

International VIEWPOINT

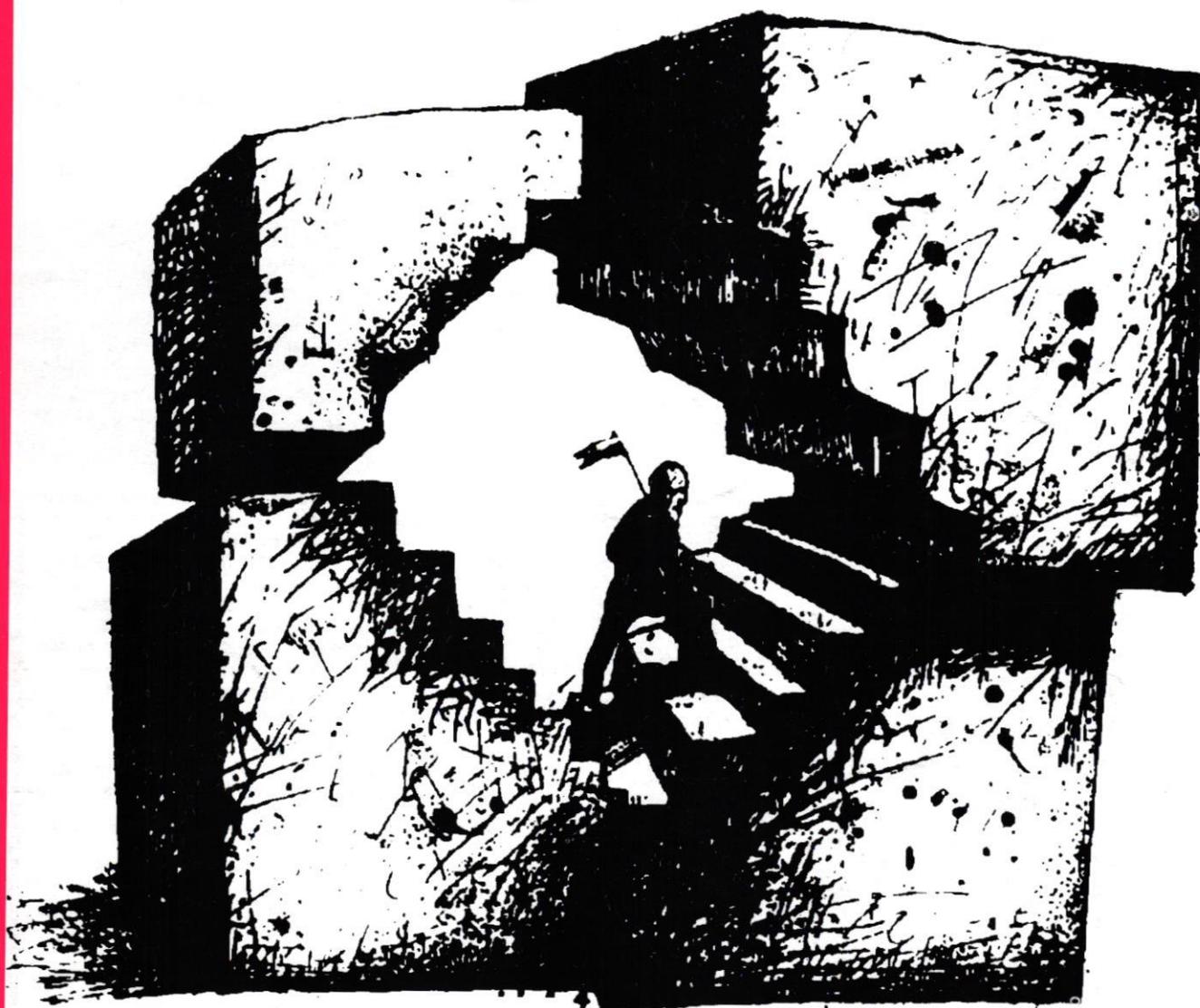
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Eastern Europe:

Between Stalinism and capitalism



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Usually we apologize for our mistakes after we have made them. However, this issue has been produced on a new layout programme, so it seems wise to apologize in advance for any bizarre phenomena that may have resulted from this...

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Revolt for peace

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA is like a cross-section of Yugoslavia itself. And if the latter is dead in its old form, it is not the case either that the future belongs to "ethnically pure" or assimilationist nation-states.

CATHERINE VERLA

SUCH a logic would imply the division of Bosnia-Herzegovina into three "entities" (one state for the Muslims, with the Serbs joining a greater Serbia and the Croats a greater Croatia).

Some months ago, "secret" negotiations pointing in this direction were held between Milosevic and Tudjman (respectively, the Serbian and Croatian presidents) and subsequently made public by the former.

But no territory comprising all the Serbs or all the Croats could be homogeneous, nor even assure a majority to its dominant population — at least without significant population movements, assimilation and liquidation.

A logic of disaster

This logic, followed through by the Serbian regime and the army, has been a disaster first of all for its Croat victims, but also for the Serbian people.

It has brought no real solution to the Serbs of Croatia, breaking up friendships and numerous mixed families, inciting the Serbs against everybody under the unproven pretext that everybody is against the Serbs.

It has proved counter-productive for the affirmation of an independent Croat state in the current frontiers; to be viable this demanded a genuine dialogue between the Croat regime and the Serbs who had lived on this territory for centuries, and not negotiations with the Serb dictator Milosevic.

For Bosnia-Herzegovina, as for Macedonia, there have been (and are still) two threats: one stems from the Great Serbian danger which in its most extreme logic denies any specific identity to the Muslims of Bosnia¹ and to the Macedonians.

The other stems from the break up of Yugoslavia into nation-states which could shatter Bosnia-Herzegovina and submit Macedonia to the threat of being parcelled out between Serbs, Bulgarians and Alba-

nians (not to mention Greece).

That is why last June these two republics jointly presented a project for a redefinition of the Yugoslav entity on the basis of a new association of sovereign states: each would have its own army and international political representation, at the same time sharing the sovereignty of a common confederal state.

For these two republics, the fact that Croatian and Slovenian independence were dealt with separately was and remains problematic, weakening the balance of forces that together, with the support of the peoples of Kosovo and of Vojvodina, the four republics could oppose to the Great Serbian logic.

It is moreover not proved that the population of the fifth republic, Montenegro, is ready to simply line up behind Serbia, without speaking of its willingness to lose its own identity².

In other words, the Great Serbian threat was not at this point so dominant and irreversible that it justified a rejection of the supposedly blocked negotiations and the adoption of a logic of each republic for itself.

Communities inextricably linked

This is all the more true in that neither Slovenia and still less Croatia could totally "disassociate" their fate from that of the other communities of the Yugoslav entity. Proximity, economic interdependence, the inextricable mix of peoples and the division of these latter among several states should then be taken not as simply a vestige of an inescapable past, but as a fact that will shape the future.

The real issue will be that of the nature of these states, of their internal democracy (individual and collective rights) and of their reciprocal relations.

It is here that the nature of the frontiers will come into play: will they be walls aimed at imposing ethnic boundaries (which would necessarily be both external

and internal) or frontiers rendered porous by the development of a multitude of links respecting the different cultures but also allowing them to intermingle?

The Bosnian capital Sarajevo symbolizes this latter possibility. It is not by chance that it was here that the biggest demonstrations against the war took place last summer. The aptly named "insurrection for peace" brought together several hundreds of thousands of people. The popular and multiethnic resistance to the spiral of hatred and fear is strongest in the towns of mixed culture.

Possibility of peace

Peace is possible. It has become inescapably clear that the war represents an impasse, desertions are massive, the rejection of the greater Serbian logic is growing among the Serbian people itself.

There is no longer sufficient cohesion in the army to make it an autonomous political force, even if there is a real danger of extremist acts by individuals and groups acting on their own initiative.

The privileges of the armed forces certainly impel their leaders to search for the biggest possible state, and the majority Serb make up of the officer corp tends to make the army a Serbian army.

But the rank-and-file conscripts are from all nationalities and the armed resistance of the peoples to any forced solution will be the rule everywhere, at the price of bloody struggles for all.

This potential violence, very real in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where everyone has their own weapons and memories³, could be the spark that will ignite the powder, but also could incite the mass of people to go onto the streets to prevent the worst.

It is this which could push forward the search for solutions which would protect the rights of all.

Without such a will and popular mobilization, the United Nations forces will be bogged down, incapable of stopping the extension of a war which could then snowball throughout Yugoslavia and beyond. ★

1. Islamicized Slavs considered by the Croat nationalists, in the writings of Tudjman for example, as Croats; the Serbian nationalists, on the contrary, consider them as Serbs who have betrayed the "cause".

2. The Montenegrins are Serbs with a real national identity stemming from a distinct history, reflected in the existence of a separate national state in the 19th century. If the representatives of Montenegro have been assimilated into the "Serb bloc" of the federal presidency, and if Montenegro will certainly form part of any maintained Yugoslavia, there would be undoubtedly also be an affirmation of the sovereignty of their own republic in this context.

3. Memories of the reciprocal massacres between Serbs and Muslims in the war, memories of a Bosnia-Herzegovina as part of the Ustashe state massacring Jews, Gypsies and Serbs as well as Communists of all nationalities, particularly Croats.

Canton: rhymes with Lebanon?

AT THE start of March the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina, a republic of what was once Yugoslavia, voted in a referendum on self-determination under the auspices of the European Community (EC). 63% of registered voters took part, with 99% of these opting for a sovereign Bosnia-Herzegovina separate from Serbia, which is continuing to terrorize all its neighbours.

The Serb leaders in Bosnia enforced a boycott of the referendum in all the communities which they control militarily, and then, immediately after the result became known, attempted to erect barricades in the republic's capital, Sarajevo. Then something not seen before in Yugoslavia took place: Sarajevo's inhabitants of all nationalities demonstrated unarmed throughout the night in front of the barricades set up by Serb militia until these latter withdrew from the city.

SLAVKO MIHALJCEK

THE emergence of this significant social force, independent of the three national-based ruling parties (Muslim, Serb and Croat) obliged the leaders of these parties to meet in Lisbon and then in Brussels from March 7 to 9. No text has been made public, but diplomatic "indiscretions" indicate that the European Community has proposed a plan to turn Bosnia-Herzegovina into a confederation on Swiss lines. The existing frontiers will be internationally recognized but the republic's constitution and the relations between the various communities remain to be defined.

Peace conference resumes

After a break of two months, the Conference on Peace in Yugoslavia has also resumed its work in Brussels. The frantic activity of Cyrus Vance (nominally the United Nations' envoy, but in fact Washington's man on the spot) in Italy and Germany is a sign of a search for an American-European consensus on the future of the Balkans.

While the national leaders of the main Bosnian ethnic groups have been discussing the future confederation in Brussels, the country itself has seen explosions, shooting and sporadic clashes whose function is to carve out the respective zones of influence. The zones of conflict between

the Serb and Croat militia notably coincide with the likely frontiers between the future ethnic cantons.

The pacifist demonstrations, which have been frequent in the main urban centres, however, remain the dominant political factor at the start of March. Often organized by youth and women, independent of the national parties and ethnic groups, it is this activity that is blocking the spread of civil war.

This high level of mobilization around pacifist slogans and opposed to national divisions is explained by the widely shared understanding that if the republic was divided up into cantons "on Swiss lines", nearly half of all Bosnians would be in a minority in their future cantons.

Today, in the Balkans the possibility of finding oneself in a minority is a nightmare.

Accor-

ding to the leaks, the Muslim and Croat leaders reached agreement on the principle of a Confederation of Ethnic Entities. The communes would be grouped together amongst themselves into national cantons on the basis of ethnic majorities as established by censuses. The Serb nationalists have held back from this agreement since they are demanding the partition of Bosnia between the different ethnic groups and the annexation of a part by Serbia.

The country would be governed through a bi-cameral government and parliament with one house elected by universal suffrage and the other being a house of national representatives. The government would control foreign relations, economic policy and the central bank. But, to be applied, all government decisions would have to be ratified by a four fifths majority in the House of Nationalities. The issues of the police and defence are to be discussed later.

Many mixed households

Many urban Bosnians originate from or form nationally mixed households and no type of cantonization can meet their desire to live in the towns and with the persons of their choice. If the Croat canton came into being, it would comprise 14 cantons of absolute Croat majority and take in 41% of Bosnian Croats. The rest of the Croat population, some 450,000 people, would live outside this canton.

The Serbs meanwhile are in a (relative or absolute) majority in 30 communes, representing some 700,000 people, that is, 50% of the Serb population. The other half, another 700,000, would live outside the Serb canton.

The Muslims, the majority in this republic, are also the majority in 52 communes, comprising 1,600,000 persons.

Despite their relative concentration, some 340,000 Muslims, 18% of this nationality, would be spread around outside their canton. ★



The trial of Erich Mielke

GERMANY is currently seeing a wave of administrative measures against former leading officials of the now-defunct German Democratic Republic (East Germany), among them the trial of Erich Mielke, former head of the GDR secret police. While Mielke is evidently guilty of the innumerable crimes attendant on his former office, he is not standing trial for these; brutality in defence of the state is no more recognized as a crime in the countries of really existing capitalism as it was under the Stalinist dictatorships.

Instead he is charged with being involved in the murder of two notoriously brutal policemen over 60 years ago. That is to say, not with defending the state against the people, but with alleged involvement in an act of revenge against state brutality.

The following article gives the historical background to the trial. It first appeared in the February 27, 1992 issue of *Sozialistische Zeitung*, paper of the German United Socialist Party.

GEORG FÜLBERTH

ON February 10, 1992 the trial began of the former Minister of State Security of the GDR, Erich Mielke. He has been accused of taking part in the shooting of two policemen on August 9, 1931 in Berlin's Bülowplatz.

The trial itself is a farce. It is disputable whether the defendant is able to stand trial. The crime itself took place almost 61 years ago and would have been covered by a statute of limitations if it really is a case of murder, which remains to be established. The court has already stated that the criminal proceedings have been brought repeatedly, so that the customary period has never elapsed. But this is a dubious notion. If it were a matter of manslaughter, then the case would certainly have expired.

There are no witnesses to the deed, no proof and no confession from Mielke. Thus it is a pure and simple question of looking at the records. Insofar as there is incriminating material, it originates in a case brought during the Nazi period which names Mielke. The statements were obtained under torture, and besides it is normal for political prisoners to incriminate comrades who they know to be safe, independently of whether they had anything to do with the act in question. If Mielke were to be found guilty this would be a perversion

of justice.

It is quite obvious that the aim is to punish Mielke for his activity as head of the ministry of state security, but it has proved impossible to find the right legal grounds. In order to offer something to the — real or alleged — popular anger, the old case of the Bülowplatz has been dug up.

The background to the case is as follows.

It is well known that from 1929 onwards the German Communist Party (KPD) pursued an ultra-left course. It claimed — as did the whole of the Communist International after the 6th World Congress of 1928 — that there was an immediate revolutionary situation. The only way out for the bourgeoisie was fascism. In such a situation parliamentary democracy was finished and the social democracy, which still supported it, thus objectively aided fascism. From this developed the thesis of "social fascism".

The prediction of an immediate decisive clash put the question of armed struggle on the agenda. Since the mid-1920s there had existed the Red Front fighting organization, which was an organization of former combatants that had the job of guarding party meetings.

At the start of the 1930s the KPD founded self-defence groups. These also had first of all a protective function in particu-

lar against fascist violence and police attacks. These groups consisted of three or four men, one of whom had a firearm, often without the other members of the group knowing who this was.

Thirdly, under the direction of Hans Kippenberger, there was the Anti-Military Apparatus (AM-Apparat). In case of a real revolutionary crisis it would undertake operations. At periods of relative calm it would be on stand-by. At the same time it provided a kind of secret service in opposition to the subversion and violence of the state and the fascists. It is highly probable that it was closely connected with the corresponding Soviet agencies.

The preparation for violent events was not only a product of strategic misestimates or pure paranoia. In fact, in the final years of the Weimar republic, there were many instances of armed clashes not only with Nazi units but also with the police.

On May, 1929, the latter fired on demonstrating workers in Berlin, killing 31. When you read press reports of the time you are amazed at how easily the police resorted to shooting. Two out of many examples: in 1931, police in Leipzig fired on a demonstration of the unemployed, killing four. In Langenselbold bei Hanau in July 1932 a police officer fired on a meeting of the unemployed killing two women and a man. At the burial a police guard and a worker also died. Such reports could be multiplied.

In Prussia the responsible interior minister was a social democrat and for the Bloody May Day of 1929, a social democratic police chief (Zörgiebel). In these circumstances the KPD's ultra-leftism could be justified in the eyes of the party membership, even if the policy was not the result of such attacks.

