

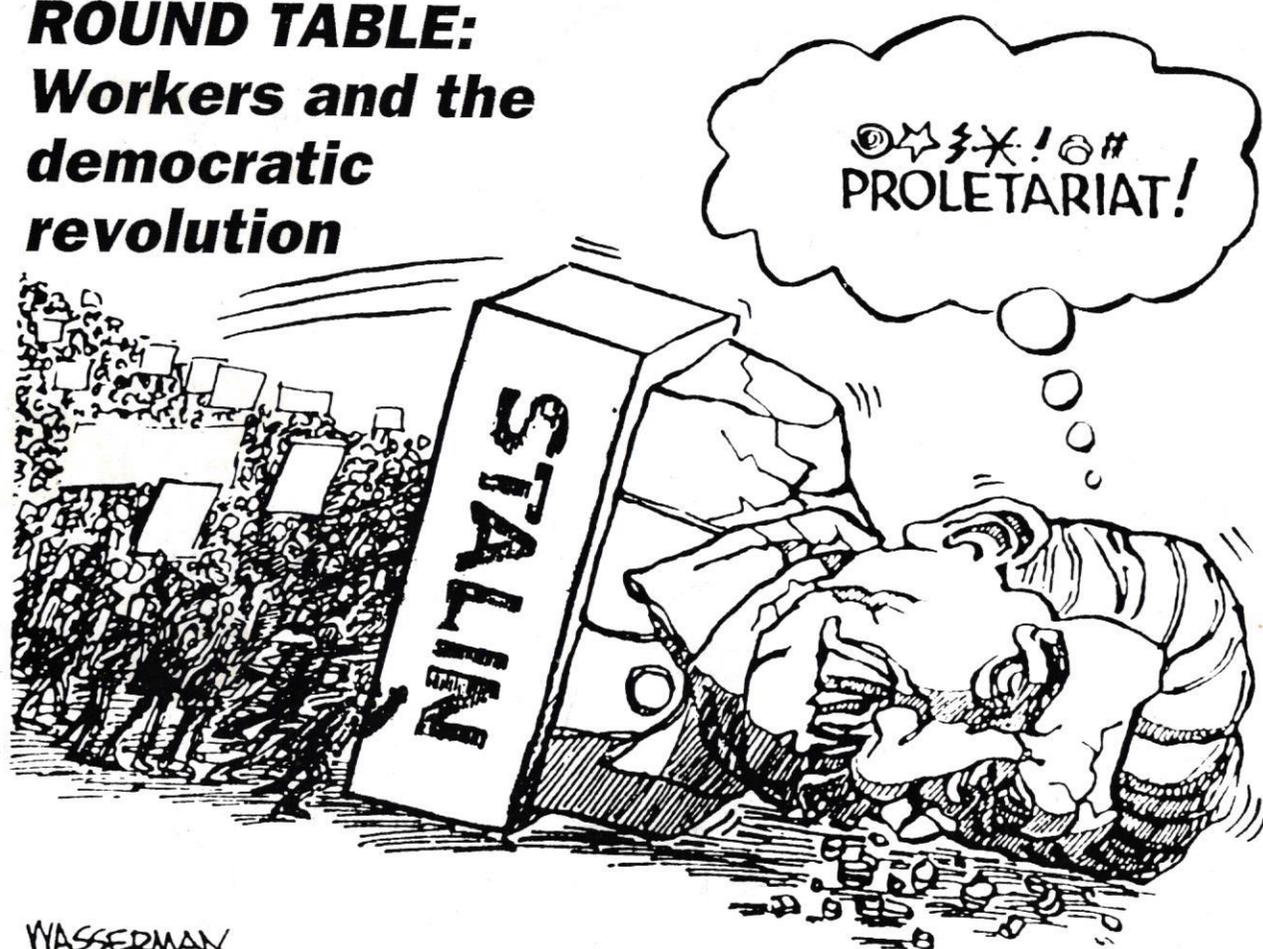
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ROUND TABLE: Workers and the democratic revolution



WASSERMAN
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INSIDE:

SOVIET UNION

The meaning of
Gorbachev's new powers —
David Seppo

Plus

West gives tacit support to
Moscow's attack on
Lithuania

EAST GERMANY

A vote for the deutschmark
— *Hans-Jürgen Schulz*



Plus

Against the annexation of
the GDR — *Document*

ALGERIA

Two interviews with Marxist
militants

BRITAIN

Thatcher's flagship hits the
rocks

Plus

Capitalism and the Welsh
language. An interview with
activists

Contents:

LITHUANIA/USSR 3

MOSCOW multiplies threats and pressures against the Lithuanian people and government — *Gerry Foley*

Plus

WHY Gorbachev needed a bonapartist presidency — *David Seppo*

EAST GERMANY 7

VICTORY for the right. An analysis of the March 18 elections — *Hans Jurgen Schulz*

Plus

UNITED SOCIALIST PARTY (VSP) opposes "the annexation of East Germany." — *Document*

CZECHOSLOVAKIA 10

PETR UHL DENOUNCES an unholy alliance between "radical" anti-Communists and the

Stalinist bureaucracy. From the independent daily *Lidove Noviny*

EASTERN EUROPE 11

SOCIALISTS from East European countries discuss the situation created by the collapse of Stalinism

ALGERIA 17

BREAKDOWN of the one-party state opens the way for polarization. *Chawki Salhi* describes the chances for socialists

Plus

ALGERIAN women's movement fights rise of Islamic fundamentalism

BRITAIN 21

SOAK-THE-POOR tax lights flames around Thatcher's battlements — *Bernard Gibbons*

BRITAIN/WALES 23

THE FIGHT of the Welsh

Language Society (Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg) against the capitalist destruction of Welsh communities. An interview with activists

Around The World 27

Third world debt campaign

GREECE 28

AFTER the Communist Party forms a government with the right, opposition groups in the CP and CP youth found a new revolutionary organization — *Andreas Sartzekis*

COLOMBIA 28

INTERNATIONAL campaign to win release of arrested A Luchar militants

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West gives tacit support to Moscow's attack on Lithuania

NEO-STALINISTS demonstrating against Lithuanian independence in Vilnius March 27 made it clear what they expected from Gorbachev in his new role as president of the USSR. Ladislav Shved, second secretary of the Moscow loyalist rump of the Lithuanian Communist Party said that the Kremlin chief "must protect us and defend the constitutional rights of Soviet citizens in Lithuania. He should take power," that is, administer the republic directly. This demand for direct rule from Moscow has also been raised by neo-Stalinist and Russian social chauvinist organizations in Estonia.

GERRY FOLEY

S OVIET MILITARY forces gave Shved at least a first installment on his demands even before the demonstration.

On Sunday, March 25, paratroopers occupied two schools in Vilnius belonging to the Lithuanian Communist Party, supposedly to safeguard the rights of the Moscow loyalist minority, in the first direct military intervention in the affairs of a Communist Party since the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. On Monday, they occupied the headquarters of the party committee in the port of Klaipeda and the former political institute of Kaunas. On Tuesday, March 27, they invaded the headquarters of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian party.

Also, in the early morning of March 27, the Soviet military defended "the constitutional rights of Soviet citizens" by invading two psychiatric hospitals that had offered shelter to youths who had left the Soviet army claiming their freedom as citizens of an independent country. About 20 were brutally dragged away, reportedly leaving trails of blood.

In the aftermath of these attacks, the Soviet authorities ordered foreigners and journalists to leave Lithuania, isolating the country still further. Telephone communication outside the country was already cut, except for the phones of the Lithuanian government itself. It appears at the same time that mail connections, not only with Lithuania but with the other Baltic republics have also been interrupted.

Moscow plays cat-and-mouse game

Ironically just before these brutal and arbitrary actions, the leaders of the Lithuanian government claimed that Moscow was becoming more amenable. The cat-and-mouse game of crackdown and intimations of reasonableness continued. The Lithuanian leaders appear to have illusions not only in the willingness of Gorbachev to let them go but in the support of the Western governments. At the same time as Moscow was stepping up the pressure on his government and the Lithuanian people, the chair of the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet, Sajudis leader Vytautas Landsbergis, began making bitter statements about being betrayed by the West.

However, if the West has betrayed Lithuania, this is not the first time. The Western powers were prepared to sacrifice their Baltic allies after the first world war and before the second as well. Even during the period of the civil war in the Soviet Union, they were interested fundamentally in restoring a powerful Russian capitalist state, and whatever alliances they made with the Baltic nationalists were secondary.

As for the policy of the real decision-makers in the US government, it is quite clear. Washington's primary interest is in maintaining the détente and deals with

Gorbachev. It is not going to endanger that for the sake of small peoples within the USSR, much less for the right of self-determination, which is hardly one of the cardinal principles of Washington's foreign policy.

An analysis in the March 27 *International Herald Tribune* by Bill Keller of the New York Times Service, close to the US State Department, stressed the isolation of the Lithuanians. "Lithuanians have also been largely disappointed in their hopes of support from the outside world, especially countries like the United States, which never officially accepted Lithuania's forcible incorporation in the Soviet Union."

Keller quoted "politicians in Moscow" as saying that "the Lithuanians themselves alienated potential allies by their aloofness, their disregard for the fears of ethnic groups and their romantic, one-great-leap approach to independence." He went on to write "Moscow has compounded the republic's isolation by the shrewd use of propaganda to raise doubts about whether the independence government is really democratic." It is hard to believe that anyone could consider Moscow's response to the Lithuanian declaration of independence as "shrewd propaganda" unless they already had a strong prejudice against Lithuanian national aspirations.

Keller wrote: "Most legislators have been hostile or lukewarm to the Lithuanian declaration, including members of the opposition Inter-Regional Deputies Group, which has often been allied with Baltic parliamentarians in campaigning for greater democracy and economic pluralism."

It is unfortunately undisputable that Russian social chauvinism goes very deep

into the moderate opposition in Russia and even into circles that claim to be revolutionary and Marxist. Keller quoted a "democratic" member of the Congress of People's Deputies, Anatoli A. Sobchak, as saying: "By actions such as these, which are not always very well thought through, they are endangering the possibilities of democratic change in the country as a whole."

Self-determination and democracy

Sobchak evidently thought that it was the duty of the Lithuanians to subordinate their national aspirations to the struggle to democratize the Soviet Union as a whole. He got things a bit backwards. Unless democrats in the Soviet Union as a whole, and especially among the dominant nationality, defend the right of self-determination of the oppressed peoples unconditionally they cannot fight effectively for democracy even on their own turf.

It is notable that at the same time as Moscow escalated its pressure on Lithuania, *Pravda* of March 26 carried a long unsigned article denouncing the dangers of political mobilizations, so-called "mitingovanie" or the proliferation of mass meetings. It gave an example of an unlikely leaflet, supposedly saying: "Organize sabotage, arson, diversions, terrorist acts. Organize mass disorders, unauthorized mass meetings. Destroy the means of mass and government communication. Destroy the armed forces. Today everything is useful that destabilizes the power of the Communists; make the situation ungovernable."

The article went on to say, among other

things: "Destructive forces are trying to take advantage of the situation that has developed in the country. Under the flag of turning over power to the 'self-managed' society, they aim to seize power by outright undemocratic means, through the strong pressure of mass meetings, through calls to the use of the so-called 'round table,' at which representatives of the government and the opposition are supposed to sit down immediately."

The argument about the need not to destabilize Gorbachev's regime led "democrats" to vote for the Kremlin chief's bonapartist presidency. Even national democrats from Estonia and Latvia voted for him, reportedly in return for promises that he would negotiate with them on increased rights for their countries. Any democrats, especially national democrats, who voted for Gorbachev helped to forge a weapon that was designed for use against them. The calls for direct presidential rule raised by the neo-Stalinist Russian social chauvinist organizations in the Baltic make that absolutely clear.

Lithuanian deputies vote against Gorbachev

The refusal of the Lithuanian deputies to vote for Gorbachev, even though it was done in the name of Lithuanian independence, was a blow to the legitimacy of the bonapartist presidency, and as such benefited all the anti-bureaucratic forces in the USSR. Similarly, if the Latvian Supreme Soviet majority sticks to its proclaimed principles and denies any authority to Moscow on Lithuanian territory, that would be a strong slap to Gorbachev's claim to rule the whole USSR on the basis of continuity with the Stalinist regime; and, if it mobilized the Lithuanian people to assert real independence, that would be a material blow to the Stalinist state machine.

The declaration of independence is a direct challenge to the political power of the Soviet state. Moscow has tried to meet it with various legalistic arguments that involve vague promises of "sovereignty" after a "referendum" whose conditions are presumably to be determined by Soviet bodies and after a "waiting period" of five years (according to Gennadi Gerasimov). For example, leaflets dropped from Soviet army helicopters over Vilnius shortly after the declaration of independence said: "Citizens of Lithuania — civil rights. The fate of the peoples of Lithuania must be decided by the peoples of Lithuania. TOWARD A SOVEREIGN LITHUANIA THROUGH A NATIONAL REFERENDUM."

Trying to borrow the weapons of Western parliamentarism, the chiefs of the Soviet bureaucracy have also turned to politicians and capitalist media in the West for arguments against "separatism."

4

In the Lithuanian crisis, *Pravda* of March

23 turned to the Scottish Labour MP G. Robertson, for his expertise in fighting "separatism" at home. The interview was done by special correspondent A. Liutyi, who introduced it as follows:

"In the British Isles, where they know about separatism first hand, they are following attentively the events in Lithuania. That was what I was told by a well-known Labour parliamentarian, the deputy minister of foreign affairs in the 'shadow' cabinet, G. Robertson."

Liutyi then went on to quote Robertson as saying: "I represent Scotland in the House of Commons.... But we in the Labour Party have opposed and continue to oppose the separation of Scotland from the United Kingdom, since we consider that today Scotland is an inseparable part of this country economically, socially and culturally. Breaking up Britain is an unrealistic policy. Indeed, in that case, Scotland would be in a very vulnerable position....In the 1970s, when separatist moods reached their peak in Scotland, I fought with special energy against the extremes of separatism."

"That is why today, I would hope that peaceful dialogue between Moscow and Vilnius will take place aimed at working out constitutional frameworks that will make it possible to satisfy the interests of both countries. Although we in the Labour Party hold a definite position with regard to the constitutional bases of the incorporation of Lithuania into the USSR, we do not stress separation. A constitutional reform is needed that would maximize the possibilities for realizing the principle of self-determination in the framework of the existing realities."

Moscow seeks support from right and left

Pravda apparently did not want just to cite the support of politicians of the "left." In its March 27 issue, it offered the opinions of British and American diplomats stationed in the Baltic in the interwar period. George Kennan's memoirs were tapped for a description of the desolation of the port of Libava. "The city was the product of the mighty economic development of Russia in the nineteenth century."

The Soviet journal concluded its argument by citing the opinions of Roosevelt and Churchill. "At the Teheran conference, Roosevelt said, jokingly, according to the American translator Ch. Bolen: 'I know that Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were part of the Soviet Union in the past and not long ago. And when the Russian armies again enter these republics, I am not going to fight with the Soviet Union about that.'" Churchill was also said to have agreed to the incorporation of these countries into the USSR during the war.

Hard experience may convince the Baltic national democratic leaders that the Stalinist regime is at least right about the attitudes of the Western powers. But their

reluctance to accept that is understandable, not only because of allergic reactions to the arguments of the regime's press. The question of "legalism," that is the call for asserting formal independence on the basis of the illegality of the Soviet annexation, has in fact been much debated in the Baltic national democratic movements.

For example, the electoral program of the Estonian People's Front, as summarized in the November 1989 issue of *Side*, the journal of the Estonian social democratic party in exile, published in Sweden, criticized the Estonian Congress severely for unrealistic "legalism." It might be added that such legalistic arguments depend in the last analysis on the support of the big Western powers, as the guarantors of international law and conventions. In the March 7 issue of *Reede*, the Estonian literary weekly, Tunne Keelam, chair of the Estonian Congress replied to such criticisms with the argument "what other alternative do we have."

Labour bureaucracy not interested in national rights

The Baltic republics are very small countries. The Russian "democrats" seem lukewarm allies at best. The workers movement in the West, dominated by social democratic bureaucracies and in a few cases by Communist Party-dominated ones and in the case of the US by bureaucrats totally subordinate to Washington, is not interested in their national rights. And the more radical movements have not shown great sympathy either.

The Lithuanians have had some solidarity from other national democratic movements in the USSR. But the leaders of the Azeri movement, which could be key in the present confrontation (since most of the troops sent into Lithuania are apparently Azeris) have tended until now to take an attitude hostile to all Europeans.

There has been considerable contacts and cross-fertilization among the national democratic groups, which have for the most part followed the example of the Baltic fronts, but no general theory of the place of these movements in the world and in history, no international democratic program. They have not explained clearly why people should support them, regardless of their nationality (although the program of the Latvian front made some important steps in that direction).

However, ultimately their only hope of achieving their objectives is to base themselves on an international current of opinion that supports the aspirations of all oppressed peoples. In that respect, the "legalistic" position, which involves returning to the pre-1940 constitutions, hardly models of real democracy, is no help. In fact, oppressed peoples and thoroughgoing democrats in general have a vital stake in the advance and victory of the national democratic movements in the Baltic countries. ★

Gorbachev: what lies behind the new presidential powers?

