

For Workers' Liberty East and West

# SOCIALIST

## ORGANISER

Conference

**Solidarity  
with workers  
in the  
Eastern Bloc**

Saturday 27 January  
ULU, Malet St,  
Central London

# EASTERN EUROPE:

# Unite to support



# the socialist rebels!

**S**ocialists can be no less astonished than the rest of the world by the pace and scale of events in Eastern Europe. In country after country the Stalinist totalitarian regimes have been crumbling, swept aside by movements from below.

Very few on the left would wish to defend the regimes of Honecker, Ceausescu and the rest. Equally very many reject the conclusion of capitalism's apologists — that the crisis in Eastern Europe proves the bankruptcy of socialism.

Socialism has not been bankrupted, and what is so potently demonstrated by the events of the past few months is the marvellous power of mass movements, workers and students uniting the population behind them.

East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Romania are vivid proofs of what the left has argued: that in great struggles, ordinary working class people can achieve great things. The full democracy that the peoples of Eastern Europe want would entail a socialist society, with real grass roots democracy.

**Turn to page 2**



## US out of Panama!

**T**owards the end of December the United States army invaded Panama.

They said they wanted to arrest General Manuel Noriega and establish 'democracy'.

Noriega himself is now in Panama's Vatican embassy and his fate rests with the Pope.

The US action, which they presumably expected to be swift and decisive, proved messy and bloody. Now the US has 1,500 of Noriega's men imprisoned behind barbed wire, but at the cost of several hundred dead.

Noriega has been portrayed as the US's arch-enemy, not least in their war on drugs. But for many years he was backed by the CIA. He

is in large measure the US's creation.

It is the first major US intervention since the invasion of Grenada in 1983.

Noriega, who is undoubtedly a foul dictator, is a soft target for the US. But the invasion of Panama could be a 'practice' for bigger actions — against Nicaragua, or in support of the El Salvadorean government, or possibly even the Colombian.

While Noriega's crimes against the Panamanian people are horrendous, the United States' action in yet again flexing its military muscle in Central America is appalling. It is trampling upon national rights, and is the opposite of the 'democracy' it purports to be introducing.

## Chronicle of ambulance fight

### From back page

**Thursday 14 December:** Petition in support of ambulance workers handed in — with 4,680,727 names on it.

Ambulance station telephone lines in London and West Midlands cut on **15 December**. Ambulance stations in Dorset had telephone lines cut soon after. This was in response to campaigns to get public to phone direct for an ambulance.

Non-TUC Association of Professional Ambulance Personnel throws out pay offer — 68% of membership vote against.

Tomy toy company donates 10,000 free toys to children of ambulance workers.

Police or army called in over Christmas and New Year in London, West Midlands, S Yorkshire, Hereford and Worcester, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Lincolnshire, Dorset.

Ambulance workers in Surrey given ultimatum to work normally from January 2 — otherwise private contractors to be brought in.

London divisional ambulance officers at two divisional officers

suspended after refusing to transfer to Waterloo headquarters. Staff at Waterloo had been suspended for taking solidarity action with ambulance workers.

In London the keys to 500 vehicles taken by management.

Labour-controlled Sandwell Council, West Midlands, and ambulance unions set up emergency ambulance service.

Members of Society of Telecom Executives instructed by leaders not to cut phone lines or divert calls away from ambulance staff.

Manchester ambulance workers vote to ban transferring patients and use of radios. Agree to still answer 999 calls. Management bring in police.

Staff in Surrey vote to remove cover on New Year's Eve.

Staff at 3 stations in Middlesex, West London, refuse calls.

Some ambulance workers call for unofficial solidarity day of action on 25 January.

Unofficial committee of shop stewards set up to push for escalation of action.

Union leaders meet to discuss the dispute on Thursday 4 January. Management refuse to budge.

## Unite to back the socialists!

### From front page

But after years of the misappropriation of socialism as the ideology of nasty self-serving dictatorships, the east European masses are unfamiliar with the ideas of socialist democracy. Anti-Stalinist socialists are a minority, on the whole, and for the moment, in the democracy movements.

The undoubtedly more democratic Western European capitalist model is viewed with envy by many in the east. That we may know that their image of Western capitalism is naive, does not change the force of capitalism as an actually existing alternative.

The apparent attractiveness of capitalism makes the work of the anti-Stalinist socialists even harder. With deepening crisis, they may find rapidly growing audiences. But we have to acknowledge their weakness in most of the countries of Eastern Europe, some of which have been starved of a serious political culture for decades.

A priority for socialists in the West is to help those socialists in the East. It is of course in our own interests to do so: a victory for socialists in Eastern Europe would be an incalculable victory for us, while a victory for capitalist forces an incalculable defeat.

So we need a campaign in the British labour movement in solidarity with socialists in the Eastern Bloc.

We need to publicise their activities, organise speaking tours for their representatives, raise money for their organisations. We need to

do whatever we can to help them grow into the decisive force in their societies. For the Left, this must be a priority beyond merely one more solidarity campaign to add to all the rest. Upon what we do could hang the whole future of socialism in the coming years and decades.

We could only hope to achieve this solidarity if the Left unites to campaign for it. Isolated propaganda gestures will not be enough.

We have been involved with the Campaign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc to organise a conference on 27 January. When the plans were first set, Eastern Europe was already beginning to 'blow'; but we did not know just how much it was going to blow. Since we began to organise the conference, East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Romania have seen changes of government.

The conference presents a timely opportunity to begin the campaign in solidarity with socialists in the Eastern Bloc that is needed. We are proposing that all sections of the Left who support the anti-Stalinist movements participate, on an equal footing, in establishing the campaign at this conference.

The Left has worked together in the Support Committee for the Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution). We need to build on that, with a broader campaign, addressing the Eastern Bloc more widely.

The current situation holds both wonderful opportunities and terrible dangers for the Left as a whole. We have to make sure that instead of being put off the agenda, socialism internationally is put firmly on it.

# The risen people

## Socialism after the East European revolutions

**I**n the short space of a few weeks we have seen a tremendous series of revolutions in Eastern Europe.

The latest was in Rumania during Christmas week. At the beginning of the week the Ceausescus were in full control. By its end they lay crumpled like rag dolls, dead beside a bullet-marked wall.

People after people have risen in revolt against the dictatorship of Stalinist bureaucrats — Poles, Germans, Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Bulgarians — and sloughed off the dictators like so much dead and putrid skin.

Millions of people rallied in streets and squares all across Eastern Europe, in the countries that have been held against their will for 45 years in Russia's empire. In one country after another, they challenged the armed bureaucrats to do their worst; and in one country after another the bureaucratic systems collapsed before the might of the risen people.

In Hungary, where the Russian tanks and local Stalinists inflicted terrible slaughter on the people in 1956 and after, Stalinism seemed to melt away, giving way to an approximation to a multi-party system.

In Poland, where in December 1981 the bureaucrats had banned Solidarnosc and shot down protesting workers, Solidarnosc, albeit a changed and transformed Solidarnosc, was allowed peacefully to form a government.

Everywhere the change was speedy; everywhere apart from Rumania it seemed almost effortless. The people had only to take to the streets and keep coming back to the streets in greater numbers, had only to show that they would not be cowed and intimidated, that they simply would not go on in the old way — and the rotten Stalinist regimes crumbled.