Ultra-left adventures

In this case any party central committee, which, in the face of these attacks and daily growing unemployment, wanted to implement a carefully thought out policy, would have had to use all its skill not to lose contact with rank-and-file anger. The KPD leadership instead preferred to engage in adventurist manoeuvres. The worst was the support for a referendum on the dissolution of the Prussian parliament which had been proposed by the German National People's Party and the Nazis in April 1931. On August 9 the vote took place. The motion fell, revealing the great isolation of the KPD from the working class, and above all from the base of the social democracy on this question.

Immediately after the news of this event became known, two police officers, Paul Anlauf and Franz Lenk, were shot on Berlin's Bülowplatz, in the vicinity of Karl Liebkecht house where the KPD Central

Committee was meeting. The two were hated by the Communists for their participation in beatings. Immediately after the attack on Anlauf and Lenk the police opened fire, shooting into the surrounding crowd and killing a trader and a child. Karl Liebknecht house was closed for 14 days by the police.

In 1934 charges of murder were brought against Erich Mielke, a reserve leader of the KPD self-defence guard, and others. At the time of the act he was under 24. The fact that in 1934 he was already living in the Soviet Union and was thus out of danger, cannot be used as an indirect proof. At that time many KPD functionaries were delegated for periods of time to the USSR — at the Lenin School, to work or for political activity, for example, in the Comintern or the Executive Committee of the Youth International.

In his memoirs, completed in May 1946, Herbert Wehner, the technical secretary of the CC of the KPD in 1931, asserted that Heinz Neumann, a member of the CC and the politburo, had been a supporter of a particularly sharp ultra-left course and had ordered the Kippenberger apparatus to shoot the policemen "in order, through the act itself and the expected repression, to over-shadow the impact of the 'people's referendum' affair and create a new situation."

Murder in Moscow

Neumann was arrested in 1937 in Moscow and murdered by the Stalinist apparatus. His life-long companion, Margarete Büber-Neumann, claimed in 1957 that Walter Ulbricht had "given the order to Fritz Bröde, the responsible leader of the party self-defence guard, to find two suitable people to carry out this deed". One of them was Mielke. Ulbricht wanted in this way to discredit Neumann, on whom he wanted to throw the responsibility for the deed.

In 1966 there appeared the eight-volume *History of the German Workers' Movement* produced by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism under the auspices of the CC of the East German SED (Socialist Unity Party — the Communist Party). The chair of the editorial collective was Walter Ulbricht. In the fourth volume it is asserted that the shooting was organized by Heinz Neumann and Hans Kippenberger.

When Margarete Büber-Neumann published her version in 1957, Ulbricht was public enemy no.1 in West Germany. The charges thus not only exonerated Neumann but also became part of the German structure of prejudice. The official version promulgated by Ulbricht in the East in 1966 was part of the attempt to attribute the serious mistakes of that time onto the Neumann-Kippenberger group that had

meanwhile been designated as "anti-party". The fact that this has now been stuck on Mielke is yet another turn of the opportunist screw in regard to this case.

It may turn out that the defendant can rely on the capacities to play out a comedy in the courtroom. His first move "I want to

go home" was successful as was his remark on the second day of the trial "someone has stolen my hat". No doubt there will be others. In any case, whatever you think about Erich Mielke, we are seeing here an attempt at a perversion of justice. ★

The missing general strike

SINCE the end of 1991, the Spanish State has been affected by a wave of social struggles. At the end of last year, Leon, Asturias, Cartagena and El Ferrol were paralyzed by general strikes. Subsequently the movement has spread through the steel and engineering industries with demonstrations in Cantabria, Andalusia and even in the Canary Islands. Transport has been paralyzed in Madrid and Barcelona and new actions are planned for Galicia and Murcia.

These are movements of protest against industrial reconversion, de-industrialization and layoffs resulting from the policies followed by the Spanish government, under pressure from the European Economic Community (EEC).

JOAQUIN NIETO

FIVE hundred miners from Leon have just undertaken a march to Madrid to demand that their jobs be retained; they are threatened by the project for the restructuring of the Ponferrada mining and steel-making enterprise. In 18 days they covered the 503 kilometres from their village to the capital. Along the route they were greeted by solidarity rallies. In some spots the entire population came out to welcome them with a musical band. Meanwhile a group of miners has been staying underground for 40 days, that is, since the strike in the Leon mines began.

This struggle exemplifies something that is becoming increasingly widespread in response to de-industrialization and the attacks on jobs this brings with it; workers' protests seeking the solidarity they need to impose the central demand of the workers: an end to layoffs.

Effects of EEC membership

The economic recession, the effects of the Spanish State joining the EEC and the policies of the ruling Spanish Socia-



list Workers Party (PSOE) have provoked a wave of reconversions in both the public and private sectors. This brings in its wake the de-industrialization of whole zones and massive layoffs affecting tens of thousands of workers in industry. Mining, steel, textiles, fertilizers and naval shipyards have all been hard hit among others.

The government's reply is that "the best industrial policy is one that doesn't exist". They are refusing any policy involving public investment which could soften the blows to the most hard hit sectors and create a new industrial fabric.

The most dramatic consequence of this situation is unemployment. Enormous job losses — between 30 and 40% in mining and steel — are planned. The weakening of these sectors will cause further job losses in related industries. Zones affected by this de-industrialization are regions of industrial "monoculture", and whole populations are afflicted by the scourge of unemployment.

Under these conditions it is easy to understand the spread and size of protests taking the form of local or regional

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general strikes over the past six months. The first general strike began in the mining villages of Leon, followed in October 1991 by a general strike that brought Asturias to a halt. In December of that year, it was the turn of Cartagena; in January 1992 the mining basins of Asturias saw two weeks of big mobilizations with clashes with the police as well as in Cartagena where the demonstrators set fire to the regional parliament. In March a general strike is planned for Cantabria and in April for Galicia.

Meanwhile, 20,000 delegates from the two largest union confederations, the Workers Commissions (CCOO) and the General Workers' Union (UGT) from the affected regions assembled in front of the industry ministry in Madrid to demand action.

Left perspectives

These conflicts have sparked off debates in the unions on the perspective of a general strike throughout the Spanish State.

This idea, which is supported by the left in the CCOO has also been taken up by some leaders such as Marcelino Camacho, the CCOO president, but the majority of the CCOO and UGT leaderships have ruled it out.

However the question will not go away since the PSOE government is in the process of going on the offensive on all fronts: there is a proposal for an anti-strike law; reductions in social benefits for the unemployed at a time of high and rising unemployment (more than 17%); and flexibility in layoffs to facilitate the reconversion of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Despite the radicalism and size of the mobilizations, the main demands — no job losses and an industrial policy leading to new jobs — will not be easily won, without the imposition of a new economic policy on the government. This is not feasible above all unless the spreading conflicts come together into a general strike.

This is why this issue is central and why its rejection by the trade union leaders is proof of their blindness.

The government is using the prospect of the European single market in the wake of the Maastricht agreement as the pretext to put pressure on the unions with the aim of bringing about a social pact. This idea has not had a very favourable response but it may make headway.

Everything hangs on the outcome of the current battle over reconversion; the stronger the resistance and the mobilizations the more distant will be the prospect of a social pact. ★

Towards equal misery

THE 54 signatory countries to Convention 89 of the International Labor Organization (ILO), which forbids women from working at night in industry, had until February 27, 1992 to terminate this agreement or to sign up for another ten years. France and Switzerland have just taken, almost simultaneously, the same decision: not to renew Convention 89, which they claim is obsolete.

MARIANNE EBEL

BOTH governments waited until the last minute to announce their decision, the French government using the pretext of a decision made on July 25, 1991 by the European Community's Court of Justice — following a submission by an Alsatian manufacturer — which ruled that French legislation was in contradiction with a European directive of 1976 on equality between men and women.

There was nothing, apart from the pressure of the employers and its willingness to submit to them, to stop France's Socialist government from resolving the contradiction by extending the ban on night work to men, thus permitting it to renew its signature to Convention 89.

Switzerland, for its part, advanced a pseudo-argument about Euro-compatibility and bravely hid behind Germany, which has never adhered to Convention 89, but

which has just declared unconstitutional a law banning night work for women.

These decisions will worsen the situation of women everywhere in the world without in any way improving that of men. Given that Europe has abandoned Convention 89, the industrialized countries of the Third World (which remain almost the sole signatories of this accord, already renounced by Ireland, the Netherlands and Luxembourg and never recognized by Britain and Germany) will feel themselves no longer bound by an article which has been emptied of all content. This will leave the field free to the multinationals to increase the superexploitation of labour in these countries. In Europe trade union mobilizations might allow the introduction of protective legislation, but the women of the Third World can hope for no such alleviation.



Workers now have an equal right to destroy their health through night work. Rather than prohibiting night work for all unless it is not socially indispensable, it is now authorized in a general fashion, in the full knowledge that it does violence to our interior clock and that it leads to irreversible damage.

The health, the lives of those who produce the wealth, the equilibrium of families, the everyday life of children, none of this counts for anything. The governments have many other concerns... and in the first place that of pleasing the bosses by lifting the obstacles to international competition, as has been frankly admitted by the Swiss federal councillor Jean-Pascal Delamuraz, responsible for the public economy: "To renew our signature to the Convention would go against the efforts undertaken to improve the framing conditions of our economy and the attraction of the Swiss economic area... To maintain this old instrument was dangerous. It was to run the risk of being badly paced in the face of competition" (24 Heures, February 20, 1992). This is also an argument, of course, in favour of legalizing child labour.

In France the Minister of Labour, Mme. Martine Aubry, has preferred to emphasize professional equality, promising that a draft law will be introduced in the spring session envisaging compensation in the form of reduced hours or wage increases. In reality, far from guaranteeing equality, this step backwards will cement inequalities.

● **What kind of night work will be offered to women?**

The same repetitive, monotonous and unqualified work that women have to do during the day, with all the added inconvenience. Far from marking any real step towards equality, night work will mean growing social isolation with no chance of promotion.

● **Night work will not be voluntary.**

By suppressing the protection previously enjoyed by women, the state exposes everyone — and in particular those who are threatened with being marginalized — to the arbitrary whim of the logic of the profits of the employers.

That much is obvious if one looks at who works nights in those sectors which already today allow night work for all: it is overwhelmingly those who really have no other choice, refugees or immigrants, single mothers, those on low wages, those who can find no other work or those whose qualifications are judged insufficient.

● **Women and men are not equal on the labour market.**

More likely to be without qualifications and to be dependent on work which is not too far from their home, women are less mobile than men and have less alternatives than men to refuse whatever work is offered to them — such as night work.

Sleep — a right or a privilege?

The suppression of Convention 89 of the ILO aggravates the situation of women without any compensation: they will continue in fact to do two days of consecutive work, one in the factory at night, the other in the house during the day, this time with the privilege of no longer sleeping at night.

Certainly, only motherhood in the biological sense of the term (pregnancy/childbirth) distinguishes a woman from a man. Outside of these exceptional periods, men and women should be treated the same.

There would be no problem with this conception of equality if health protection was guaranteed for all rather than being increasingly challenged and if one forgets that after childbirth there is the child, that after the office or the factory, there are the children, the shopping, the meals, the housework, another day of work. In short, for real equality of rights and opportunities, it is necessary to begin by recognizing the social dimension of maternity/paternity and remembering that there is inevitably a friction between waged work and educational/household work.

With a concern for equality that is absent when it comes to guaranteeing equal wages, the employers have been quick to denounce the ban on night work for women as discriminatory.

In France, moreover, they have not waited for the government to renounce Convention 89 before imposing enterprise agreements introducing night work for women in two sectors directly covered by Convention 89 — electronics and the metallurgical industry.

Between 1988 and 1989, 106 enterprise agreements have thus been concluded without the trade unions, apart from the CGT (France's biggest trade union confederation, aligned with the Communist Party), protesting against such abuses. In Switzerland trade union resistance has been

more firm: basing themselves on Convention 89, the unions have succeeded in imposing respect for this agreement, in particular preventing the micro-electronics sector from introducing night work for women.

The fact that in Switzerland (a country not renowned for its workers mobilizations!) the bosses must wait until 1993 before exploiting women workers at night demonstrates that a more determined struggle on the political and trade union fronts would have allowed a more favourable balance of forces to be built in Europe.

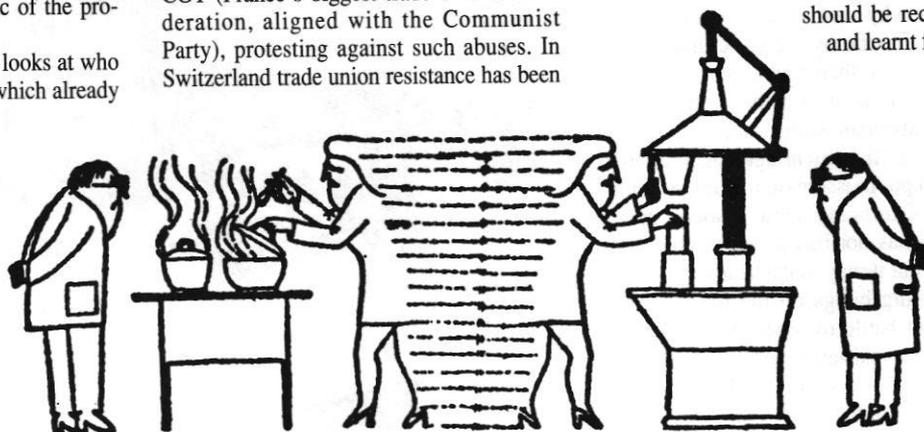
The EC Court of Justice and the Karlsruhe Tribunal would not have been able to conclude so easily that the ban on night work for women was discriminatory if women, aided by the workers organizations, had been able to defend a fundamental idea: in the context of the social inequalities which they suffer from, the suppression of a specific protection for women discriminates against them.

A genuine commitment to sexual equality would mean examining how to extend the ban on unnatural working hours to men, how to limit the inevitable health risks linked to night work and how to advance concretely towards a more equitable sharing of educational and domestic tasks. But this would imply priorities other than those followed today in the countries of the European Community, which essentially involve satisfying the demands of the employers for increased flexibility.

Slaves of the machine

At the end of a 20th century which has seen astounding technical and scientific progress, we are becoming more than ever the slaves of the machine. What future do we want for ourselves and our children? A society which works 24 hours a day to line the pockets of the few?

Are our lives to be dictated by the sole priority of productivity? This is the challenge to be met. Women, the trade unions and the workers organizations have just suffered a defeat — a defeat which should be recognized and learnt from. ★



Aristide's gamble

WAS Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's deposed president, seeking to divide the perpetrators of the coup d'état which overthrew him when, on February 23, 1992, in Washington, he signed an agreement with a delegation from the Haitian parliament? In any case, that has been the result. But, among the partisans of Aristide also, the signature of the agreement has enjoyed far from unanimous support.

ARTHUR MAHON



disappointment was already great in December, when it was learnt that, after all his other proposals had been rejected, Aristide had accepted René Théodore's appointment as prime minister in the event of a successful

outcome to the negotiations. The author of this proposal was Alvin Adams, the United States ambassador. He also put forward the name of Marc Bazin, the candidate he had supported during the presidential election. Théodore, general secretary of the PUCH (Unified Party of Haitian Communists), who got 1.8% of the votes in this election, has supported the overthrow of Aristide from the beginning and has been liaising with Alvin Adams for several months.

More surprising is the disappointment at the announcement of an agreement which at least envisages the return of Aristide. The explanation for this is that Aristide had made a number of sizeable concessions, including pledges "to respect the acts passed or ratified by the Haitian parliament" and "a general amnesty, except for common criminals".

No date set for Aristide's return

Furthermore, the agreement provides no specific date for Aristide's return to Haiti. A second agreement, signed on February 25 with Théodore, envisages that a month after the ratification of the agreement by parliament, Aristide, Théodore and the general secretary of the OAS "will meet to prepare the ground for the return of the President of the Republic". But this is no guarantee that Aristide will not have to remain outside Haiti until the end of his presidential mandate.

The Haitian people, who have paid heavily for their opposition to the coup d'état, find these concessions difficult to accept, especially since the international press agencies have been claiming that

Aristide was going to govern alongside coup leader Cédras, his nomination as head of the army being one of the "acts ratified by parliament" since the coup d'état. Urged to give his interpretation of the agreement, Aristide said that, for him, Cédras is a "common criminal" and is thus not covered by the amnesty. He must go "to prison or into exile".

But even if the accords are applied, who will decide on this point, except for the judicial tribunals which, as is well-known, are rotten to the core? (At least unless a popular mobilization can force them to change their opinion.)

And this seems to be Aristide's gamble. He knows that the agreement he has signed is exactly what the United States wants. But, on the evidence of his declarations in the newspaper *Haiti Progrès* (March 4-10, 1992), he believes that his return to the national palace will expand the area of liberty, and that the popular movement will be able to progressively transform the relation of forces. Perhaps he also believes that the contradictions of the agreement and the diverse interpretations to which it is open will be the occasion for mobilizations around concrete objectives. It seems then that, for Aristide, the concessions that he has made are complementary to the appeal that he launched some weeks earlier to the Haitian people: "I ask you to hoist the flag of resistance higher, higher and ever higher".