ON MARCH 14, a specially convened Congress of People's Deputies, by a vote of 1,817 against 133 (61 abstentions), amended the Soviet constitution to create a new strong presidency. The president will have the power to declare martial law, to veto Supreme Soviet decisions (subject to overriding by a two thirds vote), and to propose laws and quickly pilot them through parliament. The congress then proceeded to elect Mikhail Gorbachev to that post by a vote of 1542 against 368 (76 abstentions). Vitalii Korotich, liberal editor of the mass circulation magazine *Ogonyok*, declared, only partly in jest, that now Gorbachev is "dictator officially".¹

DAVID SEPPO

AT FIRST GLANCE, these developments are perplexing. S. Sergeev, Chairman of the Congress's Constitutional Revision Committee justified the changes in terms of a "paralysis of power"². But for all practical purposes, Gorbachev already had these powers. While the Soviet Union's nationality problems are often cited to explain the need for exceptional powers, the fact is that Gorbachev waited so long to intervene against the Azerbaijani blockade of Armenia, not because he lacked the power to do so, but by his own decision, or indecision.

No opposition in parliament to Azerbaijani intervention

Once he decided to intervene, he did so with speed and force and encountered no opposition from the Soviet parliament. As for the Baltic republics, the Soviet leaders themselves have ruled out the use of force there, since it would resolve nothing and

would have little support in the rest of the population.

Another oft-mentioned reason for the exceptional powers is the Soviet economy. Of course, it is true that, much to the ordinary people's dismay and anger, it is increasingly taking on a wild west, free-booting flavor. The scandal involving the joint state-cooperative venture ANT that came to light at the end of 1989 is typical of the Soviet economic scene today.

This firm, with over 5,000 employees in 150 branches across the Soviet Union, was originally set up to help the defence industry in converting to civilian production. But, as a profit-oriented enterprise, ANT found that it was much easier and more lucrative to purchase Soviet military goods and materials cheap and sell them abroad, often as "scrap", for hard currency. ANT was caught trying to ship 12 T-72 tanks and 200 tonnes of strategic titanium parts across the border. In the wake of this scandal, several high-ranking government officials were fired or given severe reprimands. Accusations are now being hurled at the Prime Minister himself³.

ANT case only tip of iceberg

The ANT case is only the tip of the iceberg of the intensifying social process of the fusion of the shadow economy with the monopolistic producers of the state sector. But the problem is not a lack of governmental power. For it is the government itself that has given increased autonomy to enterprises in their pursuit of "cost-accounting income". It is also the government that has largely legalized the shadow economy.

This is primitive accumulation in every sense of the term. One can argue to what degree this is conscious policy or stupidity, but it has little to do with a lack of power. There is no will in the government to recreate strong central economic planning and regulation. On the contrary, Gorbachev has formalized and accelerated their dismantling, which was already well under way under Brezhnev.

So why this wish to establish a new presidential system with extraordinary powers? A key to the mystery lies in the fact that at least a very significant part of the liberal deputies, like Vitalii Korotich, support a strong presidential power. Indeed, Nikolai Shmelev, probably the best-known liberal economist, not only endorsed the measures, but expressed fear that Gorbachev would not be "bold enough" to use his powers to "drastically

increase the role of private enterprise in the economy"⁴.

These people, many of whom are united around the Interregional Group of the Congress, have been posing as superdemocrats. It was they who called for a general strike on the eve of the Second Congress of People's Deputies in November to demand the abolition of article 6 of the constitution, consecrating the party's "leading role". The declaration of their "Democratic Action" movement, published in *Ogonyok*, calls on all opponents of totalitarianism to join them⁵.

But already towards the middle of 1989, some of the bolder liberal intellectuals began saying in public what many of their colleagues had so far dared to say only in private — their market reform, which they claim is the only economic basis for political democracy, cannot be introduced through democratic means.

"Let's say our leader proposes to introduce the market" asks liberal historian and publicist I. Kliamkin. "Can he do it with the support of the masses? Certainly not! Our population would be 80% opposed. The market means the differentiation of revenues and interests. You have to work hard to earn your living". (Note the implicit judgement, very widespread among the liberal intelligentsia, that the workers are opposed to the market because they are lazy and envious). The problem, continued Kliamkin, is the working class — it is socialist, and socialism's basic demand is equality. The workers see economic reform as a means to attain social justice.

Miners strike seen as support for reform

The coalminers strike was unanimously interpreted by official spokespeople and by journalists as a movement in support of the economic reform. But even without any special knowledge of the workers' attitudes, the very monotony with which this claim was repeated was enough to raise doubts about its validity.

Kliamkin did not participate in this charade. Yes, the workers want to modernize economic management, he admitted. But they also want social justice. For Kliamkin, these two demands are incompatible.

1. *New York Times*, March 14, 1990, section A, p. 18.

2. *Ibid.*, March 13, 1990, section A, p. 17.

3. G Lomonosov, "Vse na prodazhy?", *Pravitelstvennyi vestnik*, no. 6, 1990, p. 4; *New York Times*, March 15, 1990, section A, p. 10.

4. *Ibid.*, March 13, 1990, section A, p. 17.

5. *Ogonek*, no. 8, 1990.

And so, he concludes, the dismantling of the old political structures that are holding back the needed changes is necessary, "not for developing democracy, but to reinforce the power of the leader-reformer"⁶.

At the Second Congress of People's Deputies, Yeltsin, one of the cleverest of the liberal politicians, attacked the timidity of the government's program, calling it a compromise between the interests of the apparatus and the people. And of course, there is a conservative opposition in the apparatus. But it is fragmented and in disarray.

The relative ease with which Gorbachev abolished Article 6 attests to this. In the past nine months, the conservatives have begun playing with populism, but they do not have much hope of winning a significant mass base, since they are discredited by their past and lack a positive program. And besides, they fear that a populist movement might turn against them.

What is really holding up the reform is the fear of "social explosion", which the presidential powers are designed to avert. This fear is not new. It has already caused the repeated postponement of the price reform, which is surely the key element of the government's market reform. A freeing of prices would lead to galloping inflation and a drastic decline in living standards, hitting hardest those who can least afford it. Now this reform has been announced for 1991.

Popular opposition to large-scale private sector

Popular opposition is also the major obstacle to the establishment of a large-scale private sector. Hostility to the cooperatives, which are really private enterprises that often use hired labour, is very widespread. In July the coalminers demanded the closure of intermediary cooperatives, and after the strike their workers' committees proceeded to shut them⁷. Summarizing the results of an opinion survey on private property, a liberal sociologist concluded that "private property in the form most widespread in countries with a market economy has only 25-30% support.

"The majority, although not opposed to private property, want to keep it on a strictly limited scale, in strictly limited forms and spheres of activity". He suggested the introduction first of group forms of property, based upon worker leasing, buyouts, stockholding, as a way of getting the people used to private property, because "more radical transformations are pregnant with social explosion. Mass consciousness might simply be unable to withstand such an overload"⁸.

As Kliamkin indicated, the major ideological obstacle to the introduction of the market relations is the workers concept of social justice. A particular problem is the

popular concept of "unearned income", which in Russian translates as "non-labour income". Income that comes from the employment of hired labour or from "speculation", that is from buying and selling without any significant new labour input to justify the price difference, is thus considered unearned.

In numerous conversations with workers, even the most market-oriented among them who say they support the liberals, firmly reject the deregulation of prices, "unearned income", unemployment, poverty, and the privatization of basic services.

The miners' strike of July significantly intensified the fears of "social explosion" amongst the government and liberal intelligentsia. Almost immediately, articles began appearing that raised the specter of anarchy, bloodshed and civil war. The campaign succeeded in no small measure in creating a mood of anxiety and fear, especially among the non-worker population. The aim was to prepare the ground psychologically for the "firm hand". The miners' strike was, in fact, an extremely peaceful, organized and conscious affair, that gave the lie to the widespread prejudices of the workers being a benighted, declassé, and fascistic mass.

But this only made them more frightening, because such a class could not be disarmed by manipulation and divisive manoeuvres. Most of all the strike showed, as Kliamkin admitted, that the unremitting liberal ideological barrage directed at the working class over the past three years had only been superficially effective in "freeing the workers of their outdated stereotypes", or in other words dislodging their socialist values and attitudes.

Gorbachev seeks new base of legitimacy

If the new presidential powers are not in themselves really new, they should be seen as part of an operation to give Gorbachev a new basis of legitimacy. It is not a coincidence that the same session that voted for a presidential system also abolished article 6 of the constitution. The presidential system is designed to legitimize the use of state power to push through the government's economic reform.

Gorbachev wants to shift the basis of his legitimacy away from the party. For not only has the party's legitimacy been severely eroded, but it is based upon socialist ideology that is foreign to Gorbachev's reform. As president, Gorbachev can claim a "democratic mandate" (although the Congress that created the presidency is far from being a democratic body. Only two thirds of its members were elected by universal suffrage and this in a one-party context).

Of course, Gorbachev also wants to free himself from the conservatives in the

party apparatus. The state's rehabilitation and embracing of the Russian church — priests are now teaching religion in some schools — is part of the same operation. Lately Yeltsin, who always has his nose to the political wind, has even been toying with Russian nationalism, which so far has been the domain of the conservatives⁹.

Temporary ban on strikes sought

The presidential powers should be seen in the context of Gorbachev's attempt in October 1989 to ban strikes for 15 months. The Supreme Soviet agreed to do this in the basic extractive sectors, in energy, transport, chemicals and metallurgy. This came right after the Supreme Soviet effectively froze wages in all branches of heavy industry.

At the same time, it enacted a law on "resolving labour conflicts" which workers see as a law on "how not to strike". The government will soon present a new draft law on the state enterprise that will rescind most of the broad democratic powers given by the 1987 law to the worker collectives, including their right to elect managers (although, it should be added, these self-management rights have been realized in very few cases).

This is in sharp contrast to Gorbachev's original position three years ago, when he stated that "the well-being of the worker will depend on the abilities of the managers. The workers, should, therefore, have real means of influencing the choice of director and controlling his activity"¹⁰. This reflects the government's realization that its market reform and self-management are incompatible. Worker power, even limited to the enterprise level, would be a major obstacle to factory closures, layoffs and the attempt to tie wages to enterprise profits.

Gorbachev has announced that he intends to use his presidential powers to move swiftly ahead with the economic reform. This should help Soviet workers in deciding whether their declining social situation — the inflation, scarcities, and the spreading corruption — is the result of not enough reform, as the government and liberals have been arguing, or the result of the reform itself. The moment of political truth is fast approaching in the Soviet Union. Whatever its final outcome, it will at last clearly draw the political lines and dispel any illusions that remain among Soviet workers about who their real friends are and what *perestroika* from above is really about. ★

6. Cited in E. Berard-Zarzicka, "Pour une perestroika autoritaire", *Les temps modernes*, February 1990, p. 16.

7. See IV 170, October 2, 1989.

8. *Nedelya*, no. 52, 1989.

9. See recent editions of *New York Times*, week of March 14.

10. *Pravda*, January 28, 1987.

The high-tide of the right

ON OCTOBER 5, when the German Democratic Republic celebrated its fortieth anniversary, more than 100,000 enthusiastic youth paraded before the party leadership and Gorbachev. The regime seemed to be unshakeable.

Five months later, in the March 18 elections, there was no party left that dared to defend that system. But there can be no triumphal feeling about the end of Stalinism. The result was a devastating defeat for the workers movement — nearly 80% of East Germans voted for capitalist restoration, 99.7% for German reunification (many, of course, with reservations), and there is no revolutionary current. As writer Stefan Heym commented, “nothing will be left [of the GDR] except a footnote in world history”.

HANS-JURGEN SCHULZ

LAST NOVEMBER, when the democratic masses liberated themselves, polls revealed that three quarters of the population favoured a reformed Socialist system. But this was before they realized the bankruptcy of a Stalinist system which had exhausted its possibilities. The standard of living in the GDR was at best two thirds of that in West Germany, the productivity of labour less than 50%. Working hours were more than 20% higher, working conditions worse, and the environment more polluted. Workers had less freedom and less income than their West German equivalents. Under these circumstances the three million unemployed in the West, on or below the poverty line, preferred to stay at home and did not emigrate to a country with full employment and social security. In the end nobody saw advantages worth defending. Nobody saw a realistic alternative to capitalism and nobody propagated it. Socialist convictions have not been eradicated, but there was no theory or consistent program. Thus there was no alternative.



After the opening of the Wall the state apparatus and the Stalinist SED soon disintegrated. The SED lost nearly three quarters of its membership (2.3 million) and was quickly reorganized as a reformist Socialist party. During the campaign it was nearly paralyzed and only small caucuses could be activated. But the new leadership managed to consolidate the party and in the last phase could even recruit young members.

The former satellite parties of the SED (CDU, DBD, NDPD, Liberals), inspired by the Bonn government, demanded in February that the government should bring the election date forward from June 6 to March 18. This surprised all the opposition groups. In reality they had no real organization, no trusted and experienced leadership, no elaborated program, few active members (some hundreds in each group, perhaps a thousand in New Forum) and no money. With the exception of the SED/PDS and possibly the old parties there had been no formal election of leaderships or payment of member-

ship fees. Within weeks they had to organize a campaign. This could only end in defeat.

To make it worse the democratic movement split. The majority (New Forum, Democracy Now and others) changed their line and came out for the reunification of Germany. Under these conditions the United Left (VL) was opposed to a common slate. The Greens also supported reunification, but the VL now wanted to form an alliance with them. The Greens, under pressure from the West German *realos* ["realistic" Greens] refused. Under these conditions, the representatives of the independent women's league (Unabhängiger Frauenverband), politically more in sympathy with the left, made their realistic compromise with the greens and the VL was completely isolated.

There was effectively no time for the rank and file to discuss the election platforms. With the partial exception of the greens, these groups had no paper for leaflets or placards (only in the last few weeks did they receive some materials financed by left groups in the West). They managed only very late in the day to organize a few meetings and their TV spots were amateurish. Backed by no movement, divided, without effective organization and means, the leaders of the former anti-Stalinist opposition and spokespersons of the October days had no chance.

The political vacuum was filled by the West German parties. The social democrats recruited a few hundred members who were taught the program in crash courses and then appointed as formal leaders. Strategy and platform was in reality worked out in Bonn and the organization built up by Western specialists.

The Christian Democrats and Liberals could only take over some weak right wing split offs from the democratic movement. So without any scruples they recruited the satellite parties of the Stalinist SED — the CDU and the LDP. One of the leaders of the conservative alliance, Ebeling, openly confirmed that “without the assistance of the Western parties we could not organize an election campaign”.

The SPD, the Liberals, and the parties of the conservative alliance are in reality satellite parties. Everything was done for them. The program was formulated (only a few of the 300 delegates of the DSU knew what was in it, but the convention unanimously voted for it), the campaign planned and organized, the leaflets and placards made in the West and distributed by Western teams. Prominent figures spoke with great success at mass rallies of hundreds of thousands. At least one million people alone heard Chancellor Kohl, hundreds of thousands listened to others like Brandt or Genscher. At least 50 mil-

lion marks were invested directly in this campaign, and all the mass media were utilized.

There could be no debate and no discussion. The electorate got the impression that with a speedy unification they would reach the Western standard of living within a few months and they wished to believe it. Nothing was said about future unemployment, the impossibility of immediately raising the standard of living to the Western level, nothing at all about the ownership of the factories or the fate of those employed in the apparatus of the state and organizations.

Formally it was a free election — free mass media for all, no quotas for small parties. But in reality the new organizations had no chance and there was no alternative.

All the polls indicated a great victory for the social democrats. It seemed that they could guarantee both capitalist efficiency and social security. But nearly every second voter was undecided. In the last two weeks they made their choice — a majority for the Conservatives and a minority for the PDS.

Christian Democrats get highest score

More than 93% voted; nearly half of them for the Conservative Alliance, mainly for the Christian Democrats (40.9%). The DSU, an offspring of the Bavarian wing of the Christian Democrats, got 6.3% and DA, the party of secret service informer Wolfgang Schnur, only 0.9%. This was a success for Western assistance combined with a strong and experienced tradition of organization, even if they were discredited as fellow travellers.

Proof of the importance of the assistance are the organizationally strong farmers (DBD) and national (NDPD) parties, both two former satellite organizations of the SED. They had only a limited resonance (see box). Both are bourgeois parties and could as partners in government give the Conservatives a majority in parliament (the Volkskammer, with 400 seats). A stronger ally would be the Liberals.

It was decisive that the Conservatives won the majority in the villages (56%) and among the workers (58%, against 47% of the white-collar workers, 43% of pensioners and 32% of the intelligentsia). Their strongholds are the old proletarian regions of Saxony and Thuringia with 60% and more of the vote. In Berlin they received a meagre 21% and in the northern districts usually less than 40%. None of this means that the Conservatives will organize the workers. But in the former "workers' state" the workers voted Conservative in their great majority.

8 The Social Democrats are handicapped by their weak organization. The party was founded five months ago. Two thirds

of its members have joined in the last six weeks and most are not active. It has no real organization in the countryside and only a weak one in the south. In the district of Dresden, a former traditional stronghold, their vote fell under 10%.

