also liberate themselves, at least partially, from democratic controls and from national agreements between social partners.” (Suda, 1994)

In the construction of this new economic framework and of the social transition process, a key role is being played by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. CNN and McDonalds, Coca-cola and Benetton, Microsoft and Philips, Shell and many other multinational corporations are operating everywhere throughout the transition countries.

What is more, the direction and structure of imports and exports in Central and Eastern Europe have changed completely. The networks of production and trade that existed within the closed and technologically backward economic system of the former Soviet bloc and Yugoslavia have been replaced by bilateral links between the individual transition countries and the major centres of world trade, especially the EU.

The transition countries have become exporters of raw materials and cheap labour, illegal economic migrants, refugees and prostitutes. They have become importers of credit, unsafe technologies, as well as cheap products for the masses and luxury cars for the new elite.

In the ten years of transition, these countries have experienced a complete economic collapse, a dramatic increase in unemployment (sometimes hidden), and a decline in GDP of between 25 and 60 per cent. In 1998, only two transition countries and again reached their GDP levels of 1989: Poland and Slovenia. In the two transition countries with the largest populations, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, GDP is 58.6 and 40.2 per cent of the 1989 level. There has been a dramatic decline in real incomes everywhere: in Bulgaria,

Ukraine, Russia and Estonia they are 65 per cent of their value in 1989.

At the same time, there was an explosion in poverty and a big increase in income differences. In 1993/94, according to UNICEF, 30 per cent of the 414 million people living in Central and Eastern Europe were living in poverty (UNICEF, *Women in Transition*, 1999, p. 10). The destruction of the basic foundations of life has been the chief characteristic of the transition in these countries. The facts point to one clear conclusion: the transition is a re-colonisation of Central and Eastern Europe.

Thesis 2. *“Reaganomics” is still the dominant political model in the transition countries.*

In most of the transition countries, the newly elected political elite had no independent ideas about how the transition process should be structured. They either accepted blindly the diktat of the IMF and World Bank or they tried to avoid any changes whatever. The recipe on offer from the IMF/World Bank was a simple one: shock therapy.

The package was:

1. rapid privatisation of all state-owned enterprises and services;
2. liberalisation of prices for the commodities of daily life (basic foodstuffs, child-care provisions, housing, public transport);
3. liberalisation of imports;
4. stabilisation of currencies;
5. reduction of budget deficits.

The rapid privatisation of state-owned enterprises caused a massive increase in unemployment and similar decline in living standards. The privatisation of public services led to the creation of a two-class system. Health care was reduced to the basic minimum, with adequate care available only to the tiny minority of new rich. Governments were forced to cut social services in order to bring down budget deficits. Social provisions such as child-care centres and child benefits, previously available to all, were replaced by measures aimed only at the very poor. Governments were forced to reduce pensions and other benefits to below the subsistence level. Wages in the public

sector (where mainly women are employed) and unemployment insurance payments were reduced to the basic minimum. The urban middle layer, consisting mainly of highly skilled workers, began to disappear. Many were pushed below the poverty line.

This was the economic policy that created the “market economy”, a kind of “wild East” capitalism. The first to fall through the holes in this already feeble social net were the most vulnerable: people on already low incomes, on unemployment insurance or benefits, pensioners, unemployed youth, single parents, large families, workers in the black economy who had no social protection whatever.

This transition path was promoted in all the transition countries as the only possibility. It has been followed more or less consistently by the majority of transition countries. What the people in these countries have to grasp is that they are not the victims of an unavoidable natural catastrophe, but they have fallen into a trap as a result of the questionable political decisions of powerful international economic circles, decisions supported by their own planless or corrupt political leaders.

At the time of the second free elections in these countries, the demand for an alternative path was already very strong. Throughout the region, whether in Poland, Hungary, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Albania, Russia or Slovenia, the majority of the population voted for an alternative path. But there was no alternative path. The only change was in the degree of brutality with which the market economy was imposed - it lessened somewhat.

Thesis 3. *Three kinds of transition, with different degrees of intensity, made the situation of women much worse.*

Shock therapy was the dominant mode of transition, but not the only one. There were a few important exceptions to the rule. One of these exceptions was Slovenia, where all the freely elected governments in the 1990s were complex coalitions with a small majority in parliament. This made them unusually weak governments. The path chosen in Slovenia was therefore one of a slow gradual transition. The specific structures of political power and the relatively good starting point made it possible for Slovenia to pursue a more moderate course and

to preserve some elements of the highly developed welfare state - stable pensions, generous measures for mothers and for child care provision, and a system of universal grants. Slovenia is the only country in which the economy was transformed without the total destruction of the social system.

The second exception was those countries in which the transition began later and with some reluctance. The typical example here is Milosevic's Yugoslavia. Paradoxically, the consequences of such delayed transitions were even more drastic. What happened was a destruction of all natural, economic and human resources. Unemployment grew continuously and, except for those who made gains during the various wars, impoverished the whole population. In the late 1990s, the average monthly wage in Yugoslavia was around 60 DM (\$25), there were no medicines in the hospitals, child benefit had not been paid for two years, and pensioners got their money only every six months.

If we examine the changes in the position of women in the economy, what we find is that the situation is similar everywhere, regardless of the transition path followed; there are differences only in the intensity of the change. Before the transition, women made up almost half of all full-time workers in Central and Eastern Europe. They were also the best educated section of the workforce, in spite of the strong gender differentiation in both the education and labour



Table 1: Women in the working population (per cent)		
Country	Year	Per Cent
Bulgaria	1989	46.3
	1996	47.0
Czech Republic	1989	48.3
	winter 1996/97	45.8
Hungary	1990	48.6
	1996	47.4
Poland	1988	45.5
	1997	45.6
Romania	1989	45.2
	1997	44.6
Russian Federation	1993	48.4
	1996	46.7
Slovakia	1989	47.2
	1997	45.4
Slovenia	1993	46.2
	1996	46.6

Source: Alena Nesporova, 1999

systems. Women worked mainly in agriculture, in light industry, in the social services and in public administration. Gender specific income differentials varied from one country to another. In Hungary there was a high differential - women's average wages were 66 per cent of male wages. In Slovenia, the corresponding figure was 80 per cent, approaching the situation in the Scandinavian countries. In all transition countries, with the exception of Romania, women had the right to choose and had free access to abortion. There was extensive protection for mothers and women had access to cheap child-care centres. State pensions cared for the elderly. However, unpaid domestic labour was done almost exclusively by women.

The economic transformation hit women much harder than men and many more women than men fell below the poverty line. The

collapse or deliberate dismantling of the welfare system hit women as mothers, often as single mothers. In Central and Eastern Europe, poverty has a female face.

Very few women were in a position to become part of the new social elite. The opportunities for women to set up their own businesses were few. Most women didn't have their own farm or their own piece of property, which made credit extremely hard to come by. Even small amounts of credit were almost impossible and there were practically no training possibilities for young women entrepreneurs. Some women, however, did manage to become independent:

- by taking over bankrupt state-owned businesses;
- by setting up businesses in the area of their previous employment, for instance, in tourism, trade or in health care;
- by creating jobs in the non-profit sector, mostly financed by

Country	year	total	men	women
Bulgaria	1992	15.3	15.6	16.1
	1996/4th q	13.7	13.6	13.8
Czech Republic	spring 1993	3.9	3.2	4.6
	winter 1996/97	4.3	3.7	5.0
Hungary	1992	9.3	10.7	7.8
	1996	9.2	10.7	7.6
Poland	May-92	12.9	11.9	14.1
	May-97	11.3	9.5	13.4
Romania	1994/ 1st q	8.2	7.7	8.7
	1997/ 1st q	6.7	6.2	7.3
Russian Federation	1993/ 4th q	5.6	5.6	5.6
	1996/ 4th q	9.5	9.8	9.2
Slovakia	1993/ 3rd q	10.0	10.5	9.5
	1997/ 1st q	11.8	10.9	12.8
Slovenia	1992/ 2nd q	8.3	8.9	7.6
	1996/ 2nd q	7.3	7.5	7.1

Source: Labour Force Statistics, National Employment Services, 1998

foreign foundations.

In many countries, life expectancy began to decline. The worst situation exists in Russia, where male life expectancy declined by seven years and female life expectancy by four years.

Thesis 4. *Survival strategies for women - total flexibility of the female labour force.*



In most transition countries, unemployment grew at a faster rate among women than among men. Women also have to put up with both open and hidden discrimination in the labour market. The situation is especially bad for young women, for women with children, and for middle-aged women who are seen as “superfluous” to the labour market.

However, women are making their appearance in the grey and black economy - as workers without any kind of social security, as workers in the subsistence economy, or as unpaid help in the small businesses of their husbands.

Because of their generally good education and training, women represent a high proportion of the full-term employed. But they have paid a high price: lower wages, growing wage differences with men, flexible working hours, illegal overtime, unhealthy and undignified working conditions. Young women today are deciding against getting married because they can't afford to lose their job. In many transition countries the birth rate sank by about a third in the past decade.