Disorientation and consensus

Is this tactic, whose first effect was the disorientation of numerous partisans of Aristide, realistic? This disorientation may well deepen in the face of a government of "national consensus" directed by Théodore and presided over by Aristide. It might be feared that once more he is overestimating his own capacities of initiative and underestimating the obstacle represented by the army. Aristide has committed the error of polarizing the debate around the question of the fate of Cédras, saying that "even if God was the president of Haiti, with Cédras there would be no democracy".

The truth is that, even without Cédras, even with some changes at its head, even if efforts are made to "professionalize" it, as the agreement states, or else divide it, this army of murderers will still remain determined to defend the same interests.

There will be no democracy in Haiti unless this army is opposed by an organized people disposing of the means to defend itself. It is a lesson that the September 30 coup d'état has written in letters of blood. ★

ON MARCH 6, judge Nérette, who has occupied Aristide's position since the coup, appeared on television surrounded by the chiefs of the army. "They will place themselves on the perilous road of unconstitutionality" he declared in an inflammatory speech aimed at those parliamentarians prepared to ratify the Washington agreement. He was attacking not just Aristide's parliamentary supporters but also those, much more numerous, who, complicit in the September 30, 1991 coup, are now seeking a negotiated solution.

What is it about the Washington agreement that has scandalized Nérette and his cronies? According to the agreement, parliament must "restore Jean-Bertrand Aristide in the exercise of his functions as elected constitutional president" and prepare "the conditions for the return of Jean-Bertrand Aristide to Haiti". Beyond this, parliament must ratify the demand made by Aristide and the OAS (Organization of American States) to send a civil mission to Haiti. This already prepared 500-strong body has been described by Nérette as an "occupation force".

During the initial negotiations held in Carthagena in November 1991, the parliamentary delegation had refused to allow the name of President Aristide to be mentioned in the text of the resolution. The fact that they have now conceded on this point bears witness to the impasse in which the putschists, incapable of normalizing the situation, find themselves.

And yet the announcement of the agreement was greeted with consternation in the popular circles of Haiti. The

Capitalism without capital

THE Czecho-Slovak government thinks it has found a way to introduce capitalism without capital — a sixth of state property will be distributed to citizens in exchange for coupons. Despite rhetoric about the creation of popular capitalism, most citizens will entrust their shares to “privatization funds” backed by bureaucratic, black market or foreign capital.

ADAM NOVAK

THE government hopes to combine the illusion of ownership by the population with the employment of the capitalist-style skills of fund managers. But the scheme represents a big step into the unknown. The Communist Party and trade unions have even created their own privatization funds, to protect jobs and promote self-management.

The Investment Privatization Funds (IPFs) introduce some of the most modern features of capitalism to Czecho-Slovakia. Professional managers will run funds and interact with company managers, while players on the international capital markets can easily compare the results and risks of a Czecho-Slovakian portfolio to that of a Kenyan or Thai fund. Many funds already have foreign financial backing. Austrian banks like Kreditanstalt and Volksbank run funds through their Czecho-Slovak subsidiaries.

Most adult citizens have registered for the coupon privatization, and, by the autumn, should know which companies they (or the IPF representing them) are shareholders of. Formally, the citizens can control the new companies through shareholders meetings. In reality the mass of shareholders will be passive, and funds and banks controlling only, say, 10% of shares will play a disproportionate role.

And this is the main purpose of the coupon privatization. The state is transferring state property to the hands of capitalist-style managers, who will be motivated by profits. Any opposition by existing state managers has been neutralized by encouraging them to write the privatization plan for their enterprise, and even to form their own IPF.

10 Foreign investors are already contacting the funds and enterprise managers

directly and will be able to buy directly from “the people” rather than seek state approval. The federal government hopes that this liberalization of investment conditions will attract investment away from Poland and Hungary and will enable even medium sized German and Austrian firms to invest in the border regions.

The Czech elite has accepted that this internationalization means they will become a *comprador* layer, managing the territory for owners abroad. 80% of total investment so far has come from German and Austrian companies, and the danger of a split between the Czech and Slovak republics comes increasingly from Czech leaders, who see Slovakia as a brake on their “return to Europe” — that is, integration into the west European and German economic space.

An inland offshore centre

The Slovak capital Bratislava, only an hour from Vienna, is becoming an “off-shore” service and production centre for Austrian capital and consumers. The situation for Slovakia as a whole is desperate. Slovak unemployment is already 14% compared to 4.1% in the Czech Lands and the Slovak bureaucracy wants a stronger role for state investment to protect key industries. There is also anger at the Prague government’s decision to close down the arms industry (two thirds of which is in Slovakia) at the request of major investors in the Czech Republic (but not Slovakia) from Britain, France and the USA — the biggest arms exporters in the world.

The fledgling Czecho-Slovak market is operating without even the limited regulation common to Britain or Australia. There are no laws which even pretend to oblige fund managers to honestly follow

their clients’ interests. Banks can use confidential knowledge about companies to gain ownership through their IPFs, or issue undeclared loans to enterprises where they own shares. Managers of state enterprises can use their enterprises’ funds to build parallel empires for themselves and their friends. Among the mass of small unregulated IPFs are some run by crooks who will defraud their coupon-investors in any one of the ways known to Western markets.

In any case, the simple transfer of ownership does nothing to change the nature of Czecho-Slovak industry — outdated, uncompetitive and short of customers since the government destroyed trade links with the USSR and Eastern Europe.

The restructuring of Czecho-Slovak industry would be a long and expensive process under any economic and political system. In the extreme free market monetarist conditions currently in force, the best estimates are for 20% of firms to go bankrupt this year, with only 35% of firms likely to survive five years. Federal government estimates for 1992 of 12% inflation and a 10% fall in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) should be doubled.

Collapse of industry

In such conditions, the government’s fast privatization will accelerate the collapse of industry, and may prove a political time bomb. The IPFs, as private owners, will close factories rather than lose money. They may prefer asset stripping and property speculation to the massive task of reconstruction.

Some ministerial advisors have warned that the fund-managed contraction of industry will be so sharp that the state will have to re-nationalize to prevent mass closures, electricity cuts and strikes. Western fund managers expect only 30 to 60 of the privatization funds themselves to survive two years. Bank failures and bail-outs happen in the West, but will pro-free market government leader Vaclav Klaus dare to re-nationalize the privatization funds? Citizen share holders who see their “share” of the national property disappear almost as soon as they receive it, and who have never been warned about the dangers of committing their savings to the IPF scheme, will be deeply disillusioned with the reform process, to say the least.

The government is aware of these risks, but accepts them in pursuit of their short term goal of winning the June 1992 elections. The last elections, in 1990, were effectively a referendum on the

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"Shouldn't we just announce how many informers we have to the square kilometre?"

"Velvet Revolution" of 1989. The pro-capitalist policy of Vaclav Klaus' government has never been approved in an election — until now. The right needs to demonstrate that privatization is irreversible, and that the benefits are widespread. Hence the rush, and the incredible claims of the privatization ministries that 1,000 Kcs (US\$35) of coupons bought by a citizen would be worth 120,000 (\$4,150) in two years. In reality, so many near bankrupt firms have been smuggled into the coupon privatization that Western bankers say citizens will be lucky if they can sell their coupons for 30,000 Kcs (\$1,050) in three years. Not much for the individual's share in the state sector.

Dismissal of federal prosecutor

Both Czech and Slovak political elites are increasingly considering authoritarian strategies for managing the crisis. The criminalization of the propagation of "communism and class hatred" (see IV no. 224) has been followed by the dismissal of the federal prosecutor Ivan Gasparovic, who claimed that there were no legal grounds for the mass prosecution of ex-Stalinists and who refused to rubber stamp new laws he considered to be in contradiction with the constitution.

The forces behind these moves are the Czech Civic Democratic Party of Vaclav Klaus and the Civic Democratic Alliance of Federal economics minister Vladimir Dlouhy and Czech privatization minister Tomas Jezek. Press support and corporate sponsorship in the Czech republic has deserted the Civic Movement, led by ex-dissidents like Jiri Dienstbier and unofficially supported by president Vaclav Havel, which has supplied most of the

current government.

After initially opposing the coupon privatization the Czech-Moravian Communist Party (CSCM — with the support of 11% of the voters one of Europe's largest Communist parties) now argues that workers must take part, and party members have now created the *Czech and Moravian National Investment Fund*. The Miners', Chemical Workers' and Slovak Engineering Workers' union representatives have set up a series of funds for each sector of the economy through the union-owned *Bohemia banka*. These funds stress the need to avoid domination by foreign capital, to protect employment and to explore all methods of increasing worker involvement and participation in decision-making. Thanks to their low cost publicity campaigns, based on activist networks rather than TV adverts, the left fund managers are confident they will attract a large enough number of coupon holders to be able to acquire a seat on the board of a large number of newly privatized companies.

Ethical investment

Rather than a victory for the self-management movement, this may be just the beginning of the problem. Like any ethical investment organization, the progressive IPFs will have to deal with profitability, wages and discipline as defined by the capitalist system.

Will a trade union fund lay off its workers/shareholders? Will the Communist fund negotiate loans from Swiss banks? Will the funds avoid companies dealing with South Africa? If the answer to these questions is no, then how will they survive a deepening economic crisis? How different will they dare to be? The only hope is for these funds to make their

strategy open to discussion and change by member shareholders. These shareholders have to consciously see themselves as members of a self-management movement. Self-management funds will never offer the level of dividend the big commercial bank IPFs can offer and it is irresponsible to pretend otherwise. The attempt by the "self-management" funds to present themselves as a moderate "ethical investment" alternative, robs them of their only real strength, that of offering an alternative.

The activists behind the Czecho-Slovak "self-management" funds believe privatization cannot be left to the capitalists and the bureaucrats. They hope to gain enough power to make some improvements for workers even though their economy will remain a capitalist one. There are many parallels with the cooperative movement in other countries and many of the same problems apply.

Credit and investment decisions in the new Czechoslovakia will be made according to capitalist profit criteria. The climate will be hostile to investment projects for creating jobs, producing socially useful products or developing economic democracy. To take responsibility for jobs and production in such a situation means that self-management may be blamed for any job losses that result. Without operating credit allocation and without state spending programmes oriented towards meeting basic needs, it will be difficult to run factories any differently from the bureaucrats or capitalists. Most workers remain suspicious of the self-management funds. The number of those willing to invest their coupons in the company where they work has now dropped from 65% in mid-1991 to under 15% now. Workers' response to the restructuring of their workplace will more likely be to begin trade union organization and strikes. "Worker-shareholders" may not act so differently from the others, nor will those who lose their jobs necessarily accept their fate for the good of self-management in the future.

The workers' movement needs to organize and educate those faced with the results of privatization so that they can oppose its worst effects. Self-management can serve as an argument of how things should be done differently, but it is not a realizable alternative without a mass workers' movement. ★

Trade unions seek new role

AFTER the collapse of the neo-Stalinist regime of Gustav Husak in November 1989, the old state trade unions in Czechoslovakia collapsed. Adam Novak looks at the problems facing the reformed unions in that country in the face of the government's pro-capitalist reforms.*

THE old Czechoslovak trade unions went under with the system which had created them. Workers' associations in each individual enterprise were one of the pillars of the "Velvet Revolution" of 1989. These associations came together to form the national "Association of Strike Committees", which succeeded in forcing the dissolution of the old unions and which took over their buildings and resources for the foundation of new unions, set up at the start of 1991.¹

Most unions in the CSFR belong to the Czechoslovak Confederation of Union Associations (CS KOS)² which has around 5,250,000 members and brings together 41 unions.³

Despite having taken over the resources of the former state unions, the new Czech⁴ formations are very weak. In general it can be said that workers are not convinced of the need for unions. While many pay contributions, few identify with their union or are active within it. Only a few see it as a means for the defence of their own interests. In the enterprises the unions are usually very weak.

The most important exception is the union of miners, transport and engineering workers (Kovo).⁵ In these sectors there has been a considerable wave of militancy at a local level, which has led to the unions becoming real representatives of the workers, with real organizations in the enterprises and real workers support. It was on the initiative of the Kovo that in Spring 1991 some 500,000 signatures were gathered in three weeks for a petition in protest against the revision of workers' rights.

The unions share with the government the view that it is necessary to create a labour market. They accept the scrapping

of the rule under the previous regime that gave them a right of veto over attempts to layoff workers. They insist that the sacking of those who do not want to work will improve the climate at work and lead to a rise in the incomes of the remaining workers.

They have however rejected government assertions to the effect that the difference between wages and social security is too small. They want worker motivation to be created by methods other than those of poverty and fear of unemployment.

CS KOS has succeeded in getting the minimum wage set at 2,100 Kcs when the government had proposed 1,600. On the other hand, the unions have been happy to accept the principle that higher wages can only come about "when the economy permits". But the fact is that today one can buy less for 2,100Kcs than you could for 1,600 at the time when the minimum wage was introduced. The original proposal of the unions to support the network of price subsidies through a social grant drawn from wages has been wholly dropped, so that the government can now freely decide which prices to support and which to free.

Effective job creation

CS KOS has called on the government to implement an effective job creation programme aimed at ensuring full employment. According to the CS KOS Vice-President:

"Many proposals exist on paper which have not been implemented. A real [jobs] programme, which could be accepted in the different regions, does not exist. We demand a regional employment policy since unemployment has a primarily regional character. This can best be seen in North Moravia or Slovakia.

"The employment policy must be agreed for the respective regions and branches of industry... So far massive job losses have not occurred but these will follow as a consequence of privatization. We must be ready for this.

"In some regions of the republic, job creation is only possible through investment. If the government does not find the financial means, no jobs will be created."⁶

For a long time the unions have restricted their opposition to the government's employment policies to repeated protests in the form of press releases. But it is now clear to everyone that the government is planning to allow the unemployment rate

in the Czech Republic to rise to over 10% (18% in Slovakia), putting the unions under great pressure either to resist or at least to change their line of argument.

The union leadership believes that it can be a valuable partner for the government's social policies. However, in most cases, the government ignores the unions in devising social policy. Increasingly often the unions criticize the social system as inadequate.

"There is today a social security net, but it is overwhelmed; unconnected to the economic reform...the social net is built in such a way that whoever falls into it not only will not be saved, but may well never get out. This is not social security or any kind of security at all."⁶

The unions have accepted the government's decisions on which social funds should be kept open and which not. It is thus hardly surprising that they do not now find themselves in a situation to do more than propose a more social and somewhat softer version of the same aggressive social policy.

Reemergence of social conflicts

When in autumn 1990 social conflicts began to reemerge, for the first time since the "revolution", the government changed their strategy of ignoring the unions and began to consult them on the way to arrive at a "social consensus". This led to the setting up of "social consensus councils" in which workers, employers and the government are represented with the aim, amongst other things, of planning an overall agreement on wage rises.

The unions and the public saw this plan as a legally guaranteed, binding commitment for setting the lower limits of wage rises. This would ensure compensation for the announced price rises of 50%. But when the time for the wage rises came, the government asserted that all that was involved were non-binding guidelines for enterprise managers. Most workers did not get the suggested wage rises.

* The following article first appeared in the March 1992 number of *Ost-West-Gegeninformationen*, published in Graz, Austria.

1. For more detailed information see *International Labour Reports*, nos. 38 and 40, 1990.

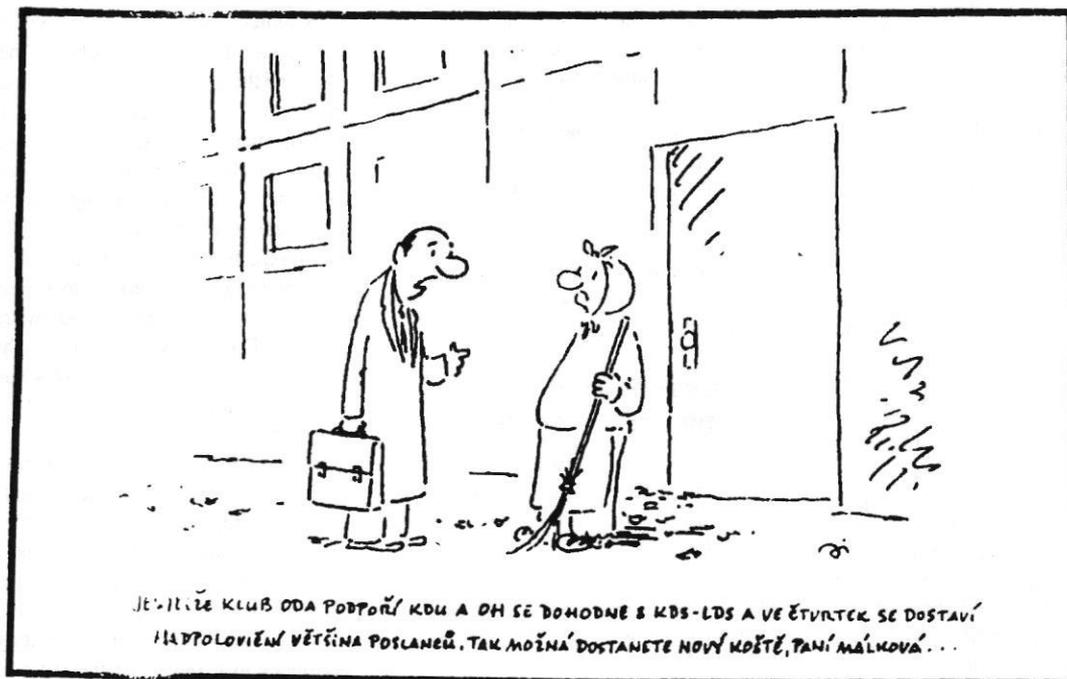
2. In April 1991, the CS KOS (Ceskoslovenske Konfederace Odborovych Svazu) joined the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. It is currently an active participant in the European Trade Union Forum and is negotiating entry into the European Confederation of Trade Unions.