The PDS's achievement in scoring nearly two million votes came as a surprise. The new leadership around Gysi and the acting premier Modrow (by far the most popular politician in the country) consolidated the demoralized party, which six weeks ago was expected to get only 5-7%. It received every tenth worker's vote (mainly amongst the labour aristocracy), and nearly a third of the intelligentsia voted for it. Their stronghold is the old apparatus. But their adherence is greater. In the last phase of the campaign it could mobilize tens of thousands for meetings in the northern districts.

Radical democratic movements isolated

Under these conditions the radical democratic and social movements were reduced to small minorities. The greens, allied with the relatively strong and very lively women's movement, hoped to get half a million votes. Bündnis 90 (Alliance 90), with the New Forum (which had 300,000 members three months ago) and others hoped for much more. They hoped that the independent parties of the GDR could get a third of the votes — necessary for blocking a change of the constitution. But only 5% of the population voted for the pioneers of the uprising. The mass organizations linked to the PDS (a youth and a women's list) were also unsuccessful, receiving 52,000 votes and two seats.

Also there is no real revolutionary current. The United Left had hoped for at least 10 seats and got one. Four other revolutionary or centrist groups collected 16,000 votes, amongst them two organizations which specialize in discrediting Trotskyism — the Spartacist League (2,400) and the ex-Healy BSA, posing as the "German section of the Fourth International" (374).

The situation in Germany has changed completely. A disorientated working class has voted for capitalist restoration. A dependent Conservative government will reorganize a currently non-capitalist society for *anschluss*. That will last some years.

In the meantime they cannot avoid mass unemployment, reduction of social security, abolition of both the newly won democratic rights and the improvements in women's rights which took place under the old system. In the coming defensive struggles there is a chance to form a new revolutionary current. But if there is no left alternative, the disorientated and disorganized masses can turn to the right and there will be a dangerous nationalist upswing. ★

Against the annexation of East Germany

THE FOLLOWING document, issued on March 5, 1990, gives the position of the United Socialist Party (VSP) on recent events in East Germany. The VSP is the product of a fusion between the German Fourth Internationalists (GIM) and the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in October 1986.

DOCUMENT

1. THE VSP does not believe in the possibility of a political revolution in the GDR in the short or medium term in the sense of a conquest of power by the working class. Nor does it believe in the likelihood of a prolonged period of confederation on a basis of equality between the GDR and the FRG which would in some way offer the time needed to change the balance of forces and reopen a revolutionary perspective in the GDR.

After the March 18 elections, the VSP expects to see the start of a period in which the chief measures needed for the FRG to absorb the GDR will be taken. The length of this period may vary, depending on the obstacles the project meets. However the mass flight and the imperialist pressure have created serious disorder in the GDR's economy which has, in its turn, reinforced the flight. The absence of a mass movement in the FRG increases the pressure for unification. Some are expecting an end to the exodus to the West while others await a perceptible improvement in their material situation. The tendency towards unification on a capitalist basis has become irreversible.

The federal system that is to be introduced into the GDR after the elections will also be a big help to the West German imperialist bourgeoisie to smoothly carry through the assimilation. It will allow the *Länder* to accept a whole series of laws

now in force in the FRG. This applies to the education system, to some aspects of social security, tax law, housing prices, property forms, electoral laws and rights such as that of referendum. The only thing that must be guaranteed is that in the case of a conflict between the *Länder* and federal legislation, it is the latter that decides.

2. THE "reunification" underway is not a unification on the basis of equality between two social systems that are incompatible. What is involved is the pure and simple annexation of the GDR, that is to say the seizure of social and political power by the bourgeoisie, implying the dismantling of the main social and political conquests of the previous non-capitalist regime and the November revolution. This will remain true whether it is an outright bourgeois force or the social democracy that carries it through. On the political level, the bourgeois parties hope for a straightforward extension of the federal constitution to the GDR while the social democracy is proposing a new constitution on the model of the FRG's. The difference is however important from the point of view of allowing the masses to put forward their own propositions and, eventually, also democratize the federal constitution on certain points. But this does not change the fact that in the two cases, the GDR will be assimilated into the capitalist system.

In the absence of a credible socialist perspective in the FRG at present, the only possibility for safeguarding the gains of the working class and women in the GDR lies in defending the East German state as a sovereign and independent entity in every respect. This is why the VSP is firmly opposed to the so-called "reunifica-

tion".

It may be said that we are putting forward a perspective that will become redundant very quickly. This is true. And, naturally, it will then cease to have any meaning even if reunification has not yet been formally carried through. But we are not there yet. The GDR still exists as a sovereign state and, insofar as people in the GDR go on fighting for a non-capitalist society, for an alternative to the FRG, we do not have the right to say that their efforts are useless.

3. IN the GDR the assimilation project will have devastating consequences for some layers of the wage owners and will probably meet ferocious resistance. At the same time there is within the working class a great readiness to make sacrifices in order to improve the standard of consumption. In the FRG on the other hand the division of the working class between its Eastern and Western situations creates enormous social pressure. In the West a large part of the class is afraid that it will pay for the unification. From now on the employers will be demanding a "national sacrifice for the GDR".

We consider vital the establishment of a united front between workers, women, young people and the social movements in the GDR and the FRG to lead a common struggle. This is our way of fighting frontiers.

4. IN the current relationship of forces, the workers have no possibility of saying "we want unification, but not at our expense." Furthermore those in the East will be easily blackmailed: if the social mobilization continues there will be no

capital and the economy will collapse. To resist this blackmail the working class would have to take a firm and collective decision to do without West German capital and seek a non-capitalist alternative. But the same motivation that has caused people to leave the country in their thousands and demonstrate massively for reunification, will lead them to accept "sacrifices". All those such as the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the [West] German Communist Party (DKP), the renovators and other reformist currents who do not clearly oppose unification, but only its costs, can only contribute to weakening a strong position against the annexation of the GDR.

For the same reasons we do not think that a basis exists for a slogan such as "for a socialist reunification of Germany".

The social and the "national" are indissolubly linked in this situation, with the "national" question being systematically used by imperialism to create a national consensus that it needs to get the "sacrifices" that it requires. Confronted by the enormous effort implied for imperialism by the unification project, it has to reinforce German chauvinism and again needs a climate where "there are no parties, only Germans". This will go along with the reinforcement of regressive and discriminatory legislation against immigrants, against the right of exile, against democratic rights of non-Germans and with xenophobic and racist acts.

5. AT its special congress, the VSP took the following decisions:

a) The VSP is decisively opposed to the campaign for reunification in all its forms, as it has been undertaken by the government, the expelled associations, the bosses and the extreme right and fascist organizations. The VSP has expressed this opposition without ambiguity through articles and the general line of its paper, *Sozialistische Zeitung*.

b) Beyond this clear anti-revanchist position, the VSP has had no debate on the national question in the framework of the socialist revolution in the FRG. Such positions have their place in the political debate and in the VSP. They cannot be denounced as revanchist.

c) Independently of this discussion that has still to be had, the VSP is of the opinion that it is not possible to raise the question of reunification in a progressive fashion in today's conditions.

At the same time the VSP is discussing an initiative for a referendum on unification. We want to be able to say "no" to the *anschluss* of the GDR and reinforce the desire of the masses to decide their fate for themselves. We demand a real right to self-determination, including for the five million immigrants who live in Germany and have no voice.

In the same way, we support the existing initiatives for the abolition of the West German army, following the Swiss example. There is a real mass sentiment in favour of seizing the opportunity to establish a new order in Europe that is not shaped by armies, atomic weapons, national states, chauvinism and racism. In this respect, the VSP proposes to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International a common initiative for the abolition of the army in every European country, in the perspective of a demilitarized Europe and for a European anti-militarist conference that could lead to an international demonstration.

We are working for international solidarity across frontiers, basing ourselves on reflexes of self-defence against the capitalist offensive. ★



Who benefits from anti-Communism?

FOUR MONTHS after the "gentle revolution" of November 1989 Czechoslovakia's triumphant opposition finds itself in an impasse. All currents united to remove the detested government of Gustav Husak and Milos Jakes, but removing the bureaucratic regime as a whole is a different matter.

Rumours abound of police involvement in trying to divide up the opposition, and there is great disquiet that the forces of the ancien regime are recycling themselves under new labels. At the same time the new government itself is being accused of reluctance to take steps to clean out the police and army.

In this anxious atmosphere, a petition to outlaw the communist party has been getting some support, diverting popular anger from the real question of replacing the bureaucratic power structure. Below we publish a comment by Czech revolutionary Marxist Petr Uhl on this troubled situation. This text first appeared in the independent Czech newspaper *Lidové noviny* in its issue of March 24, 1990. It has been shortened slightly for space reasons.

DOCUMENT

DISCONTENT with Civic Forum (OF) has grown in recent weeks. In the districts and localities, in enterprises and institutions the old bureaucratic mafias are still in control, and in local OFs "shirt-changing" is the rule. People feel that the purge of the armed services is proceeding at a scandalously slow pace. The secret police (StB) has not yet been wholly abolished. The preference of the OF for corridor politics is being more and more noisily criticized, as well as its lack of democracy.

If, however, we agree that the possibility of an armed putsch has been ruled out, we must also agree that careful preparation, forethought and broad-mindedness for the solution of these questions are better for our democracy than speed or longing for revenge, retribution and personal satisfaction.

The collapse of the bureaucratic structures in the first weeks was surprisingly swift. The Charter 77 ethic — its accent on human rights, the offer of a dialogue with the outgoing regime, tolerance and an explicit belief that freedom of speech and assembly applied to everyone ready to respect democratic rules — all this led to round tables at every level, in a peaceful transfer of legislative and executive power. As a result the Communists supported Václav Havel who, as president, is the guarantee of justice for them as well, a guarantee of existential security for them

and their families. For this reason a majority of the Communist party's members also felt themselves liberated by the revolution. It opened up for them the perspective of a new life. Many left the party and those who — perhaps from a sense of propriety — remained have gradually freed themselves from its discipline. There was the hope that the majority of them would not vote for the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC) in the elections.

For some these original civic attitudes were evidently only salami tactics. Now that the state structures and the KSC itself have been broken up and reshaped to such an extent that the old order can clearly not be restored, our "revolutionaries" have

unleashed the struggle against Communism and Communists. This is a special cultural phenomenon: the KSC promoted — and despite its weakness now promotes even more vigorously — a petty bourgeois outlook. All the force of our revolution was thrown against this petty bourgeois mentality. At the same time, however, we took into this as into every other revolution an enraged petty bourgeois, full of hatred, longing for revenge and a final solution. A piece of this petty bourgeois lives in everyone, though some of us try to suppress it.

"And how did they behave?" "They were not so kind to us". These expressions send a shiver down the spine above all of those to whom they were really not too kind, or people in positions where they feel some sort of responsibility concerning other people, and who therefore refuse to fire the latter without some concrete evidence that they really did someone some harm. Are we going to repeat the experience of the purges of 1969-70? (I don't want to be misunderstood — there is no reason why StB officers should pick up salaries for not going to work and I do not think that the heads of the regional police departments should keep their jobs. Nor do I believe that local OFs should be run by party functionaries or other mafiosi.)

Elections are coming up. Either we will proclaim the KSC to be a criminal organization and try to condemn or otherwise persecute all its members or we will continue the dialogue with all parts of society, including the Communists and refuse to discriminate against anyone. We



Hey guys, we've killed the dragon (from the Ukrainian satirical weekly "Starchel")

should legally pursue and curtail at work only those against whom it can be concretely proved that they committed a crime — which does not mean merely for supporting the old regime. (The ex-dissidents could bring charges on the grounds of supporting the old regime against all those who voted in elections, were in the official trade union movement or who did not sign the [dissident] document "Some Sentences".)

At the same time many people are saying that it is not necessary to outlaw the KSC, merely to expose the Communists — both present and former. Even those who left the KSC 20 years ago but were members in the 50s. This is not a fantasy. These are the real accents of the present wave of global primitive anti-communism.....

This demagoguery, calling people to a "just" war on Communism uses deceitful terminology. Slogans such as "democracy from below", "direct democracy", "permanent revolution" are being bandied about. As someone who has used this terminology for a long time, I must categorically state that fanaticism and vengefulness have nothing to do with its real content. This does not of course mean that our revolution should not constantly refer back to these ideas or struggle to make our democracy a democracy for everybody, complementing its parliamentary basis with self-managing and direct democracy. Social conflicts, the struggle over the ownership of the means of production and the two-year period for preparing a constitution and the development of political life will give us plenty of opportunity.

Swelling wave of anti-Communism

Who benefits from the swelling wave of indiscriminate anti-Communism? The answer can be found in the opinion polls. The OF is losing popularity while all those threatened are being driven together. Without this campaign the KSC would probably have lost even more people and would have had trouble getting over the 5% barrier. If the campaign gets stronger, we can expect that the KSC will get 20-30% of the votes. The autumn local elections will be even worse. The people who will vote for it will not be voting for some kind of overall programme, but for institutions that will defend their basic rights — to work according to their qualifications, of their children to education and so on. No wonder. We can wonder, however, who is responsible for the campaign. And we can wonder that people do not see how the secretariat of the KSC's central committee are rubbing their hands with glee. In individual cases we can even ask whether the agreement of interests between the anti-Communist and Communist apparatchiks is accidental or whether someone is behind it. ★

The working class and the democratic revolution

THE FOLLOWING discussion on the current state of working class consciousness in the GDR, Poland, Hungary and the USSR was organized by *In precor*, the French language sister publication of *International Viewpoint*. The participants in the discussion were Annett Seese, an East German student and a member of the United Left in Leipzig; Milka Tyszkiewicz, from Poland, a member of the Socialist Political Centre in Wroclaw; Laszlo Andor, a Hungarian economist and a member of the Left Alternative; and Poul Larsson, a member of the SAP, the Danish section of the Fourth International, who has recently returned from a visit to Moscow and Siberia. Questions are by *Inprecor*.

WHAT has been the attitude of the working class towards the recent events in Eastern Europe?

ANNETT SEESE: The first problem in the GDR is that the movement did not start from the working class, but has been a movement of the entire people, and has been experienced as such. It is thus difficult to speak of a specific attitude of the working class. It must be stressed that the movement preceded and brought about the political changes, which in their turn allowed new political activities.

Already in May 1989, during the preceding elections, a series of activities had been carried out to criticize the way they were organized and show that they were being manipulated by the bureaucracy. It was a first step, taken not by the working class, but by people coming from the working class and the intelligentsia, acting together. Then, there was the huge mass movement...of the rush towards the West! And, finally, the mass demonstrations of last October, in Leipzig. These demonstrations developed around a church, which had previously been the rallying point for those who wished to emigrate to West Germany. In October, the main slogan was "We're staying here!". At that time, there was certainly an important working class participation, but the working class was not there as a specific social category. Strikes only began much later, in the form of "warning strikes". But these consisted of walk-

outs — the workers would leave their factories, express their demands, then return to work, even working extra hours to make up for those that had been "lost".

POUL LARSSON: I am the honorary Russian for this evening...it is clear that the working class in the Soviet Union represents a social body of more than 100 million workers who are present at different levels and under different forms in the political struggles currently underway, notably during the elections and so on. Important differences also exist at the level of the republics — I want to give here two concrete examples of workers' activity in Russia.

During the last few months, we have witnessed "uprisings" in several of the principal industrial towns of the USSR, in Tioumen, in Sverdlosk, in the Urals and in Western Siberia. The information we have is limited because, for example, all communications have been cut between Sverdlosk and the rest of the country. We know however that there have been important demonstrations and strikes and that, following this, the local leaderships — particularly conservative — of the Communist Party (CPSU) have resigned in these two towns. These events are also very important at the level of their repercussions inside the CPSU, for it should not be forgotten that nearly 40% of its members are workers.

The general feeling largely prevalent inside the working class in Russia is particularly anti-bureaucratic — this includes

a defense of *glasnost* and a genuine pluralism, as well as a break with the leadership of the CPSU. The miners have produced the most advanced political program up until now in the different areas where there were important strikes last summer. This movement developed and expressed itself at different levels during the elections to the soviets — some miners put themselves forward for election, even against party candidates, which is very significant.

MILKA TYSZKIEWICZ: As you know, for the majority of the Polish working class, the market has become a kind of universal alternative to self-management, to socialism. In the consciousness of the workers, the very word "socialism" has become synonymous with Stalinism.

In the spring of 1988 and the summer of 1989, during the strike waves that preceded the "round table" accords, the working class was not divided and constituted a bloc against the bureaucracy. After the "round table" accords, the working class divided into two — a group supporting Walesa and his political line, and another demonstrating in the street. During the last five months, after the application of the austerity measures of the new Mazowiecki government, this second group has also split in two. A first group, very radical, has decided to cooperate again with Walesa so as to maintain the unity of the working class. But, to the extent that the leadership of Solidarnosc has put itself to work with the enemies of yesterday, the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) and Jaruzelski, the notion of the "common enemy to overthrow" has disappeared and certain members of this group have begun to speak of fascism as the only alternative which can resolve the political crisis. They have started to demand "guillotines" to "cut off the heads of all the leftists".... That said, these groups remain marginal.