Even where an Erich Honecker, East Germany's ruler for two decades, wanted to take the "Tiananmen Square option" and mow down the demonstrating workers, he was overruled by his own colleagues, who decided to disarm rather than resort to arms.

Where the "Tiananmen Square option" was attempted, in Rumania, the state apparatus split and the army — with all its bureaucratic structures intact, it seems — took the side of the people against the Stalinist terrorists.

It was a tremendous and inspiring proof of the power of the masses. When millions are determined on change, and audacious and fearless

in fighting for it, then miracles can happen.

Yet there was more to it, and the contrast between the Rumanian and the other East European revolutions brings it out clearly. Of all the countries which have experienced mass popular revolutions, Rumania is the only one which is (uneasily) independent. The others are Russian satellites, under Russian occupation.

In those countries, the USSR's "Red" Army — for now, Gorbachev's army — holds the ultimate power, wields or is not willing to wield the big stick. The power of the bureaucracies buckled, in one country after another, and the bureaucrats surrendered their monopoly of political power because they knew they could not rely on the Russian Army to back them against the people.

That is the ultimate explanation for the astonishing series of almost bloodless victories. In all those countries, too, as in Rumania, the army — the decisive "Red" Army — defected from the regime, with no shots or only a few shots fired. Gorbachev pulled the rug from under the Honeckers and the Husaks.

The Stalinist rulers in Eastern Europe were more or less puppets of the USSR — satraps without the support of the people they ruled. Their rule was rule by soul-dead bureaucrats, with nothing left even of the corrupted idealism that could still be found in and around the "Communist" parties in Czechoslovakia twenty years ago and in Hungary and Poland a decade earlier. And then the walking dead of Eastern Europe's ruling Stalinist parties simply had their puppet strings cut.

The Russian Empire is in headlong retreat. Though it still maintains its armies of occupation in Eastern Europe, and continues with a softened-up variant of the Stalinist one-party state in the USSR itself, Moscow has decided to abandon the attempt to maintain Stalinism in the satellites.

Or rather, when, under the stimulus of Gorbachev's reform propaganda, things got so far out of hand that only force and repression on the level of Tiananmen Square could have secured the survival of the old system, the Kremlin decided that the game was no longer worth the cost.

The Russian bureaucracy itself is in turmoil, locked in a bewildering battle to resuscitate the economy of the USSR. It has set its face towards getting capital and technology from

the West. It has learned the hard way, in its own ten year long "Vietnam war", that it could not annex Afghanistan to its empire against the wishes of a people determined to resist, and so decided to cut its losses and withdraw.

Gorbachev and his associates decided to let things take their course in Eastern Europe, and, while maintaining the occupation armies there, to let their political satraps go down before the anger of the people.

### Breakup of USSR?

Yet it remains extraordinary, and an ultimate proof of the decrepitude at the heart of the European Stalinist empire, that Moscow abdicated in Eastern Europe. For events in Eastern Europe put into question not only Russia's continued military occupation of the East European countries, but also the continued existence of the USSR itself.

What is happening in Eastern Europe now must quickly raise the question of the withdrawal of Russian troops in a way in which it could not be raised while the peoples of the Empire's subordinate states were held down by the political and economic systems which Stalin designed for the precise purpose of holding them down. And more: the likely effects on the USSR itself are huge.

The USSR itself is an empire, within which there are a large number of oppressed nationalities, ranging from the three Baltic republics annexed by Stalin with Hitler's temporary blessing in 1940 to areas such as Georgia and Armenia and the 50 million Ukrainians.

The example of Eastern Europe's giant steps to independence threatens the USSR itself with destruction. The logic of events in Eastern Europe now is for the nationalist ferment to spread to the USSR itself and break it up.

One of the motives for invading Afghanistan generally ascribed to Moscow ten years ago was fear that the Muslim fundamentalist ferment would spread from Afghanistan to the Muslim areas inside the USSR. Now the East European nationalist ferment from the West threatens the USSR's survival in its present form, and not in the long or medium term, but more or less immediately. And Moscow did not have the will to try to burk it.

The movement for secession in the Baltic republics is now at an advanced stage, perhaps already beyond the point where it can be reversed without full-scale military reconquest. The Communist Party of Lithuania has just split on the issue of independence from the Soviet CP. In Azerbaijan, the Stalinist apparatchiks have been chased out of Djallilabad, and the town is under the control of a 'popular committee'.

Poland, with its newly-installed anti-Stalinist government, is next door to the Ukraine, where 50 million people constitute the biggest oppressed nation on earth.

That the Kremlin bureaucrats sail so close to the wind is proof of just how desperate they see their own situation to be. It is evidence that the (for now) decisive sections of the USSR's bureaucracy are convinced that they have no option but to press ahead with perestroika, at whatever cost. They did not make the East European peoples pay in blood for their vast increase in freedom: they threw their satraps to the wolves instead.

The paradoxical truth is that the inspiring revolt of the peoples won their immediate goals too easily. Everywhere, even in Rumania, where the popular victory was won only after a short, bitter and bloody

## Bulgarian union makes independent strike call

**T**he free trade union organisation in Bulgaria called a general strike for 28 December against the wishes of both the reform-Stalinist government and most of the middle-class opposition.

The strike was called off only after the government made concessions. It is the first time in the current revolutions in Eastern Europe that a workers' organisation has taken an initiative separate from the broad opposition movements.

Bulgaria's free trade union, Podkrepa, is said to be based mainly on technicians and scientists, but

evidently it has strong enough roots for it to call a general strike and for the government to take it seriously.

The union demanded the resignation of the government, the parliament, and the Communist Party's central committee. The main opposition group, the Union of Democratic Forces, opposed the strike call on the grounds that such action should be taken only as a last resort.

The government did not resign, but it did agree to immediate talks with the opposition. Even after the general strike was called off, local two-hour strikes took place in many workplaces.





Demonstrators in Bulgaria demand the end of the political monopoly of the Stalinist party

civil war, the decisive segment of the old state apparatus remains intact — the army.

### Role of the armies

The old state machinery has nowhere been broken up. The machinery of coercion remains mostly in the hands of Stalinists or recent ex-Stalinists. And the Russian armies of occupation remain in place.

There was a notable absence of open hostility to the Russian occupying forces. Indeed, the revolutionary demonstrations, in East Germany and Czechoslovakia for example, often proclaimed themselves "Gorbachevite", only demanding for their own country what Gorbachev was doing in the USSR.

Demands for Russian withdrawal will come to the fore quickly. It is improbable that the entrenched power of the armies will be used in an attempt to restore the old Stalinist system. What is probable is that the ex-Stalinist armies will in some of the East European countries, and maybe even in the USSR itself, begin to play the role played by the army in so many Third World countries — that of arbitrator and court of last resort, to act on behalf of a weak, in this case an emerging, bourgeois class.

Sections of the old Stalinist bureaucracy are trying — and in Hungary and Poland, at least, succeeding — to turn themselves into a bourgeoisie. There are strong middle class groups who aspire to expand their present role into that of a bourgeoisie. There is the prospect of a vast new influx of foreign capital. Sections of the old Stalinist bureaucracy and of the existing

middle class and incipient bourgeoisie are joining hands with Western capitalism to asset-strip Eastern Europe.