3. In addition there is a culture and arts union, the KUK, with some 30,000 members.

4. This article does not deal in detail with the situation in Slovakia.

5. Kovo is the second largest free trade union in Europe (after IG-Metall). It has around a million members, organizing one out of every six unionized workers in the CSFR.

6. *Sondy*, December 12, 1991.



"If the ODA club supports the KDH and the OH reaches an agreement with the KDS-LDS and gets more than half the votes on Thursday, you may get a new broom, Mrs. Malkova!" (cartoon by Vlastimil Jiraneck from the Czechoslovak daily *Lidove noviny*.)

In January this year, the Slovak unions urged the Slovak government to give information on which workers had not had a wage rise of at least 10% in 1991. The Slovak government promised to give "indirect, but not financial help" to the firms concerned, by which means they hoped to achieve a rise in this year's wages.

In the Czech republic even this modest initiative has not been undertaken. The unions continue to nail their colours to the mast of social consensus although they know that the government is cynically abusing this notion. They are hoping that the growth in social divisions will force the government to accept them as partners and are defending the general consensus in the hope that it could be useful to them in the future.

The unions' line of argument is that privatization cannot be taken as an aim in itself but should be seen as an instrument for improving efficiency. Local union groupings often support the demand of undertaking restructuring without privatization. But the unions have not developed any alternative proposals to privatization, so that they often find themselves confined to haggling over details and the time schedule for privatization. In the few cases where workers have put forward their own plans for privatizing enterprises as workers' cooperatives, they have received union support.

Some union journals have asked their members to join in the coupon privatization⁷ and invest in the coupon fund for their sector. Some local union groupings have supported management plans where-

by workers would receive a minority share in the enterprises.

Participation in privatization

The unions have hardly discussed the question of how workers should participate in the massive coupon privatization, and if they should take part at all. This could change, since now a privatization fund supported by the Czech Communist Party (CSCM) is offering to buy shares where it has "participants" and raises demands around workers co-management and employees' initiatives where it has influence over the management.

The philosophy that the workers' themselves should take over leadership of the enterprises has received little support from the unions. This idea plays only a secondary role among Czech workers and the left.

The confused and modestly expressed attempts of some unionists to work out a strategy that could turn the coupon plan to their own advantage has not received the needed theoretical and technical support from intellectuals nor access to the financial and media resources of the CS KOS. The result of this has been that workers are putting their trust in the coupon fund, which has been promoted through the television and direct advertising, even where its investment strategy aims at enterprise closures.

The unions are now experiencing a number of attacks from the new private owners including bans on union membership, sacking of union activists and so on. Most people in the CS KOS now take the view

that on the whole the present legal situation guarantees union rights but that capitalist (and often state) managers will only apply these laws if the unionists in the enterprises enforce them. The unions are not opposed to private property as such. According to Andrej Rady from the union of translators:

"Our starting point is essentially different to that of Western unions. What we need here (and I am talking from here and not from the West) is an increase in the private sector. It is much easier to deal with an employer who perhaps represents foreign capital and knows the value of a partnership with the unions. This would be much easier than finding a concrete basis for negotiations with these dilettante bureaucrats, many of whom are known to us from the former time."

When the workers at the Skoda car plant in Mlada Boleslav learned of the plan to sell the plant to Renault-Volvo, they threatened to strike to ensure that it would be sold to Volkswagen. Most union activists in the CSFR believed and still believe that foreign investment would ensure the survival of their enterprise along with integration into the Western market and a chance to achieve Western wage levels and working conditions.

Six months after VW took over the Skoda works discussions took place with the German management that failed to yield the hoped for improvements in wor-

7. Every citizen can buy a coupon book for 1,000 Kcs with which to buy shares.

8. *Kovak* (weekly paper of the Kovo), December 13, 1991.

king conditions and production. There was also very strong resentment against the West German unions in VW who were accused of being against a levelling up of wages and working conditions, of not understanding the situation of the Czech unionists and activists and of having backed off from cooperation with the Czech workers under pressure from the Skoda management.⁸

The union leadership sees its role as that of a neutral or centre left negotiator for the workers. They are therefore uneasy about taking a clear position on current government policies. Thus Vladimir Petrus, the president of CS KOS' Czech and Moravian office:

"The unions accept every political decision-maker who works in a good and professional fashion. We will not criticize any minister on the grounds of their political outlook. Much has been said about Minister Klaus. But he is naturally only responsible for finances and not for the recession. We are naturally opposed to him when we get the feeling that this or that measure which he takes as finance minister hinders bringing the recession to an end. As unionists we really do not have a specially close relationship with Mr. Klaus, but we will certainly not attack him simply because he is the head of a party that is somewhat to the right."

More combative attitude needed

Obviously the development of a more combative attitude in the unions depends on the coming into existence of a pro-worker and socialist current which can work out a critique of the reform programme measured by its effects on the workers. Left and right wings are only slowly forming in the unions. The top levels of the unions recoil before identification with party political standpoints and even those unionists that are sympathetic to the Social Democratic Party (CSSD) rarely express themselves publicly. Furthermore the leaderships' "neutralism" largely corresponds to the sentiments of the membership. They fear that a more politically committed leadership style could repel people from joining the unions, especially in Prague where many support Klaus' Civil Democratic Party (ODS).

For the July 1992 elections the CSSD will criticize the government's economic programme on the grounds that it would also be possible to have an economic reform which did not exact a high cost from the smaller people. In such a case, a part of the union leadership will declare its support for this party to create a focus for the left independent of the Communist Party.

Although around a third of workers are

in favour of the unions standing their own candidates in elections, another third of the working class and most national leaders are against since they fear that this could lead to a split in the movement and tar it with a leftist image. It is thus unlikely that there will be any union candidates in the forthcoming elections, although it is possible that the more radical unions may put forward a list of demands and advise their members to question candidates about their attitude to these demands.

Weakness of extra-parliamentary left

The extra-parliamentary left is very small and ignores the unions. The only exception is the Slovak group, Forum Robotnikov ("Workers' Forum") which propagates basic workers rights such as the right to work or the right to compensation for inflation and calls on workers and union leader to fight for these demands. The Forum has brought up to 20,000 workers into the streets. Its supporters are mostly thirty to fifty year old skilled workers.

The roots of its success are certainly to be found in the drastic deterioration of living standards in Slovakia and the widespread conviction that the Prague reformers want to reduce Slovakia to the status of an under-developed region, as it was between the wars. Conditions are less favourable for a group like this in the Czech Republic. The economic crisis is less acute and the majority of workers believe that the Czech speaking part of the CSFR can relatively rapidly approach West European living standards.

Some union activists and full-time officials from the steelworkers, miners and transport workers union began sometime in 1991 to talk about founding a workers' party. The basis for this is the growing discontent with the government's economic reform, the extremely moderate policy of the union leadership, memories of the failure of a non-Communist left alternative in the 1990 elections and the recognition that there will again be no left alternative at the forthcoming elections apart from the Communist Party.

A little later, a Democratic Workers Party was founded but it lacks real involvement from the union memberships or local union leaders.

Most of its members are ex-Communist Party members who belong to the intelligentsia. The party, which is of a purely parliamentary type, is already split between a very moderate leadership and a more radical minority. As is the norm among left wing ex-Communists, this party spends much time reappraising the Stalinist past and trying to define a "democratic socialism founded on modern social

developments throughout the world".⁹

Far away from the real debates, the proposals of the Czech left are very moderate and show an exaggerated trust in modern foreign management techniques (Japanese quality circles, German co-management, and American shared planning schemes) or "social models" (the "Swedish model").

From the foregoing it becomes clear that the government's approach to the unions stems from its concern about workers' activity. This is also the reason why the government introduced reforms such as wage indexation, social councils and a minimum wage.

However the government until now has kept to its agreements in these points and is looking for ways to undo the reforms since it has noticed that there is no resistance from the workers and that the unions are very weak. The unions are not fully aware of the government's strategy and continues to believe that the latter can be persuaded to negotiate. However unless they represent movement on the ground the unions are an irrelevance for the government.

Until now there has been no worker radicalization in reaction to the economic crisis. No strengthening of the worker movement is springing. Further time will see a more life begins to flow into the union structures, and the latter will have little influence on the forthcoming elections.

Several things will happen if the workers are to have influence on politics in the CSFR. Workers have to develop a critical appraisal of the government's reforms.

They need to have a clear evaluation of the possibilities and limits of negotiations and learn to use more radical forms of protest, in particular strikes. They must rely more on their own activities than on the leaderships layer.

Improved contact with the workers' movement of the capitalist world can help Czech and Slovak workers to learn to see through the strategies of the incoming multinationals and capitalist managements. As far as is possible such contacts should be established at grassroots level. And finally, in a country which is seeing fundamental change to the detriment of the working class, it is necessary to get rid of the illusion of non-political unionism. Even if there is a risk that many workers will be repelled, we must take clear political positions. ★

9. Programmatic Statement of the Democratic Workers Party, Prague 1991.

The Great Depression

IN MOSCOW in late 1991, a rather revealing masthead appeared on the daily paper *Pravda*. A kicker underneath the name of the paper read, "paper founded on May 5, 1912, on the initiative of V.I. Lenin." Along the top of the page was an advertisement that read, "Shares in the All-Russian Exchange Bank, a guarantee of your success and a symbol of your prosperity".

PETER ANNEAR*

THE unintentionally ironical masthead mirrored the confused situation in the former Soviet Union — now the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) — where the economic and political crisis was and is deep. What happened in 1989 in Eastern Europe and what transpired in the CIS at the end of 1991 are, of course, linked. In a purely descriptive way, it might be said that after the failed August coup, the Soviet Union unequivocally entered the East European road, the difference being that, today, the countries of central and Eastern Europe have travelled further in the direction of the restoration of the capitalist economy. What can be said, then, about the events that have transpired since the 1989 changes swept across Eastern Europe? Briefly, if 1989 was the year of upsurge, and 1990 the year of sorting out power, then 1991 was the year of consolidation of the capitalist economic reform project and signaled the end, once and for all, of any notion of a struggle for "democracy" against the former authoritarian system.

Addressing five key questions can help provide an understanding of the situation in eastern Europe today.

- What is the current economic situation two years after the so-called reform process began?

- What level of social resistance to this economic reform process is evident or can be expected?

- In what ways has the problem of the old state apparatus been tackled by the new anti-communist governments, and what is their own record on the question of democracy?

- Through what political stages has the

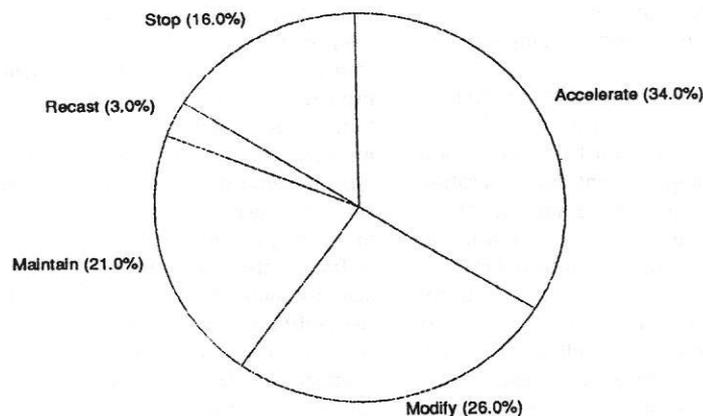
restoration process passed so far, keeping in mind that such an historical process has never been attempted?

- How has the left oriented to the post-Stalinist political situation and what are the possibilities for a left resurgence?

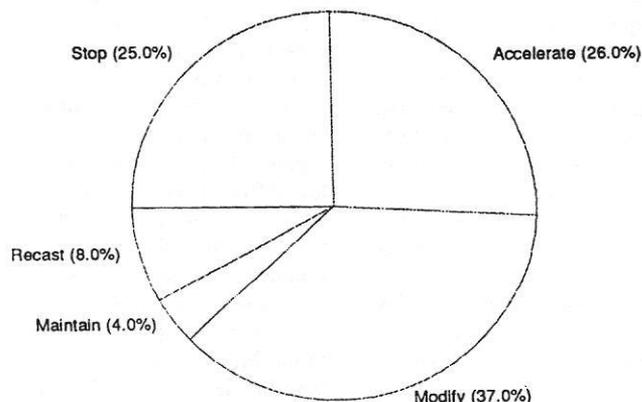
The Depression in Eastern Europe

In the two years after 1989, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe moved from economic stagnation to a depression about as deep as the Great Depression. Total national output across Eastern Europe fell by about 25% during 1990 and 1991 and no real turn around is in sight in 1992. By comparison, in the four years between 1929 and 1933, gross national product fell by 29% in the USA and Canada and by slightly less in western Europe. Industrial output in eastern Europe is falling even faster than total output.

Czech Republic
Attitude to economic reform



Slovak Republic
Attitude to economic reform



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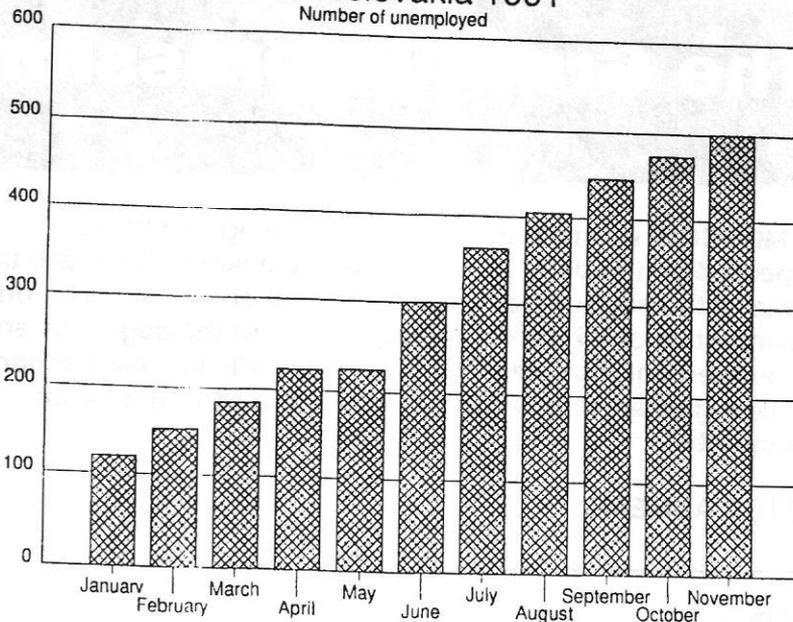
As a consequence, unemployment began a steady swift climb, at least doubling during 1991 in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland (where it has reached 13%). In Albania, unemployment rose to 30% during 1991. Already, about 7 million workers across eastern Europe are jobless, a number that will quickly double again. Inflation is also a major problem and, as in Poland, which is regarded as a model for the economic transition, has everywhere led to the implementation of rigid austerity policies. During 1992 Russia will experience hyper-inflation and has already negotiated for conditional IMF loans. Where inflation is not an uncontrollable problem, as in Czechoslovakia, that is true only because of a purposely induced recession. Additionally, in Poland, for example, real wages fell 30% in a year.

During 1991, therefore, both output and living standards in eastern Europe dropped dramatically. Mass social discontent has not yet broken out as a result of this economic decline mainly because unemployment is still relatively contained, due to the fact that many theoretically insolvent state enterprises are still operating. In the 1930s, political agitation in the west was less the product of falling incomes than of rising unemployment, which hit 30%.