There exists also among the working

class a great interest in everything that happens in the neighboring countries, notably in the Baltic states (a part of these regions, for example in Lithuania, belonged to Poland before the second world war). The debate on German reunification, the uprising in Czechoslovakia and in Rumania have also had a very deep resonance.

An idea which is very present is that of the necessity of preserving national independence at all costs. Some of the government's measures have been rejected by the workers because they could imperil independence, through the sale of Polish factories to foreigners. For these same reasons, the idea of self-management has also begun to regain an audience amongst the workers. But the problem is how to combine this will for independence with links with the West, believed to be none the less necessary.

LASZLO ANDOR: So far as the attitude of the Hungarian working class during the recent events is concerned, it is necessary first to make it clear that the situation is not at all the same as in the other countries, even if there appear to be some similarities. You have to take into account here the attitude of the workers in relation to what is called in Hungary the PT, the "peaceful transition"...towards the restoration of capitalism! Because the PT is very much on the order of the day in Hungary.

This state of mind is the result of the history of the past decades — the dramatic level of the country's debt, the worsening of the exploitation of the workers, the fall in their standard of living and their real salaries. The workers, then, react very violently to all that they consider as being the cause of this growing economic and social crisis.

1989 was a year of great hopes and illusions for the working class and the whole of the society. After 40 years of Stalinist dictatorship, very much was expected of pluralism — and the market — which were supposed to resolve all the problems. There was a tremendous euphoria, a tremendous optimism. That said, all this happened without the effective participation of the workers. The new parties were founded without any base in the workers' movement. A first disillusionment came when it was revealed that the new parties were not noticeably better than the old single party and their leaders were not particularly more intelligent! It is possible to distinguish three kinds of attitude in response to this. Firstly, among cer-

tain workers, a rejection of all this political show, of pluralism and so on, and a total demobilization. The second group could be tempted to vote for the right, under the influence of the mass media which repeats day in and day out that socialism represents a shameful parenthesis in our history, that the USSR has played an ignoble role in Hungary, and so on. And finally, a small minority of workers, amongst the most conscious, in the workers' councils, the trade unions and the little parties of the left — and also the Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP) or the Socialist Workers Party (HSWP), the two wings coming out of the split in the old Communist Party in power — who are going to oppose this peaceful transition.

Has socialism a future?

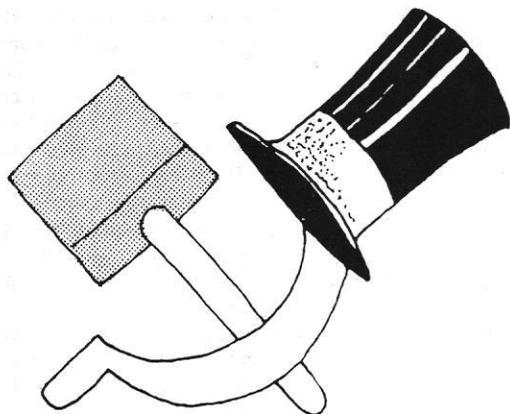
■ Does it follow from all this, as some claim, that socialism no longer has a future and that the working class has no central role to play?

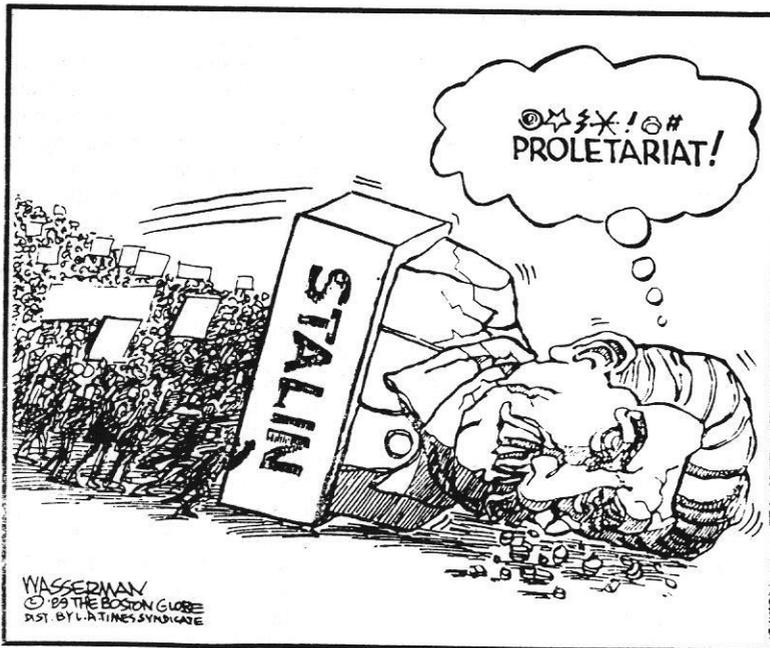
MILKA TYSZKIEWICZ: It cannot however be said that the socialist project, understood as a positive utopia, has no future in the East, nor that the working class is totally atomized and won over to the ideals of capitalism. I was able to note, for example, at the last congress of Solidarnosc in my region, that the aspiration towards democracy was very powerful. The problem is, of course, that people have very different practices in the name of this same democracy.

In Poland it is possible to find people who have been workers for ten or fifteen years but now possess their own factories...this plays very much upon their consciousness.

ANNETT SEESE: The crisis of the societies in Eastern Europe is besides not uniquely economic and social but also moral — it is a crisis of orientation, of perspectives. In the factories in the GDR, it is even possible to hear arguments like this; "If we organize ourselves, if we create workers' councils, that would frighten the capitalists and they would refuse to come and invest in us. Then when we have no money left, the factories will be closed and we will be on the streets. For this reason, we should do nothing...or else, we should create councils like the ones in West Germany, to boost the level of production and attract the capitalists".

Besides, the social situation and the standard of living in the GDR are very different to those in Rumania or in certain parts of the USSR. Absurd situations exist, like for example the fact that some





workers earn more money than their bosses. But exploitation is not measured solely at the level of wages. Differences exist, for example, between men and women, not because there isn't equal pay for equal work, but because the traditional women's jobs are less well paid than the predominantly male jobs. The differences in standard of living between the middle bureaucrats and the working class are not really very big, the divide exists often at the level of petty privileges, for example the special shops which are better stocked. Another example of the distortions of the system which confuse consciousness is the myth of free health care. Yes, doctors and dentists are free in the East...but the people would prefer to pay a doctor who really exists in the West, rather than have a phantom doctor in the East!

POUL LARSSON: The role of the working class in the recent events is complex. The workers were largely present and active during the uprisings in the GDR and Czechoslovakia. The workers have played a crucial and significant role during the general strike in Czechoslovakia and the insurrection in Rumania.

In the Soviet Union, it is important to note that the miners have succeeded — after 60 years of institutionalized bureaucratic dictatorship — in formulating political, social, economic or ecological demands at a very high level. That doesn't mean we should cry victory and deduce from this that the socialist paradise has already arrived. But, in the USSR above all, we have good reason to be optimistic.

LASZLO ANDOR: In order to really understand the situation in Hungary, you have to return to the particular ideology of the bureaucracy under Kadar, the

nature of the system then. During those years, the workers heard this refrain; "What are we doing? We are building socialism. Why is this a good system? Because the standard of living has not ceased to grow". From the time when the standard of living began to fall, in the mid 1970s, the HSWP regime was put onto the defensive on the ideological plane. The party in power began to become demoralized, incapable of facing up to the economic crisis. The pretended reforms then began from 1987, under the weight of a very aggressive ideological offensive of liberal politics and neo-classical economics.

This "new way of thinking" now enjoys a total hegemony. This does not mean that Marxism and socialism have completely disappeared from the scene; as I have already said a certain vanguard exists amongst the workers and the intelligentsia, which has no illusions in capitalism. But it is totally marginalized in the media and lacks the means to have an impact upon the society.

Working class organizations

■ **What are the forms of organization of the working class today, and its attitude to the structures already in place?**

ANNETT SEESE: Until October 1989, the German Federation of Free Trade Unions (FDGB) was the only existing trade union organization. All workers were de facto members of it. It was not then a trade union of militants. Official

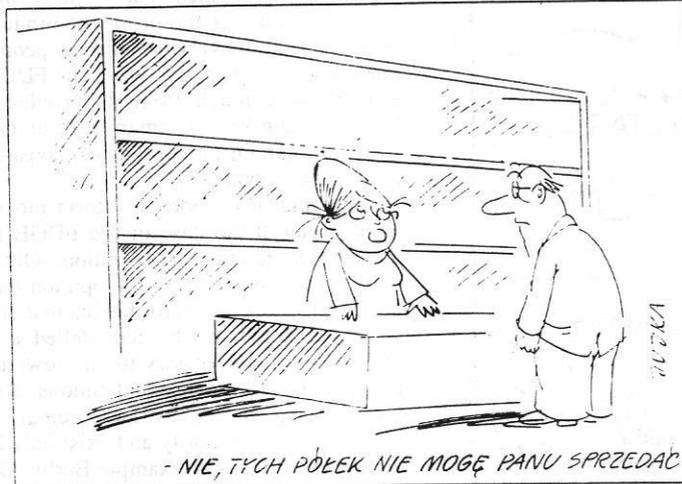
propaganda pretended that property was collective and that the means of production belonged to everyone. But the people did not see things in that way. The FDGB profited very much from its privileged links with the West German trade unions which, in certain circumstances, lavished financial aid upon it.

Beginning in October, a reform movement began at the base of the FDGB to make it a genuine trade union. Other worker militants were of the opinion that the FDGB was not reformable, that the apparatus could not be remodelled and that it was thus necessary to aim towards the creation of independent unions. But the independent unions have remained very much in a minority and exist only in certain cities, like for example Berlin. On the other hand, in Leipzig, in certain small enterprises, workers have begun to put into practice forms of self-management outside of any structure of the trade union or workers' council type.

Moreover, in addition to the traditional unions with elements of self-reform and the small independent unions, there exist three varieties of workers' councils. The first, very much in a minority, considers workers' councils as instruments for the implementation of a genuine self-management. A second variant, of which I have already spoken, is based on the involvement of the workers in production, on the West German model. The third advocates representation of the workers amongst the management.

During its recent congress, the FDGB adopted a very radical language — quasi-revolutionary! — in defence of the workers and their trade union rights. But it is hard to know if this will be followed through and if it still has enough of a genuine base to put its words into practice.

POUL LARSSON: In the Soviet Union also, there is an official trade union confederation, which has some millions of members, but whose nature as a trade union body is more than debatable, to the extent that it organizes no collective negotiations, no strikes and no wage demands! It functions rather as a structural framework, with some social and cultural activities. With *glasnost* and the mobilizations, these official trade unions are subject to a strong pressure and must find a new role. One of the possibilities open to them is to take a populist turn. The United Front of the Toilers (UFT) is an example of this (not to be confused with the Popular Fronts and the United Front of the Toilers in Kouzbass). The UFT is linked to the trade union bureaucracy, it employs a workerist rhetoric, attacks the cooperatives, the new millionaires — which is certainly correct — but bases itself also on Great Russian chauvinism. The UFT has without doubt a real mass base for the moment — it is an attempt of the trade union bureaucracy to gain some influence in the working class. Parallel to this, new structures of



"No, sir I can't sell you the shelves"

the trade union type, very much more positive, have also developed. I want to give two examples of this. The first is that of the Socialist Trade Union Federation, Sotsprof. It is difficult to estimate its real strength at the moment. According to one of its leaders who recently toured Great Britain, Sotsprof now groups around 60,000 workers, whereas it had less than 10,000 last summer. Sotsprof organizes workers in transport, in some factories, in steel and also has contacts with the miners. The second example is still more important — it concerns once more the miners who have not dissolved their strike committees which continue to function. The committees have their own publications and have sometimes taken control of the official trade unions. A sort of dual situation sometimes exists between the trade unions and the strike committees. The miners have created the United Front of the Toilers of Kouzbass, whilst at the same time the official trade unions created another organization, having practically the same name, to keep control of the workers of the region. The struggle continues between these two groups. The miners will soon be organizing a national conference which will undoubtedly have repercussions throughout the country.

MILKA TYSZKIEWICZ: A multitude of workers' organizations exist today in Poland and the situation can be summarized in the well known witticism — every time two Poles meet, three organizations are founded...and there are 35 million Poles!

Leaving aside the Stalinist organizations or those linked to the Church...I will content myself with speaking briefly about some of the organizations linked to Solidarnosc or to the clandestine activities of the working class in the 1980s. Solidarnosc was originally a mass organization with, roughly, one single type of membership. Today, a series of little organizations exist having very complicated structures. Solidarnosc now has nearly two million members, with two

structures at the national level. The first is a vertical structure, bureaucratic, led by Lech Walesa. It supports totally the Balcerowicz plan (see IV 178, February 12, 1990) and the reforms of the Mazowiecki government. The second is a horizontal structure of the different

industrial sectors. Today, there are 25 structures of this type organized at the base by the workers. This problem is very intimately linked to the workers' consciousness, or in any case that of the members of Solidarnosc. At first, everybody was in favour of capitalist "laissez-faire" but when people saw that it had become difficult to find work, when they had tasted the popular soup of Mr. Kuron, and when they had seen the real nature of the paradise which they had expected, they began to organize themselves.

Thus, in my region, the enterprise-based trade unions used to pass on 25% of the dues of their members to the regional structures — recently, they have decided to reduce this proportion to 10% and keep the rest for their own expenses. The majority of this sum is henceforth to be devoted to these horizontal structures. There also exist regional territorial structures, the networks. These are essentially groups from different enterprises in the same city or region who coordinate together for local activities.

Some clandestine structures of Solidarnosc continue still to function at the regional level, with regional strike committees. The majority of their members belong also to the legal trade union, but maintain their clandestine structures, their equipment, and so on. I must also mention "Fighting Solidarnosc", another clandestine organization, which is half way between a classical trade union and a political organization. Politically, "Fighting Solidarnosc" can be placed in the social democratic current — initially, under martial law, it had a radical enough program on self-management, then it veered to the right.

Another interesting fact is that, since nearly a year ago, a trade union of sectors of the army and, more recently, a police trade union have begun to organize themselves. There is also a structure of Solidarnosc of small peasant proprietors which also organizes the agricultural workers on state farms. They are very radical and are almost nostalgic for the good old days of

Stalinism when their living conditions were not as bad...

I must also mention the Committees of Citizens of Solidarnosc, which are political structures set up before the parliamentary elections. They bring together both factory workers and sections of the intelligentsia and envisage transforming themselves into political parties. But the level of political consciousness of the working class, as opposed to its level of organization, is fairly low.

Under martial law, and a little before, a kind of "clandestine state" existed, composed of groups of intellectuals from the working class and of permanent workers, organized at different levels, in trade unions or in cultural clubs. One of these is the Informal Information Agency. These kinds of agency existed even at the factory level with structures independent of Solidarnosc. Today, they are important, the leadership of Solidarnosc tries to dominate the media, notably the television where the news emanating from the bureaucracy has simply been replaced by that emanating from Solidarnosc.

LASZLO ANDOR: The last decade of economic crisis has weighed very much on the evolution of the trade unions because the workers have been disoriented by these unions which did not defend their interests, despite the fall in the standard of living and of wages. But, paradoxically, the official trade unions have not experienced a significant decline. They have however been paralyzed, losing their capacity for mobilization.

It was an ideal situation for the proponents of the peaceful transition. Under capitalism, the trade unions could only be a source of problems, of conflicts, and so it was best to weaken them to the maximum in this period of transition. There has been pressure to fragment the trade unions, and create a multitude of groups so as to divide the workers — the League of Independent Trade Unions (LITU) and Solidarity are two examples of this. The LITU is under the thumb of the Free Democrats who are one of the right wing organizations in our multiparty system. Certainly, there are honest trade unionists in these two groups — more in Solidarity than in the LITU — but the effects of this division have been disastrous for the workers. The parties of the right and these new structures have demoralized the old trade unions and tried to destroy them. Of course, very many of the leaders of the old trade unions were corrupt, they did not do their work as trade unionists and contented themselves with observing developments. They complain incessantly about not being consulted about the measures which are taken, sometimes attempting to organize strikes, but they have lost their capacity for initiative. As to the groups of the right, they are too preoccupied with their parliamentary tasks, by the privatiza-

tions, and so on, to have the time to take any interest in trade union questions! Except when it comes to attacking the old leaders. For example, they launch attacks in the press on the corruption of the trade union leaders — which is correct. But the principal reproach which they address to them is not to do with their passivity in the face of government decisions (for these trade unions act as transmission belts for the regime) but rests on the fact that they menage the peaceful transition to capitalism!

But, after the elections, the attacks against the trade union movement will be still harder and, because of the disarray of the workers, it will be even harder for them to defend themselves. The real debate then revolves around the necessity of creating a new and genuine trade union structure which defends the interests of the workers. It is in this context that the movement of workers' councils must be analyzed. Historically, workers' councils have always been a last recourse for the working class, when it could no longer make its voice heard by other means — that is the situation in Hungary today.

Firstly, the government and the directors of the economy are preparing to sell the factories and enterprises of the country to foreign countries. Very many workers have doubts about this economic robbery of the peaceful transition, about the privatizations and the selloffs of state property. There are of course some notable differences between the marvelous abstract capitalism and actually existing capitalism. Besides, in most cases, the new local capitalists or the new managers are none other than the former enriched bureaucrats or the former directors, the very people whose management has led the economy and the enterprises to bankruptcy! Which poses some problems in the minds of the people...