The consequences will inevitably be the rapid open growth of a new bourgeoisie, protected by the existing state and entwined with it. There will be accelerated class differentiation, and more or less accelerated working-class disillusion with free market economics.

All these societies face a prolonged series of class struggles — within which the forces of a reborn working-class socialism will be defined and shaped. More: in most of the East European countries, and especially within the USSR itself, there exists a nightmarish network of national and communal antagonisms.

There is a long history of chronic conflicts. Such conflicts will threaten to tear these states apart. And these class and national conflicts will reverberate and detonate in societies where the new bourgeoisie is striving to establish itself, where it has no tradition, no stable network of rule.

It is close to the classic conditions for the armies which have so far emerged intact to play a "Third World" role. This may even be the probable development in the USSR itself.

For example, if the elections due in the next few months further discredit the "Communist Party" and erode its power — or, as the elections in Poland did last summer, shatter its credibility — then the army may quickly find itself the only stable framework holding society, and the empire that the USSR is, together.

Such army regimes would most likely preside over the continued bourgeoisification, working with such international capitalist agen-

cies as the IMF. In retrospect, the "military coup" in Poland in December 1981 may prove to have been the beginning of a pattern.

We cannot know in detail. What we do know is that the conditions that are unfolding in Eastern Europe are not those which normally breed stable democratic systems.

Right now the mass movements would easily be able to defeat attempts to substitute army rule for the discredited rule of the old Stalinist parties. So was Solidarnosc after it forced the Polish regime to recognise it in summer 1980. Things were different eighteen months later after the prolonged stalemate between the union and the bureaucracy had produced chaos and disorganisation. Jaruzelski made his coup.

Only working-class rule and an economy organised to serve the mass of the people and not the rising bourgeoisie and international capitalism can secure stable democracy in Eastern Europe and the USSR. Socialists need to understand that, and insist on it to those who, understandably perhaps, see nothing but cause for optimism and euphoria in the recent glorious events.

The outcome in Eastern Europe for a long time to come will be determined in the period ahead according to whether or not the working class, or sizeable sections of it, can organise itself into a class-conscious socialist force opposed to both Stalinism and capitalism and fighting for a working-class democratic socialist solution to the present crisis — that is for working-class power.

### The best of times, the worst of times

For anti-Stalinist socialists — revolutionary socialists, that is, socialists who are socialists in more than name, those who stand for and fight for the end of wage-slavery — this is the best of times! Even where the working class has not differentiated politically from other groups in the great uprisings of "society" against "the state" (to use the terminology popular in Eastern Europe), the working class has taken the lead in the vast demonstrations.

Free trade unions are being

started everywhere in the areas from which Stalinism has been forced to retreat. Anti-Stalinist socialist movements are, for the first time in half a century or more, free to function openly. Whatever beliefs or illusions in market capitalism there are now throughout Eastern Europe — and there seems to be a tremendous wave of faith in capitalism as the road to prosperity and freedom — they cannot last.

Workers who look to a free market system to bring them prosperity after the long years of heavy-handed economic bungling and corruption are certain to be disappointed, and thus to be forced to rethink their whole political philosophy. Masses of workers who are now "anti-socialist" because they think of socialism as what the Stalinists said it was — state tyranny — will be able to see that only democratic working-class socialism can provide the answer for the working class.

The genuine socialists who oppose both Stalinism and capitalism can quickly come into their own in the situation that will rapidly shape up in Eastern Europe — and is already shaping up in Poland — if they are at all adequate to their tasks.

So, the best of times — but it is also the worst of times, and we shouldn't shut our eyes to that aspect of things. Stalinism was never socialism as Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg and all the pioneering generations of socialists understood it. Nevertheless, for over half a century, Stalinism has represented "actually existing socialism" for vast labour movements, in popular parlance, in Stalinist and bourgeois anti-Stalinist propaganda.

The ideas of Stalinism have corrupted generations of labour movement activists — and not only fully-fledged Stalinists. The idea that state ownership is necessarily socialist; the idea that development by the state of backward countries defines socialism; the idea that you can have socialism where the working class is kept down; the idea that democracy doesn't matter, and is an optional extra — all these have spread widely, in more or less diluted forms.

Some of these ideas are not peculiar to Stalinism. For example, the idea that state ownership

defines socialism was shared by the original Fabians. But Stalinism welded all the ideas into a powerful force, fuelled by the urgent drive of millions of would-be revolutionary workers to overthrow the capitalist system. It was able to stamp the idea on the labour movement.

The crisis and partial collapse of Stalinism, the open mass discrediting of what has passed for socialism, the extravagant disavowal of socialism by its most visible and prominent representatives — all that now generates a great pressure against socialism. There is a great debauch of anti-socialist propaganda in the press.

More than that: not only is the monstrous state-monopoly Stalinist totalitarian system attributed to socialism, and used to discredit socialism, but now its collapse is used to boost free market economics and thus discredit anti-Stalinist socialism from another angle. Peregrine Worsthorne writes in the *Sunday Telegraph* that the debacle of Stalinism should in the next generation discredit the left as the experience of Nazism has for so long discredited certain right-wing ideas: the wish is father to the thought.

Throughout the capitalist world in the last decade, state-operated enterprises (the other "actually existing socialism") have been dismantled and the market boosted as the best, or anyway the natural system. Until the next big slump — and that there will be such slumps is as certain as anything can be — it will seem to work.

Everything — the debacle of Stalinism in the East, the ending of the cycle of heavy reliance on state-organised industry in the West — means that this period is like the "anti-capitalist" '30s in reverse.

Then, great masses of people were impelled towards what they thought was socialism by the decay of the capitalist system. Now, in Eastern Europe, masses of people are propelled the other way, in revulsion against Stalinism and in search of prosperity and liberty.

Genuine socialists, who have had to swim against the tide of "state socialism" for so long, now see the tide begin to change. But it is not our tide yet.

Stalinism is still doing immense damage to real working-class socialism. The East European Stalinists now want to hand the workers over to the "more productive" exploitation of the bourgeoisie; and revulsion against Stalinism disarms and disorients many workers, rendering them as yet unable to look after their own interests in face of the capitalist threat. But they can learn in struggle, and quickly.

Socialism is faced with renewing itself. We have nothing to renew or redefine in our basic principles — only those are socialists who fight for an end to wage slavery and to the rule of bureaucratic states, and who constantly draw all the lessons of the history of working-class struggles.

The renewal of socialism will taken the form of learning the lessons of such experiences as Stalinism, combined with a bitter, stubborn, unconquerable assertion of the irreducible truths of socialism against both the counterfeits of socialism and the gale of bourgeois lies howling about our ears.

They say socialism is discredited because Stalinism is discredited. No, it isn't! Despite the difficulties immediately ahead, the conditions for a renewal of revolutionary socialism, and of revolutionary socialist movements, have not been so good for 60 years. The words which Rosa Luxemburg gave to an imaginary figure of Revolution in 1918 will do for socialism itself: I was, I am, I will be!

*'The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of sex or race'*

Karl Marx

Socialist Organiser  
PO Box 823, London  
SE15 4NA. Phone 01 639  
7965.

Latest date for reports: first post  
Monday

Socialist Organiser,  
PO Box 823, London SE15  
4NA.

Printed by Press Link  
International (UK) Ltd (TU).

Registered as a newspaper at  
the Post Office.

Signed articles do not  
necessarily reflect the views of  
Socialist Organiser.