However, the alarm bells are ringing. In December, the bulletin of the United Nations Commission for Europe said popular disappointment and frustration threatened to undermine support for the economic reforms in eastern Europe. It pointed to the sharp contrast between western recommendations to east Europeans to liberalize their economies as quickly as possible, as well as their earlier promises of the benefits of "democracy", and their present reluctance to remove import barriers to east European products. It urged the west to initiate a recovery program for eastern Europe similar to the US Marshall Plan which stimulated revival in western Europe in 1948-51. But 1991 was not 1951, and a new Marshall Plan is definitely not possible.

Another report in December by the Morgan Stanley merchant bank in the US said, "eastern Europe faces a new crisis because its reforms will lead to ominous rates of unemployment rather than economic growth next year [1992]". It said that the former Soviet Union faces "at best a Bonapartist, at worst an anarchic [outcome]." (*Financial Times*, December 23, 1991) That was a very accurate comment. If there were presently a one-word description of the economies of the former Soviet Union it would be "anarchistic" - the lack of any real or accepted system as such. By "Bonapartist" Morgan Stanley

Czechoslovakia 1991
Number of unemployed



meant the restoration would not convert the economy to authentic capitalism but that it would remain based on socialist forms of some type. The report said that it would take \$100 billion a year, adding a dramatic 0.5% to western interest rates, to start to tackle the deep-rooted structural problems that affect all sections of the former Soviet economy. Incidentally, the message that Harvard monetarist economist and advisor to Boris Yeltsin's Russian government Jeffrey Sachs is giving to the west is also that it must find a way to finance the reconstruction of the Russian economy. Sachs previously advised the Bolivian government on economic reform and privatization and then was contracted by the Polish government as an advisor, not always with good results from a social point of view. The product of this financial burden on the west, of course, would be to further prolong the international recession. The report said calamity can be avoided only "if the west recognizes that [the current] *laissez faire* reform [program] will not produce minimal prosperity within a *politically feasible time frame*", the meaning of which is abundantly clear [emphasis added]. Unemployment, it said, will soon approach 20% on average.

Political repercussions have already followed from this unexpected economic crisis. Apart from the splintering of parties, the reason the Polish parliament could not produce a stable government following the October elections was the division over economic policy between former prime Minister Jan Krzysztof Bielecki, a hard line *laissez faire* monetarist supported by Polish president Lech Walesa, and

prime minister designate Jan Olszewski from the Christian democratic Centre Alliance party (formerly Walesa's party, now opposed by him) which is afraid the economic decline will cause "political instability" and which therefore hoped to reverse the present recession with Keynesian-style growth policies while purging the apparatus of former Communists. A similar pattern is evident in the national and political divisions within the Czech and Slovak federation.

Some governments in the region, and most notably the finance minister Vaclav Klaus in Czechoslovakia, are predicting the depression will bottom out in 1992 and growth will come in 1993. To put the best light on it, this is a case of unfounded optimism; in reality it is conscious deception. The crisis may well bottom out in some places, but there will be no quick turnaround. Unless the east European governments retreat to a policy of supporting state industries and inflating their economies, they have only two possible avenues for growth: joining the EC and successful privatization, both of which have a gestation period of about ten years at least, and both of which are anyway unlikely ever to produce the desired results.

Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary have agreed to full trade liberalization with the EC by 1999. But given the weakness of the central European economies in the face of unfettered competition from industrialized Western Europe, freer trade is unlikely to produce widespread economic benefits. A lop-sided distinction was anyway made in the agreements between on the one hand steel, coal, textiles and

agriculture, which are regarded by the EC as "sensitive products" and in which trade limitations will therefore remain, and on the other general industrial goods, where the EC holds a big advantage and where a specific timetable for the elimination of trade barriers has already been set. Such an agreement is a recipe for underdevelopment in eastern Europe.

On average, wage rates in the east are about one-tenth of what they are in the west. At high income levels this disparity will begin to narrow, but for the overwhelming majority of the people it will remain about the same — or it will widen. The experts — like the prominent right-wing Hungarian economist Janos Kornai — all insist that preserving low-wage economies is the fundamental requirement of any success in the bid to reenter the world market. Kornai warns that potential wage rises are the Achilles heel of the reform process. Moreover, while in none of the east European countries is the total value of state-owned property very large by western standards, in no case are domestic savings nearly sufficient to buy out state property. Additionally, foreign capital is proving very selective in just what assets and industries it will buy, taking only the cream.

Some regions will be much worse affected than others. In place of the Iron Curtain, a new economic border running much closer to the old, pre-war divide between the semi-periphery and the real periphery of industrial Europe will emerge — splitting the modest wellbeing of Prague from the hopeless poverty of Bucharest. To the west of this new border, east Germany, some parts of Poland, the Czech Lands, Slovenia and the wes-

tern parts of Hungary may gain access to EC-Europe as tiny partners. But the agrarian regions of Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Albania, and what used to be Yugoslavia will lie over the horizon, making the lands to the east of the Oder-Neisse and Budapest to industrial Europe what Latin America is to the USA.

It is now clear that as a result of the so-called reforms these formerly agrarian countries will again find themselves economically about where they were at the turn of the century. In Hungary, Poland, Rumania and Bulgaria, economic development for a hundred years was dependent on the highly industrialized regions of western Europe, which dominated the east politically and established economic relations of a colonial type. If you read current IMF projections for the east, you will see that relations of a colonial type are just what they again, more or less openly, propose. This is true for example in plans drawn up by the IMF and other international bodies for restructuring the former Soviet economy. There are many plans for developing the former USSR's raw material reserves but none for manufacturing industry. By contrast, the post-war "socialist" economic development on the Stalinist model proved to be a unique and partially successful catching-up strategy of industrialization and national development, limited though it was by the enforced isolation of the cold war and by bureaucratic methods (see Komlosy and Hofbauer, unpublished paper on eastern Europe, Vienna 1991).

Nor will privatization necessarily be effective. As one Hungarian researcher (Istvan Csillag) has pointed out, there is

no causal relationship between privatization and economic efficiency. And there is no innate reason why a combination of various forms of property ownership — which could include private small industry, collectives, workers' self-management or state ownership of big industries — could not produce as good or better economic results.

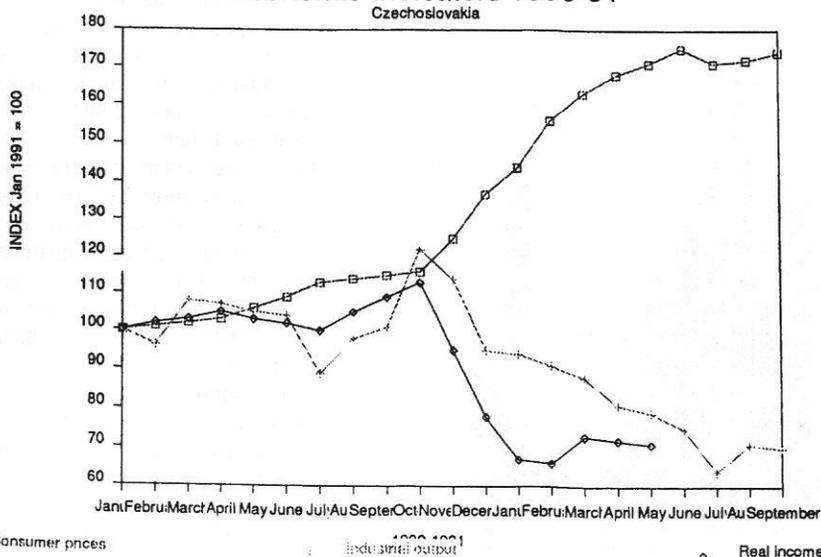
In this regard it is important to understand that the depression in eastern Europe is not the product of the failure of the former "socialist" economies. Nor is it just the side-effect of the market reforms. The economic theoreticians themselves make it clear that the depression is actually the practical means for reintroducing capitalist relations. In *The Road to a Free Economy* (a program for the market reform in Hungary written in 1989), Kornai reserves for the depression the label of "creative destruction", meaning that the depression destroys large parts of the state-enterprise sector in order to clear economic territory for the budding of new private enterprise. In Czechoslovakia, for example, which until 1989 had a stagnant but viable economy with a diversified industrial base and a relatively efficient agricultural sector, finance minister Vaclav Klaus says openly that he expects one-half of state enterprises to go bankrupt — that is, he intends to bankrupt them as a result of his economic policies.

Privatization does not have a strong economic justification and should more correctly be seen primarily as a process of social restructuring, creating a new layer of property owners who may one day become real capitalists. However, creating new classes, as Kornai wrote, is an "organic process" and despite all attempts to force the pace, it will take time — decades probably — for people to learn to be capitalists and to accumulate capital.

In the mean time, a more immediate process is being organized. The previous "socialist" economies were characterized by extreme income leveling, to which was attached both positive and negative features. While it avoided the social stratification that characterizes capitalist societies, this leveling was also one of the important causes of economic stagnation due to the concomitant absence of social and political incentives. The end product was a sort of universal apathy. The establishment of real popular democracy could address the problem, but rather than that the reform process aims to create instead individual monetary incentives. And the first step in this direction is to replace social leveling with wide income disparities.

At the top of the income table, the

Economic Indicators 1990-91



right to earn high incomes has been restored and small privatization is giving valuable property and business opportunities to a new breed of entrepreneurs, mostly ex-apparatchiks and other corrupt elements. When right-wingers in Czechoslovakia started to complain that those buying assets in the government auctions must have got their money corruptly as bureaucrats under the old system, Klaus replied that if they pursued that line of reasoning to the point of action they would destroy the reform process. They suddenly went silent.

At the bottom of the income table, stringent wage restraints apply. In Poland, stiff tax penalties apply to firms granting unauthorized wage rises. In Czechoslovakia, wages are set by the government, which still controls 95% of the economy and recently refused to honor an agreement with the unions for the indexation of the minimum wage when inflation went to 50% over six months. The social welfare provisions which were the heart of the old social system are being destroyed. There is no job security, and unemployment benefits are being pared back. And inflation destroys the purchasing power of fixed low incomes.

For all the governments of the region, national economic management has by and large been reduced to the task of controlling runaway inflation while the property and income changes are carried out. As it is being implemented, the economic reform is inherently very inflationary. There are incidental reasons for this such as price liberalization, and "monetary overhang". But the fundamental reason for inflation is that the conscious destruc-

tion of state enterprises cripples the supply of goods at a time when demand is running ahead. Instead of solving the problem by stimulating state as well as private industry, the monetarist governments of the transition process simply restrict credit, raise interest rates and bring on the recession. Those major areas that get scant attention in terms of government policy include measures to curb unemployment, the maintenance of living standards, and the preservation of social welfare, all of which are assessed only politically as a consideration of how far people can be pushed before they will eventually resist.

One academic commentator has observed: "If the decline in production and national incomes continues and budget cuts increase in severity, the momentum and support for economic reform could dissipate. The communist and other parties, as well as the trade unions, could provide a major challenge to the new governments. Since the transition to markets, unlike the introduction of central planning, is undertaken in a democratic system, the social aspects need to be given particular attention if the transition is to succeed." (Jan Svejnar). In a successful transition, however, the "democratic system" itself would prove to be an illusion.

Elements of social resistance

As the Polish elections indicate, the base of public support for the reform process is becoming increasingly narrow, and concerns about the economic situation are growing. In Poland, six out of every ten voters stayed away from the October polls

because, more or less consciously, they did not want to lend their support to any of the political forces contesting the elections. Of those who voted, as many voted for the Democratic Left — based on the old Communist Party — as voted for the major new right party, the Democratic Union of Mazowiecki, Kuron and Michnik (virtually Solidarity's non-Catholic, non-trade union leadership).

In response to this narrowing base of support, many of the rightist parties have turned openly to witch-hunting and purges. Centre Alliance called for purging 40,000 former Communists from government posts and the Congress for an Independent Poland demanded that the nine members of the Military Council for National Salvation responsible for the implementation of martial law be put on trial. Interestingly, General Jaruzelski's public defence of the martial law period during which he was the country's leader was that without it there would have been a Soviet invasion. And in opinion polls in December, 50% of respondents said they now believed Jaruzelski had been right to introduce martial law while only 19% thought the generals should be brought to trial.

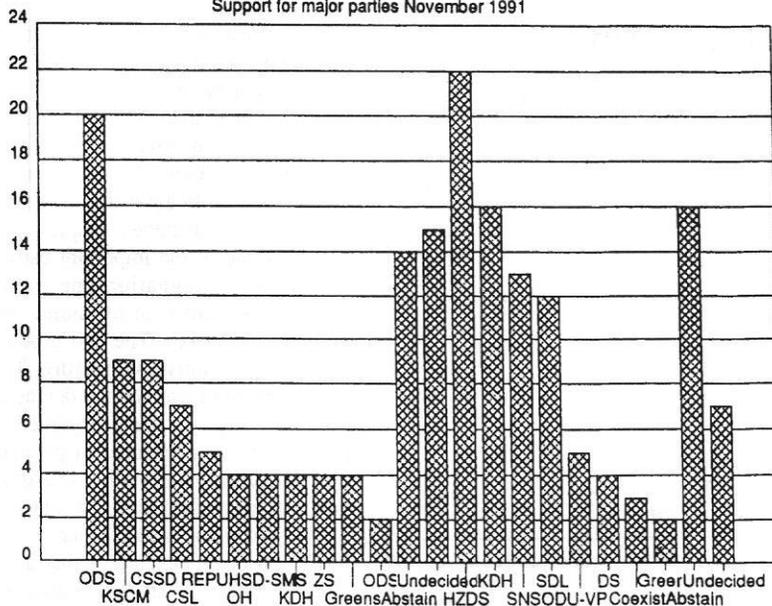
Czechoslovakia watched the Polish elections very closely, understanding it was the curtain call for its own elections in June. Here also the right wing parties are weak and divided and the Communist party still has a significant electoral base. Either as reform communists in the Czech republic or as social democrats in Slovakia, the former Communist party could win up to 12% of the vote. The right is divided, between the extreme monetarists who dominate in the Czech republic under Klaus' leadership and the more moderate supporters of greater government intervention of a Keynesian type coloured by nationalist sentiments in Slovakia, where social democratic and Christian democratic parties are strongest. The division will make it very difficult to form a coalition across the two republics and the new parliament could be deadlocked as it is in Poland.

Through the extremist *Lustrace* law an anti-communist purge has already begun in Czechoslovakia, with several clear aims: to sideline the Communist party as much as possible prior to the elections; to discredit the right's liberal opponents, who were forced to object to the blatantly undemocratic clauses of the law, as being "soft on communism"; to make this and not the economy the main question of the election campaign; and actually to purge the state enterprises and ministry bureaucracies.

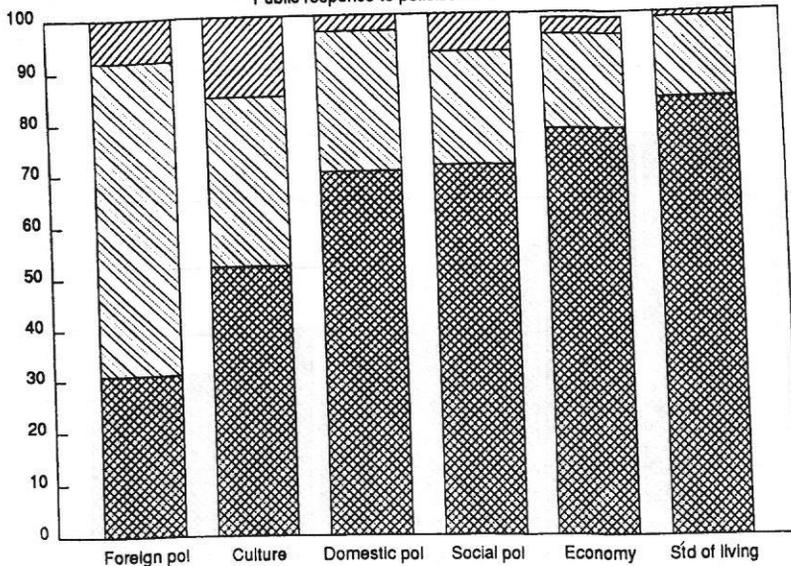
Even though there is less obvious public discontent in Czechoslovakia, opi-

Czechoslovakia

Support for major parties November 1991



Czechoslovakia
Public response to policies 1991



nion polls reveal a growing disillusionment with social and economic policy. The polls record very high (70-90%) dissatisfaction with regard to standards of living, the economy and social policy. In every case dissatisfaction is greater in Slovakia than in the Czech lands. Unemployment is the single biggest concern in both republics. A significant minority (20% of people in the Czech lands and 33% in Slovakia) want the economic reform either stopped or changed. 45% of the people in the Czech lands and 54% in Slovakia do not agree with the *Lustrace* anti-communist law.

Liberals rather than monetarists are commonly the most popular politicians in the country. Vaclav Havel is federally most popular, though less so in Slovakia than in the Czech lands, followed by foreign minister Jiri Dienstbier, a liberal, and then social democrat and former Obroda member Valtr Komarek, a prominent economist and opponent of Klaus's reform. Komarek is one of the very few leading politicians who are equally popular in the Czech lands and in Slovakia. Klaus comes in sixth at about 50% support.