Thesis 5. *The personal became political.*

Fifty years after the introduction of women's right to vote, the women's movements in the developed democratic countries were strong enough to force a political discussion on the topic of discrimination in the private sphere, in the labour market, and in the area of access to the

Table 3. Women MPs in the transition states					
Country	women's right to vote/stand	highest number in parliament %	in the first free elections %	in second free elections %	in the last elections %
Albania	1920	1974 - 33.2	3.6	5.7	5.2
Belarus	1919		3.8		4.5
Bulgaria	1944	1981 - 21.8	12.9	13.3	10.8
Croatia	1945	1982 - 17.0	4.4	5.8	20.5
Czech Rep	1920	1986 - 29.5	10	15.0	15.0
Estonia	1918		5.7	12.9	17.8
Georgia	1921		7.2	6.3	7.2
Hungary	1958	1980 - 30.1	7.3	11.4	8.3
Latvia	1918		15		17.0
Lithuania	1921		8.1	7.1	17.5
Moldova			2.1	4.8	8.9
Poland	1918	1980 - 23.0	9.6	13.0	13.0
Romania	1946	1985 - 34.4	3.6	4.1	7.3
Russian Fed	1918	1984 - 34.4	13.4		7.7
Slovakia	1920	1986 - 29.5	18.1	14.7	14.0
Slovenia	1945	1982 - 26.0	11	14.0	7.8

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva

most important resources - information, advanced technology, capital, property, and economic, cultural and political power. At the end of the 1980s, there were only six European countries with a long democratic tradition in which participation of women in parliament was over 20 per cent. In the past decade, there was a slow improvement in the political position of women. At the beginning of the new millennium, there are only ten countries with a long democratic tradition in which participation of women in parliament is over 20 per cent. But in all of these countries some steps were taken to improve the political representation of women.

In the transition countries the development has been in the opposite direction. In the countries of “really existing socialism”, at the end of the 1980s, the level of female participation in parliament was similar to that achieved in the Scandinavian countries. This was because the ruling Communist Parties had an equal-rights policy for women and had created a functioning quota system. The first democratic elections and the attack by ultra-conservative circles on women’s rights caught women unprepared.

Women realised too late that they had underestimated the importance of their strong representation in all areas of the one-party system. It took them even longer to realise that the ending of the quota system, justified by the claim that it has been a “false representation”, had been carried out against their interests. The end of the quota system had been demanded by right-wing conservatives who wanted women to return to their traditional role with respect to “children, the kitchen and the church” [the KKK of Nazi policy - trans]. As women lost their places in the parliaments of Central and Eastern Europe, these parliaments removed many of the “equal rights” measures that many in society had taken for granted - free education and health care systems, liberal abortion laws, a generous benefits system, publicly financed child care facilities, free meals in school and at the workplace, and so on. Women in the transition countries were forced to realise that the personal and the private were also political.

Step by step, women in the transition countries are beginning to make their political come-back. The re-awakening of political consciousness has gone through a number of stages:

- shock and disillusionment about the ease with which envy, aggression and cynicism were praised as “new democratic politics”;
- retreat to private survival strategies;
- the experience that, for the great majority of women, there were no such private survival strategies;
- strong involvement of women in NGOs;
- the experience that the efforts of women in civil society were limited to struggling against some of the worst conditions without overcoming the structural deficiencies of male-dominated politics;
- the experience that women could not penetrate the pure male sphere of politics but none the less needed to change the values,

Table 4. Women MPs in other European states

Country	women's right to vote	highest % women MPs before 1997 %	women MPs 1987-91 %	women MPs last election %
Finland	1906	1931 - 39	1991 - 39	1999 - 36.5
Sweden	1919/21	1994 - 40.4	1991 - 33.5	1998 - 42.7
Norway	1907-1913	1997 - 39.4	1989 - 35.8	1997 - 36.4
Denmark	1915	1994 - 33.5	1990 - 33	1998 - 37.4
Netherlands	1917-1919	1997 - 31.3	1989 - 25.3	1998 - 36.0
Belgium	1921-1948	1995 - 12	1991 - 9.4	1999 - 35.0
Britain	1918-1928	1997 - 9.5	1987 - 6.3	1997 - 18.4
France	1944	1988 - 6.9	1988 - 6.9	1997 - 10.9
Germany	1918	1994 - 26.2	1990 - 20.5	1998 - 30.9
Italy	1945	1994 - 15.1	1992 - 8.1	1996 - 11.1
Austria	1918	1997 - 26.8	1990 - 19.7	1999 - 26.8
Switzerland	1971	1996 - 21	1991 - 18	1999 - 23.0
Portugal	1931-34-76	1995 - 13	1991 - 8.7	1999 - 18.7
Spain	1931	1997 - 24.6	1989 - 14.6	2000 - 28.3
Ireland	1918-1928	1997 - 13.9	1989 - 10.0	1997 - 12.0
Greece	1952	1997 - 6.3	1990 - 5.3	1997 - 6.3

Source: IPU

priorities, methods and indeed the entire process of transition;

- the experience that, without a strong women's presence in the decision-making bodies (the critical mass is about 30 per cent), it is not possible to make strong alliances for a real change.

These stages were not gone through with the same speed and consistency in all the transition countries. The better the economic, social and political situation in a particular country, the less international support there was for women in their fight for social and political change.

How women lost their position in governments and in

parliaments, and the kind of struggles they have to wage, can be demonstrated in the case of Slovenia.

- Women in Slovenia constitute more than half of the electorate and a little less than half of the work force. In secondary schools and universities they are more successful than men.
- With their paid and unpaid labour, women in Slovenia create the major part of GDP. They work more and earn on average 13.5 per cent less.
- During the past ten years, politics in Slovenia was structurally hostile to women. The entire energy of the Slovenian women's movement was directed at the fight for the right to abortion, state-supported child-care centres and a fair pension system.
- No parliamentary party is led by a woman and no parliamentary party fights seriously for equal rights.
- In 1996 only seven women stood for election to parliament; all other election lists were filled by men. The United List of Social Democrats, the fourth biggest party in Slovenia, introduced a 40 per cent quota for women but, ironically, all nine MPs are men.
- The liberal prime minister, between 1996 and 1999, created an all-male cabinet.
- The proportion of women among official government representatives decreased by half in the past four years.
- The difference in average income between a male and female manager is around 36 per cent.

One would think that this would be enough to awaken the anger and solidarity of Slovenian women. In reality, there has been no serious political effort to unite women in Slovenia to fight for their political rights. The situation is similar in Poland and Hungary.

The bitterest lessons had to be learned by women in the Balkans, where the transition was set in motion by war. Women, who have suffered most in this conflict, learned very rapidly to shed their role as eternal victims and take control of their own destinies. They learned to rise above national, religious, state and trade union barriers, to unite in at least one political party and, with international assistance, to combine national alliances with supra-national unity. They learned this lesson in self-help groups for war victims. What began in the early 1990s as a humanitarian initiative developed, by 1995, when

the UN Women's Conference met in Beijing, into a highly political and successful attempt to ensure that rape carried out in the course of military conflict would in future be treated internationally as a war crime.

Following the Dayton Agreement and the free elections that followed, in which women won 3 per cent of the seats in parliament, women in Bosnia, with the support of the OSCE mission, have clearly understood that they have to fight for their share of political power if they are to live in freedom with democracy and social justice. And today women in Bosnia have some made some significant advances:

- electoral law, at both local and national level, requires 30 per cent of all party lists to be women;
- Bosnia-Herzegovina has the highest proportion of women parliamentarians among all the transition countries (26 per cent);
- In the local elections of May 2000, Bosnia-Herzegovina had the highest proportion of women on electoral lists in its history.

Since January 2000, 21 per cent of MPs in Croatia are women, with three women ministers in the new government. A similar strategy was successful in bringing more women into parliament in recent elections in Macedonia, Estonia and Lithuania.

Building on this success, more than 150 women's organisations from ten countries met at the beginning of the negotiations around the Stability Pact in July 1999 and formed a group to promote women's interests. This was the first time that such a group was integrated from the beginning into an international project. It is proof that women in this region have given up their role as victims and have become fighters for democratic and social change. ●

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Stephen Day

From Social Democracy of the Polish Republic (SdRP) to Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)

Introduction

As Poland heads towards the next scheduled elections of 2001, the newly formed Partia SLD (Democratic Left Alliance - SLD) remains consistently ahead of its nearest rival, the incumbent Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność (Solidarity Electoral Action - AWS). At times the poll ratings have topped 40 per cent, a post-1989 record for any political party. Such levels of support are not only the result of the political turmoil connected with the governing AWS-UW coalition, it is also because of the declining levels of distrust and fear associated with the ex-Communist SdRP. This article examines the transformation of the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (Socjaldemokracja Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej - SdRP) to the party Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej - SLD).

The electoral/ legal/constitutional argument

The evolution of the Polish party system (1990-99) has brought with it a considerable refinement of the rules affecting political parties.