## Romania: can the workers organise?

**N**ever in history has a dictatorship at the height of its arrogance fallen so swiftly to its own people.

The fall of Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania was like the overthrow of the Shah of Iran in 1979, only hugely speeded up. Ceausescu, like the Shah, found that even the most elaborate and vicious system of secret police and armed repression cannot hold when the mass of the people are mobilised and willing to fight and die for freedom.

On 15 December Romania was quiet. The upheavals elsewhere in Eastern Europe had found no counterpart there, aside from a quickly-crushed workers' revolt in Brasov in 1987 and a letter of protest to Ceausescu from some veteran bureaucrats.

On 16 December the secret police seized a rebellious Calvinist pastor, Laszlo Tokes, and attacked people trying to protect him. Big demonstrations, and mass killings by the security police, followed in Timisoara.

Even after the killings, the people kept coming on to the streets. Ceausescu called a rally in Bucharest, and they booed him. The army changed sides. Ceausescu fled his palace on 22 December, but was captured and eventually shot on 25 December.

The secret police carried on fighting, but by 26 December a new government had been formed and the gunfire petered out.

Ceausescu's ever-crazier pursuit of glory and luxury for himself, and economic self-sufficiency for Romania, had alienated even the bureaucrats. While 2,500 workers toiled around the clock to build the dictator's giant palace, six times the size of Versailles, and demolished much of the centre of Bucharest to do so, the people were denied food, heating, and light bulbs brighter than 40 watts.

Romania's future is as fluid as Iran's in 1979 — indeed, more so. No group was able to develop policies, structures and activists under Ceausescu's despotism, not even to the extent that the Islamic fundamentalists could under the Shah.

The National Salvation Front which has taken over the government seems to be dominated by anti-Ceausescu members of the bureaucracy and the army top brass. Although the Communist Party has reportedly been dissolved, the Salvation Front appears to want to reconstitute some sort of neo-Stalinist or reform-Stalinist party.

It has abolished state control of agriculture, in a move which may soon lead to the complete return of the countryside to individual peasant plots.

A National Peasant Party-Christian Democrat has been launched, basing itself on right-wing traditions from before the Second World War. It calls for the re-establishment of "Christian morality", and some of its leaders favour bringing back the monarchy.

There are also Social Democratic, Liberal, and ecology parties, but we have little information on them. And an independent trade union movement is being formed.

The future of Romania will depend on whether the workers are able to organise themselves into an independent party, offering a free socialist alternative to both Stalinism and the private profit system.



A woman worker on her way home after a shift at the lignite processing plant in East Berlin

## The left in East Germany

**Herbert Misslitz is a member of the 'Group of Democratic Socialists', which in September 1988 helped to organise the demonstration against the World Bank in East Berlin in parallel with the anti-IMF demonstration in West Berlin. About 1000 people took part in the demonstration. Misslitz is also a member of the leading group of the 'United Left'. This interview with him is translated from the West German fortnightly Sozialistische Zeitung.**

**Did the opening of the wall come too early, as Barbel Bohley (one of the leaders of the New Forum opposition) said?**

Not too early; rather, too late. It is understandable why thousands and millions of DDR citizens take the opportunity to visit the West. Any way the wall was opened, there would have been a little chaos of the sort that happened, but I don't think that's a problem.

We believe, however, that this business of opening the wall, connected to the freedom of travel, not only comes too late — though obviously it's good that it has come at all — but also, in the way it has happened, means that once again rights have been conceded as a sort of safety valve by a political leadership which manifestly has an acute lack of perspective. To be granted rights by such a leadership is, however, something different from using rights like the freedom of travel: that is an expression of the sovereignty of the people.

**What's the difference?**

We are trying to develop something like direct democracy in this country, so that governing bodies are made up of people's representatives elected by people from different areas.

The opening of the borders leaves unclarified many problems here.

Unclear, for example, is how far the SED (the Stalinist party) holds on to Article 1 of the Constitution, where it claims a leading role which would however be put in question by elections.

**The main demand now is for free elections. In the West that means free elections to a parliament. Is it the same in the DDR, or does your concept of another kind of popular representation get a response?**

At present the publicity which the different concepts get is very different. A lot of publicity is through the Western media; so left ideas have few opportunities on radio and TV. Things are seen from a Western viewpoint and in Western categories. Projects of bourgeois parliamentarism are favoured.

We of the United Left do not have the possibility, at present, of getting our ideas into the DDR press and putting them up for discussion. We are confined to our own publishing capacity, which is extremely limited.

We are trying to put our ideas across through meetings in the workplaces and public meetings. Of course that is not enough. There are negotiations going at various levels about establishing an independent left press and creating a sort of magazine for theoretical discussion in which all groups should have the opportunity to express their ideas. Of course there are lots of bureaucratic problems.

In the meantime we're trying to concentrate on workplace publications: that's a start.

The way it is at the moment, those who get most publicity get most discussed.

**We know of two proposals from the opposition, the first for a referendum on the new electoral law, the second that before the national elections the local elections of May 1989 should be re-run, because they were rigged. That would give the opposition groups a chance to strengthen themselves locally and build themselves better. Do you support these proposals?**

In any case we support the proposal that there should be a 'round table'

where all groups, with the SED, the SED's coalition-partner parties, and the mass organisations, can discuss their concept of elections openly before the media. That would bring about something that is very necessary: that the concept of 'free elections' should be concretised, and the different ideas brought out.

We have quite different concepts on what free elections should be from the groups which are for bourgeois parliamentarism and party pluralism on the model of West Germany. We think that parallel to such a 'round table' there should be a national conference of workers' delegates.

We are building towards that in co-operation with other groups in the workplaces. It will take some time to pull it off, because people here are not used to taking personal responsibility on political decisions, even though there is a widespread politicisation in the population.

Such a delegate conference could also discuss real forms of participation and workers' self-management, and the rights and duties of independent works councils. The election of such workers' councils would be the second stage. The parties and social organisations would have to take account of the expression of workers' demands in that way.

**Can you tell us something about the situation in the workplaces?**

There is a lot of discussion in the workplaces. Leaflets from opposition groups are stuck up everywhere. The debate centres on the possibilities of improved living standards and the future of the businesses. If the principle of profitability is followed through rigorously, then the question of works closures will be posed in several combines (Kombinate, the giant business empires in which East German industry is organised). Many enterprises and combines simply do not work effectively. They suffer from an acute lack of innovation.

I had a discussion with workers in the Leuna works, and they said:

"We have no desire to continue working in this filth, but we have no desire to be unemployed either." They demand that scientists, economists, and technocrats, who are now urgently needed, should take positions on this question and represent the interests of the workers.

**What are your perspectives, and what can the left in other countries do to help?**

The main issue for us is to put the idea of socialism on the agenda again as something living. With its lying claim that a developed socialist society had already been established here, the bureaucracy has alienated wide sections of the population from the idea of socialism. We must work out transitional demands.

The question of links with the international left stands in this context. We see that there is no workable model of integration in Comecon counterposed to the EC Single Market, and so there is a danger that the rich West will buy up the East. We must make an alliance with the international left, with the Eastern left and also with the West German left, and develop common ideas against the rapacity of the finance sharks.

It is important to work out a position in common with the West German left against the demand for reunification raised especially by right-wing circles. We must resist that altogether.