The workers have realized that their factories are going to be sold at very low prices and that in the future they will have no right to participate in decisions in the enterprise. So they want to forestall this and create a counter power — this is one of the reasons for the creation of workers' councils.

Another factor, especially in the small towns, is that the workers no longer want their factories to be mere subsidiaries of the big enterprises, and so they want to take in hand the management of these small concerns.

Two conceptions and objectives underlie the formation of workers' councils. Ini-

tially, it was about substituting for the decaying trade unions and taking their place. These first councils were led by supporters of the Democratic Forum. That tied in with their strategy for the destruction of the trade union movement. A second conception then appeared, according to which the workers' councils must coexist with the trade unions and play a complementary role. Today this conception seems to predominate in the majority of the existing councils.

The movement for workers' councils is in full flow in Hungary, their number has not ceased to grow, above all in the last few months. The first national meeting of workers' councils was held in December 1989, with 20 trade union delegates, as



well as representatives of the political parties and other movements. The second meeting, which took place last February, brought together more than 50 delegates and established a national council and a trade union information bureau. This bureau works with the intellectuals who are sympathetic to the workers and who play a role not of "proselytism" in favour of the creation of new councils, but of help and assistance to the workers who want to create councils in their factories.

Workers and the market

■ **What is the attitude of the working class to the privatizations, the market reforms, and the bureaucracy's attempts at self-reform?**

LASZLO ANDOR: In Hungary, it would be difficult for us to speak of "market reforms"...This was still valid in the preceding period, when the Communist Party initiated these reforms. But, today, it would be more accurate to speak of the total restoration of capitalism and the

market!

The attitude of the workers remains fairly neutral. The policy was decided above their heads and only the party leaderships have had the opportunity to express their views on it. The workers have not then really had the chance to realize what has happened in the country other than through the fall in wages and the rise in prices and the rate of inflation!

MILKA TYSZKIEWICZ: In general, the problem of the market reforms has always been linked to the attitude of the working class to the bureaucracy and to bureaucratic planning. Two kinds of attitude exist on the way to approach the problem of the bureaucracy. A first group in the opposition supports certain sectors of the bureaucracy, hoping thus to divide it and play off one sector against another. This first tendency wants to realize the market reforms and the privatization of Polish industry, "in the name of the working class". I'm not speaking here of the position of groups of intellectuals but rather of that of groups of workers. This first group supports Walesa.

On the other hand, there is also a very strong rank and file movement against the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy has divided into two "social-democratic" parties which are led by the people who imposed martial law at the beginning of the 1980s! As a consequence, some people, like Kuron and Modzelewski, who used to refer to themselves as social democrats, have become rather embarrassed because the very concept is discredited. Modzelewski has even had to write a fairly critical article to clarify his attitude towards this concept.

The new social democracy of the Republic of Poland refers to nationalist and anti-semitic ideas, plays on the fear of German reunification, denounces "certain Jews who played an infamous role in the Stalinist period", and supports Monsignor Glemp, the Polish primate, in the conflict around the Carmelite convent at Auschwitz. This is the first time in the history of the relationship between the Communist Party and the Church that a speech by a high-ranking Catholic dignitary has been published in full in the CP's newspaper!

As to the reforms, the spokespeople for the bureaucracy — and above all Rakowski — on the one hand boast of having initiated them, and, on the other, do not hesitate to say that the government today is a Solidarnosc government (and not a CP/Solidarnosc government) and that,

consequently, it is Solidarnosc that bears the entire responsibility for the (unpopular) measures... The bureaucracy uses the Stalinist official trade unions (OPZZ) to attack the Mazowiecki government.

A part of the bureaucracy continues to enrich itself, notably with speculation on the exchange rate of the dollar and the zloty, through contact with foreign entrepreneurs. It expands its business relations with foreign capitalists and serves as a political cover for them. In exchange, the capitalists provide 99% of the capital...but the profits are divided equally. They buy the enterprises — as in Hungary — of which they are directors or technical engineers, which they have directed in the past with such incompetence! In some cases, they sabotage production to lower the price at which the factories can be sold, and then, after their privatization, they pocket huge profits.

The market has become a universal alternative to bureaucratic planning. When you go into the factories to ask the workers if they support the introduction of the market, they will respond almost unanimously in the affirmative. But if you ask them what the market means to them concretely, they reply that it means the absence of inflation, low prices, high salaries, enrichment and happiness for everybody! It is, to say the least, a very idyllic vision of capitalism...

But what is essential is the process of becoming conscious of the reality of capitalism. To the extent that information on this subject comes from the West and people realize that Poland has no chance in the event of a complete opening to the competition of the world market, the working class will begin to seek other solutions. But, for the moment, no credible mass alternative exists to the Balcerowicz plan.

There is a real absence of initiatives coming from the working class. The workers sense that they can launch strike movements — which is easy, they know how to do it — but they have no alternative project. This leads to a certain paralysis.

It is interesting to see how the discussion on self-management has evolved in this context. There is a real tradition of self-management in Poland, with structures on a national scale, such as the Self-Management Forum, which has existed for nearly ten years. It consists of mixed structures, based essentially on the original workers of Solidarnosc. Solidarnosc and the structures of self-management had already tried to kick the bureaucrats out of the factories, notably by replacing them with its own supporters. But they then met with serious difficulties — it was impossible for them to resolve the crisis at the scale of single factories. Thus, Solidarnosc's project (dating from 1980-81) of a self-managed republic has been progressively abandoned, and many people have turned towards other models,

notably the American or West German models of co-management or workers' shareholdings in the factories. But all this is not yet very concrete.

POUL LARSSON: In the USSR, it is necessary to take into account the egalitarian sentiment and certain socialist values which are very much more anchored in the consciousness of the workers than in the other countries of Eastern Europe. Despite all the criticisms of the regime, the working class is determined to defend its full employment and the stability of the prices of certain consumption goods and rents. But, the radical partisans of the market play a very important role at the ideological level, notably in the media. The introduction of private cooperatives, nearly three years ago, represented the first important test of the reaction to the market reforms. In the context of general anarchy that characterizes the Soviet economy, these cooperatives have had the opportunity to make huge profits, buying products very cheap and selling them very dear, thanks to the generalized scarcity of a series of basic necessities. This has led to a violent reaction from the workers. One of the demands of the miners, for example, was the pure and simple abolition of the cooperatives, or at least the application of measures of restriction against them. These restrictions already exist, through the means of regulations and commissions, including at a national level.

This economic anarchy has created new contradictions within society, which certain groups of workers have been able to profit from. Thanks to the liberal reforms, some factories have been able to reconvert themselves towards the production of more expensive goods and to realize important financial gains from which the workers have also benefitted.

The scarcity of consumer goods has

engendered a real pressure in favour of the market, with its usual quota of illusions. But the danger is that the use of these kind of mechanisms could diffuse the idea that the introduction of the market could permit a more equitable redistribution thanks to the law of supply and demand. Tensions develop between regions which accuse each other of exploitation or hoarding of products.

ANNETT SEESE: Is it necessary to speak again of what the East German workers think of the market? This said, the fashionable slogan today is "All freedom to the market...but a social and ecological market!" Everybody believes it, and it is absurd. In fact, these problems have never been really discussed — what is the market, how could we have an ecological market, and so on. The market is vulgarly identified with liberty and the plan to a prison. If you say to people that capitalism is in fact still more planned, and still more "disorganized" than bureaucratic planning, you are immediately treated as a Stalinist, SED supporter, and so on. People even think that the market will suppress all administrative bureaucracy, every formal and bureaucratic procedure linked to the functioning of the state.

Worse still, the demand for the market is perceived by the workers as essentially progressive. Very many amongst them say that some price rises and a certain level of unemployment are inevitable with the market, indeed necessary...but nobody is ready to lose his or her own job! Thus, in absolute terms, people want the market, whilst being ready to combat its concrete manifestations, like price rises or unemployment.

We are headed then towards a Polish situation. In the GDR also, a part of the bureaucracy, the directors, "privatizes" itself to profit from the new freedoms to rush to the West and do business with the capitalists. ★



Social crisis brews as Algeria opens up

NEXT JUNE municipal elections will take place in Algeria. President Chadli Benjedid and his supporters are hoping to damp down discontent without endangering either their power or the liberal reforms currently underway. The recently legalized Socialist Workers Party (SWP) plays an important role in the Algerian democratic movement, fighting against both the government's austerity plans and the Islamic fundamentalists. Its spokesperson, Chawki Salhi describes the situation in the country. The interview was carried out on March 7, 1990, by Erdal Tan.

WHAT is the situation in Algeria after the October 1988 Intifada? What effect have the riots had?

The crucial fact is the catastrophic economic situation. The regime tried to smash the mass movement in order to be able to implement a policy of making the state sector and the whole economy profitable, by opening it to foreign investment.

The October 1988 events¹ complicated this project. The youth revolt forced the regime to change tack. But Chadli has skillfully manipulated popular pressure on the regime's institutions: he has proposed a political opening up and at the same time created the conditions for the very rapid application of the programme of opening up to imperialism and of internal economic liberalization.

Initially, the process of political opening up was restricted to the idea of the organizing of tendencies inside the single party, the National Liberation Front (FLN). But multi-partyism has been forced on the regime, because the ruling bureaucrats were opposed to any change in the FLN and also because of the overall rejection

of the institutions of the single party by Algerian society and the often radical, democratic aspirations of the popular masses. In this context, the opposition nuclei could not accept integration into the single party without discrediting themselves.

Algeria is an increasingly politicized country, but a workers movement has not formed on the same scale as the social struggles. Workers struggles are numerous, but scattered and localized, and put forward only timid demands.

Finally, it should be pointed out that while the regime makes more and more clearcut declarations of liberal intent, they are not carried through in reality. The state sector has not been sold, reforms are made, but the financial organizations have not given much of a response.

■ You have talked of the economic crisis and the regime's economic liberalization project. Can you say more about this crisis?

The first thing is the burden of foreign debt that eats up 70% of the income from exports. Algeria is still a totally dependent country. Basic food products and spare parts indispensable for production come from abroad. This creates an infernal circle of permanent indebtedness demanding payment of the interest.

Since the start of the 1980s, we have been suffering the aftermath of the disastrous industrialization effort of the Boumedienne government in the 1970s, which has resulted today in massive youth unemployment. It is the young people who rebelled in 1988.

The nationalized sector, too heavy and badly managed, has a permanent and inbuilt deficit. The present tendency is to shut down unprofitable firms, putting their workers on the dole. They are the victims of the incompetence of the bourgeois bureaucracy and the present regime.

In the future, the regime is planning to sell off the means of production to foreign and Algerian investors, hoping that

the profit motive would thereby get the economy moving again. But the fall in wages and the continuing wearing down of social benefits in such areas as education and health will provoke a reaction. The regime is envisaging ever more draconian measures to attract foreign investment.

■ Is the privatization effort directed mainly to foreign investors or is there a layer of the bourgeoisie or bureaucracy that has accumulated enough capital to take over the nationalized sector?

The Algerian private sector is significant and has capital. But it does not invest much in production because of the existing political institutions. In general the stolen billions are sent to Switzerland or towards speculative sectors of the Algerian economy, above all services.

The Algerian capitalists are certainly contemplating taking over part of nationalized industry, but they will be very cautious about using their own capital — they will prefer to use finance from the state banks.

But none of these investors can open operate on the vast scale needed to get the strategic sectors, such as steel, or the enterprise complexes created in the 1970s back on the road. Imperialist capital is essential for the government's plans. But the ruling apparatus is showing a certain inertia over its plans. The National

Assembly for example has turned down a plan for a mixed company controlled by the foreign partner. The embedded nationalism remains an obstacle to foreign investment.

■ What has been the opposition's reaction to the economic plans?

Most of the parties that have emerged with the regime's encouragement after October 1988 put forward a liberal programme, with the exception of the Party of the Socialist Vanguard (PAGS, the Stalinist party), which qualifies its support for economic liberalization, and the Socialist Workers Party (PST) that opposes this national consensus contrary to the interests of the workers and the popular masses.

1. On October 5, 1988, rioting broke out in Algiers and the rest of the country, to protest against increases in the prices of basic necessities. The government declared a state of emergency for the first time in the history of the country since independence — the repression cost more than 500 lives. Chadli restored calm by promising democratic reforms.



■ What has happened to the mass movement?

Its best organized component is the student movement, that was born in the 1987 general strike of some 150,000 students in some 20 university centres. This gave rise to the National Union of Independent and Democratic Students (SNEAD). Last December and January there were important student struggles, notably against the autonomy plan for the universities. This reform went in the direction of making the universities pay, and threatened the right to an education of the poorer layers of the population. But this union is stagnating, partly because of the emergence of two fundamentalist student organizations with real influence.

There is also a women's movement that has been formed in reaction to the violent attacks of the fundamentalists.

Movements have appeared in the villages and in the urban districts around the question of land distribution, housing problems and water supplies. In towns like Oran, the population is organized in committees that came out of the democratic movement against repression from 1988. But these committees are not permanent, except in the special case of the Kabylia area, where there is a considerable level of organization.

The Berber movement has been the backbone of other forms of social expression. It has been the only movement not to sink into the expectant passivity that has gripped the country. Since 1980, when the Berber movement arose, and the following repression, the regime has become more tolerant. There are hundreds of village associations. A pluralist structure has been organized after the start of the July 1989 school term which led to a march on Algiers on January 25 this year to demand the opening of a Berber language institute and the recognition of Amazigh, the Berber language, as an official language on a par with Arabic.

The situation in the trade union movement is not clear. The working class is only slowly organizing. Social struggles are multiplying, but the state trade union apparatus, the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA), blocks out the horizon. It has yet to be challenged by another union current that can either disrupt the bureaucracy from inside or propose a credible alternative from the outside.

■ What is the reason for this situation in the workers movement?

In my view the forces of the organized movement — revolutionaries or Stalinists — are very weak and the context is not one of a profound political radicalization that would allow a qualitative change. There has been a considerable rise in social struggles and a progressive politicization of the workers, but unemployment causes workers to be cautious.

Union coordinations have seen the light of day here and there, between October

1988 and June 1989, notably in Kabylia, Algiers, Oran and so on. To an extent they have been replaced by the initiatives of the bureaucratic left, that is tied to the regime for renovating the UGTA, even if these initiatives are doomed to failure given that they do not relate to social struggles. This bureaucratic manoeuvre, against a background of demands for free union elections and open conferences of the union opposition, has frozen the forces of the union elites and advanced militants, without having any great impact on the general consciousness of the workers.

Some of the struggles underway are coordinated. There exists, for example, an interesting structure in the teachers movement and local initiatives have arisen in sectors of industry. But there is no national alternative. The economic liberalization may change things and provoke violent reactions.

There was an important mass movement against the repression after October 1988. It has now retreated, as is shown by the fall off of organization in the urban localities that arose in Autumn 1988.

The fundamentalists take advantage of these weaknesses. They continue to have regular activity via the mosques and have become a pole of radical opposition to the regime on the social level and on the level of liberties.

■ How strong are the fundamentalists? What is their programme?

The fundamentalist current now plays a major role in Algerian politics. In October 1988, Islamic fundamentalism was a small group like the PST or the Stalinists. But on October 7, 1988, in the middle of the mobilizations, the fundamentalists called for a demonstration after Friday prayers. This got a big response and gave them valuable political credibility. After that the secular student and intellectual movements took charge of the organization of the democratic movement and pushed the fundamentalists into the background. But the failure of the democratic movement in the confrontation with the regime left the field open to the fundamentalists.

■ Is the regime deliberately using the fundamentalist movement to block the democratic movement?

There was a tactical alliance between the regime and traditionalist currents who are not opposed to the reforms or to privatization. Then the regime discovered that the fundamentalists are a real threat. They have picked up the rebellious youth, above all the declassed youth. Their audience threatens Chadli's power.

■ What is the explanation for the influence of the fundamentalists among the young?

The fundamentalists give social assistance to the unemployed, for example. During the 1989 earthquake, the mosques

collected relief and the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), the fundamentalist party took the credit, organizing recruitment campaigns in the disaster areas. But their central activity is their political campaign against women, more than on the social terrain.

Fundamentalism thrives on social disintegration. The source of fundamentalism is the population's perception of the failure of capitalism, along with the catastrophe of the so-called socialist countries, even before the spectacular events in Prague and Berlin. All this has led to a retreat into mysticism, and a certain religiosity, going beyond the organized fundamentalist milieu. On the other hand, the fundamentalist movement was to an extent isolated by the democratic response of the mass movement.

Fundamentalism is extremely dangerous. It challenges Chadli's dictatorship and demands the right of the people to speak. But then the Imams put themselves forward as the guardians of the people's interests, saying that, since the people are ignorant, an Islamic council must lead in their place. On the social level the fundamentalists denounce the corrupt Westernized regime, but only in a moderate fashion, since it has no alternative to propose.

■ What other political currents exist today in Algeria?

There is a social democratic party that is rather timidly liberal bourgeois, tainted by links with the FLN. There are a number of more or less liberal parties that call to one degree or another for a liberal opening up. Many of these parties have neither a history nor a social base. They are inventions of the president's services to give credibility to the democratic opening.