These legal developments have either necessitated or recognised the need for an effective and efficient party organisation. Institutionally, the new Constitution (1997) and the new law on political parties, which came into effect in 1998, had the aim of situating parties at the heart of the democratic system and strengthening the democratisation of political culture in Poland. Article 11, Clause 1, of the constitution, for example, reads:

The republic of Poland shall ensure freedom for the creation and functioning of political parties. Political parties shall be founded on the principle of voluntariness and upon the equality of Polish citizens, and their purpose shall be to influence the formulation of the policy of the State by democratic means.

In terms of the law on political parties, unlike the eight articles of the 1990 law, the extensively revised law has sixty-four.¹ The law deals with issues such as the registration procedures for a political party, participation of parties in public life, party structures and principles of action, party finance and the procedures for the banning and liquidation of a party.² The new law also clarified the position of state subsidies which it was hoped would make parties less vulnerable to different group interests and corruption, as well as enabling them to fulfil their public duties instead of focusing their efforts on acquiring funds.³

The new Constitution confronted the party-system with an interesting legal question. Article 100, Clause 1 states that, "Candidates for Deputies and Senators may be nominated by political parties or voters".⁴ Thus the bloc-structure of the electoral committee SLD and the AWS could well be deemed ineligible to put forward candidates at the next election. It was this factor that gave a considerable thrust to those supporting the idea of a Partia SLD.

Similarly, the debate on the new electoral system, which is presently before the Parliament will also be crucial for the Union of Freedom (UW) and the Polish Peasants' Party (PSL), in relation to the number of elected deputies in each multi-member constituency, and hence the future developments of the Polish political system.

The need for organisational change

Any type of political party requires an organisational structure that is capable of: firstly translating its orientation into a connection with the voters and secondly effectively co-ordinating itself during a time of government or opposition. The desire on the part of the leadership of the SdRP for such an organisational structure was a fundamental trigger for change.

In 1990, the formation of the SdRP arose out of an identity crisis of the PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party). In 1999, the formation of the SLD arose not from a crisis but rather from a desire to overcome many of the organisational difficulties experienced during its time in office and opposition, difficulties associated with the federative nature of the SLD. Additionally, the election of Leszek Miller as SdRP leader in December 1997, whose desire to bring a sense of order into the internal life of the party and whose support for a single party entity had been well publicised, proved decisive. Six months earlier he had stressed his support for a democratic system based on parties rather than electoral blocs:

Parties have a clear cut programme, a given set of principles regulating the election and moreover its parliamentary caucus and party itself have to be one. As far as the SLD is concerned this is a construction that consists of numerous political groupings and there is always some kind of additional problems... The programme of such a coalitional political group is always less clear because it always has to reflect the interests of many subjects.⁵

The electoral coalition SLD which was established on 16 July 1991 brought together a number of different organisations under the umbrella of a broad leftist movement. This enabled organisations, which would have found it extremely difficult to have joined the SdRP, to maintain their own identity and integrity.⁶

Among both opponents and supporters alike of a single entity there was considerable agreement that a number of the 33 collegiate groups (32 following the departure of the Association of Polish Communists "Proletariat" - ZKPP) within the SLD had become a liability because of the numerous empty promises that they had made

during the 1993 electoral campaign, as well as their inability to mobilise support during the 1997 campaign. Much of this criticism was primarily aimed at the trade unions who, it was argued, had too much representation in proportion to their contribution. According to Marek Borowski, a leading figure within the SdRP:

A federation did not work out in terms of a party of power because of certain internal disagreements which hampered the functioning of the government. The SLD as a party wants to speak with one voice...⁷

Thus from the leadership perspective, a single party rather than a federative bloc would be much easier to manage, enabling a pragmatic and 'professional' approach to politics. Marek Borowski, in an interview conducted after the 1997 election, said,

The sooner we understand that the job of politics is for professionals, the better for us. The time of national uprising is over, what counts is professionalism.⁸

Continuing co-ordination difficulties between the SdRP authorities and those elected on the SLD lists also emerged following the 1998 local elections. Much of this stemmed from the fact that only approximately 17,000 of the 50,000 candidates fielded by the SLD were members of the SdRP, in spite of the fact that the SdRP was by far the biggest party. In addition to these problems of co-ordination it was also felt that the SdRP, as a vehicle of the left, had reached a point where change was unavoidable. The nature of the problem had already been highlighted in 1992 during the Second National Convention, where it was recognised that the party had yet to capitalise '...on all of its possibilities of influencing social life and strengthening its position as a formation of the Polish left.' The resolution went on:

Its membership and scope of influence, including the scope of electoral backing, do not fully reflect a shift in social moods and sympathy in the direction of goals and values of the left.⁹

Despite the obvious electoral successes from 1991 to 1997

(11.99 per cent in 1991, 20.4 per cent in 1993 and 27.13 per cent in 1997), in terms of an increasing share of the vote, conditions at the end of the 1990s necessitated change.

Change, of course, is never a straightforward process, not least because of an inner resistance usually stemming from a fear that such change would dilute the party's ideological identity and enable the imposition of an increasingly centralised control. Jakub Rzekanowski argued that it was simply too early and would lead to a social-liberal force that was even more removed from the working class:

...making a single party would be rational if our left was strong enough ideologically and if it knew what it wants (apart from taking power) but the Polish left is not strong enough ideologically.¹⁰

Establishing the Democratic Left Alliance (Partia SLD)

The momentum for a single entity was unstoppable and in April 1999, at a Supreme Council meeting of the SdRP, it was decided that the SLD would be formed as a unified party. On 26 April 1999 the formal documents needed for registration were submitted to the Warsaw Court. The registration was approved on 17 May. Parliamentarians and 29 members representing the founding groups met as the interim National Council to establish a body that would appoint the party authorities and prepare the new party for its first Congress in December 1999.

At the Fourth Congress of the SdRP, 16 June 1999, the delegates voted to dissolve the party. "The delegates", according to Mariusz Janicki, "approved the option of the leadership that the mission of the SdRP had been achieved and that there was a need for a new opening under the SLD banner."¹¹ At the Congress 275 delegates voted in favour of dissolution with two abstentions and one against. On 1 July 1999 Leszek Miller was selected as the provisional leader with the support of 174 out of 179 members of the SLD National Council. The vice-chair was Stanisław Janasa from the All-Poland Trade Union Alliance (OPZZ).¹² It was decided that the party would be led by a provisional council until the First National Congress in December 1999. The outcome of programmatic deliberations would

also be finalised during the First Congress.

The new party has been initially joined by 182 out of the 192 deputies and senators of the Parliamentary Club of the SLD.¹³ The deputies and senators of the PPS, as well as Jozef Wiaderny (leader of the OPZZ) and a number of deputies associated with the Movement of Working People (RLP) decided not to join (although it is likely that the PPS will return at some stage prior to the next election). Many of them believed that the new party would soon be overrun by social-liberals who would lead the party into the arms of the liberal Union of Freedom (UW). Piotr Ikonowicz, PPS leader, complained that the party would be pushed into a liberal dead-end.

Right and left critique

Right-wing opponents of the SLD/SdRP and authors such as Voytek Zubek and Wojciech Roszkowski claim that the establishment of the Partia SLD is merely another attempt to blur the connection with the PZPR. Zubek said of the formation of the SdRP that:

While Poland's left portrays itself as the carrier of values of Western social-democracy, philosophically Poland's left is rooted in Leninism, Stalinism and post-Stalinism... Consequently, Poland's left will lead the Polish transformation not in the direction of the Swedish or Spanish model but towards a traditional Latin American statist model.¹⁴

By tying itself to the belief that the successor party of the old PZPR remains incapable of reform - 'once a Communist always a Communist' - the right ignores the impact of environmental change, generational change or the membership of former UW members such as Andrzej Celiński and Katarzyna Piekarska. But Zubek and newspapers such as *Gazeta Polska* continue with this line of criticism.

A more sophisticated critique claims that the party is merely a party of power, i.e. a pragmatic vehicle devoid of ideology. This is the view of Ryszard Bugaj, former leader of the Union of Labour (UP). He claims that the 'SLD is a strongly consolidated party of power, under the efficient control of a leadership that stems from the hard core of the PZPR apparatus and the well-functioning nomenklatura.'¹⁵

Another source of criticism is the issue of party debts. This is the spectre of 'Moscow money', where the PZPR initially borrowed \$1.2 million dollars from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. When they returned 600,000 dollars in November 1990, Leszek Miller and Rakowski were charged with currency fraud. The question of PZPR assets also continues to remain problematic. Under terms drawn up in February 1991, the SdRP was entitled to retain those assets which stemmed from the PZPR membership fees. In 1997, during the SLD-PSL government, the SdRP signed a contract with the Ministry of Finance which obliged it to pay 4.5 million zloty. According to the SdRP treasurer, Edward Kuczura,

We made a deal with the parliamentary commission of Mr Ambroszek under the Mazowiecki government. On that basis, we submitted to the state treasury 96 per cent of our assets, and 11 buildings... We paid back the cash which the PZPR borrowed for the 1989 elections. We also had to fulfil the requirements of 20,000 employees who left the PZPR apparatus.¹⁶

In June 1999, the remaining 2.5 million zloty was paid off prior to the Fourth Congress of the SdRP. The PZPR liquidator, Andrzej Herman, however, said that this still left unresolved the issue of the \$7.5 million dollars in hard currency in the PZPR accounts which was, according to him, illegally taken over by the SdRP.¹⁷ This argument will continue.