Another question is what possibilities the Western left has of influence on the forms of economic aid. It is a fact that the DDR can hardly recover from its lack of innovation on its own. It will be forced to look for financial help and credit. So one demand could be the cancellation of the foreign debt, but without conditions, not, as has already been suggested by many people, on condition that the financiers can get their hands on the DDR. Common positions might be possible here.

Even more important, perhaps, is our joint work with the left in the East.



# For a Socialist United Europe!

**Eric Heffer MP writes a stimulating analysis of the spectacular events in Eastern Europe and the USSR**

**What is happening in Eastern Europe is not the end of Socialism or Communism. It is the political revolution long predicted by Trotsky and others.**

It was clear that a political revolution was essential once Stalin had got in power through the transformation of the Bolshevik Party. Despite oppression and state terrorism, it was only a matter of time before the revolution took place.

I must go back into history for us to understand what is happening today.

The October Russian Revolution of 1917 was the first and only successful workers' revolution in the world. The Paris Commune of 1871 was equally a workers' revolution, but unfortunately did not last. It was militarily destroyed and thousands were killed by French Government troops. The 1905 Russian Revolution led by Leon Trotsky, when Soviets were first developed, was the forerunner of the 1917 Revolution.

During the First World War — an imperialist war, which was fought, not over democracy, but over the control of markets and for colonial possessions — the Bolsheviks were one of the few parties who kept to the resolution of the Second International, to oppose capitalist imperialist wars. That is, to oppose the imperialist war, and to fight against one's own imperialist government.

Most of the parties of the Second International betrayed the principles of the International and supported their own government against the other governments involved. The Labour Party, as perhaps could be expected, did that in Britain.

Once it was understood that the war was murdering millions of people, creating great sorrow and destruction, the anti-war Socialist forces regrouped, and the Bolsheviks were in the lead.

German Socialists like Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg opposed the war and were imprisoned because of their attitude. In Britain, people like John Maclean, William Paul, the Socialist Labour Party, and some in the Independent Labour Party like Ramsay MacDonald were against the war, some for pacifist reasons.

Once the workers (under Bolshevik leadership) overthrew the Tsar, and then the Kerensky Provisional Government, genuine Socialism throughout the world gave unqualified support to the Soviets.

There was, however, serious criticism of the way the Bolsheviks operated. One of the greatest critics was Rosa Luxemburg, who had spent many years in jail. She helped to create the Spartacus League and the German Communist Party, but was murdered by a right-wing military group, with right-wing Social Democrats giving their blessing.

The widespread support amongst Socialists for the Russian Revolution led to the formation of the Communist International on the basis of the 21 conditions set down by Lenin.

Some of the parties of the Second International, like the Italian and French parties (in a majority) joined the CI, others split, and in other countries new Communist Parties were formed. In Britain a CP was created out of various groups like

Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers' Socialist Federation, the British Socialist Party, the shop stewards movement, the Socialist Labour Party, etc.

In the 21 points was the acceptance of the concept of 'democratic centralism' — a concept which meant a great deal of centralism in the party but little democracy.

Over the years the CPs became, in the main, apologists of the Soviet Union. The process of so-called Bolshevisation took place and led to centralised control, both locally and internationally. After Stalin became secretary of the Soviet Party, the CI became the instrument of Soviet policy and power, and real debate was more or less eliminated from the CI and the CPs. Decisions were handed down from above.

The brief period of democracy in the Soviet Union under Lenin was destroyed under Stalin. Unfortunately the process had begun under Lenin, when all groups and tendencies in the Bolshevik Party were banned as a temporary measure.

That temporary measure became, as so often in society, permanent. Under Stalin more or less total control was put into the hands of the General Secretary.

***"Trotsky was banished, his friends imprisoned and, in show trials, condemned and shot. The Red Army leadership was practically destroyed, and the Gulags and prison camps were set up"***

Lenin was very worried about the too great centralisation of power, and the growth of the bureaucracy. He warned against it and against Stalin in his so-called 'Testament' which was suppressed for years in the Soviet Union but is now published.

The truth is that Soviet society, as envisaged by Rosa Luxemburg, i.e. lifeless and bureaucratic, became increasingly bureaucratic and power was centralised into the hands of the General Secretary. All democratic processes were destroyed. Stalin used the state apparatus, the secret service, the police and armed forces, to destroy the opposition.

Firstly, Stalin used the Right of the Party to destroy the Left Opposition, then he turned and destroyed the Right, people like Bukharin and Rykov. In the meantime, hundreds of thousands had joined the party, and now owed everything to the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Trotsky was banished, his friends imprisoned and, in show trials, condemned and shot. The Red Army leadership was practically destroyed, and the Gulags and prison camps were set up.

That was the negative side, yet positive things were done also. Massive industrialisation took place, but in a bureaucratic fashion and at the expense of working people. A health service was created. All got a good chance of education. Houses, but not enough, were built. Workers' conditions improved — however, not as they should have been.

Independent trade unions were destroyed, with the unions becom-



Romanian flag is waved on top of the CP headquarters, Bucharest

ing part of the state apparatus. The unions became the transmission belt for the Party, not the instrument for the workers.

The truth is that in place of the workers being the dictatorship over the capitalists, the Party, and ultimately the leadership, became the dictatorship over the workers.

The socialist critics of the Soviet leaders argued about the nature of the Soviet Union. The Trotskyists said it was a deformed workers' state. Others, like the Socialist Party of Great Britain, and later the IS/SWP and CLR James, etc., said it was state capitalist. Some ex-US Trotskyist intellectuals like Burnham argued that it was a bureaucratic collectivist society. The only thing that they agreed about was that the Soviet Union was not a genuine workers' socialist society, and that sooner or later a political revolution would take place.

Personally, I am not sure what type of society Stalin created, but the socialised base of society cannot be ignored.

It was clear the political revolution would demand that there be free and independent trade unions, that there should be free elections, freedom of speech and the press, and that more than one political party of the workers should be formed.

The hopes for that were dashed after the Second World War. The capitalist powers, together with the Soviet Union, agreed that the world, especially Europe and the Middle East, should be divided up into spheres of influence between them. That is what Potsdam was about. It was the division of the world into spheres of influence by the USA, France, Britain and the Soviet Union.

That is why Stalin did not lift a finger to help the Greek partisans on the one hand, and the West on the other let Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland go. It was a stand-off.

The truth is Yugoslavia would have gone to capitalism but in that country Tito and the partisans were too strong and there was little the West could do. The Yugoslav revolution was a genuine people's revolt. The same was true of Albania, and even in Czechoslovakia, in the early days, the workers were, through their factory committees, supporting the Communist Party. To that extent there was an element of genuine revolutionary upsurge.

Elsewhere the Communist Parties were installed on the points of the Soviet bayonets. They were put in power because it suited the Soviet Union to have buffer states around them which could be used as safeguards against future attacks.

We should not be too critical of that aspect of Soviet policy. After all, there had been the Allied intervention after the Revolution in 1917, and there had been the failure to agree an anti-Nazi pact before the war. That is why the Soviets attacked Finland, and after that

agreed to the Soviet/German non-aggression pact, which Stalin hoped would stop them being attacked by Hitler.