Other signs of social discontent and opposition to the capitalist reform program of the governments of eastern Europe have been evident. There have been persistent strikes in Poland, including, on the eve of the election at parliament house, a miner's demonstration that Walesa threatened to repress. In Hungary the 1991 transport blockade was a watershed and the government's attempt to tame the unions last year by registering union membership failed. In Czechoslo-

vakia, most response has come so far from farmers, when in November about 20,000 rallied in Wenceslas Square. Though they are quite conservative, the Czechoslovak unions are now also beginning to make noises of discontent. In the former Soviet Union, the unions may play an even more decisive role, both because of the depth of the economic crisis and because of superior leadership. The Moscow Federation of Trade Unions, with five million members and a conscious political leadership, is the most advanced of all the union organizations in the region. Through the Party of Labor, where it is allied with leaders of the Socialist Party including Boris Kagarlitsky, former Communist Party members such as Alexander Buzgalin, and leaders of an anarchist federation (KAS-KOR), the Federation will play an increasingly important political role.

This increasing discontent and opposition has caused many political leaders to turn to authoritarian rhetoric, the best known example of which is Walesa in Poland. The danger of authoritarianism is very real and the likelihood of suppression of union and democratic rights is great. But the threat should be kept in proportion.

Certainly, capitalism cannot be reintroduced by democratic means, to think so is an illusion. Walesa in Poland, Antall in Hungary, Klaus or Havel in Czechoslovakia, Milosevic in Serbia are all possible candidates for a turn to authoritarian, non-parliamentary, one-person rule. However, right now such an outcome could be achieved only by consent, and the likelihood of militaristic dictatorships in any of

these countries is currently less likely precisely because the state apparatus is still weak. The Yugoslav army, for example, which might have been regarded as the most likely candidate for a coup in eastern Europe, revealed in combat its great weaknesses and divisions.

Equally, there is no evidence yet to suggest that attacks on wages, jobs, social welfare, unions and left parties will immediately lead to a working class rebellion. There are still many problems, both objective and subjective, to overcome before workers will feel fully confident to go into battle. No doubt, however, there will soon be many more localized battles and an increasing number of skirmishes that will pave the way for bigger battles in the future. Already, serious unrest has surfaced in Russia, for example.

The authoritarian challenge

In Czechoslovakia, the right, which is in a small minority in the government, has skillfully used the parliament to carry its reactionary proposals. But this could change. In Poland, for example, in the wake of the elections left forces began to consider the need to defend the parliament as an instrument of elementary and partial democracy against attempts to bypass it in an authoritarian manner, principally by the presidential office. Walesa has repeatedly said he wants parliament to assign him executive powers. In Moscow, Yeltsin has already achieved that, of course.

Defence of democracy and the obvious failures of the economic reform, especially rapidly rising unemployment, are the two key questions on which the pro-capitalist right is weakest. In fact, the right seems more aware of its own weaknesses than do its opponents.

The ruling pro-capitalist parties are generally small in membership and have a very limited social base made up of those who can directly benefit from the capitalist reforms. Without any possibility of directly expanding their base of support in the short term, these governments have turned towards a strengthening of the state apparatus for repressive purposes.

Referring to protests that had occurred prior to the elections, Walesa said on election day, "More such demonstrations are planned in the future to coincide — not by accident but with the result of purposeful actions — with the inauguration of the new parliament. This cannot be allowed. We must guarantee legal order. If this order is threatened, the authorities will take all necessary steps" (*Polish News Bulletin*). Walesa has made this sort of comment over and over again, and insists that those associated with the old

system have no right to democratic participation in the new one.

Like *Lustrace* in Czechoslovakia, de-Communization is the greatest threat to democratic practices in Poland. It is championed not only by Walesa but by Centre Alliance and the KPN among others. Something similar is occurring in Hungary, where the Antall government is tightening its grip on executive power. This was signalled in the middle of 1991 by the much publicized case of the MDF-government leader who instructed the press organizations that talk of democracy suited the purposes of removing the Communist Party well but had a less certain place in building the new structures now. The government has tightened controls on the media, an act of virtual state censorship.

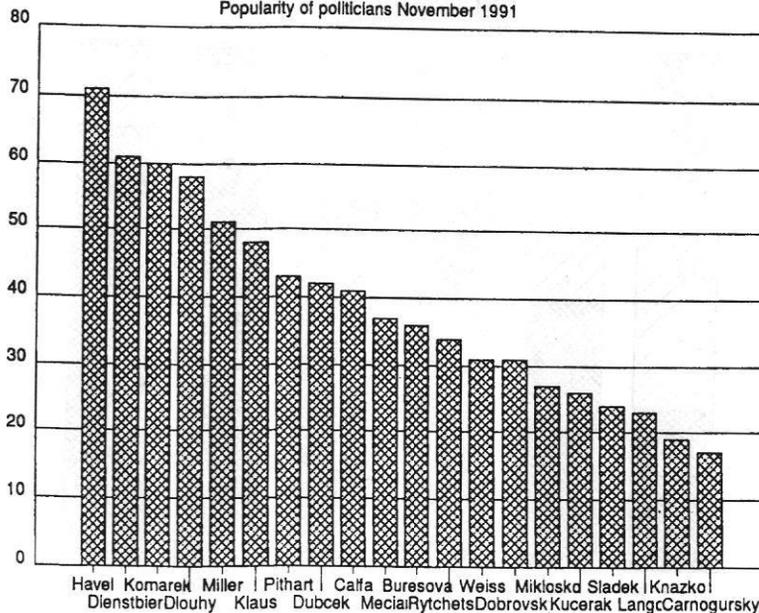
Accordingly, "Now that the world has no scruples any more about Hungary — now that no one casts doubts on the commitment of the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the government to liberalism, democracy, freedom of the press, human rights, and a free market economy — I am convinced that it is possible to bring about radical changes in the bias and mentality of Hungarian Radio and Television" — Imre Konya, head of the MDF parliamentary faction. MDF ideologue Istvan Csurka called for putting "an end to the age of impotence".

Bolstering shaky regimes in order to drive through capitalist reforms is not the only and not the most important object of de-Communization and curtailment of democracy. More important is the attempt to break down the old state apparatus and to construct a new one. Hundreds of thousands of people will lose their jobs in Czechoslovakia as a result of *Lustrace*, not just former officials and government workers but also managers of state enterprises. In one such case, the managing director of the famous Pilsner Brewing factory at Plzen lost his job because he was a former member of the peoples' militia. In this way, much of the old (ruling) bureaucracy may soon be removed.

In Czechoslovakia, the popular militias have been disbanded. This happened quickly, for example, at the big VSZ steelworks in eastern Slovakia. The militias may have amounted to very little, rotted as they were by the decay of the Communist party itself, but they were bodies of armed workers located inside factories. Now they don't exist, and only the federal army bears arms. Proposals for reforming the armed forces include ending the practice of a conscript army — which could be thought of as training and arming the general population — and replacing it with a much smaller professional standing

Czechoslovakia

Popularity of politicians November 1991



force. Such a force would serve a particular purpose. Furthermore, the former secret police, the STB, was not totally disbanded — even though contact with the STB has been the pretext for rubbing out of public life many individuals, including leftist opponents of the former regime and other dissidents — but taken over, purged of its Communist Party directors and renamed and now serves the new government as a secret service, the FIS. In these ways a new state apparatus is being created.

Stages of the political process

In the last two years political events have passed through similar identifiable stages in many of the east European countries, though here only Czechoslovakia will be cited by way of example; understanding these stages can help to ascertain what politically come next, though nothing is automatic and the eventual outcome of events will depend almost entirely on what political forces step forward to grasp the nettle.

The first stage could be called plebiscitary in distinction to the more common label of a "revolutionary" period of overturn of the old regimes. In Czechoslovakia this first stage lasted from the events of 1989 to the federal elections of June 1990 and was characterized by the leading role of the Civic Forum. In this phase there was no open contest between the various political forces within the movement of opposition to the former regime, political parties had in general not yet formed, and every group from the non-Communist left Alternative and

reformists in the Communist Party to Havel and to Klaus were in a common front. This gave the movement a rather broad, popular and somewhat democratic character. But there was no real discussion of alternatives, of programs or of proposals for a new state setup (Ivan Svitak).

Even on the left many people looked very benignly towards the activities of the Civic Forum government, not recognizing the underlying pro-capitalist direction it was taking under the guise of a democratic political reform. Talk of democratic revolution was common at this stage, but in the absence of a pro-socialist program, that democracy could inevitably become only reactionary bourgeois and at best weak parliamentary democracy. The masses soon disappeared from the streets into passive support for the government's reform program.

Even during the elections, parties did not come forward offering alternatives but mostly stood on the Civic Forum ticket, and the party political differentiation followed the June election. So the election was simply a sort of referendum against the Communist Party. Leftists now identify the illusions associated with that period of support for the Civic Forum government and its policy of "return to Europe", "return to the first republic" (of 1918-1938). But at the time the rightist direction of the government was not clear and people did not vote for a return to capitalism but for the new democratic regime. Expectations were very high.

The June elections opened a second stage in which the Civic Forum leadership adopted the course of capitalist reform

that had not been in its program and for which it had no mandate. In this period, using the institution of the new parliament, the right increasingly gained the upper hand, culminating in the election of Klaus as leader of the Civic Forum at the end of the year. Soon after, the Forum split into monetarist and liberal wings. The continual slide to the right to a more aggressive pro-capitalist policy was represented by several pieces of legislation passed through parliament, including, importantly, laws related to the privatization of the state-owned economy.

1991 constitutes a third stage characterized by political differentiation, party formation and the preparation for new elections in June 1992. It is also characterized by the consolidation of the rightist project into a hardened program for the most rapid possible capitalist restoration, highlighted in the political sphere by the adoption of the anti-communist *Lustrace* law and led by the Klaus party, the Civic Democratic Party (ODS). The outcome of three questions now dominating the political agenda will determine whether the Havel style of liberal reform will survive, whether the hard right will triumph, or whether the left will establish some kind of influence over the future course of development.

● Czech-Slovak relations and the character of the state: First it must be recognized that the national sentiments of the Slovaks are just and progressive while at the same time there is not widespread support for independence as the solution to national concerns. But behind the apparent national conflict the question is really whether the right will triumph in Slovakia, where it is actually very weak. The right thought it would solve the problem by replacing the nationalist former Slovak premier (Vladimir Meciar), but it seems the problem has only deepened. The kernel of the dispute is what the economic character of the future republic will be.

● The problem of the economy: While the situation is not absolutely disastrous, it is much worse than the government expected, and the threat of strikes by miners, appearing for the first time in late 1991, increased their fears. For the first time too, people began to think about alternatives to the economic reform. For example, the Social Democrats, though they have internal differences over policy, started to publicly attack the position of the right.

Who will politically exploit the situation of the deteriorating economic situation is hard to say, but certainly the far right, represented by the extremist right wing Republican party, will, and the left will have to run hard if it is not to be sidelined.

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● Electoral regulations: New laws are to be enacted concerning the election of republican and federal governments, though whether this will be done before June 1992 is a moot point. Certainly the right will push for regulations that virtually disqualify former and present Communists, the social democrats and the left from parliamentary representation. A recent amendment to the criminal code outlawing the propagation of communism along with fascism is a sign of the times. By these and other means the right will attempt to prevent the left from using public facilities like television for the presentation of their electoral campaign while propaganda against the left will be intense.

The right is understandably very uncertain about the outcome of the elections. Klaus' social base is among those who believe in capitalism and want to start their own business, but that is not such a great number.

Workers who depend on their small wage, are confronted by the falling value of money and face the uncertainty of unemployment are not natural supporters of the Klaus project.

In all the countries of eastern Europe, though each has its own particular history, it is possible to identify these stages of political evolution, beginning with a plebiscitary vote against the old system followed by moves towards capitalist restoration and the opening of the process of party political differentiation. The importance of this is that so far the right has been able to steal a march and still holds the political initiative.

But the tide could turn. If trends towards the emergence of a social democratic opposition in Czechoslovakia deepen, the next political stage could possibly see the beginnings of a fightback.

The State of the Left

It goes without saying that this new

situation creates a difficult environment for the left. Today, many east European leftists are looking for ways to restore the socialist project while scrupulously avoiding any intimation that a return to the old bureaucratic system in any form is proposed. The prevailing conditions make it very difficult to agitate for socialist alternatives to the current reform project, even though a democratic form of "socialism" is the only real alternative to what is happening. To be more accurate, what is posed is a move to a society transitional towards democratic socialism in place of what is currently a transition away from democracy and socialism. Understandably the question of formal democracy rates very high on the agenda in this struggle.

The Polish elections were very instructive from the point of view of left tactics. Leave aside for the moment the big abstention rate and the fact that as a result of the elections it has been impossible to form a government. A very significant outcome of the elections was the vote for the Democratic Left Alliance (based on the former PUWP-Communist party in coalition with smaller organizations) running on a quite left social democratic platform. It won 60 seats, topped only by Mazowiecki's party with 63.

Until the elections, the hope remained among some left-wing former dissident circles that a left current could rise out of the wreckage of the Solidarity movement. This was particularly the case for two prominent opponents of the former regime, Karol Modzelewski (famous for co-authoring the open letter in the 1960s with Jacek Kuron, now a liberal rightist) and Joseph Pinior, who spent time in prison as a dissident.

Modzelewski was the key figure in the Labour Solidarity group, whose election ticket was supported by the Socialist and Political Centre, in which Pinior is prominent. The Labour Solidarity leaders were very disappointed with their election score of only 2%. It represented in fact

the final attempt to draw the left out of the Solidarity movement, a tactic which has suffered a "historic defeat" according to Piniór. Consequently, the election showed that the left had to rapidly change course if it was to survive. It had to break with the old dissident attitude and take up a new fight against the current regime.

However, the vote for the Democratic Left was a good sign for the whole left as it indicated a certain base of support for socialist alternatives (in the broad sense). This residual support for socialist policies is a feature worrying the new regimes in eastern Europe. Some at least on the Polish left drew the conclusion from the results that it was necessary to look for broader alliances of all the forces opposed to the capitalist reform, including the remaining elements of the former Communist parties, in support of the parliament (in the circumstances the only institution representing any form of democratic government) and against the anti-democratic rightist campaign of McCarthyism and "de-Communization". The fact is, as a result of the election, most of the left political landscape will be occupied by the Democratic Left. And as the impossibility of introducing the market economy becomes more apparent, the DL may move further to the left.

The situation in Czechoslovakia shows many similarities. Reading the Polish results carefully, the right immediately drew the conclusion that it was necessary to drive through de-Communization rapidly before the June elections in order to marginalize the left, to cut across support for the Czech Communist Party and the Party of the Democratic Left in Slovakia and to limit the influence of the liberal and social democratic parties. The Czechoslovak left faces the additional problem of the much more ubiquitous anti-Communist sentiments among the population as a result of the bitter disappointment of 1968.

At one point it was possible to think that a significant left oppositional current could emerge out of the broad Civic Forum movement. Perhaps the greatest hopes focussed on the Left Alternative group which was subsequently expelled from the Forum. Some commentators say there are a million votes to be garnered for an apt left campaign. But Left Alternative has not so far capitalized on these possibilities.

It has proved very difficult for the left to devise a programme of opposition to the new regime, mainly because it has been tied in various ways to the post-1989 democratic reform process, a process which has now been captured well and truly by the right.

Meanwhile, the deteriorating economic

situation has created an opening for social democracy — particularly left social democracy. The Czechoslovak Social Democracy has chosen Valtr Komarek to head its election campaign. Komarek is a prominent economist with popular support. He was deputy premier for six months after 1989. He joined the Social Democracy early in 1991 as one of a group of former 1968 reform Communists organized in the Obroda group, which dissolved in the process. This group is now called the Social Democratic Orientation.

Komarek is probably the most prominent opponent of the Klaus reform and articulates the only evident economic alternative, a sort of Keynesian reform emphasizing welfare over privatization. His programme is for wage indexation, measures to alleviate unemployment and improvements in social welfare, policies that are far from complete but which in effect would stop the privatization strategy in its tracks and alleviate a lot of hardship. If the Komarek campaign gets going in 1992 it could clearly attract a lot of sympathy. Talk of socialism is anathema to the population of Czechoslovakia, but social democracy, which has a strong pre-war tradition, still has prestige.

The Czech Communist Party (KSCM) has not officially reformed, but it no longer represents simply the politics of the old regime either. Rather, it tends to represent that section of the former leadership that helped get rid of the former regime.