But this criticism of the SdRP has less resonance as time goes by. At a time when all parties are facing increasing criticism, the SLD remains the least unliked of all and the number of people thinking it unfit for government has declined from 23 per cent in 1996 to 18 per cent in 1999, according to a poll in *Gazeta Wyborcza* on 2 August 1999.

From the SdRP to the partia SLD

The founders of the SdRP faced two problems - how to create a social democratic-type party and how organisationally to preserve the interests and identity of a given social milieu. Such a scenario was well recognised by reformists such as SdRP leader, Aleksander

Kwaśniewski, who for example argued that,

It is a political fact that this newly emerging party consists of people with PZPR roots and it is not possible to find out who is a genuine social-democrat and who is still a party apparatchik. I believe we have to be tolerant and show our understanding of this problem and at the same time we have to set up clear limits which cannot be violated.¹⁸

He was well aware that the emergence of political parties in Poland was taking place on the basis of biographies rather than commonly shared values. Indeed, he saw the first free elections (October 1991) as an experience that would not result in a parliament along Western European lines but rather one in which political parties would have the opportunity to achieve political maturity and self-awareness.¹⁹

For Tadeusz Fiszbach, however, this broad nature of the SdRP was the main reason why he left to form the Polish Social Democratic Union (PUS). As Fiszbach explained at the time,

There is not much difference, as far as the party programme is concerned. The two parties have more in common than initially meets the eye. The point is that we don't want to sit in the same room with people who belonged to the same party but, at the same time, represented completely different views.²⁰

For the reformers, within the SdRP, their desire to transform the internal political culture of the party was about putting themselves firmly in the driving seat. This goal though had to contend with structural inertia, particularly at the local level, and with the actions of political opponents who, in seeking to marginalise the SdRP between 1990-1993, brought about a defensive reaction.

Thus from an organisational and philosophical perspective the SdRP represented a safe haven for some while for others it represented the possibilities of a new social-democratic formation. Under such circumstances the party remained open to attack.

Taking such experiences into account, the newly formed *partia SLD* sought firstly to broaden its base beyond those connected with the SdRP, to include trade unionists (who largely remained absent from the SdRP) and those local government delegates who were elected

on the SLD lists in October 1998.²¹ Secondly it also sought, as a major priority, to secure the support of young people, thereby bringing about a rejuvenation of the party and enabling a new generation of figures to prepare to enter the front line of the Polish left early in the next century. It also appealed to those who hold leftist values but were not prepared to join the SdRP. The new party is also trying to overcome the historical barriers as well as the anti-clerical image of the SdRP. According to Miller,

It is important to abandon the label of an anti-clerical party and the stereotype that whoever votes left wants to fight with the Church. I am convinced that this will change in the near future.²²

Of course it remains to be seen what type of party the SLD is going to become. Piotr Gardinska from *NIE* pointed out that ‘the people on the temporary Executive Council do not reflect the small groups of the SLD’. He argued that the new party of the left is moving towards the formation of a strong centralised authority that ignores its base.²³ Structurally, the party has established 16 Voivodship Co-ordination Groups to correspond with the country’s new regional set-up. These are made up of three co-ordinators: one former SdRP, one OPZZ and one woman. The fact that the women tend to be young, inexperienced and ‘attractive’ has triggered protest among many activists who see them as leadership stooges.²⁴

Whatever the final outcome of change, the initial result has been that the party has dramatically increased its support. A poll carried out by PBS in November 1999 gave the SLD 43 per cent compared to 21 per cent for the AWS and 10 per cent for the UW.²⁵ Such increasing social support is probably the single most important factor in helping Miller overcome the barriers to change.

Social support for the new party

At the close of 1999, the SLD finds itself with a public opinion rating well above its 1997 election result and with a significant increase in trust compared to 1996. When asked if the party was honest three years ago 50 per cent said no; in 1999 that figure had declined to 38 per cent.²⁶ The issue is how to build on this support and consolidate

it. From the perspective of Gregorz Drzycimski,

The left needs successful people who are able to understand the needs of others. The left needs people who represent different social strata, who advocate different outlooks...One has to pay attention to individualism and self-fulfilment. This is what is lacking in the program, manner of thought and mentality of the Polish left.²⁷

Others, such as Piotr Ikonowicz, argue that the left should focus upon the working class but up to now the latter have been marginal.

Considerable interest was generated by the fact that Andrzej Celiński, a former founder member of KOR (Workers' Defence Committee), Solidarity activist, and deputy and vice-chair of the Freedom Union (UW), announced that he was going to join the newly established SLD in July 1999. Celiński cited the party's adherence to European values and its tolerance towards others as reasons for joining and he called upon anyone with leftist values to join the party as well.²⁸

The SLD and European Social-Democracy

At the end of the twentieth century social-democracy was in a state of flux. Social Democracy in Britain and elsewhere is calling into question the techniques that it traditionally relied upon (state intervention in both the socio-cultural and economic spheres, Keynesian demand management and corporatism) and the goals to which it traditionally aspired, described now as a state-oriented outcome in which 'individuals became clients of the state rather than autonomous citizens, passive recipients rather than active co-operators with each other.'²⁹ Today, the major elements of the debate can be found within two recent documents: the 1999 Party of European Socialists (PES) Manifesto and the Blair-Schröder Declaration.³⁰

The Blair-Schröder Declaration was issued in June 1999. This was an attempt to give the 'third way' or 'neue Mitte' (new centre) a programmatic basis. Much is made of an approach without ideological preconceptions, one that benefits both winners and losers, one that offers practical and pragmatic solutions, one where there are no rights without responsibilities. The core of the declaration concerns economic

modernisation.

Product, capital and labour markets must all be flexible; we must not combine rigidity in one part of the economic system with openness and dynamism in the rest...A framework that allows market forces to work properly is essential to economic success and a precondition of a more successful employment policy.

The 1999 election manifesto of the PES set forth 21 commitments that “reflect our shared values as socialists and social democrats.” The Manifesto promised “to strengthen the European social model” and to “develop a more effective global governance through reformed international institutions and a better regulated financial system”.³¹

What about the SLD?

In developing its identity in this international context, the SLD looked to the historical and post-Solidarity elements of the Polish left as well as the international family of social-democracy. In terms of the former, the party attempted to draw upon the long and successful socialist/social-democratic tradition of the PPS. In relation to the wider international social-democratic family it was during the Second Congress that the first tentative moves for membership in the Socialist International were made by Aleksander Kwaśniewski:

The SdRP understands the moral obligations of the Socialist International towards historical political parties, which were not allowed to act after 1945. We appreciate this and we are of the opinion that this is a very moral stance from the point of view of the parties of Western Europe. But we do not understand why so many Western parties maintain a passiveness and carefulness in their contacts with us as with the parties ruling in our countries before 1989. In our view this is an unjustified stance and one that greatly threatens the future of the left. The true left exists in Europe in various parties, also in such parties as ours - in parties like the SdRP.³²

The first formal approach was initiated by the Third National

Convention (23 April 1994) where a resolution was passed which expressed the party's desire to become a full-member of the SI. The role of the PPS (which already had strong contacts within the SI and was at this stage a member of SLD), as well as increasing contacts with successor parties from across central Europe, particularly the Hungarian MSZP and the Slovak SDL, did much to alter attitudes within the SI towards the SdRP.

By 1994 the SdRP was receiving the backing of other major European members within the SI, including Italy and Spain, which balanced out the continuing reluctance of the German Social Democrats (SPD) and the Labour Party. Full membership status was granted in November 1996 at the Twentieth Congress of the SI and the final seal of approval came in December 1997 when Luis Ayala (General Secretary of the SI) addressed the party Congress and stated that the SdRP espoused the same values as those of the SI. In a subsequent interview, he stated that:

We are convinced that the Polish parties of the left, including the SdRP, have matured sufficiently to participate in the process of creating the new face of Europe.³³

To what extent will the Polish debate be influenced by either the Blair-Schröder Declaration or the Manifesto of the PES remains to be seen. The PES Manifesto is generally closer to the thinking of Lionel Jospin. It expresses a desire to exercise some control over global capitalism and is much more assertive than the Blair-Schröder line.

There is certainly a strong desire on the part of the Polish left to engage in this debate - from both an international perspective, so that it is seen to be involved, as well as from an intra-party perspective in terms of the precise nature of the party programme. To date Miller has made use of the Jospin-style slogan: 'Yes to a market economy, no to a market society'. He has also said that:

The founding fathers of the new political left must be aware that they face a difficult task. It is not enough to announce that the SLD is a single party. It is necessary to work out a meritocratic programme that would define the party...The

majority of Polish society yearns for social justice. The SLD can count on wider social support if it responds to this sentiment with a concrete programme that is free from the spirit of neo-liberalism.³⁴

Conclusion

The formation of the federative SLD in 1991 was very much a product of its time, an umbrella of left-oriented forces seeking collective strength. Although it failed to bring together all of the various left currents, it nevertheless represented a considerable achievement. However, the hostile environment in which the ex-Communist SdRP was evolving resulted in a defensive 'closing of ranks' mentality which inhibited the creative process of transforming the internal political culture of the party. This led to continuing suspicion, both domestically and internationally, at a time when the ex-Communist Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP) was already being well received at international forums.