The parties based on the Berber movement are much more consistent and resolute in their democratic demands. They take up issues such as secularism, freedoms, women's rights and so on. The Berber parties are for a market economy, without central control.

Chadli's political dynamism surpasses the FLN. He wants to be the president of all the parties, and of all Algerians. He wants to play the role of a Bonaparte, saviour of the nation, as when he succeeded in damping down the demonstrations in 1988 through making promises.

But then there is the problem of what is to become of the FLN's bureaucracy. There has been resistance to Chadli's plans even in the Central Committee, although the economic reforms have not been questioned.

In June there will be municipal elections in an unfair context where the parties do not have the same means and on the basis of a constitution drawn up by the FLN alone. It would have been fairer, more democratic to have had an open discussion with different proposals, but the regime did not want to take the risk. The

fundamentalists have the means to present themselves at a national level. The PST is fighting for a constituent assembly.

■ What has been the impact of the East European events on the PAGS [the Communist Party]?

The Stalinists of the PAGS have come out of clandestinity in a weakened condition. After various tactical twists and turns they have supported all the regimes, all the governments that have succeeded one another in Algeria. In October 1988 many of them were thrown into prison and tortured. Their permanent battle for the formation of a "patriotic front" including both fundamentalists and military men devoted to the nation has considerably lessened their impact. The crisis in the so-called socialist countries has increased the confusion in this already weak party. For example, at a press conference, the PAGS leadership announced that it had sent a message of support to the East German SED for its courage in entering upon reforms, just a few days before the fall of Krenz.

During clandestinity, the PAGS operated in a relatively decentralized manner, as a protection against repression. But legalization brought the contradictions out into the open. In practise the various sectors of the PAGS do not act in an homogeneous fashion. On various occasions local federations have put pressure on the historic leadership of PAGS to force changes of line.

■ What about the PST?

The PST was legalized in October 1989. It is a force that has an impact on Algerian politics for several reasons. This is because of its role in the democratic mass movement, in various social movements, where it sometimes plays the leading role, despite its limited resources, but also because of its political initiatives and positions.

For example, the PST opposes the cosy collaboration of all the parties, and has unmasked the perspective of an anti-popular national union. The PST has played an important role in mobilizing against the fundamentalist danger. Today we are a small organization of several hundred organized activists, but at last our spokespeople have access to the media. We have some hundreds of organized sympathizers and thousands of requests for membership that have not yet been followed up. The PST exists in some 20 Algerian towns, above all in Algiers and Kabylia. It has organized meetings of more than a thousand people. This is a force, a precious capital, that needs to be tended, since unfortunately there is no mass workers party. This gives the PST a great responsibility.

The PST gets a hearing because it is the only party that takes up the demands of the workers and the popular masses. It is the only party that demands taxation of

Women against fundamentalism

LAST MARCH 8, 30,000 women demonstrated in the main Algerian cities, responding to an appeal by many womens organizations. These Algerian women demanded the abolition of the Family Code, and women's rights to education, work and full citizenship. They also wanted to respond to the attacks of the fundamentalists of whom they are the main target. IV spoke to Samira Fellah, a member of the Algerian Socialist Workers Party and of the Association for the Emancipation of Women about the situation of women in Algeria and the perspectives of the Algerian women's movement. The interview was carried out on March 1, 1990 by Djamila Ben Said.

WHAT is the situation of women in Algeria against the background of the rise in fundamentalism?

We must remember that backward traditions have never relaxed their grip, despite the participation of women in the war of liberation. Certain historians have spoken of the "instrumentalization" of women. During the war, even if they were given a subaltern role, women got out of the family ghetto and took on responsibilities, some even joining the guerillas. However, their participation in the anti-colonial struggle did not put an

end to the traditional vision of the woman and her secondary role in Algerian society.

At independence, when there was a question of constructing a new, supposedly socialist, society, no concrete measures were taken to struggle against this ancestral vision of the role of women, as some had hoped after their participation in the war. The question has never been discussed, nor even taken up by women themselves.

Islam was an important mark of identity in the face of French colonialism. It was used, behind the official "socialist" discourse, to justify retaining traditional

the rich, to initiate a campaign for non-payment of the debt, to denounce the sale of the state sector to multinationals, and the opening of the Algerian market to the world market. These themes are very popular in Algeria but they have all but disappeared from every other political programme.

The PST has approached other small revolutionary organizations² in the hope of making its founding congress, that takes place this year, the occasion for a bringing together of all those who are for the socialist revolution.

We believe that the Chadli regime is unable to resolve the crisis in Algeria. The only solution is socialist revolution and we are today proposing a democratic transitional programme that will lead, via the establishment of a broad workers and popular front, to the setting up of a workers' government, the only way out of the crisis. This strategic axis does not prevent us from making alliances on specific questions, very broad and democratic fronts, including with the liberals, on democratic demands.

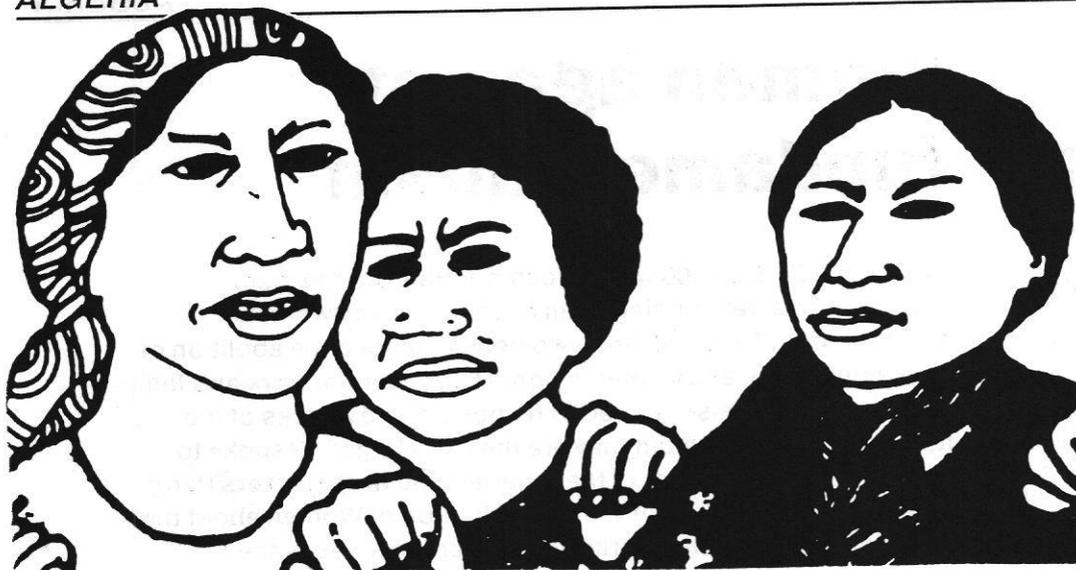
Our line in the elections will be the alliance of all those forces that base them-

selves on the struggle of the popular masses.

■ The PST came out of the Revolutionary Communist Group (GCR), a sympathizing group of the Fourth International. What is the relationship of the PST to the Fourth International?

The GCR gave birth to the PST which is not a member of the Fourth International and does not have organic links with it. It is prohibited by law for parties to have international affiliations. The PST will fight to change this law. Our fight alongside the workers, the popular masses, naturally creates an identity of aims with the Fourth International and other currents in the international workers movement on concrete solidarity tasks. On the other hand the regime finds its international partners in the imperialist forces. ★

2. The other Algerian far left groups are the Workers Revolutionary Organization (the ORT, a split from the PST), the Socialist Workers Organization (OST, part of the international Lambert current) and the Algerian Communist Movement (MCA).



social relations and thus women's traditional role. In the 1970s, when Algeria needed labour, women were used as a "reserve army".

In the aftermath of the democratic opening that followed the October 1988 events and the first assemblies of women at the University of Algiers, attacks on women have multiplied. Mobilizations had already taken place in 1980, first of all against the decree that forbade women from travelling without a chaperone and against the Family Code, under discussion since Independence but never applied because of the protests it aroused.

This family code makes women minors for life. It is necessary, for example, to get the agreement of the guardian for marriage and for any important individual decision. Divorce is made difficult. In cases of bigamy, for example, the woman has the "right" to leave, although there are few places to go outside her family, which will not always take her in, especially if she has children. Divorce can be obtained if the marriage is not consummated, but this is difficult. In any case, divorce represents a terrible moral humiliation and a hard material test — especially since single women have difficulty getting housing.

But women are increasingly in danger of physical attack. The flat of one woman was set on fire, another was burnt by her brother because she refused to give up work and so on. Women are often attacked in the street by men who order them to come home with them. The street is becoming forbidden to them. All this creates an atmosphere of terror for the majority of women. In such an atmosphere, it is difficult to organize and react, above all in the absence of any space for organized conviviality that would foster meeting and discussion between women.

■ Why do the fundamentalists have such a grip on Algerian society?

The fundamentalists have led a whole series of campaigns. Against mixing of the sexes, against a teachers' strike in October

1989 in which they targeted the women (for whom they demanded early retirement), against women working and "stealing" the work of men and so on.

These women-hating campaigns are real incitements to murder. Young people, left without any ideals and with little hope of finding employment, are often responsive to the fundamentalist discourse. They add it onto the backward view of women that they have received from their education, including their school textbooks.

■ Have things got worse for women in recent years?

A few months ago I would have replied in the negative. For 15 years women's work has not improved. Women are fenced off in the same insecure sectors, as is often the case in the third world. If officially 8% of Algerian women are working, we suffer more and more open discrimination and are more and more disapproved of by public opinion. Women are badly accepted both in the street and at work.

The absence of representative and militant trade unions for all workers does nothing for the situation of working women. Faced with attacks on our elementary professional rights, women do not have a real trade union framework to put forward their problems.

■ How are women reacting to these attacks and the aggression?

Since the October 1988 movement women have begun to organize, to protest against torture, for the "victims of October" but also around their own problems. Several women's associations have been born on the basis of preceding work done by a variety of political forces.

The Party of the Socialist Vanguard (PAGS) developed work towards women in the 1970s. But since the mobilizations against the Family Code, in the 1980s, the only activity that it continues is the production of a theoretical review bring-

ing together intellectuals, which has at least enabled certain debates to take place.

At the time, and during a period of repression, the Revolutionary Communist Group (GCR — a sympathizing organization of the Fourth International) organized women's cine-clubs, to bring women together. As soon as it became possible, these structures contributed to the creation of women's organizations. Since 1985, the Socialist Workers Organization (OST — from the Lambertist current) has maintained a women's association. But it did not try to mobilize women during the demonstrations against the Family Code and its activity has amounted to not much more than its formal existence.

After the October demonstrations, both the OST and the PAGS did not attempt to continue the fight around women's questions. They have sought above all to present themselves as political forces. They even banished our comrades who, in the associations, raised questions of the specific oppression of women and who refused to reduce the question to a purely legal level.

The PST, for its part, has always explained that there exist in Algeria unwritten laws that also have to be fought. Women must become aware of their specific situation and organize themselves to change the existing relations. Laws are not enough to change a concrete situation, and our work must go beyond juridical forms.

Today, the PAGS and the PST maintain several associations in different parts of the country. The PST takes part in the main associations, and is leading two equally important campaigns; the struggle against what has been ancestrally inscribed in people's thinking and social relations and the struggle against the laws that codify women's status, since these laws could not have existed if the society had not been predisposed to them.

Algerian women are perfectly aware of the double nature of their fight, which is why women not associated with the PST work with us in the associations.

■ Is any attempt being made to unify the women's movement in Algeria?

Steps have been taken to coordinate the different associations that exist. From November 30 to December 1 1989, the first meeting of Algerian women's associations was held to create a national coordination with the strength necessary to respond to the present attacks. This coordination has not however been able to respond to the essential problems that are posed because of the division into different associations. The women themselves refuse to choose between different programmes and associations. Political sec-

Thatcher's flagship hits the rocks

tarianism such as that of the OST and PAGES means the creation of quasi-cartels in the associations that they lead. This makes the situation difficult but we continue to hope and will go on fighting to build a unitary, and above all democratic, women's movement.

In our association we put forward the idea that, despite common problems, women do not experience repression in the same way regardless of their social position. Even if this aspect of our work appears rather propagandist, we are therefore trying to bring together working class women. The task for us today is to construct a democratic movement of women who know how to react to their concrete problems regarding political, social and cultural equality, which is not just a juridical matter.

At a time when the fundamentalists threaten the few gains that women have, the women's movement that we need to create is one that knows how to reach women who are often illiterate or do not know the content of the laws and most of their rights.

After the different women's mobilizations, the fundamentalists have been compelled to recognize that women do have problems. They responded by an assembly of more than 50,000 people, many fewer than they announced or hoped for. Some women participated voluntarily, but many were taken there by force by their male "guardians". The women's coordination has also obliged some democratic structures to react and defend women.

It is necessary to explain to people that the fundamentalists' aim is above all political, for confusion reigns both among women and the masses as a whole. There is a confusion between a cultural element and fanaticism in the service of political goals. Women must not be alone in this fight, as they have been for the past months. A more profound response is needed today, drawing in other forces.

This is what is taking place with the Forum for Democratic Liberties, which brings together trade unions, including the National Union of Autonomous and Democratic Students (SNEAD), women's organizations, the Assembly of Intellectuals and Scientists (RAIS — organized by the PAGES) and certain parties including the Front of Socialist Forces (FFS — liberal organization, mainly Berber) the PST and the PAGES. The Forum is trying to equip itself with a democratic platform, but this is not enough for women. They need much more precise answers.

In the coming years the women's movement will be a test of all the problems of Algerian society. In posing their problems regarding work, women are raising the problem of unemployment, which is a menace to all Algerians. The same is true of housing, purchasing power and so on. The women's movement is, above all, one of the main forces fighting fundamentalism. ★

THE FIGURES speak for themselves. A parliamentary by-election in Mid-Staffordshire on March 22 saw a Conservative majority of 14,600 converted into a Labour majority of 9,400 — a swing to Labour of 21%, the biggest in a by-election since 1935, and sufficient to guarantee a Labour majority in Parliament of over 200 seats if repeated at a general election. To underline the point, an opinion poll in the *Observer* of March 25 reported a Labour lead over the Conservatives across the country of 28%, the highest figure recorded since polling began. Whilst a number of factors account for the current unpopularity of the Thatcher government, one issue in particular has come to the fore as a focus for popular anger at its policies — the introduction of the "Poll Tax" as a new basis for the financing of local government. In recent weeks, over 100,000 people in Britain have participated in public protests as local councils met to set the rates at which the Poll Tax would have to be paid. As anger spilled over into violence, politicians united with the media in denouncing the "Trotskyist agitators" alleged to be inciting the protests.

BERNARD GIBBONS

THE MORE thoughtful sectors of the bourgeoisie, however, are more aware of the fragility of Thatcher's "miracle" and the depth of popular resentment at the Poll Tax — as the pro-Conservative *Sunday Telegraph* put it, "in a society where violence lurks so near the surface...governments ought to take great care to avoid giving provocation on this unprecedented scale".

How is it, British political commentators ask, that such a seasoned demagogue as Thatcher should have misread the popular mood so wildly? Usually, the explanations revolve around Thatcher's personal psychology, her legendary stubbornness, arrogance and so on. In fact, the strategy behind the Poll Tax is a logical continuation of the one pursued by Thatcher since she came to power in 1979. Something more fundamental has gone wrong for the Tories — the basic structural weaknesses of the British economy are becoming increasingly apparent, and economics is no longer on Thatcherism's side.

Thatcher has characterized the Poll Tax as the "ideological flagship" of her current administration. It crystallizes two of her chief obsessions; firstly, her crusade to defeat Labour in the big urban local authorities, which she sees as the last bastions of Socialism in Britain, and second-

ly, her need to maintain the support of the skilled working class and lower middle class layers who have been kept in the Tory camp through a consumer boom based on tax cuts, easy credit and a string of populist innovations.

For many years, local government finance in Britain has been based on the payment of local "rates" levied on each household. Although far from being equitable, the old system had some progressive content in that the amount paid was dependent on the size and quality of each individual dwelling. The system also allowed considerable autonomy to local authorities to determine their own levels of expenditure, and in particular it allowed Labour controlled authorities to reflect to some extent the needs of those who had elected them. This system has been increasingly eroded since the Tories came to power, and the Poll Tax is intended to seal this process. Now, every individual over 18 will have to pay the same amount (although the exact sum will vary from area to area) regardless of income or size of dwelling — an unemployed youth will be expected to pay the same as a millionaire.

Whilst clearly the less well off will suffer under such a scheme, concern for such people has never particularly entered into Thatcher's scheme of things. But the plan was that upper working class and lower

middle class voters, many of whom resented the old system, would benefit from the redistribution of the burden. Conservative controlled councils would set reasonable and sensible rates for the Poll Tax, whilst Labour councils in the big cities, already struggling to provide even the most basic services for those hit hardest by Thatcherism, would be forced either to slash spending even more brutally or to set impossibly high rates for the Poll Tax. This scenario, combined with a continued onslaught in the slavishly pro-Thatcher media against Labour's "loony left" local councils (allegedly lavishing money on lesbians and gays and various troublesome ethnic minorities) would provide the background to another Tory election triumph.