What was awful was that, as a result of the pact, German Communist Party members and antifascists were sent back to Germany, imprisoned, tortured and killed. Communists were betrayed by the Stalinist leaders. Equally, after the Spanish troubles, Spanish antifascists ended up in Stalinist prison camps, as did many Austrian workers who fought against fascism in Austria in 1934.

Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, etc. could not have become so-called People's Democracies had not the Communist Parties been put in power by the Soviets. That is really the key to the present situation.

In Czechoslovakia the 1968 upsurge was overthrown by Soviet troops and tanks. In 1956 the Hungarian Revolution, led by Imre Nagy, was overthrown by Russian tanks, guns and troops. In Poland the Soviet Army had huge numbers of troops, and after the War a Russian General was put in charge of the army.

Stalin, immediately after the War, put certain people in control of the Communist Parties in Eastern Europe who were his creatures. That is why the trials of innocent people took place. That is why the purges took place. That is why any semblance of democracy was destroyed.

***"There have been demands for democracy and freedom for a long time in Eastern Europe. That demand is not a bourgeois concept, it is a workers' demand"***

The fact is that in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia — and in Yugoslavia, where Stalin's writ did not run — the democratic processes and upsurges began inside the Communist Party, and it was Communist Party people who were the first victims. Nagy and Dubcek were Communists. Even Husak was jailed in the '50s, and was released to do the job for the Soviets after the troops had shot down the peoples in 1968.

There have been demands for democracy and freedom for a long time in Eastern Europe. That demand is not a bourgeois concept, it is a workers' demand.

It began among the British workers in the 1830s, with the Chartists, and it is the demand everywhere where workers want their rights. The South African black workers demand the right to vote and independent trade unions. The Chilean workers demand the right to real democratic votes. The Spanish workers demanded it under Franco. It is the demand of workers throughout the world.

During the upsurge in Eastern Europe, the demands were for free elections, free trade unions, workers' control of industry, more than one political party, free publications, freedom of speech, freedom to meet and demonstrate, etc.

Clearly, the struggle in these countries has taken on different forms. In Poland the Roman Catholic church, which remained a powerful force, played a significant role. Solidarity originally was a workers' organisation, very much influenced by Catholic social teaching. But, I stress, it was a workers' organisation, and the church members, mainly workers, adhered to it.

In Hungary the church played only a minor role. In the main the move for democracy and freedom came from within the Party, backed by working people, but led by writers and intellectuals. In Czechoslovakia again the intellectuals were involved but recently the workers have become involved. They have become decisive.

In East Germany the workers were involved from the early days, and it must be remembered that it was building workers who led the revolt in East Berlin in 1953.

To understand the situation thoroughly in East Germany one should read Heinz Brandt's *The Third Way*. He was a Communist put in jail by the Nazis — a Communist who sided with the government of East Germany but nevertheless was put in jail by the East German regime. It is a profound book and should be studied by all serious socialists.

The upsurge in Eastern Europe began not from below, but because the Soviet bureaucracy has split. One section, a section growing over the years from the time of Khrushchev, accepts that the problems of production in the Soviet Union cannot be solved unless there are changes of a democratic nature. The old bureaucratic system is no longer adequate.

That does not mean that they wish to entirely get rid of the socialised basis of industry and the services, but that it is essential to initiate and that must mean some competition at least among publicly-owned industries. Bureaucratic planning has failed and is a total flop. It also means that money must be found by ending the enormous defence expenditure. That is why Gorbachev is keen to get rid of nuclear and other weapons.

Turn to page 11



# A theatre of resistance

Steven Holt looks at the life and work of Samuel Beckett, who died recently

Beckett's early poem, 'Whoroscope', shows the influence of James Joyce in its perhaps academic playing with words, and of TS Eliot and Ezra Pound in its reliance on obscure quotations, but by the mid 1930s, with 'More Pricks Than Kicks' and 'Murphy', he had found his own voice.

These hilarious novels can be recommended to anyone who thinks Beckett is a "difficult" writer.

In these and later works, human deprivation and frailty are presented with humour and compassion and with a self-critical narrative that avoids the lie of earlier fiction. The characters in a novel are not real people, and an important tendency in modern writing, especially in Beckett, as in Brecht, is honesty towards the reader.

A novel is a collection of words

existing in the mind of the reader in relation to her/his experiences. Beckett's way of encouraging conscious reading include the short summaries at the end of each chapter, as in children's books, of his novel 'Mercier and Camier'.

The play 'Waiting for Godot' established Beckett as a dramatist in the tradition of the absurd (a new type of theatre in France in the 1950s, in which traditional directional plot is replaced by repetition or elaboration of a situation). Two tramps wait for Godot, who doesn't come. Nothing happens except the passing of time.

This vision of wretchedness made a great impact on post-war audiences in ruined Europe, and remains Beckett's best known work.

In the later prose and plays, the language and images are increasingly pared down to essentials, until, in the novella 'Worstward Ho', most sentences have only one or two words. To this late period also belongs the less austere 'Ill Seen Ill Said', describing an old woman alone in her cabin, which is perhaps the most beautiful of the late works.

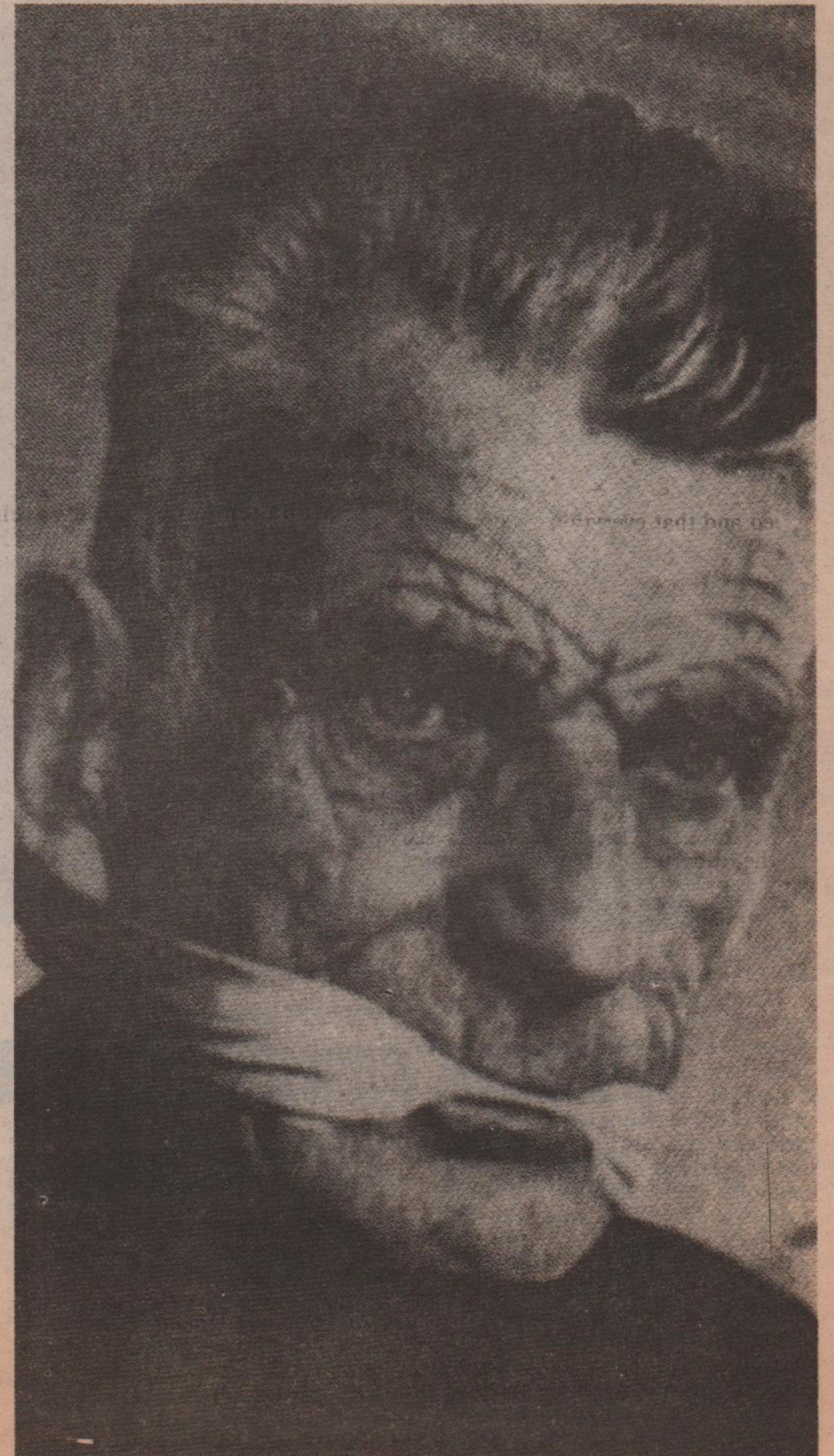
Beckett did not wish to become part of the media circus to which