At the end of August 2000, the Partia SLD is the strongest left-of-centre force in Poland, a full member of the Socialist International (SI) with observer status at the Party of European Socialists (PES). Domestically, the party is riding high in the public opinion polls with some 45 per cent of popular support, has a membership of some 64,000, has been able to attract someone of the calibre of Celiński from the Union of Freedom.

The new SLD represents an organisational renewal which has brought in new personnel and new ways of doing things. The formation of the SLD is at least another step forward in changing the internal political culture of the party. However, if the party wishes to go further than merely reaping the temporary benefits of the unpopularity of the present government, then it has to pay more attention to cultivating a reservoir of support. This means securing, and maintaining, the votes of the centrists whose views have yet to crystallise, who remain disappointed by the right but lack the confidence to vote for the left. In that sense a new quality and a new formation, particularly one that is able to draw the UP closer, could provide the stimulus that such an electorate requires. Merely catching

the outcome of the disarray of the policies of the present government is not enough; there needs to be an answer to the question, what is a social-democratic party under Polish conditions.

Notes

1 See “Ustawa z dnia 27 czerwca 1997 r. o partiach politycznych”, *Dziennik Ustaw*, nr 89, poz.604.

2 “Wykaz Partii Politycznych wpisanych do ewidencji w Sądzie Wojewódzkim w Warszawie”, document (new register) obtained by the author. See also ‘Koniec z partyjną fikcją’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 2 January 1998, p.2. The most immediate and visible change of the new party law was an end to the registration procedure requiring only 15 signatures. This had resulted in a party register of over 350 parties by the end of 1997 - many of which had a double registration or had ceased to exist . The new requirement of 1000 signatures meant that at the beginning of 1998 the register had shrunk to 63 parties. Draft bills put forward by both the PSL and the SLD, in 1994, advocated a figure of 10,000, but this was ultimately rejected because of its infringement upon the right of freedom of association.

3 The question of subsidies during the bill’s second reading established a ‘purpose grant’ (amounting to 60 per cent of the overall reimbursement) for money used for day to day activities according to the party’s statutes and a ‘subject subsidy’ for the costs incurred at election time. The former would be granted to those gaining at least 3 per cent of the vote (and would be reflected in the state budget) and the latter to any party gaining at least one seat in the Sejm or Senate

4 *The Constitution of the Republic of Poland*, (Warsaw: Sejm Publishing Office, 1997).

5 See ‘SLD jak Coca-cola’ an interview with Leszek Miller, *Rzeczpospolita*, 15, April, 1997, p.3.

6 The aim was to bring forces together united around a core set of beliefs: the role of the secular state; its attitude towards the Catholic Church; economic priorities; social policy; women’s rights; policy towards the family; social dialogue; privatisation and foreign policy. According to Aleksander Kwaśniewski, co-operation was not about establishing an SdRP hegemony: “We emphasised many times, when

we proposed a dialogue with other forces on the Polish left, that we don't aim at having a monopoly on the Polish left. We do not proclaim that we have all the answers." Interview with Kwaśniewski in *Mysł Socjaldemokratyczne*, p.14. The invitation, though, was initially spurned by both independent and post-Solidarity forces - including for example the Polish Socialist Party, the social-democratic group (RDS) around Zbigniew Bujak, and Labour Solidarity led by Karol Modzelewski and Ryszard Bugaj.

7 'SLD w przemianach, przemiany w SLD', Interview with Marek Borowski in *Mysł Socjaldemokratyczna*, nr2/99, pp.27-33.

8 See 'Polityka jest dla profesjonalistów', *Trybuna*, 26 September, 1997. It is clear that many of the major emerging parties, in a bid to enhance their credibility, have marketed themselves as experts. The government of Jan Bielecki (January-December 1991) was considered a government of experts and both the UW and SdRP have been referred to as parties of professionals.

9 See 'The Key Directions of Activities of the SdRP and its Links', in *Programmatic documents of the II National Convention of the SdRP*, February 15, 1992.

10 Jakub Rzekanowski, 'Jednak koalicja lewicy', *Trybuna*, 2 December, 1998, p.11.

11 Mariusz Janicki, 'Likwidacja według planu', *Polityka*, nr 26, 26 June, 1999, p.28.

12 For a brief introduction of the OPZZ see 'OPZZ in 1998: what is it like?' <http://www.opzz.org.pl/opzz/new/0005.htm>.

13 These figures come from 'Miller bez konkurencji', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2 July, 1999, p.4.

14 See Voytek Zubek, 'The Reassertion of the Left in Post-communist Poland', *Europe-Asia Studies*, No. 5, 1994, p. 831.

15 'Powrót kierowniczej siły', *Rzeczpospolita*, 2 Aug 1999, p. A9.

16 See Jacek Mojkowski and Piotr Pytlakowski, 'Rachunek otwarty', *Polityka*, 14 March, 1998, p. 24.

17 See 'Sojusz partia', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 16 June, 1999, p.10. See also 'Życie po SdRP: Sojusz nie ten sam, ale taki sam?', *Wprost*, 27 June, 1999, pp.24-25.

18 'Możemy się dogadać', interview with Aleksander Kwaśniewski, *Polityka*, 3 February 1990, p.6.

- 19 See 'Dylematy polskiej sceny politycznej', an interview with Aleksander Kwaśniewski in, *Myśl socjaldemokratyczna*, No. 1, 1991, p. 9.
- 20 Interview with Tadeusz Fiszbach, *Polityka*, 3 Feb 1990.
- 21 See 'Nie jesteśmy strażnikami świętego ognia', *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, 16 June, 1999, p.3.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 See 'Jak sięrodzi nowe SLD', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 30 June, 1999, p.4.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 This came on top of a Pentor poll of October 1999 that put the SLD on 42 per cent, the AWS 18 per cent and 11per cent for the UW. A CBOS poll at the same time was a little less dramatic with figures of 31, 20 and 10 respectively. See 'Preferencje wyborcze' <http://www.kpsld.4net.pl/cgi-sld/sondaz.pl>
- 26 See the CBOS survey in *Trybuna*, 2 August, 1999, p.3.
- 27 Grzegorz Drzycimski, 'Nowa Lewica', *Dziś*, nr. 6, 1999, p. 130.
- 28 See 'Former Opposition Activist Joins SLD', *The Warsaw Voice*, 1 August, 1999, p.6.
- 29 Peter Hain 'Rediscovering our libertarian roots', *The Chartist*, July/August 1999, pp.25-6.
- 30 This was published in Polish as 'Manifest socjaldemokratyczny', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, July 10-11, 1999, pp.9-11. For a particular view on what has become known as the 'Third Way debate' see Ralf Dahrendorf, 'Kwadratura Trzeciej Drogi', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, July 17-18, 1999, pp.12-13.
- 31 See 'Dwadzieścia jeden zobowiązań na XXI wiek: Manifest Europejskiej Partii Socjalistów przyjęty w Mediolanie 2 marca 1999r.' *Myśl Socjaldemokratyczna*, See also the PES website: http://www.eurosocialists.org/election/en/1a_content.htm
- 32 Address by party Chairman Aleksander Kwaśniewski to the Second Congress, March 21-23, 1993. Manuscript given to author.
- 33 See an interview with Luis Ayala, 'Wizja zbliżenia ludzi', *Przegląd tygodniowy*, 31 December, 1997, p.12.
- 34 Mieczysław Rakowski, 'Powodzenia', *Trybuna*, 19-20 June, 1999, p.12.

Urszula Lugowska

The Polish Socialist Party and the Radical Left in Poland

The electoral coalition, Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) recently transformed itself into a party with hopes of winning the upcoming parliamentary elections. The Polish Socialist Party (PPS), for many years a member of this left-wing electoral alliance, hung on to its independence, developed its own more radical discourse and is now presenting itself as an alternative to the SLD. The radical left as well is making its presence felt in Poland as the election approaches.

In the 1990s, there were two currents in the Polish parliamentary left. One of these currents was the SLD (*Soyusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*), the political core of which was the social democratic party of the ex-Communists, the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (*Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej - SdRP*). The SLD was in government between 1993 and 1997. The SLD candidate, Aleksander Kwasniewski, was elected president in 1995. In December 1999 this electoral alliance became a political party. Opinion polls suggest that the SLD stands a good chance of winning the next election. It currently has the support of around 30 per cent of the electorate.

The other current, with its background in Solidarity, was the

social democratic Union of Labour (Unia Pracy - UP). In the 1997 election Unia Pracy won only 4.7 per cent of the vote and, because of the 5-per-cent hurdle, didn't gain any seats in parliament. This electoral set-back severely weakened the UP which, up to then, had 41 seats in the Polish parliament. After 1997, the future of Unia Pracy seemed very uncertain.

The Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna - PPS) was a bridge between both these currents. In 1991 the PPS went into the elections in a coalition with Unia Pracy which, at that time, was known as Labour Solidarity (Solidarnosc Pracy), but failed to win any seats. In the elections of 1993 and 1997, the PPS entered the electoral alliance SLD and won seats. In the recent period there has been a noticeable radicalisation of the PPS, adding a new quality to the Polish political scenario. Recent statements from the party leader, Piotr Ikonowicz, suggest that he wants to position the PPS as a left alternative to the SLD.

Something new on the Polish left

Following the May events in Warsaw, Ikonowicz was openly critical of the political and social situation in Poland. His criticism was directed not just against the right-wing governing coalition but also against the main opposition party, the SLD. Ikonowicz accused the SLD of betraying the interests of the working class by defending the same neo-liberal policies as the conservative government. None of the governments that had been in power since 1989, including the SLD government, had governed in the interests of the working population but in the interests of capital. Ikonowicz proclaimed that his party would stand alone in the next election, not entering into coalition with any other party. In his speech, Ikonowicz frequently directed his attack at the capitalist system itself and this is indeed something new in Polish politics; since 1989 no Polish politician has taken a public stand against capitalism.

These statements from Ikonowicz have awakened media interest in the PPS and in the whole radical left scene in Poland. The leaders of the SLD, who have been confidently awaiting victory in next year's election, have been somewhat irritated by Ikonowicz's remarks because they open up the possibility of a split in the left vote

and the creation of a left alternative to the neo-liberal course of the SLD. Izabella Sierakowska, a member of the SLD presidium, expressed the concern of the party leadership:

I am certain that the left will go into the elections united. I am concerned about this statement of Piotr Ikonowicz that the PPS will stand alone in the election. If the left wants to win this election, for the wellbeing of the people and in the interests of progress in our country, then it has to stand united: the PPS, SLD, UP, PeiR [Partia Emerytów i Rencistów - Pensioners Party], RLP [Ruch Ludzi Pracy - Movement of Working People]. I am confident that our leadership bodies will be united. We can't waste a single left vote. We on the left shouldn't campaign against each other. It is only by standing together that we can achieve a lot. (*Trybuna*, 2/3 May 2000)

For a close observer of Polish politics, this project of the PPS to go it alone in the elections will come as no surprise. The media as well as conservative politicians have always portrayed Ikonowicz as the representative of the most radical wing of the SLD. At the time of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, Ikonowicz tried to persuade the SLD to condemn the NATO attack. Having failed in this attempt, he then collected the signatures of 119 MPs from the SLD and the PSL (Polish Peasant Party) calling for a "limited truce", an initiative that met with little enthusiasm from the SLD leadership.

At the time of the debate over re-privatisation (the return to private ownership of estates nationalised after the Second World War), he was the only politician to argue for a more limited privatisation. In his statement to Parliament in October 1999, he declared that

the majority of the people can not be made to pay compensation to a minority whose only distinctive characteristic was the fact that they enjoyed the privileges of private ownership in the previous system and only in this respect were affected by Communism.

An MP from the governing AWS coalition, Marcin Libicki, responded with the comment that Ikonowicz spoke about the previous property owners with the language of Stalinist propaganda from the

1950s (*Rzeczpospolita*, 7 Oct 1999).

Piotr Ikonowicz was strongly opposed to the transformation of the SLD into a party. His main reasons for opposing this move, in spite of appearances to the contrary, have little to do with political differences between his party and the previous SdRP. In reality, these differences are not so great. Ikonowicz's recent anti-capitalist statements need to be seen more as a tactical manoeuvre, especially in the light of his strong support for Polish entry into the EU on the grounds that the EU would fulfil socialist ideals. His hostility to NATO is also not so total: at the time of the vote on Polish entry, Ikonowicz abstained while the majority of PPS MPs voted in favour. The only MPs to vote against were from the far right.

The real issue at stake here is whether a dissolution of the PPS and its integration into the *partia* SLD would have the effect of marginalising Ikonowicz. The structure of the old SLD electoral coalition allowed the small parties to play an important role. Ikonowicz was a member of the SLP presidium, for instance. In the new *partia* SLD, this may no longer be possible.

There is also the fact that the PPS has a long political tradition. It has existed since 1893. This has some advantages and it is something that Ikonowicz doesn't want to lose. The leadership of the new *partia* SLD, especially Leszek Miller, has very little interest in an electoral coalition with an independent PPS. The reason for this has to do with how the SLD sees its own future as a party in government: at the moment, it appears to be preparing for a coalition with the liberal Union of Freedom (UW) and it doesn't want to antagonise its future coalition partner with the radical rhetoric of Ikonowicz.

Who is the PPS?

Before the Second World War, the PPS was the biggest workers' party in Poland. In December 1948, in accordance with Soviet plans, it was merged with the Polish Communist Party (*Polska Partia Robotnicza* - PRP) to form the Polish United Workers Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza* - PZPR). The PPS continued to exist in exile, its headquarters in London. In 1987, the left wing of Solidarity (still illegal) decided to rebuild the PPS. Internal differences, however, soon led to a split. The (moderate) PPS was led by Józef Lipinski. The

PPS - Democratic Revolution (PPS - Rewolucja Demokratyczna PPS-RD) was led by two people - the charismatic Solidarity leader from Lower Silesia, Jozef Pinior, and the less well known Piotr Ikonowicz from Warsaw.¹ The PPS-RD was denounced as ultra-left and "Trotskyist". Ikonowicz had translated a number of Trotskyist works into Polish, for instance, some of the writings of Ernest Mandel, and had taken part in a number of Trotskyist conferences.

In reality, the PPS-RD was a broad left organisation, with a number of different currents - social democrats, pacifists, libertarian trade unionists and Trotskyists. This was the period in which a large number of political parties were being formed in Poland and party programmes were still rather loosely formulated. In general, the programmatic vision of the PPS-RD was based on its principle of self-management.

In 1989, the PPS led by Lipsky supported the Round Table Agreement between the government and opposition. In return, Lipsky was guaranteed a seat in the new parliament to be elected on 4 June 1989. The PPS-RD opposed the Round Table Agreement and questioned the democratic character of the coming election - only 35 per cent of members in the Polish parliament could be freely elected in that first election [65 per cent of seats in the Sejm, the lower chamber, were reserved for the Communist Party. ed]. The PPS-RD also demanded that the Communist nomenklatura be called to account for its actions. It accused the Solidarity leadership of doing a deal with the nomenklatura in order to share in power and of betraying the Polish working class. The PPS-RD strategy of building a political alliance in opposition to the Round Table Agreement failed and the party was considerably weakened by these events.

The London-based PPS, led by a veteran of the socialist movement, Lidia Ciolkoszowa, proposed a fusion of the two wings of the party which would exclude the most radical members of PPS-RD. This then happened: the Trotskyists around Jozef Pinior were expelled in 1990 and PPS and PPS-RD were re-united under Jozef Lipsky. When Lipsky died in September 1991, Piotr Ikonowicz was

1. The "Programmatic Platform" of the PPS-RD was published in *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, No. 1, 1990.

elected as new party leader.

The radical left expelled from the PPS-RD regrouped themselves in two organisations: the Socialist Political Centre (Socjalistyczny Ośrodek Polityczny - SOP) in Wrocław (Józef Pinior) and the Revolutionary Left Current (Nurt Lewicy Rewolucyjnej - NLR) in Warsaw, Katowice and Kielce. The SOP was never very active; Pinior dedicated himself to academic research and later became a member of the leadership of the Union of Labour (UP). The NLR went on to become the most prominent group on the Polish radical left in the 1990s.

The PPS, although it entered parliament, remained on the margins of political life in Poland. The left electorate was drawn either to the SdRP or later to the Union of Labour. Following the electoral debacle of 1991, the PPS decided to end its critical opposition to the post-Communist SLD and became a partner in the coalition. Following the 1993 elections which brought the SLD to power, the PPS was given three seats in the lower house. In 1994, however, the PPS disagreed with the SLD budget and left the coalition. For the 1997 election, the PPS again joined the SLD coalition and was given five seats in both chambers of parliament - the Senate and the Sejm.

In June 2000 the PPS presidium decided that Piotr Ikonowicz should stand in the presidential elections in the autumn. Twenty-five members of the presidium voted for this, ten voted against and wanted the PPS to support the SLD candidate, Aleksander Kwasniewski. The SLD condemned the Ikonowicz candidacy as an attempt to split the left but it will, no doubt, promote the image of the PPS as a left alternative to the SLD.