For example, the party's president, Jiri Svoboda, was an initial signatory to Civic Forum (though he was subsequently expelled). It is possible to discern three currents within the party, which is not politically unified. The leadership of the party, including Svoboda, could be described as reform Communists and identify with the ideas of self-management. There is also a social democratic current called the Democratic Left, which has threatened to split from the party because of its unwillingness to break officially with Stalinism. And there is a current of unreformed Stalinists, mostly older members of the party.

It is not necessary to imagine that either left social democracy or reform Communism will provide the answers to the post-Communist political crisis. However, these developments do indicate a possible opening for a reconstitution of the left built on cooperation, formal or de facto, between the different currents that oppose the monetarist, rightist reform project. Saying no to the current reform is a good starting point for further discussions about strategies and programmes for some sort of socialist solution. In this way

the left would at least have a milieu to work in, a project, a sense of direction and a chance to start building something new. But it is still early days and, realistically, nothing much will develop in Czechoslovakia until after the June elections.

From stagnation to collapse

Once the "socialist" economies entered the period of stagnation in the 1960s and 1970s from which they could not emerge given the prevailing conditions, the collapse of the Stalinist experiment was certain. Once the bureaucratized economies collapsed, the Stalinist political system could not survive either. The various attempts at economic reform — all of them in the absence of real democracy — succeeded only in paving the way for capitalist restoration. Market reform went farthest in Hungary under the old regime, which converted state industries into stock companies and called in the IMF as early as 1982.

In Poland the economic crisis led to the emergence of Solidarity, to martial law and to IMF-inspired economic restructuring. In Czechoslovakia, the stagnation of the 1960s was the motive force for the Dubcek reform process and was later the main cause of the collapse of the unreformed Stalinist system created by Husak.

Clearly, the Stalinist Communist parties were not parties at all in any real sense of the word. They did not have a political life, an understanding of processes or a programmatic attitude. They were merely the shell within which the bureaucratic administrative system stumbled along. Even so, the Communist party structures reaching throughout society proved to be all that was holding the state and economic administration together. These parties were little more than huge employment agencies on the one hand and avenues for a top career on the other. This was very obvious in Czechoslovakia. There, when the party ran out of answers and a big part of its own leadership wanted it out of power, it simply collapsed overnight.

It is too soon to draw rigid conclusions about the fate of the former Soviet bloc. A historically unprecedented process has just begun, the outcome of which cannot be predicted. The most important thing is to follow events dispassionately, without illusions, to understand the objective course of developments and act where possible. While it is necessary to soberly accept the fact that the project of capitalist restoration in eastern Europe and the former USSR has no immediate rival, nothing is inevitable; both sides are weak and the outcome will be decided only in struggle. Even Jeffrey Sachs admits that the restoration of capitalism is not inevitable and might still be reversed. ★

A decade in prison

LAU SHANCHING spent ten years in jail in China, having been convicted of "counter-revolutionary activities" after travelling from Hong Kong to visit families of arrested Chinese dissidents. At the time of his arrest he was a member of a Hong Kong Trotskyist group; now he describes himself as an independent orthodox Marxist. IV spoke to Lau when he passed through Paris as part of an international tour he is making to publicize the plight of China's dissidents. We also publish extracts from his own account of his experiences in prison.

OFTEN we read here that the Chinese government has successfully combined a bureaucratic political system based on repression with pro-market reforms, and it is thus a stable government.

I think that the Chinese government is not stable. I do not believe that it can solve the economic problems in China. The government is not socialist and cannot rely on the workers; and so it is trying to re-introduce capitalism in China. But capitalism is also unable to solve the country's problems.

■ Do you see events in China taking the same path as in the Soviet Union?

As a world trend Stalinism is collapsing. When the current regime collapses there will be a long period of chaos, as there is no alternative revolutionary regime available. Nobody likes chaos, but there is no other way out of the present situation and is thus a step forward. No one can change this.

Chinese people are aware of what is going on in the Soviet Union. After the June 4 [Tiananmen Square] massacre some of the warders in my prison, grass roots members of the Communist Party, blamed Gorbachev for what was happening. We discussed the June 1989 events every day in jail at the time — we got the newspapers.

■ How did the political prisoners you spoke to in jail assess the Chinese history of the last 40 years?

On the whole they thought it was a great mistake. They have big illusions in capitalism.

It is not quite the same in China as in Eastern Europe — there is no support for returning to the imperial system for

example; what people imagine is something on American lines, not even something like in Hong Kong. The belief in capitalism is widespread, it is not just something among the intellectuals. Obviously workers approach the question in a more down to earth fashion.

■ How far have the capitalist reforms gone in China?

In terms of the relationships between companies very far; but if you look at the companies themselves there is no private ownership.

■ During the 1989 democracy movement the movement seemed to be confined to the towns; the countryside remained indifferent and this was crucial because most of the soldiers are peasants.

Nobody can mobilize the peasants, and it is true that many soldiers are from the villages.

But I think if the movement is strong enough and has a firm enough leadership the army can be divided.

■ In an article in the *Wall Street Journal* (February 11, 1992) you say that you went into jail as a radical Trotskyist and that while there you became an "orthodox Marxist".

I use the methodology Marx used in *Capital* to analyze current reality. In particular it can be used to show that China cannot make a transition to capitalism given the low level of productivity.

■ In eastern Europe the trend is for Western companies to buy up what they find most useful for their global operations, but there is no overall development of the economy. There is integration into the world capitalist market, but no sign of a

fully developed domestic capitalism.

The same is possible in China. Marx emphasized the question of ownership of property; from this point of view there is no capitalist class in China.

■ Did the political prisoners discuss social questions, such as the position of women?

No, they did not understand this. The Stalinist regime has meant improvements for women. Women can work and are more independent than before. There are women involved in the dissident movement.

The next historical stage in China will be a democratic stage. This will come about in the near future. Everybody thinks that the problem is not Stalinism but socialism. Chinese people are isolated and know nothing about the problems of capitalism. They want a capitalist system. They will have to learn from their own experiences. In Russia there were very prominent figures inside the party stating their opinions, but there is none of this openness in China.

■ What about Hong Kong?

Nearly all the newspapers and the TV interviewed me when I arrived. But the problem in Hong Kong is that no one speaks for the workers there. The industrial working class there is collapsing; there was a very skilled working class ten years ago, but many of the industries have moved to China. Now they become waiters and so on.

It is very easy to travel between Hong Kong and Guangzhou in southern China. There was only a very weak mobilization here even during the June 4 movement. Southern people are said to be more concerned about profits than politics. Political experience is better in the north. Beijing is the centre of everything — the first movement, the 1976 demonstration in favour of Zhou Enlai and the Democracy Wall movement took place there.

I intend to become politically active in the workers' movement in Hong Kong and stand for election as an independent leftist candidate. There are elections planned for 1995.

■ What about your present tour?

I am going to London where I will meet MPs and meet democratic activists, human rights' groups, overseas Chinese and so on. I have been to Geneva to talk with the UN Human Rights Commission.

■ Any message for our readers?

I am optimistic about the situation in Hong Kong and China; I am convinced there will be a mass movement in China in the near future. ★

Inside the Chinese Gulag

Lau Shanching

IN December 1981 I went to Guangzhou alone to visit the wives of Wang Xizhe and Ha Qui (both of whom had been arrested).

I mainly wanted to see how they were getting on — we discussed the future of the democracy movement and I gave them some clothes. At midnight I was arrested by the Public Security Service at Liu Hua Guest House and was sent to a detention centre.

I noticed that the guards of the detention centre had been withdrawn to keep my arrest a secret. They said that I had committed the “crime of counter-revolutionary propaganda” which included sending money and books to the relatives of pro-democracy elements.

However the books they mentioned were only some titles on political economy and *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* [the classic study written in the 1930s by the Trotskyist author Harold Isaacs], whose author had been mentioned by a local newspaper previously.

I had been arrested simply because the authorities wanted to suppress the pro-democracy movement. In fact, the suppression had begun nine months before my return. I assumed that it would be safe enough for me to visit.

The months of solitary confinement

From the day of my arrest on December 27, 1981, to the day I was sentenced I spent almost 18 months in solitary confinement in the Guangzhou Hwang Hua Detention Centre...

During my time there I was totally insulated from the outside world, with nobody to talk to and with almost nothing to read except, in the later days, *Nan Fang Daily*. There was no mirror or clock. I totally lost the concept of time, even of an idea of when I would get my meals...

After almost a year, and following numerous requests, I was allowed to use the money I had when I was arrested to buy something to read (some books by Marx and Engels, the *Dream of the Red*

Chamber and some Russian novels) and some dried beef and powdered milk. Later on I was able to borrow books from the centre's library, but most of them were political dogma.

After 18 months I was sent to Meizhou Prison. They used a Toyota saloon to deliver me alone rather than allowing me to travel with other prisoners. The day trip from the detention centre to Meizhou prison was my greatest relaxation since I was imprisoned.

Mid 1983-Mid 1988: The days in Meizhou Prison

It was almost Mid Autumn Festival by the time I arrived at Meizhou Prison. The head (*ke zhang*) of the prison's political department provided me with my first lecture (do not make friends with other people) and I was assigned a guardian — a labour-reform prisoner — to make sure I did not make contact with other prisoners.

In theory, we were treated like ordinary workers in terms of working hours and labour security.

In the evening we had lectures on political study and propaganda meetings or briefings. Sunday was a day off and we were allowed to watch television, play chess and ball games, and occasionally watch movies.

Prisoners from each unit were kept in a two-storey block. There were six cells on each floor which could take 12 or 13 prisoners each. There was a leader in each cell (also a prisoner) who was responsible for the cell management and political study.

After work every prisoner had to return to their cell. By 7 pm cadres would take the attendance register and then the political education would start.

It was all about asking prisoners to confess to their crime, follow instructions and report on the performance of their cell-mates. Group discussions followed the lecture, aided by cadres and usually chaired by the leader.

This kind of “political study” was held every night and we were forced to state our standpoint. I used to refuse to say anything, which made my situation worse...

Most of my block-mates were hooligans and criminals, only a few of them were political criminals. Even then, their involvement was more military and regional. Put simply, their political perceptions and cultural level were quite low. Cases such as myself were very rare in Meizhou Prison.

Cadres selected labour reform leaders from the prisoners in each cell. The leaders were responsible for cell management, reporting on the situation and individual behaviour in his cell. Most prisoners would try to please him to have a better record.

My relation with all of them was quite bad, because I insisted on not pleading guilty, and I was labelled as an extreme reactionary, even worse than Jiang Jieshi [Chiang Kai-Shek — the former leader of the bourgeois nationalist Guomindang]. I was blamed whenever there was any dispute.

As all the cell-mates knew that the cadre disliked me I was bullied and tricked into making mistakes. As a result I was punished frequently. I was locked up in the dark room (solitary confinement) twice and foot-shackled more than once.

Whenever I was shackled, I had to self-censor my thoughts until it satisfied the cadres. No matter how tough I was, eventually I had to write self critical articles to confess my faults. If the cadres were unhappy with it, it had to be rewritten...

The dark room

My first experience of the dark room happened not long after I arrived at Meizhou Prison.

There was an annual assessment, which was considered quite important, of the political study of each prisoner. Everyone had to write a report confessing their crimes, expressing their willingness to obey instructions and to express their attitude towards mental reform, labour attitude and labour reform.

I refused to write my report for the first year and the cadres found this intolerable. However, because of my particular situation they could not hit me but came to talk to me every day, lecturing me repeatedly despite my reluctance. I was also attacked by labour reform leaders and members during the nightly group discussions.

After about a month I replied with a report in which I claimed that I was innocent and had been condemned owing to the irresponsibility of the judge. This irritated the cadres very much and they put me in the dark room.

I was kept for ten days until I wrote a repentance. But I only said I should have listened to what the cadres had said and did not admit to any counter-revolutionary

crime.

My second experience of the dark room was when I asked my parents to smuggle my prosecution document back to Hong Kong. This time I was held for more than a month and was released only because I was transferred to Huaiji Prison.

That month was the most difficult of my time in prison...

I was the only Meizhou prisoner who refused to confess. Sometimes I questioned my stubbornness and sometimes gave way under the endless pressure of the cadres. Eventually I confessed. This happened only once and about a year later, I changed my mind.

Generally speaking, confession and performance (writing something on a notice-board glorifying the Chinese Communist Party for example) were rewarded with shortened imprisonment. You could also "light ashes" that is report on other prisoners, to cover your guilt.

My confession was only about 200 words long. I asked for lenient treatment from the authorities but I did not glorify the party nor light ashes.

As it became clear that my sentence would not be reduced a year later I withdrew my confession. During that year my life was significantly easier, after it I experienced the most difficult 18 months of my entire prison term...

Mid 1988-December 1991: Huaiji Prison

Early one morning I was told by the *ke zhang* to pack my belongings and go with them.

I had no idea where we were going. We travelled to Guangzhou Prison where I was kept overnight in the dark room. The following morning we set out for Huaiji. When we got there I was put in a "special middle team for counter-ideological management".

This was a prison within a prison which was totally isolated from other buildings and was specially designed to hold political criminals of the pro-democracy movement in Guangdong Province. The prisoners I met there included Wang Xizhe, He Qui, Lo Haixing, Li Peicheng, Li Longqing, Zheng Yinwu.

Wang Xizhe, who had arrived earlier, witnessed the construction process of this special building which was under the direct control of the Labour Reform Office. Its ordinary cells were even smaller than the dark room at Meizhou.

When the construction work was about to finish it was demolished and rebuilt. It is believed that the authorities were afraid of being challenged by prisoners once they were released.

As a prisoner directly managed by the

Labour Reform Office, my stay in Meizhou Prison was only transitional.

We were supposed to have been sent to this prison which was not ready until 1988...

Other political prisoners

Zheng Yinwu was from Hainan Island. He was accused of organizing a counter-revolutionary group in 1986 and was sentenced to 14 years in prison. Zheng said the organization had had a membership of five to six hundred.

He Qui, who was arrested about the same time as Wang Xizhe, was very passive and quiet in prison. In his case, it seems, his sentence was shortened. I have not heard from him since he was released nine months ago.

Wan Xizhe was arrested in 1981 and sentenced to 14 years in prison. His physical condition is very bad... His mental condition is even worse, and he is very emotional.

During the democracy movement in 1989, we four discussed the events by shouting through the windows every evening after dinner.

Our discussion usually took more than an hour. We exchanged viewpoints through the bits and pieces we read in the *People's Daily* and *China Daily*.

We had a meeting with the cadres where they screened the official version of the massacre, showing tanks, acts of arson, people being killed and shot at, or mobs throwing stones.

That was our first sight of the situation. After the screening the cadres were not confident enough to ask us to show our attitude, since we had been yelling and shouting anti-CCP slogans throughout the screening.

Even the cadres opposed the bloody suppression. I said to them: "many people were killed during Mao's days" to which they replied "they shouldn't kill people during peaceful times". During that period we had our discussion shouting through the windows, while the cadres had theirs in their office.

Prison measures were not tightened after the June 4 massacre. It was believed that word would get to the United Nations and arouse a strong response. However, solitary confinement itself is already very inhumane...

I had already forgotten the exact date when my sentence would finish. It was not until the eve, December 24, 1991, that I learned my release was imminent. The *ke zhang* announced my release certificate on Christmas Day... On December 26, 1991, they used my money to hire a car which brought me to the main road. From there I continued my journey like an ordinary passenger to Guangzhou. ★

It's not over till it's over

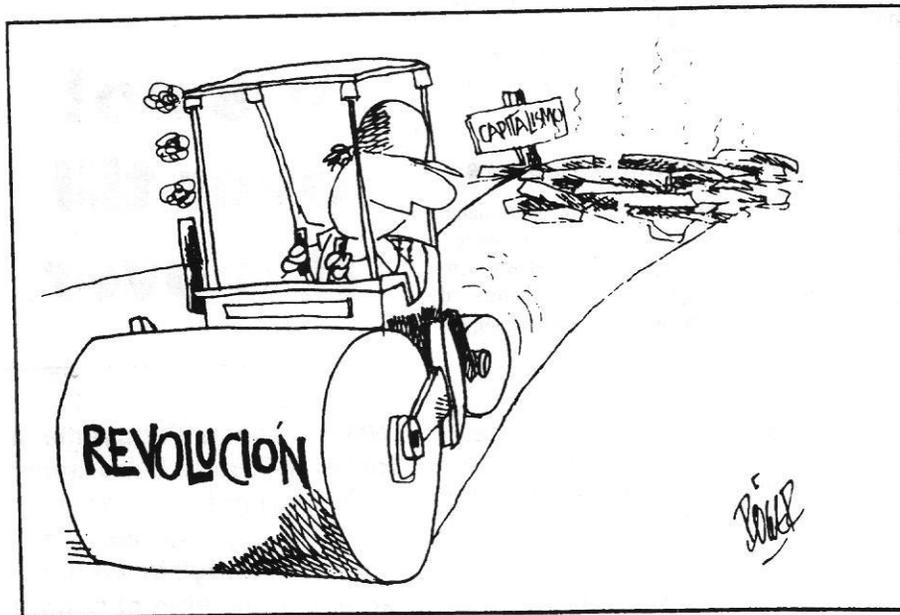
WHEN Francis Fukuyama, a former US State Department foreign policy advisor, published his article "The End of History" in 1989, he achieved the kind of instant celebrity status accorded to few intellectuals in the Anglo-Saxon world. Despite being published in an obscure right wing magazine, *The National Interest*, his article caught the mood by theorizing the defeat of Stalinism as the final victory of liberal democracy and free market economics.