many successful artists sell out or fall victim; he did not supply "meanings" for his work, and avoided biographers. It is significant that he was active in the French resistance, since many critics fail to see any political aspect to his work.

I see his work as a theatre of resistance, resistance to bourgeois illusions and false ideologies. Against the widespread complacency towards oppression and denial of the right of ordinary people to a fulfilling life, Beckett is radically critical.

Beckett's influence has been wide and will persist, on the English Marxist writers BS Johnson and Alan Burns, and especially on mainland Europe. Theodor Adorno's unfinished 'Aesthetics' was to have been dedicated to Beckett.

The emphasis on "degraded" sounds and the labour of the production process in performance in the music of Holliger and Lachenmann, the materiality and interiorised commentary in the films of Kluge and Syberberg, the self-critical monologues in the theatre of Heiner Müller (the East German successor to Brecht), all show the influence of Beckett, or at least similar concerns.



Samuel Beckett

## A novel about racism

Gordon Mazi Milian reviews 'Tea in the Harem', by Mehdi Charef. *Serpent's Tail*, £6.95. 157 pages

Mehdi Charef's first novel has waited six years to find itself translated into English, and it has taken the innovative *Serpent's Tail* to do the job.

'Tea in the Harem' is the bitter, bitter story of Majid, a young French Algerian, and his family, living in a ghetto outside Paris, on a

"huge concrete estate, ringed by motorways, factories and police," in a France that is racist and prejudiced.

For Majid and his friends, violence, robbing, alcohol and drugs form a barrier against the emptiness that envelops their days. His mother, burdened with a crippled husband, works all hours and she harangues Majid until she herself cries. Everyone in the novel fights unrelentingly to keep despair away from their doors and the "piss out in the hallway".

This novel is brilliant in its simplicity, in its portrayal of young people struggling to find something of their own whilst caught between two cultures and belonging to

neither of them.

'Tea in the Harem' represents so well the kind of unbounded straight-speak Dirty Realism that is currently universal, but at the same time distinct in its Europeanism. It is this kind of working-class literature that is so lacking in Britain, whose publishers prefer the cheery diluted water colours churned out by our mainstream writers, whose preoccupations remain those of the "troubled middle classes".

The images and faces, the poor wretches that inhabit Charef's world are recognisable. The despondency and the waste are more than familiar. It would not be hard to change the city to London and the country to Britain.

## Should socialists object to drag?

By Edward Ellis

Dame Edna Everage is not a drag queen, according to Barry Humphries, answering Melvyn Bragg's questions on Sunday night.

Drag acts, he said, are self-conscious imitations of women. Dame Edna, by contrast, is a complete, real person, if an invented one. We might marvel at how perfectly a drag act imitates Shirley Bassey; but Edna exists.

Barry Humphries has a point, which makes me think about socialist attitudes to drag.

There are essentially two types of drag act. Most common are those that mime to female singers. But there are also drag acts who themselves sing (and here you can see Barry Humphries' case: not in falsetto), and a lot of drag acts have a comedy routine. Typical of drag queen humour are off-the-cuff abusive put-downs: the more apparently improvised, the better.

In this, I would suggest, Dame Edna is a very classical drag act. Apparently, live she is more obscene, which would also put her firmly in the classical drag category.

Yet in a much more profound sense than Barry Humphries', Edna is very different. Because what

unites the numerous kinds of drag queen is that their humour is gay. There is nothing much gay about Edna Everage.

A lot of feminists object to drag, and to transvestism (which is not necessarily the same thing: a transvestite is a man who dresses as a woman for some reason of sexual or other personal satisfaction; a drag queen does it as an act on stage).

They say that the image of women portrayed by drag queens is a stereotypical, misogynistic one. The 'women' are absurdly made up, foul-mouthed harpies, constructions of male hatred for women's bodies. Moreover, this image of women is one born of a sexist society; if such images of women die out, as they will, so will drag. Drag is the product of reactionary attitudes towards women, and so both feminists and socialists should be hostile to it.

Thus on Lesbian and Gay Pride marches, you sometimes find leaflets distributed calling for the drag queens and TVs to be ejected on the grounds that they are reactionary and anti-women.

Of course, a lot of drag queen humour is misogynist (and racist, etc). So is most humour you will hear in working class pubs and clubs. But it is not true that drag per se is sexist.

Drag queens dress up as women, and employ a stereotypical image of women. But it is not women who are being parodied; it is men. Barry Humphries is quite right, that never for a moment does anyone doubt that the drag queen is a man; but it is a man ridiculing conventional images of masculinity. It is a man celebrating the denial of those images, saying: "Look at me, I'm a nelly queen, I don't conform to all the stupid stereotypes, and sod you. And I'm funny."

Indeed, a lot of drag queens deliberately find a straight man in the audience to persecute mercilessly for their entire act: that's part of the point of the whole thing.

So drag queens are an enormously important part of gay culture. In general I'm not happy with the concept of gay culture, but in so far as such a thing exists, drag is part of it.

Obviously more so for gay men than for lesbians, but it is by no means true that drag queens have no lesbian audiences. Drag is an entire world of entertainment that has been created within the gay community, sub-culture, or whatever it might best be called.

And so it's an important aspect of creating a sense of identity, a way of laughing at straight society, maybe.

If you doubt what I'm saying, try to catch a performance of Regina

Fong one night. After an act in which the whole pub sings along to 'Skippy the butch kangaroo', jeers at various shampoo adverts, and performs the sound effects for 'The Toy Town Choo Choo', everyone lines up for a slightly gropey dance routine to an old Helen Shapiro song, 'Tell Me What He Said'. The experience can only be described as total euphoria.