In analysing this decision of the PPS to stand independently against the SLD, there are four factors that have to be borne in mind. Firstly, there is the desire of the PPS to change its image. Secondly, the impoverishment of a large part of Polish society could generate support for a new anti-capitalist politics. According to recent statistics, over 51 per cent of the Polish population live below the poverty line. Unemployment is officially 13.9 per cent. In a recent poll organised by the polling institute, OBOP, 56 per cent described the "Gierek years" [Gierek was Communist Party leader 1971-1980] as "the best years of their life", which was probably why they voted for the SLD

as successor party of the old CP and not for the less well known PPS. Thirdly, it is impossible, on the basis of the last election, to estimate the level of support for the PPS because it was part of the SLD coalition. Finally, the party has a very small membership; official party figures put the membership at 7,000. Many of the PPS elected representatives in local government are now joining the SLD. Local politicians often prefer to be in a party that has some prospect of control over the levers of power.

The PPS youth organisation

The idea for a change of strategy came from the youth organisation of the party (Organizacja Młodzieżowa - OM) which has always had a more radical rhetoric than the PPS itself. Its radicalism consists mainly in the use of the more revolutionary symbolism of Western youth organisations - they carry posters of Che Guevara and chant slogans such as "Ho Chi Min" or "Down with the Cuba blockade" on demonstrations. They threw a stink bomb at the AWS MP, Michał Kamiński, when the latter left for London in early 1999 to pay a visit to the Chilean ex-dictator, General Pinochet. In their newspaper, *Che*, they wrote in the style of the Communist Manifesto:

It is essential that all communist and socialist forces should co-operate in striving for an alternative to bourgeois society, for a society in which the free development of each individual is a precondition for the free development of all."

All communist and socialist voices in our land must be raised in support for the revolutionary Cuba of Fidel Castro and for all of those who are struggling for equality and social justice. (*Che*, 3/1998)

When these quotes from *Che* were printed in the weekly newspaper, *Wprost*, in May 1999, the then leader of the youth organisation, Maciej Rebacz, declared that the true models for the PPS were Blair, Schröder and D'Alema, while Che Guevara could be a model only for Third World countries. (*Wprost*, 27/1999)

Radical left currents

The anti-capitalist left in Poland is overwhelmingly Trotskyist. The Stalinist-influenced Union of Communist Proletarians (Związek Komunistów Proletariat), created after the dissolution of the Communist Party (PZPR), never had much influence. It has a few hundred members, mostly pensioners. This group was part of SLD for a number of years, which exposed the SLD to strong attacks from the right. It left the SLD in 1997 when Article 13 of the new Polish constitution prohibited parties and organisations that supported totalitarian systems such as National Socialism, Fascism or Communism. In spite of initial fears on the left, this article has so far not been used against left parties.

The most serious organisation on the anti-capitalist left is the previously mentioned Revolutionary Left Current (NLR). The NLR was created in 1987 as part of the PPS-RD and was linked with the Fourth International (United Secretariat), with headquarters in Paris. It is a small and rather orthodox Trotskyist grouping which includes among its members such legendary figures of the Polish left as Professor Ludwik Haas. Haas, born in 1918, has been a Trotskyist since the age of 20. He spent 17 years in Soviet labour camps and two years in prison in Poland in the 1960s.

The NLR publishes a quarterly journal, *Dalej!* (Forwards), the most serious publication on the Polish radical left. It was first published in 1991. The writers in *Dalej!* are very critical of the situation in Poland, which they regard as not truly democratic.

The IMF imposed on Poland a destructive economic programme and a exploitative labour relations policy. The government coalition, with the agreement of all its parties, has blindly accepted the dictates of the IMF. Behind the veneer of democracy, Poland is a dictatorship of capital and clergy. It is, moreover, the most parasitic and most speculative form of capital and the most reactionary wing of the clergy. (*Dalej!* 13/1993)

The NLR press also informs its readers on the international situation, on successes of the left in the West (France, Poland), resistance movements in Latin America, the role of the media in the

Balkan war, etc. These are subjects about which very little is known in Poland. The group has also published many Trotskyist works that were censored during the Communist period.

The NLR has an extremely critical attitude towards the PPS and will not support the party in next year's election:

Ikonowicz likes to criticise the SLD but, in reality, the only difference between him and Miller is at the level of rhetoric. Of course, Ikonowicz would also like to be party leader. (*Dalej!* 28/2000)

Conclusion

The PPS is portrayed by the Polish media as a radical left-wing party but, in reality, the radical rhetoric of the PPS is merely a device to differentiate itself from the social democratic SLD. At the propaganda level, both parties are moving further away from each other, especially since the SLD is involved in a process of de-ideologisation similar to what is happening in Blair's Labour Party and Schröder's SPD. Nonetheless, the public positions being taken by Ikonowicz have brought a new quality into Polish political life - the re-emergence of a left-wing anti-capitalist discourse.

[This is a slightly shortened version of an article that appeared as "Die PPS und die radikale Linke" in the Austrian quarterly, *Ost-West Gegeninformationen*, Sept. 2000. The translation is by **Gus Fagan**.]

The Real Danger in the Balkans

Interview with Zarko Puhovski

In January 2000 there was a change of government in Croatia, with the 10-year rule of the HDZ (Croatian Democratic Community) coming to an end. There was a great deal of hope for a better future. Was the optimism justified?

This new hope is without doubt the most important effect of the change of government. At the same time, this is a new danger for the region. The government is made up of six coalition parties and its victory was largely the result of protest votes, not unlike the victory of the HDZ in 1990. Of course, in 1990 the HDZ had a programme that consisted largely of symbols, for instance, sovereignty and independence. With words like these you can manipulate people for a long time.

* **Dr Zarko Puhovski**, born in Zagreb in 1946, is Professor of Political Philosophy at the University of Zagreb and is Co-director of the European Peace University in Stadtschlaining in Austria. He was co-founder of the first Yugoslav Alternative Movement in 1988 and of the Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in 1993.

What was the main electoral promise of the present coalition?

The new government coalition simply promised better living standards and better quality of life. But these are values that can be easily measured and with these it is not so easy to manipulate people. Up to now, of course, it has remained just a promise. We are witnessing numerous strikes every day now of workers who are unhappy with their situation.

What have been the main consequences of the HDZ's 10-year rule?

Firstly, the HDZ government carried out a major militarisation of the country. Of course, it had objective causes - the attack on Croatia and the military conflict inside the country. Secondly, Croatia in this period had an enormous number of civilian victims. I'm thinking in particular of the many people who died for no other reason than the fact that they weren't Croats - Serbs, Jews, and others. Thirdly, the HDZ government carried out the so-called privatisation of the socially owned means of production, which represented in reality a gigantic plundering of Croatian citizens and Croatian society, creating social misery for the majority of the population and dividing our society into rich and poor.

Can the new government correct this negative development?

Everyone is talking today about the economic and social damage caused by privatisation but practically no one is talking about the murder of innocent civilians. People want to forget, as if nothing had happened. This also has to do with the fact that many leading politicians of today were members of the government at the time of the war, when the most terrible abuses of human rights took place in Croatia.

As far as the economic consequences of HDZ rule are concerned, the politicians today all claim that the situation they found when they took over power was far worse than they had expected. Therefore they have to moderate all their previous promises. There is actually some truth in this. The HDZ ruined so many possibilities for



Croatia's prime minister Račan (R)

future development. The country today is in the worst possible economic situation and is politically isolated from the outside world.

Experts ponder the question how Croatia can survive in the future. I am no economic expert, but the main opportunities for Croatia, as I see them, are in tourism and transport. But for that you need good stable political relations with your neighbouring countries, something that doesn't exist today.

What did the opposition do during the period of HDZ rule, in other words, the people in today's government?

The first to oppose the Tudjman regime were small groups of people organised in non-governmental organisations (NGOs), especially the anti-war campaign and the Croatian Helsinki Committee. There were, in addition, a few independent media such as the Feral Tribune in Split and the Novi List in Rijeka.

But the fact is that the opposition did practically nothing to oppose the Tudjman regime during those years. When the Croatian

Helsinki Committee called on the opposition to condemn the abuses of human rights in Croatia, their response was that it was too early to do this and that it might lose them votes. They would deal with it when they came to power.

As a member of the Helsinki Committee, what assessment do you make of the human rights situation in Croatia today? In particular, what are the possibilities for a return of Serbian refugees?

There is no doubt that the situation is not as bad now as it was a few years ago. There are no political assassinations, no threats, no expulsions, as there were between 1991 and 1993. The consequences of these events at the time remain, however. In the past decade, 400,000 Serbs left Croatia, as well as 200,000 Croats and other national minorities. A small number of these left because they had no social or economic prospects in Croatia. But the vast majority left under pressure and out of fear. At the present time, between 50,000 and 70,000 have returned. The most optimistic estimate is that roughly the same number will return at some future date. The maximum number that will return, in other words, is between 100,000 and 150,000. That's around 20 to 25 per cent of the people who were forced to leave. So Croatia has achieved what was its main goal at the time, and what is the main goal throughout the whole territory of former Yugoslavia, namely, ethnic cleansing.

According to the census of 1991, 76 per cent of the population in Croatia were Croats. Today it is 95 per cent. There are only three regions left in ex-Yugoslavia that are still multi-ethnic. These are the city of Tuzla in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Vojvodina in northern Serbia and the city of Belgrade. All other areas are, for all practical purposes, ethnically clean.

What are the main problems preventing the return of refugees?