PHIL HEARSE

HIS new book, *The End of History and the Last Man*,¹ deepens and modifies his analysis, and is itself becoming the subject of intense controversy. Fukuyama's thesis can be briefly summarized as follows: firstly, contrary to what is widely alleged, history is comprehensible and has a direction and logic; on this Marx, and above all Hegel, were right.

The direction of history is towards the final establishment of the liberal democratic state and the free market economy as the most perfect form of human society available. As Fukuyama puts it:

"As mankind approaches the end of the millennium, the twin crises of authoritarianism and socialist central planning have left only one competitor standing in the ring as an ideology of potentially universal validity: liberal democracy, the doctrine of individual freedom and popular sovereignty... But the fact that there will be setbacks



and disappointments, or the fact that not every market economy will prosper, should not distract us from the larger pattern which is emerging in world history.

"The apparent number of choices of how societies will organize themselves politically has been diminishing over time. Of the different types of regime which have emerged in the course of human history, from monarchies and aristocracies, the religious theocracies, to the fascist and communist dictatorships of this century, the only form of government which has survived intact is liberal democracy.²

For Fukuyama, economic growth is dependent on the existence of the capitalist free market. Every Third World country can attain the status of a developed country if it abandons experiments in state planning and "mercantilism".

For example, the dependent status of Latin American economies is put down to the history of state intervention in the economy, experiments like Peronism and the regime of the Peruvian generals, and the failure to properly implement the free market.

By contrast, the success of the Asian new-industrializing countries, like Taiwan, Singapore, Korea and Hong Kong is attainable by all who would liberate their economies from the chains of state intervention.

Free market favours democracy

Fukuyama advances a complex argument why free market economies normally tend towards liberal democracy. Economic efficiency and innovation are promoted by democratic freedoms.

More advanced economies with a higher level of formal education tend to promote

dense civil societies and thus a greater potential for the organization of oppositional pressure groups.

But, more important, capitalist free market economies will be the site for the expression of a fundamental mechanism of human history — the individual's struggle for recognition and status. Totalitarian societies naturally crush such individual struggles.

In truth, there is not much new in Fukuyama's ideas. Seymour Martin Lipset popularized the "capitalism and democracy" thesis in the 1950s, establishing a permanent trend in sociological thought which sees democracy as a semi-automatic product of advanced capitalism.³ Fukuyama's philosophy of history, what he calls the Universal History of Mankind, is taken over wholesale from Hegel.

In this account the End of History is the collapse of the Berlin Wall, but the beginning was the French Revolution, culminating at the Battle of Jena in 1806, when Napoleon's republican army crushed the Prussian Junkers.

Obviously Fukuyama's celebrity status is based on the apparently greater plausibility of his ideas after the collapse of the USSR, rather than the originality of his insights.

Despite rave reviews in the United States, Fukuyama has had a universally bad press in Britain.

Part of that is because of the empiricist bent of the intellectual establishment, which rejects theories of history wholesale. But it is also because of the strength of the left and Marxist influenced intelligentsia.

But it has to be said that Fukuyama's ideas represents a serious and sustained challenge to Marxism which has to be answered.

Unlike weak-minded post-modernists,

who view history as unintelligible, Fukuyama has the merit of providing an internally coherent explanation of human history which, potentially at least, can explain contemporary developments in world politics and place them in an historical context.

Fukuyama is correct in seeing history as cumulative and having a direction. For his temerity in asserting this, Fukuyama has been denounced by the French "new philosopher" Bernard Henri-Levi as "the Last Marxist". Rejecting cyclical or accidental theories of history, Fukuyama sees the development of science as central to the increase in human wealth.

What, from a Marxist viewpoint, is obviously missing is an account of the relationship between science and production, between the growth of human knowledge and the development of the productive forces.

Marxism rendered redundant

But at the heart of his theory is a stark proposition, which if true, renders Marxism redundant. That is that contemporary capitalism is capable of fulfilling the slogans of the French revolution — liberty, (relative) equality, and (maybe) fraternity.

We are not, as the post-modernist philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard claims, in the period of the "end of the grand narratives".

On the contrary, now that the historical detour of totalitarianism (fascism and the October revolution) is over, the grand narrative of the French revolution can go forward to fulfillment.

Its result will be a society where history as a succession of events does not end, but where the titanic clash of classes and social systems is over.

The End of History thesis is based on a number of crucial assumptions. First, that democracy, if not the automatic product of capitalism, is in any case the usual product of advanced capitalist societies.

Second, that international capitalism is more-or-less stabilized and has the potential for infinite future growth. Third, as we saw above, that every country can in time successfully take the road to becoming an advanced capitalist country, and consequently a democratic country.

The idea that every Third World country can take the route to economic advancement if it gets its free market act together is among the more preposterous ideas in the book.

Fukuyama goes out of his way to extra-

vagantly attack theories of imperialism and dependency, especially those which became popular in Latin America after the Cuban revolution (Cuba is dismissed as an "ugly little dictatorship").

It is perhaps possible to have a discussion with someone who sincerely believes that a free market economy will aid development in Brazil and Argentina; but someone who puts forward the same views for Bangladesh or the Sudan is surely a crank.

It is one of the less edifying features of Fukuyama's book that he systematically blames the victims of capitalist underdevelopment for their own misfortunes.

Growing gap between rich and poor

There is no recognition in the book that the gap between rich and poor countries is getting bigger or indeed that the history of the advanced countries might have something to do with the history of imperialism. Another less than edifying aspect of Fukuyama's prescriptions is his warning against "premature" attempts to introduce democracy.

In a country like the Philippines, he argues, democracy just gives a wider terrain for the battle between the reactionary pre-capitalist classes like the landlords, and the Leninist left who have grown up to challenge them.

Far better to go for an authoritarian modernization capable of crushing right and left, thus preparing the way for the free market.

The equation of advanced capitalism with democracy is a more serious idea, and one which has a massive hold on popular consciousness in the West. Critics can point to the fact that there are, on a broad interpretation, only some 25 constitutional democracies in the world.

But it is Fukuyama's strong point that all the most advanced capitalist countries are parliamentary democracies. Marxists have to seriously answer this point.

For example, the long-term existence of parliamentary democracy since the second world war stands in rather stark contrast to Engels' claim that Bonapartism is "the religion of the bourgeoisie".

The relative stability of liberal democracy is surely connected to the prolonged period of economic stability during the long postwar boom, and hence the ability of the bourgeoisie to grant major concessions to the working class; and also to the catastrophic experience of the imperialist bourgeoisie with fascist experiments in Europe during the second world war.

The absence of authoritarian governmental forms is deeply connected to the absence of economic or social emergency from

Tunisian Marxists sentenced

TEN supporters of the Revolutionary Communist Organization (OCR — Tunisian section of the Fourth International) who were arrested in January of this year (see *International Viewpoint* 221, February 3, 1992) have just received prison sentences on charges of membership of an illegal organization, the distribution of leaflets without authorization and threatening public security. The ten were the following: **Mohammed Kamel Charni** — 13 months; **Fathi Salawi** — 11 months and a fine of 100 Tunisian dinars; **Nureddin Selmani** — 11 months and a fine of 100 Tunisian dinars; **Nureddin Saidi** — 11 months and a fine of 100 Tunisian dinars; **Habib Souihi** — 11 months; **Jelil Zoghalmi** — 11 months; **Jelil Tlili** — 11 months; **Rafik Tlili** — 11 months; **Shaifeddin Mselmi** — 3 months; **Imad Zoghalmi** — 3 months. Two other defendants, **Abdelmajid Mselmi** and **Hamadi Zoghalmi**, were acquitted. The defendants are all appealing but no date has as yet been set for the hearing and it is important to maintain pressure on the Tunisian government. Protests can be sent to the Ministry of the Interior, avenue Habib Bourguiba, Tunis, Tunisia — copies of protests should be sent to the Tunisian League of Human Rights, fax number: 216 1 79 54 66. ★

the viewpoint of the ruling class. To posit the impossibility of a return to authoritarian rule depends largely on the presumption of continued economic growth and stability.

It is hard to see how Fukuyama can explain the growth of the Front National in France and other European fascist movements, which have their roots precisely in economic crisis.

Blind optimism is also apparent in his approach to areas like the Middle East and the ex-Soviet Union. They will become economically developed and this will result in liberal democracy — because the theory says so. The prospect of a long period of authoritarian rule is simply discounted.

The appearance of Fukuyama's book coincides with the publication of a detailed historical and comparative study of many of the themes he raises — *Capitalist Development and Democracy* — written by three Canadian social democrats.⁴

Landowners hostile to democracy

Their conclusion is that everywhere the most reactionary social layer and the one most hostile to democracy are the landowners. There is however no innate predilection of the bourgeoisie towards democracy; in every case, democracy is a product of the size and density of working class organization and of the history of the struggle for democratic rights.

Constitutional democracy, they find, is thus a product of class compromise. Such a way of viewing things is of course a closed book to Fukuyama.

Fukuyama's book introduces a new slant on the alleged impending victory of liberal capitalist democracy throughout the world. Capitalist victory creates a "Last Man" who lives in a society in which all basic

questions have been solved.

No longer is there the possibility of struggling for higher goals, but the danger of producing a society of bored consumers. Might they not, he speculates, revolt against their sublime zombie-like existence and resume the course of History?

Here Fukuyama has really skewered himself, making a series of admissions which undermine his whole case. The potentially unhappy state of the Last Man results from the "decline of community" and the growth of isolated consumer existence.

Fukuyama should have read a bit more Marx. Even if his whole case was justified, why is it that the final result must be such a bored, apathetic and alienated society? Might it not be something to do with the intrinsic nature of capitalism that the danger exists of the rebellion of the Last Man? Something to do with the commodity spectacle? With the logic of a society dedicated to the production of more and more useless things, to make more and more destructive profits?

Isn't humanity capable of something a bit more profound than the latest fashion in motor cars or the appalling, vulgar advertising campaign that masquerades as a presidential election in the United States?

Fukuyama is right. Even if the victory of the free market and constitutional democracy is at hand, this is an outrageous and catastrophic state of affairs against which it will be necessary to rebel. Even in the circumstances envisaged by Fukuyama the course of history would be resumed. ★

1. *The End of History and the Last Man*. Published in Britain by Hamish Hamilton and in the USA by the Free Press.

2. Op. cit, pp. 42-45.

3. See for example Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man*, Garden City, Anchor Books, 1960.

4. *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, by Dietrich Rueschmeyer, Evelyne Huber Stevens and John D. Stevens, Polity Press

AROUND
THE
WORLD

DENMARK

Bomb attack on socialist group

THE Copenhagen headquarters of the Danish revolutionary socialist organization Internationale Socialister (IS) was destroyed by a powerful bomb on March 16. The explosion, which took the life of 29 year old Henrich Christensen, was most likely the work of fascist circles who have been at the center of a racist and xenophobic campaign against immigrant workers in Denmark.

IS, along with other organizations that have been active in anti-racist work, such as the Socialist Workers Party (SAP) — Danish section of the Fourth International, the Left Socialists (VS), the Left Socialist Youth (VS) and the Federation of Immigrant Associations (IND-sam), has been victimized by threats and physical attacks over the last four years.

The Danish police have refused to take energetic measures to counter the climate of fear and hate whipped up by the far-right and fascist forces. For example, in

the summer of 1990 Lubni Elahi, an immigrant woman and socialist city councillor in Copenhagen was physically assaulted by fascist thugs. Though responsibility was claimed by Albert Larsen, leader of "De Nationale", a Nazi group, the police refused to bring charges against Larsen or his organization. This group has also threatened to bomb a mosque currently under construction in Copenhagen. Rather than pointing their fingers in the obvious direction of the fascist organizations, the bourgeois media has taken the occasion of the bombing of the IS headquarters to launch a scurrilous attack against the victims themselves. TV news reports and right wing papers have suggested that IS itself was involved in fabricating bombs in spite of that organization's openly stated policy of fighting fascism through building broad anti-racist mobilizations.

Messages of solidarity can be sent to: Internationale Socialister, Ryesgade, 8, 3. DK-8000 Aarhus C., Denmark, or to the weekly newspaper *Den Roede Traad* (Fax: 45 33 33 86 56).

UNITED STATES

Mark Curtis Defence Campaign

THE struggle against police brutality and for the vindication of Mark Curtis, the U.S. trade unionist and socialist activist imprisoned in the state of Iowa after being framed-up on rape charges, has recently registered a significant victory.

On January 31, a U.S. federal judge ruled that the two police officers who had severely beaten Curtis on the night he was arrested — March 4, 1988 — must pay \$11,000 to Curtis in compensation for the damages he suffered.

The court's judgement will strengthen the campaign to win Curtis' release from the Iowa prison where he is serving a twenty-five year prison term.

The ruling occurred during a campaign to protest a wave of police brutality by the Des Moines police force that has spread terror through the city's Black community. Public meetings attracting hundreds of people in support of Curtis and against police brutality have been held recently.

The Mark Curtis Defense Committee has launched an appeal for funds to meet the expenses that will be incurred as this struggle enters a new phase.

Contributions and messages of support can be sent to the Mark Curtis Defence Committee, Box 1048, Des Moines IA 50311, United States of America. Please make checks payable to the Political Rights Defense Fund. ★

EUROPEAN DEPUTIES CONDEMN CUBA BLOCKADE

DEPUTIES to the European Parliament have recently addressed a letter to Frantz Andriessen, the European commissioner demanding that the embargo against Cuba instituted last January by the European Economic Community (EEC) be lifted. We publish below the principal portions of that letter.

"Your office has indicated that over the past eight days you have issued precise instructions to prohibit all direct or indirect aid to Cuba because 'the Cuban government does not respect human rights.'

"This decision has probably been made following the one reported in the January 23 edition of *El Pais* to suspend all plans for cooperation and that published in *Le Monde* on January 25 reporting on the cancelation of the planned trip of a commission to Cuba charged with studying the possibilities of cooperation. This decision, taken to protest the recent application of the death sentence, has shocked us. Firstly, because the EEC has close political and commercial relations with many states that still apply the death penalty. Secondly, because it holds a people hostage for the actions of its government. We see this action as a pure and simple indication of support for the American blockade against Cuba.

"Last October, 78 European deputies demanded in the pages of *Le Monde* that the blockade be lifted.

"Your decision, taken at the end of January, to prohibit even humanitarian aid has shocked us even more. As a consequence, thousands of innocent people will be condemned to death or to malnutrition!

"We demand that these disastrous decisions be reversed and that food assistance be delivered to Cuba's children, mothers, and elderly people."

SIGNED

D. Piermont (Germany); **L. Castellina** (Italy); **Ken Coates** (Britain); **A. Falconer** (Britain); **M. Elliott** (Britain); **A. Smith** (Britain); **H. Verbeek** (Netherlands); **R. Bontempi** (Italy); **M. Hindley** (Britain); **P. Napolitano** (Italy); **C. Oddy** (Britain); **R. Imbeni** (Italy); **R. Barzanti** (Italy); **D. Dessylas** (Greece); **R. Piquet** (France); **H. Barrea** (Spanish State); **M. Simeoni** (France); **L. Van Outrive** (Belgium); **P. Canavaro** (Portugal); **K. Tsimas** (Greece); **R. Roumeliotis** (Greece); **J. Vandeuembroucke** (Belgium); **N. Blaney** (Ireland); **S. Santos Lopez** (Spanish State); **V. Ephremidis** (Greece); **R. Brito** (Portugal); **F. Wurtz** (France); **S. Elmalan** (France); **M. Gremetz** (France); **S. Ribeiro** (Portugal); **J. Miranda da Silva** (Portugal); **A. Alavanos** (Greece); **R. Barton** (Britain); **W. Ewing** (Britain); **D. Morris** (Britain); **H. McCubbin** (Britain); **G. Ruiz-Gimenez Aguilar** (Spanish State); **S. Mayer** (France); **S. Ainaudi** (France); **P. Herzog** (France); **D. Valent** (Italy); **W. Telkamper** (Germany); **N. Kertscher** (Germany); **S-Y. Kaufmann** (Germany); **R. Trivelli** (Italy); **H. Breyer** (Germany); **K. Landa Mendibe** (Spanish State); **C. Roth** (Germany); **P. Crampton** (Britain); **C. Cheysson** (France).