It has all gone horribly wrong for Thatcher. As planned, the poorest will indeed suffer, and the richest will gain — researchers at the London School of Economics have shown that the poorest 20% of the population will pay 5% more per year under the new system, with the richest 20% being 5% better off. But it is now clear that the middle layers in the more comfortable areas, the Thatcherite bedrock, are also going to suffer. Surveys have shown that the average household will be paying 33% more under the current system than the old, and in some areas 50% more — and Thatcher accepts that these figures are accurate. 36 out of 39 county councils, including many loyal Conservative administrations in relatively well-off areas, have set rates for the Poll Tax far higher than government targets. Batches of Conservative councillors have resigned from the party, and some of the most militant and violent confrontations have taken place in the quietest Tory backwaters. For these "middle layers", already under pressure from high interest rates, high poll tax demands mark a further twist of the financial screw.

Thatcher's miscalculation is a product of the economic problems her government is facing. For example, the government's target rate for the average Poll Tax levy was calculated on the basis of an inflation rate of 4% — in fact inflation in Britain is running at 7.5%, and expected to rise through to the summer. A tightening labour market has given new confidence to workers, and wage settlements are now running at an annual rate of 9.25%, again expected to rise (needless to say, in the face of this, monetarist dogma and eulogies to the "free market" have gone out the window, and Britain's economic problems are again being attributed to "greedy workers" who are unfairly using their industrial muscle to make

excessive demands). More fundamentally, it is becoming clear that 11 years of Thatcherism have done little to remedy the real weaknesses of the British economy in the sphere of production — the Thatcherite "miracle" is beginning to look as hollow as those allegedly worked by the late "Genius of the Carpathians".

At the centre of Thatcher's problems is a vast and historically unprecedented balance of payments deficit — the current account deficit was £20.9 billion last year, and for the first time in history earnings

payers. But of course the problem is fundamentally political and not ideological — how can the government both follow the recessionary policies the markets are demanding and regain the support it needs to win the next general election?

The Tories might be more worried still if Neil Kinnock's Labour Party presented a more credible alternative. Rather than channelling the current popular anger into a coherent radical alternative to Thatcherism, Labour's policy might be summarized as "after Thatcher, us". Their massive lead in the opinion polls is a function of Thatcher's unpopularity rather than any genuine enthusiasm for their extremely vague policies. Labour's economic spokesperson, John Smith, has pledged that Labour will "maintain a responsible fiscal policy with prudent control over public finances, spending only as resources allow and as the economy can afford". Faced with the poll tax protests, Kinnock's response has been to express his full agreement with Thatcher that "demonstrations organized by the militant left... are a nega-

tion of democracy". Kinnock and the Labour leadership have consistently opposed the demands of the left that the party should support those who are refusing to pay the tax, and Labour have refused to organize a national demonstration in opposition to the tax.

The attitude of the Labour Party leadership stands in sharp contrast to the growing confidence and militancy of the anti-Poll Tax movement. The All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation, representing several thousand local groups committed to the non-payment, non-implementation and non-collection of the tax, is organizing national demonstrations in London and Glasgow on March 31 expected to be several hundred thousand strong. Federation activists estimate that as many as 10 million people will refuse to pay the tax. This figure does not seem unreasonable on the basis of the experience in Scotland, where the Poll Tax has already been introduced — in parts of Glasgow it is reported that one in three residents have not paid and 700,000 Scots are three months or more in arrears. Efforts to collect from or punish non-payers are likely to raise the level of resistance still further. Already the strength of the campaign has forced concessions and humiliating climbdowns from the government on a number of fronts. The myth of Thatcher's invincibility has been visibly dented — the task now is to remain on the offensive and build a mass movement which can sink not just the Poll Tax, but Thatcherism itself, the "ideological flagship" of the capitalist austerity drive of the 1980s. ★



from invisible trade (banking, insurance, travel, overseas investment proceeds) fell into deficit in the last three months of 1989.

The government's response has been to repeatedly raise interest rates, again to historically unprecedented levels — but, to its horror, the effect has been to slow down the domestic economy rather than to curb consumer spending. The markets waited for a stern budget on March 20 to deal with the problem — but the Chancellor of the Exchequer, John Major, did not dare to deepen the unpopularity of the government still further through income tax rises. The result was a further slide in sterling, which has fallen by 10% in the past three months.

Thatcher encouraged frenzied consumerism

The contradiction between Thatcherite populism and the current dire state of the British economy is then central to the government's current unpopularity. The frenzied consumerism which Thatcher encouraged in her heyday has to be restrained. High mortgage rates were supposed to dampen consumer spending, although they were a bitter pill to swallow for a government which poses as the champion of the homebuyer. For all the unpopularity they have brought the government amongst its natural supporters, it is clear that they have not been sufficient; now the Tories are haunted by the specter of an increase in income tax, anathema to a party which rode to power pledging to get government off the backs of the tax-

The Welsh language and capitalism

Interview with activists

IN SWANSEA/ABERTAWE in southwest Wales, at the office of the Welsh Language Society (*Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg*) the following interview was given to Gerry Foley. Helen Prosser is a teacher of the Welsh language and a leader of *Cymdeithas*. Ceri Evans is the southern organizer for *Cymdeithas* for the campaign against Thatcher's poll tax. *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg* is a direct action organization that fights for the rights of Welsh speakers and participates in other social struggles considered relevant to its aim of maintaining Welsh as a living language in Wales. Welsh was still the majority language in the country at the end of the nineteenth century. Now only about a fifth of the population speak it. In the north and west of the country it is still generally the language of the community, but threatened by an influx of English Yuppies seeking second homes and business opportunities. The discussion that follows took place in December 1989.

HOW does *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg* propose to deal with the problem of English immigration into north Wales?

Helen. The immigration is not just into north Wales. It is into the entire western band from north to south. Having said that, it's going further east all the time. It's an economic problem basically. Some years ago, many people were worried about rural depopulation. What we've got now is an influx of people who are not Welsh and are not Welsh speaking, because they're selling their houses in the southeast of England for a terrific price and then moving in, and putting the house prices up here, which makes it impossible for local people to remain in their communities.

Our slogan for the campaign is that Wales is not for sale. What we emphasize is not being anti-English as such. But what we do want is the right of the local people to remain in their community, and to be able to have work and housing in their communities. We started campaigning in this area about three years ago. The first thing we did was to make people aware of the situation, to target estate agents. They exploit the local people. So, we targeted them to draw attention to the

problem. We had several protests outside agents' offices. We took "for sale" signs and dumped them there and so on.

We've moved on now to the second part of the campaign, which is with the local councils. We feel that we have to work democratically. What we believe is that local councils should be able to buy houses that go on the market, and then rent them for a fair price to local people. We got 12 of the 13 local councils in Wales to come to a conference organized by *Cymdeithas yr Iaith*, and each spokesperson said one after the other that they were in favor of having hundreds of millions of pounds to be able to buy these houses to then rent to local people. Obviously, that money has got to come from the Welsh Office [the local authority for Wales], and it isn't coming.

The third step, which we have just started on, is to ask for a new property act, where there would be a point system, and local people would be at the top of that scale, so they would have the first chance of buying a house. So, there would be a sort of points system, which operates in local authorities now, in the free market. This is a terribly difficult campaign for *Cymdeithas yr Iaith*, because with Thatcherism in the British Isles now, this is not asking for a con-

cession but going directly against her policies. But it's her policies that are undermining the communities, and the only way we're going to tackle it is by taking that approach.

Ceri. It's these years of Thatcherism that have created the economic conditions, whereby local people are being forced to move out, and if they do stay finding themselves homeless. As Helen has said, this campaign has gained the support of the Welsh councils, and the council that didn't come to the conference said that it would support it to some extent.

Helen. It was quite an achievement, you know, to get the councils to back something started by *Cymdeithas yr Iaith*. They obviously see the crisis in the communities.

Ceri. It's very much going against the direction of Thatcherism. The very idea of giving the councils money to buy houses, at the moment councils are being obliged to sell all their housing stock. So, it's also a defense of public housing, of quality public housing being available to the local people. Because when you look at the wage levels in the north and west, they are extremely low, even for those people who are in work.

Helen. Obviously this is a general problem; but it's more acute here in Wales because it's changing the nature of the community completely. The problem is even more serious in Wales, because we've got this added linguistic factor, where these people are moving in and changing the nature of the community. We've mentioned houses, but we haven't mentioned businesses. Of course, these businesses are even more expensive than houses. You wouldn't believe the number of post offices and pubs that have been bought up by English incomers. [Sub post offices are held privately in Britain] I know in Pen Llyn, which is probably the most Welsh part of north Wales, there are about two pubs in the hands of Welsh speakers now, because they have got so expensive. This is where people meet, in the post office, in the pub, and therefore the language is changing there.

Ceri. There is also the problem of the attitude of the people who move in. It does result in the imposition of English in these areas. It means that the Welsh speaking people are denied the right to use Welsh in their lives in dealing with state institutions such as post offices. And recreation facilities, which would have been Welsh speaking in the past, are now predominantly English.

Helen. One example, about something very small, just to show the sort of thing

ment for young people that would integrate the service far more, and would use young people.

There's a conference being held hoping to get together all the different youth organizations in Wales to stress the importance of this. Some ideas we got are that the people's schools are urged to set up their own unions, and that local councils set up special groups for young people so that they've got some say.

■ What role has Cymdeithas played in the Welsh rock-music movement?

Ceri. Without exaggeration, you could say that it created it, not in a heavy handed way but by encouraging it, going back to the first protest songs sung by early leader of Cymdeithas, such as Dafydd Iwan. There was a conscious decision to promote this aspect of Welsh culture, which some of the more traditional Welsh organizations were slow to pick up on. Some people were totally opposed to it. They regarded it as not part of Welsh culture. Cymdeithas offered a space for the Welsh rock bands by organizing local concerts and doing posters and so on, giving their experience of organizing, and doing a big week of concerts at every Eisteddfod [the national festival of Wales]. It has become a tradition.

Helen. Organizing these concerts has been a very positive thing for Welsh culture and for Cymdeithas. These rock groups also produce their own magazines, which are full of jokes and so on, but the political message is there also. One other thing we hope to draw attention to through this youth liberation movement is how people are exploited, especially now under Thatcherism, with all these Youth Training Schemes where young people are used as kind of slave labor.

■ There is a definite political attitude in this Welsh rock scene?

Ceri. Perhaps less so now than in the past, although it's a constant theme running through, if you read the lyrics. In my opinion, the fact that they chose to sing in Welsh is a political choice. It's certainly not the way you're going to make money. And a lot of the lyrics are very political.

Helen. I would agree totally with Ceri that the fact that a band plays in Welsh is a political decision. The pop scene is very healthy.

Ceri. It's professionalized a lot as well, without becoming a capitalist institution. People are taking it very much more seriously now. There's a national rock magazine that complements the local fanzines. There's things like distribution agencies being set up so that people are much more able to get hold of records. Previously, when a lot of independent labels were set up, you just couldn't get hold of the

records. There is a sort of union for Welsh rock musicians being set up, which meets regularly. With the development of the Welsh TV channel, you get into dealing with big companies and that sort of thing, and you have to look after yourself to make sure that you're not ripped off.

■ When you say professionalized, that implies that there is enough money in this for at least the best to become professional.

Ceri. Altogether, there are maybe 200 groups, of which maybe two or three are professional. What I mean by professionalization is that a regular magazine is produced that sells 2,000 copies, a high circulation for a Welsh publication. There is a chance to appear on TV and an organized distribution network. While the bands are not professional, there are some agencies. And the companies themselves are on a bit more of a sound basis.

Helen. We organize concerts to raise money and to create the Welsh rock scene. It gives the bands a chance to play and the local people a chance to see them.

■ There was a similar thing in the US. There was big development of traditional music groups, and many of them were willing to offer free entertainment for H-Block affairs. They also built a milieu around themselves that provided a base for the H-Block committees.

Ceri. What's striking is the invisibility of all this activity. You could live in Wales and in Swansea, five or six miles away from a Welsh-speaking area, and you wouldn't know that these bands existed. You wouldn't know their standard. Particularly, before we won these radio programs, you wouldn't hear them on Welsh radio. So, we're breaking out of that.

■ Only a mass movement can do that. Otherwise, commercial radio and TV would drown them out. Traditional music is big in Ireland, but it is still a minority thing.

Ceri. It's much the same thing here. All the currents of Welsh music are very much of a minority thing, but a significant minority, something that's broader than Cymdeithas yr Iaith.

■ There must also be a pressure of commercialism on these people. Because if the better ones wanted to make a career in music, they would have to change to singing in English.

Ceri. None of the bands has done that. I think that there would be such a reaction against it that they would lose any kind of respect.

■ They would be regarded as traitors.

Ceri. In a sense, I suppose they would. It simply hasn't happened. People haven't even considered it, I don't think, really. The commitment to the Welsh language is such that no band has done it. It's unheard of.

■ Do you find people who are not native Welsh speakers learning Welsh to participate in these bands?

Helen. Oh yes. Lots of these bands come from the Welsh schools in Cardiff and Pontypridd, where I imagine 90% of them come from non-Welsh-speaking homes. It's people who have gone to bilingual schools who are starting up these bands. We've got more bands starting up in the east than in the west.

■ Does this cultural movement extend into other mediums, new writing or theater?

Helen. Theater. There are many theater groups in Wales. This started in the 1960s, and they are now all over the place. The problem there is finance. The arts are being cut back all the time and they're getting less money. The young writers have mainly been attracted to TV, since the Welsh TV channel was set up.

■ What is Cymdeithas's role in the campaign against the poll tax?

Ceri. Cymdeithas passed a resolution a few years ago saying that it was opposed to a poll tax when the Tories first mentioned it. At the last conference it passed a more detailed policy of identifying the poll tax as another attack on the working class communities in Britain and something that would further undermine the Welsh speaking communities. It declared its support for an active campaign of non-payment.

■ Why would it undermine the Welsh speaking communities in particular?

Ceri. Given the economic conditions in Wales after ten years of Thatcherism, a further attack on poorer sections of society, a further transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich, would undermine the whole of the Welsh communities. But if we are looking at the communities where we would wish to retain Welsh as a living language, the poll tax would be more of a burden.

Following on from that, you have to decide how you're going to oppose the tax.

Cymdeithas adopted a policy of supporting mass nonpayment, refusing to pay and to collect the tax. It decided to participate in the existing campaigns rather than set up a separate one and ensure bilingualism in these campaigns, that Welsh is at the forefront. ★

SAMPLES of the lyrics of Welsh rock songs are given below. They are literal translations of two songs from *Y Trên Olaf Adref* ["The Last Train Home"], a collection of Welsh rock lyrics published in 1984 by the Welsh publisher Y Lolfa. There are a number of songs in this collection dedicated to Bobby Sands, the Irish republican martyr who died on hunger strike against the H-Blocks of Northern Ireland in 1981. In the introduction, it is explained that the "last train home" means that Welsh rock is the last chance of the Welsh language. Despite the popular form of these songs, some also are based on ancient Welsh poems.

A worm in the wood
by Gronw Edwards and Datydd
Rhys

THE end of our society,
the end, the end of everything
good;
Thousands of them, a horde of
English,
Thousands of summer homes.

But I've been on the dole too
long
I have no chance to get a job,
the situation is bad
There is a worm in the wood
Everything is finished,
There is no more hope
To be able to stay in the parish,
You have to leave the place
A subculture is in flight. Weari-
ness in the eye,
Oppression under the smile
The blood of men is beginning
to congeal,
The chains are too old.

Take, take our lands
Take, take our jobs
Trample, trample on our cul-
ture,
Trample, trample on our lan-
guage

The centuries with the rain
by Gareth Iwan
Within the prison walls,
The oppression [of Ireland]
continues,
But Bobby Sands did not yield
to oppression and insult
Against unjust rulers
And the hard confines of his
cell,
He continued his fight for
respect, for a better Ireland....
Bobby Sands died under the
iron hand of the English;
His blood is on their hands,
because they denied his just
demand...
Over his grave, the centuries
weep with the rain. ★

norm rather than representing specific concessions. What we've got is what the Welsh Office set up following the demand for a new Welsh language act, a Welsh Language Board, who haven't recommended bilingualism. They've recommended "equal validity," which is very different.

In the summer, we held a referendum, and we gave everyone a chance to vote, a bilingual referendum, asking people to vote either in favor of a comprehensive Welsh language act, and sufficient money for the teaching of Welsh as a first and second language, or to say that they were content with the Welsh Language Board and Peter Walker's initiative in Wales. And we got a 99.2% majority. And yet neither Peter Walker nor the Welsh Language Board have changed their minds. So, we have passed in our general meeting that we're going to the European Court of Human Rights, saying this is what the people of Wales have voted for, can you do something about it?

■ **How do you propose to appeal to non-Welsh speakers?**

Helen. That is very important. We do

insist in Cymdeithas that we Welsh are one nation. It's a matter of luck whether you speak Welsh in Wales these days. What we want is for everyone to have the chance to become bilingual. Firstly, we want enough resources so that Welsh is taught properly in schools, so that every young person leaving school at 16 is bilingual. We also hope to appeal to people in non-Welsh-speaking communities by solidarizing with them in their campaigns.