The people who return are generally older people who, sadly, are returning home to be buried in the same graveyards as their parents and grandparents. The other problem has to do with the fact that Croats are now living in the previous homes of the refugees, in many

case Croats who were expelled from Bosnia-Herzegovina and who are themselves victims. The morally right decision is sometimes quite difficult. These people are also strongly influenced by nationalism and are generally not prepared to make compromises. Today, as previously, there is no policy of an organised return of refugees.

What are the perspectives for Croatia as part of Europe and as part of the Balkans?

Geographically, a great part of Croatia belongs to the Balkans. Everyone today is talking about Europe and about the borders of Europe but no one can say exactly where this border is. The geographical boundaries of the Balkan peninsula are fairly clear but most people pretend not to know this. For example, the world famous tourist city, Dubrovnik, is certainly geographically in the Balkans and the village of Cepin, in the vicinity of Osijek, is undoubtedly part of central Europe. From the point of view of culture, in which of these two places would you choose to live? It is quite false to make Central Europe a symbol of culture and the Balkans a symbol of barbarism.



Does Croatia have a future in the European Union?

Politically and economically, Croatia is at a higher level than some of the countries being considered for EU membership, such as Romania

and Bulgaria. So Croatia ought to be part of the EU. But what disturbs me most in this area is the fact that the government and all official pronouncements speak of “Euro-Atlantic integration”. What they mean here, of course, is membership of NATO. It is totally unclear to me why the post-socialist states should join NATO.

In fact, it is unclear to me why NATO should have continued to exist at all after 1990. NATO was an alliance, as its founding document says, “to defend the free world against the danger of Communism”. With the fall of Communism, new dictators had to be found that constituted a threat to the free world - Saddam Hussein, Ghaddafi, or Slobodan Milosevic - and justify the continued existence of NATO. The intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo only served to establish new tasks for NATO.

The so-called “Partnerships for Peace” are a way of keeping the war industries in full swing. All potential NATO members have to renew their antiquated military machinery. This will be at enormous cost for the new members without, in any significant way, improving their security.

Europe will eventually have to give up the idea of “fortress Europe” and open itself up to new members to be politically, culturally and economically integrated on the basis of equality. It is completely wrong that this road to integration should lead through NATO.

How do you see future developments in the rest of the Balkans?

Bosnia-Herzegovina is not a state, for all practical purposes. The Dayton Agreement was a good treaty to end the war. But it was not a good basis for the creation of a new state. The future of Bosnia-Herzegovina depends to a large extent on what happens in Kosovo. If the USA and its allies opt for independence for Kosovo, then there will be no argument left for preventing Republika Srpska breaking away from Bosnia-Herzegovina. The same is true for the mainly Croat-populated Western Herzegovina, as indeed for the Albanian-populated part of Macedonia. But this spells catastrophe for the Balkans.

The “international community” is making very big mistakes. I don’t know if they are doing this deliberately or not. A year after the Dayton Agreement they organised elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina,

Croatian elections, 3 January 2000		
Party	%	seats
SDP and HDLS		
Social Democratic Party (SPD)	47	44
Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSLs)		24
Primorlan-Goranian Union (PGS)		2
Slavonian-Baranian Croatian Party (SBHS)		1
Croatian Democratic Community (HDZ)		
	30.5	40
United List (ZL)		
Croatian Peasant Party (HSS)	15.9	16
Istrian Democratic Assembly (IDS)		4
Liberal Party (LS)		2
Croatian People's Party (HNS)		2
Croatian Social Democratic Action (ASH)		1
HSP and HKDU		
Croatian Right's Party (HSP)	3.3	5
Christian Democratic Union (HKDU)		1
Serbian National Party (SNS)		
		1
Hungarian Democratic Community of Croatia (DZMH)		
		1
Representatives of Croats Abroad		
		6

*[The government is made up of the SDP, HSLs, HSS, IDS, LS and HNS.
The president is Stjepan Mesić (HNS) and the prime minister
is Ivica Račan (SDP).]*

thereby giving the worst kind of nationalists a democratic legitimation. They are doing the same thing now in Kosovo.

The greatest danger for the future of Bosnia-Herzegovina and for the whole of the Balkans is not the nationalists but Washington and Madeleine Albright.

*[This interview first appeared in the German daily, **Junge Welt**, 27 October 2000. The translation is by **Gus Fagan**.]*

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Ashwin, Sarah, *Russian Workers: The Anatomy of Patience* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999) xi + 202 pp, \$69.95, ISBN 0-7190-561-X.

Why has there been so little overt resistance by Russian workers to a transition that has so negatively affected their situation? Why has the representation of workers' interests been so problematic in post-Soviet Russia despite the lifting of repression? What has prevented the former Communist unions, which in 1991 organised the overwhelming majority of workers, from doing this? And given this failure, why have workers not organised outside of the official unions?

These are the questions that this ethnographic case study of a Kuzbass mine in the town of "Vishnevka" sets out to answer. The bulk of the study was conducted during three month-long visits to the "Taldym" mine between October 1994 and August 1996, during which the author conducted numerous interviews with union officials, with workers in groups and individually, and observed the activities of the union and the work of labour collectives. The author chose this mine as a "negative case", since its union leadership was one of the most militant and favourable to union reform and its workers had shown themselves capable of mobilisation. Despite this, they were unable to organise themselves independently through or outside the union to defend their interests. This shows that the fundamental reasons for this state of affairs are not "voluntaristic" (bad or corrupt leaders) but "structural", i.e. deeply embedded in the socio-economic relations and traditions of Soviet/Russian enterprises.

The argument is very rich and too complex for adequate summation here. But it centres on the specificity of the Soviet "work collective" that has largely persisted into the post-Soviet period: workers acting under the "leadership", the administration as a "supplicatory unit" vis-à-vis the central state. This "one enterprise" outlook is fostered today, among other things, by the workers' continued dependency on the enterprise for much of their material and social provision, provision marked by managerial arbitrariness as well as by the economic threat to the enterprise's very existence. (A "well-off" mine, "Taldym" is insolvent without subsidies.) The result is that even when the workers mobilise, they do so only to change

masters, not to become independent collective actors.

I know of no other English-language study that captures so accurately, and with such attention to concrete detail, the quality of relations within the Russian enterprise today. Written with deep empathy for the workers (women workers not least), it is full of penetrating observations and insights. The research is meticulous and the reasoning, for the most part, is convincing.

At the same time, however, the author's emphasis on the "work collective" seems overdone. She rejects repression as a satisfactory explanation for worker passivity in the Soviet period, since the lifting of repression has not led to independent organisation. But one need not lean so strongly on the "work collective" to explain this. As the author notes, 1988-91 was a period of growing worker activism, at least some of which showed signs of considerable independence. Attempts were also made at consolidating that independence. One could plausibly argue that it was cut short by "shock therapy", which in Russia is a functional substitute for the repression of the Soviet period: lightning-speed, profound, restructuring of socio-economic and ideological relations, profound decline in living standards from an already low level, and rapid shift for workers from almost total economic security to almost total insecurity, including the very tangible, immediate threat to the very survival of their enterprises.

It is hard to imagine workers even in a "normal" capitalist society reacting effectively to this situation, let alone workers who, after seventy years of totalitarian rule, had almost no traditions or experience of collective action and no ideological legacy of their own. And it is not only unions, but all civil organisations, that are weak and ineffective in Russia. The problem of union independence, and more generally of workers acting as independent collective subjects, is not specific to Russia - it is the fundamental problem of labour movements everywhere and the central issue of progressive labour education. The tendency to "partnership" in the labour movement is universal, though it takes different forms and has different strength, depending on the country and the historical conjuncture.

The emphasis on the "work collective" in explaining the workers' inability to break out of subordinate collaboration with

management is no doubt fostered by the book's focus on the enterprise. This is its great strength but also its weakness as an attempt to explain the workers' failure to mount effective resistance. What happens in the enterprise is surely one important part of the explanation, but not the only one. The fact is (the author seems to recognise this but does not take it sufficiently into account) that no worker action, independent or otherwise, limited to the enterprise could be effective. Effective resistance in Russia today has to be political.

Of course, one can argue that the unions cannot get their act together on higher levels because they cannot do so in the enterprise. But the opposite surely is also true: workers in today's Russia who seek solutions to their problems within the confines of their enterprise will almost inevitably be forced into a "one enterprise" position. Thus, what might appear as "structural", when viewed from the vantage point of the isolated enterprise, may be the result of (at-least-to-some-degree) "voluntaristic" choices made at levels beyond the enterprise.

One choice the miners' leaders have made on the national level is to limit their politics to forcing partial, temporary economic concessions from the government for their own sector, with no serious attempt to draw the rest of the labour movement into a common struggle against the "shock therapy" regime. Is this conditioned by the situation in the mines? The leaders undoubtedly argue that it is. But this obviously failed policy reproduces the very "structural" conditions that foster the "one enterprise" approach in those mines. These remarks are only to argue that the author might have been more conscious of the limits of her topic. They in no way detract from the great value of this book for anyone interested in understanding Russian labour and society today.

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