Ceri. It would be foolish to say that the effects of Thatcherism in Wales end at the border of the Welsh-speaking area. Cymdeithas clearly identifies itself with other groups that are opposing the development of Yuppie housing in traditional working-class areas. One aspect is to follow up on the campaign against the Cardiff Bay Development, which aims to wipe out the Docks community, the only old Black community in Wales, and replace it with a Yuppie-type marina development. It is important to overcome the divisions. But we are not outside the English-speaking communities. The Welsh-learning movement is extremely

strong in English-speaking areas. What Cymdeithas is trying to do is to create the conditions so that when these people leave school, these people have an opportunity to use Welsh in their lives.

Helen. In the predominantly anglicized areas, the schools that teach through Welsh are full. Here in Swansea, people are being turned away from the Welsh schools. The response has been terrific. We have had to double the courses in areas because the demand has been so great. I'm not talking about people who have decided to learn Welsh this year, after doing pottery the year before. I'm talking about people who are really dedicated, who are ready to give four evenings a week to learn.

■ **Do they pursue the language to the point of fluency?**

Yes. Not every single one, obviously. But people come on Welsh language courses today thinking that they're going to be Welsh speakers. That's an excellent thing to start with. Up until ten years ago, people came to Welsh-language classes to say one or two things. Now people come because they want to become fluent Welsh speakers.

■ **Do you have any links with non-white groups trying to preserve their cultures?**

Ceri. There is an indirect link with blacks through the anti-apartheid movement. This is not just solidarity with the struggle in South Africa, but a practical opposition to the Welsh Rugby Union, which openly collaborates with the apartheid regime.

Helen. Cymdeithas repassed its motions saying that we would not go back to Rugby matches until those players who went to South Africa stopped playing for Wales. I think that we are the only people who took that stand.

■ **Do you have special campaigns for young people?**

Helen. Lots of our members are young. And we've targeted age groups. For five to seven year olds, we've got a slogan "*Tai i saith i gadw yr iaith*" ("Three to Seven to Keep the Language"), that the language has to be taught properly to this age group, and the young between 14 and 25, people who are going through change in their lives, taking major decisions about how their lives are going to be set out after that.

We think that this is a terribly important age group, that we have to have a culture that is relevant to them. So, we've had campaigns against Radio Cymru, which is the Welsh radio station. And we've actually been successful in our campaign. We've got programs from 10:00 to 11:30 each night, specifically aimed at young people. What we want is a special depart-

ment for young people that would integrate the service far more, and would use young people.

There's a conference being held hoping to get together all the different youth organizations in Wales to stress the importance of this. Some ideas we got are that the people's schools are urged to set up their own unions, and that local councils set up special groups for young people so that they've got some say.

■ **What role has Cymdeithas played in the Welsh rock-music movement?**

Ceri. Without exaggeration, you could say that it created it, not in a heavy handed way but by encouraging it, going back to the first protest songs sung by early leader of Cymdeithas, such as Dafydd Iwan. There was a conscious decision to promote this aspect of Welsh culture, which some of the more traditional Welsh organizations were slow to pick up on. Some people were totally opposed to it. They regarded it as not part of Welsh culture. Cymdeithas offered a space for the Welsh rock bands by organizing local concerts and doing posters and so on, giving their experience of organizing, and doing a big week of concerts at every Eisteddfod [the national festival of Wales]. It has become a tradition.

Helen. Organizing these concerts has been a very positive thing for Welsh culture and for Cymdeithas. These rock groups also produce their own magazines, which are full of jokes and so on, but the political message is there also. One other thing we hope to draw attention to through this youth liberation movement is how people are exploited, especially now under Thatcherism, with all these Youth Training Schemes where young people are used as kind of slave labor.

■ **There is a definite political attitude in this Welsh rock scene?**

Ceri. Perhaps less so now than in the past, although it's a constant theme running through, if you read the lyrics. In my opinion, the fact that they chose to sing in Welsh is a political choice. It's certainly not the way you're going to make money. And a lot of the lyrics are very political.

Helen. I would agree totally with Ceri that the fact that a band plays in Welsh is a political decision. The pop scene is very healthy.

Ceri. It's professionalized a lot as well, without becoming a capitalist institution. People are taking it very much more seriously now. There's a national rock magazine that complements the local fanzines. There's things like distribution agencies being set up so that people are much more able to get hold of records. Previously, when a lot of independent labels were set up, you just couldn't get hold of the

records. There is a sort of union for Welsh rock musicians being set up, which meets regularly. With the development of the Welsh TV channel, you get into dealing with big companies and that sort of thing, and you have to look after yourself to make sure that you're not ripped off.

■ **When you say professionalized, that implies that there is enough money in this for at least the best to become professional.**

Ceri. Altogether, there are maybe 200 groups, of which maybe two or three are professional. What I mean by professionalization is that a regular magazine is produced that sells 2,000 copies, a high circulation for a Welsh publication. There is a chance to appear on TV and an organized distribution network. While the bands are not professional, there are some agencies. And the companies themselves are on a bit more of a sound basis.

Helen. We organize concerts to raise money and to create the Welsh rock scene. It gives the bands a chance to play and the local people a chance to see them.

■ **There was a similar thing in the US. There was big development of traditional music groups, and many of them were willing to offer free entertainment for H-Block affairs. They also built a milieu around themselves that provided a base for the H-Block committees.**

Ceri. What's striking is the invisibility of all this activity. You could live in Wales and in Swansea, five or six miles away from a Welsh-speaking area, and you wouldn't know that these bands existed. You wouldn't know their standard. Particularly, before we won these radio programs, you wouldn't hear them on Welsh radio. So, we're breaking out of that.

■ **Only a mass movement can do that. Otherwise, commercial radio and TV would drown them out. Traditional music is big in Ireland, but it is still a minority thing.**

Ceri. It's much the same thing here. All the currents of Welsh music are very much of a minority thing, but a significant minority, something that's broader than Cymdeithas yr Iaith.

■ **There must also be a pressure of commercialism on these people. Because if the better ones wanted to make a career in music, they would have to change to singing in English.**

Ceri. None of the bands has done that. I think that there would be such a reaction against it that they would lose any kind of respect.

■ **They would be regarded as traitors.**

Ceri. In a sense, I suppose they would. It simply hasn't happened. People haven't even considered it, I don't think, really. The commitment to the Welsh language is such that no band has done it. It's unheard of.

■ **Do you find people who are not native Welsh speakers learning Welsh to participate in these bands?**

Helen. Oh yes. Lots of these bands come from the Welsh schools in Cardiff and Pontypridd, where I imagine 90% of them come from non-Welsh-speaking homes. It's people who have gone to bilingual schools who are starting up these bands. We've got more bands starting up in the east than in the west.

■ **Does this cultural movement extend into other mediums, new writing or theater?**

Helen. Theater. There are many theater groups in Wales. This started in the 1960s, and they are now all over the place. The problem there is finance. The arts are being cut back all the time and they're getting less money. The young writers have mainly been attracted to TV, since the Welsh TV channel was set up.

■ **What is Cymdeithas's role in the campaign against the poll tax?**

Ceri. Cymdeithas passed a resolution a few years ago saying that it was opposed to a poll tax when the Tories first mentioned it. At the last conference it passed a more detailed policy of identifying the poll tax as another attack on the working class communities in Britain and something that would further undermine the Welsh speaking communities. It declared its support for an active campaign of non-payment.

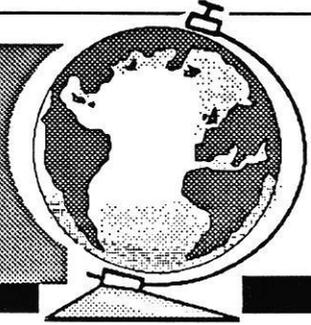
■ **Why would it undermine the Welsh speaking communities in particular?**

Ceri. Given the economic conditions in Wales after ten years of Thatcherism, a further attack on poorer sections of society, a further transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich, would undermine the whole of the Welsh communities. But if we are looking at the communities where we would wish to retain Welsh as a living language, the poll tax would be more of a burden.

Following on from that, you have to decide how you're going to oppose the tax.

Cymdeithas adopted a policy of supporting mass nonpayment, refusing to pay and to collect the tax. It decided to participate in the existing campaigns rather than set up a separate one and ensure bilingualism in these campaigns, that Welsh is at the forefront. ★

AROUND THE WORLD



THIRD WORLD DEBT

Berlin, Paris, Houston....

THE success of the demonstration and concert held in Paris on July 8 of last year (see IV 168, July 31, 1989), coming after the demonstrations of September 1988 in Berlin against the meeting of the IMF there, showed the possibility of a prolonged campaign for the cancellation of the third world debt. This has been followed up, with initiatives planned in several countries for the time when the summit of the world's seven richest countries takes place this year in Houston, Texas. The "Bastille Appeal", launched by the unitary collective that organized the July 8 demonstration in Paris, denounced the worsening of the pillage and impoverishment of the third world, and demanded the immediate and total cancellation of the debt, which overwhelms the people, encourages the dictators, and smothers democracy.

In France, support has grown — around the writer Gilles Perrault are grouped numerous artists, writers, intellectuals, but also all the anti-imperialist and third worldist organizations, the Communist Party, the CGT (the biggest trade union federation), the SNES (a teachers' union), the Green Party's European representatives, the anti-racist organizations MRAP, FASTI, and SOS-Racisme, a number of Socialist deputies and personalities, the League of Human Rights, and so on.

In Latin America support is strong in a number of countries, notably in Mexico (the PRT, the Mexican section of the Fourth International, but also C. Cardenas, leader of the Democratic Revolution Party), Bolivia (the leadership of the COB, the trade union federation), Brazil, Colombia (all the left organizations), Haiti (the Independent Federation of Haitian Workers), Martinique and Guadeloupe.

In black Africa, trade unionists have pledged the support of their organizations in more than 10 countries, and support has also come from movements of opposition to the existing regimes. The appeal has been signed in Morocco and Algeria.

In Belgium, a unitary collective has been created grouping numerous forces, the Communist Party, Socialist deputies, Greens, solidarity committees, and the POS, Belgian section of the Fourth Inter-

national. In Greece, the NAR, an important regroupment comprising ex-members of the Communist Party and the Communist Youth, and the OKDE, Greek section of the Fourth International, have supported the appeal. In Italy, Democrazia Proletaria has asked for the support of other sections of the left. In Spain, the appeal is beginning to be circulated.

In both West and East Germany, support is strong. Even in Houston, during the meeting of the Seven, a counter-summit is planned of the non-governmental representatives of the peoples of the poorest countries of Central America, organized by the International League for Human Rights and the Liberation of Peoples. Demonstrations are already anticipated in Mexico, Bolivia, Chile and Brazil, but also in Senegal with the support of the revolutionary group And-Jef and the OST (Senegalese section of the Fourth International). Demonstrations are being discussed in Algeria, Greece, Italy and Spain. In France and

Belgium, the collectives plan to organize rallies.

In Berlin, left organizations in both East and West are planning a demonstration and an international concert to be held in the city on June 23. What better place to organize an initiative with delegations coming from all over Europe symbolizing the common struggle of the peoples of East and West, in solidarity with the peoples of the third world against the summit of the seven imperialist powers? It is crucial that the solidarity of the peoples, of the workers, be affirmed, at a time when the bankers and the IMF are withdrawing their capital from the third world after having pillaged it and subjected it to drastic austerity plans, and prepare to subject the peoples of Eastern Europe to the same mechanisms and win new markets which they hope will be more profitable.

Daniel Ortega has summarized it well; "there is another wall to overthrow, that of the third world debt". The recent popular uprisings in Gabon, Niger, the Ivory Coast and Senegal has shown the urgency of the campaign. In France, the Collective against the Debt has solidarized with these demonstrations provoked by the weight of the imperialist debt, and has denounced the responsibility of the French rulers. During these hunger riots, Jacques Chirac, former prime minister, declared that "multipartyism is a luxury for the countries of the third world", and the French government expelled a Gabonese oppositionist. For these "democrats", the struggle for democracy and against the single party stops when it turns against their imperialist interests. ★

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CONTENTS

- * PALESTINE: The third year of the *Intifada*. Interview with Dr. George Habash, followed by a commentary
- * LEBANON: The snowball
- * MOROCCO: The situation and tasks of revolutionaries — a document from the Revolutionary Communist Circles of Morocco
- * TUNISIA: The Tunisian Communist Party, from its foundation to its self-dissolution
- * ERNEST MANDEL: *Glasnost* and the crisis of the Communist Parties



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New far-left organization is formed

THE FOUNDING CONGRESS of the New Left Current (Neo Aristero Revma-NAR) was held in Athens February 11-12. This grouping is made up essentially of activists coming from the Communist Youth (KNE) and from the Communist Party (KKE).

ANDREAS SARTZEKIS

THE COMMUNIST PARTY and the Communist Youth have gone through major crises in recent months as a result of the KKE's political evolution and the electoral coalition, the *Synaspismos*, that it formed with the small Greek Left (former Eurocommunists) and some personalities. After focusing its campaign against PASOK (Andreas Papandreu's Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement, which was in power from 1981 to 1989), the *Synaspismos* participated with the right in the first "clean-up" government (June to November 1989).

In this way, the coalition claimed to be combating the real scandals in which PASOK was mired. Then, finally, after last November's elections, it ended up alongside PASOK and the right in a class collaboration government attacking the workers.

Communist Youth reject coalition

The Communist Youth rejected the *Synaspismos* orientation outright, and then had its majority expelled by the KKE leadership in September 1989. Thousands of young activists found themselves in the KNE-Grapsas (called by the name of its secretary), which led very militant mobilizations (of students and young workers).

At the same time, members of the KKE Central Committee resigned, without the party leadership being able to conduct a campaign to discredit them in the eyes of the ranks. Some of those who resigned were too popular for the leadership to be able to afford that sort of counterattack. One such was Kappos, who resigned from the Political Bureau (See box.) Moreover, the poor election results obtained by the *Synaspismos* marked the failure of the new course — unbridled class collaboration following splendid sectarian isolation.

The current that left the KKE included party intellectuals such as Kotzias, as well as working class and young and not

so young activists. The NAR arose from these two currents (ex-KNE and ex-KKE). Its appearance seems to have been a sufficiently disturbing phenomenon for the press to keep quiet about it. Of course, the NAR is not homogeneous on many points, notably the USSR and East Europe. The extent to which its members have broken with the heritage of the KKE is uneven. From this standpoint, the activists coming from the Young Communists are more advanced.

However, because of its desire for an opening to the left, its project of building a revolutionary party, its roots in the struggles and its composition, the NAR has a dynamic that has already outdistanced the united-front groupings that have been launched in recent months to the left of the traditional organizations.

The congress took place in a period

marked by two events; the success — unequaled in 15 years — of the January 15 general strike and the mobilization of the student youth following the acquittal of a cop who murdered a young demonstrator. The latter mobilization was launched by the United Student Union (EFEE) led mainly by the KKE. It involved demonstrations, concerts and the occupation of schools.

Debate focussed on April elections

The 93 delegates who took part in the NAR congress come from all over Greece. Many points were taken up (the East European countries, theoretical and programmatic questions). But the debate was focussed above all on the elections coming up in April. After having decided by a large majority to take part, the NAR discussed whether or not to block with the anticapitalist alternative group (EAS), in which the Greek section of the Fourth International is involved, and a left faction coming from the former "Interior" [Eurocommunist] Communist Party.

The great majority decided against electoral accords at the leadership level. The NAR will invite all left activists who are interested to take part in the initiative committees already set up.

Their slate will not go under the name of the NAR. The axes of their campaign will be class independence and unity in the struggles, through a broad and powerful regroupment against the conservatives, austerity and class collaboration, as well as against capitalist Europe and the US bases in Greece. ★

Demand the release of Daniel Libreros and other arrested Colombian militants!

DANIEL LIBREROS, member of the National Executive Committee of A Luchar in Colombia was arrested at the airport of Cali on March 27. Libreros, who is a lawyer and university professor, was in Cali to visit imprisoned militants of A Luchar as their defence lawyer.

This arrest comes in the context of a campaign of harassment of A Luchar led by the newspaper *El Tiempo*, and involving a wave of arrests of A Luchar militants. Some 80 militants of A Luchar in Cali have been arrested in the last month, nine of whom are still in prison, including a number of trade-union leaders. The reports received are that these nine have all been tortured and the only woman among

them, Elizabeth Suarez, raped as well.

The Third Brigade, responsible for these arrests, is notorious in Colombia for its treatment of prisoners. However, up to the time of going to press, Daniel Libreros, who has been visited by his family, has not suffered ill-treatment.

International Viewpoint and its international collaborators has immediately launched a campaign to put pressure on the Colombian government to release Libreros and the other imprisoned militants.

Support has come from lawyers' organizations to defend a colleague who was exercising his professional responsibilities at the time of his arrest, human rights organizations and other associations and personalities.

It is urgent to send messages of protest to:

Presidente Virgilio Barco
Palacio de Nariño
Bogotá - Colombia

General José Manuel Bonnet
Tercera Brigada
Avenida 4 Norte - Calles 18-19
Cali - Colombia