Julian Clary, the erstwhile Joan Collins Fan Club, who currently hosts the hilariously funny 'Sticky Moments' on Tuesday nights, is a product of the drag queen tradition, although he wears a different sort of drag. Having this kind of thing on TV is important, it seems to me, because it is specifically gay humour; it's a humour in which homosexuals, so often the butt of cruel jokes, laugh at everyone else (and if the people we are laughing at don't get the joke, why should we care?)

Feminist opposition to drag is based on a misconception of its actual role.

Anyway, that's enough pontificating for one night. I'm off to take in my frock. I'd just like to say that since I, Edward Ellis, am also a completely fictional character, I find this business about Edna Everage a bit too close to the bone; but that's something for a future discussion.

### The Day of Days

By William Morris

Each eve earth falleth down the dark,  
As though its hope were o'er;  
Yet lurks the sun when day is done  
Behind to-morrow's door.

Grey grows the dawn while men-folk sleep,  
Unseen spreads on the light,  
Till the thrush sings to the coloured things,  
And earth forgets the night.

No otherwise wends on our Hope:  
E'en as a tale that's told  
Are fair lives lost, and all the cost  
Of wise and true and bold.

We've toiled and failed; we spake  
the word;  
None hearkened; dumb we lie;  
Our Hope is dead, the seed we spread  
Fell o'er the earth to die.

What's this? For joy our hearts  
stand still,  
And life is loved and dear,  
The lost and found the Cause hath crowned,  
The Day of Days is here.



## For a Socialist United Europe!

From page 9

The move, then, comes from the top, from within the bureaucracy, but of course is welcomed by others, particularly professionals and intellectuals, the artists and writers who have been held back from free action and expression for so long.

The bureaucracy, that is the section who recognise the need for change, nevertheless want to make sure that change is strictly controlled and that everything is done with Party control and agreement. If this was not so the other section of the bureaucracy, the conservatives, could in the long run win and Gorbachev's reforms come to an end. At that stage the political revolution could perhaps turn into a violent revolution.

The truth is that differing sections of society have different interests and they will increasingly demand that those particular interests are looked after. Nationalists see the opportunity to get even greater autonomy. Some want separation, like the Baltic States who were not incorporated into the Soviet Union until the start of World War 2.

There are reactionary forces amongst some of the nationalities. Some of them are anti-semitic and fascist in outlook. That of course is not true of all, but we should not welcome every move because on the surface it appears democratic.

It is also clear that in some of the ex-satellite countries there are people who wish to restore private capitalism. That will be encouraged by the Bushes, Thatchers and Kohls of this world. Equally, some, if not all, of the Social Democratic leaders will go along with that.

I believe we must declare our full support for the democratic process but at the same time give our full support to those who, like Dubcek, argue for socialism with a human face. We must be positive and aggressive in our view. We should send delegations to these countries to meet up with all the opposition forces as well as Communists and let them know how we feel.

We must work for peace, for disarmament, for nuclear-free zones in Europe, ending up with the end of the NATO and Warsaw Pacts. In particular we need contact with the free trade unions, including those in the Soviet Union, and talk to them about the nature of capitalist countries. They must learn from us as we can learn from them.

The opportunities are tremendous. We must recognise that a wider Europe is possible, a Socialist Europe, and we must put forward the concept of a United Socialist States of Europe that is federated together.

The attacks on Socialism need to be beaten off. We must work to ensure that the people of the Soviet Union, in rejecting bureaucratic authoritarian society, do not get conned and accept that right-wing social-democracy is the answer or that capitalism can solve their problems.

We must explain to them what is happening in Latin and Central America, what is happening in Africa and Asia, and point out that although the struggle in capitalist society and in the Soviet Union have different aspects, it is really the same struggle.

Democratic socialism is still the only answer. We have to go out and fight for it throughout the world.

Presented to the Campaign Group of Labour MPs on 13 December 1989.

## Engineers regain initiative

The unions have begun to regain the initiative in the engineers' battle for a 35-hour week.

One thousand pickets turned up on Tuesday morning, 2 January 1990, at British Aerospace, Preston. The mass picket provided the perfect answer to management's boasts about being able to organise a major return to work.

In the event only 30 scabs went in, not the hundreds management had hoped for.

A further blow to management came when mass meetings at the Warton and Samlesbury plants voted to boycott being bussed into the Preston plant to undermine the strike.

Management immediately responded by suspending 250 workers who refused to go into Preston.

At both plants workers look set to increase their levy collections to counter the effects of the suspensions.

These new tactics from the unions are a big step forward in comparison to those adopted before

Christmas. Then, the Confed leadership refused to call on the Warton and Samlesbury workers not to cross the picket lines on the grounds that the national unions couldn't afford to pay any more strike pay!

This only helped to eat away at the morale of the Preston strikers and encourage scabbing.

The new approach is much better and should be linked to the demand for national backing for all of the suspended Warton and Samlesbury workers. Those laid off should also receive national support.

### Don't let British Aerospace workers fight alone!

As the bitter war of attrition against British Aerospace continues, it's important to look for ways of spreading the action and involving more engineering workers in the dispute.

If we stick to the strategy of the Confed leadership then we will be creating big problems for our side.

Selective action and local deals make it difficult to keep up the momentum with the levy collections. Workers



British Aerospace workers march in Preston. Photo: Paul Herrmann, Profile.

are reluctant to keep on paying a national levy which is funding local deals.

As a result the levy has fallen, and strike pay has been cut by half, from £120 a week to £60.

Enhanced strike pay may make it easier to win votes for action, but it gives the union leaders too much control over the strikes. So, for instance, at Rolls Royce Hillingdon the threat of cutting strike pay was used to ensure acceptance of a deal almost identical to one thrown out a few days earlier.

Enhanced strike pay also makes it more difficult to escalate the action. So now the ballots at GKN, Lucas and Weir group have been postponed indefinitely, leaving the British Aerospace strikers to fight alone.

The strategy of winning local deals, especially now that the bosses have said they will not enter national negotiations, threatens to sow further divisions.

The end of the national agreement

means that the strength of the best organised will not help to pull up the general level of all engineering workers. Worsening terms and conditions at the small firms will be used to help undermine the strength of the best organised.

A major change of direction is needed. Rank and file engineers need to take control of the dispute and turn it into a genuine national battle.

Hold regular local Confed stewards conferences to build support for the levy and discuss ways of escalating the dispute such as unsubsidised solidarity strikes.

For a national Confed stewards conference to map out a strategy to escalate the dispute!

For a one-day national engineering strike!

These steps would start to turn the tide against the engineering bosses, but they are unlikely to concede the full claim without sustained national action.

### "The dispute will have to escalate"

"It's important that everyone recognises this is not just a British Aerospace dispute. It's a national dispute for all engineering workers.

"The dispute will have to escalate after Christmas. The strategy committee have got to sit down and look to bring other factories out on one and

possible two-day strikes to show the solidarity with the lads and lasses out on the cobbles.

"We also need to push harder to get more and more money into the central fund."

Keith Garnall, Convenor GEC Traction (Preston) and AEU district committee

### Move this motion

This...restates its full support for the CSEU's campaign for a 35-hour working week.

As our claim is a national claim we believe it is vital to involve every engineering worker in this dispute. To this

end we resolve to:

1) Campaign for a national one-day strike of all engineering workers in support of the full claim.

2) Call on the CSEU strategy committee to call a national CSEU shop stewards' conference with lay delegates from every region.

## Roy Lynk's OBE

### WHETTON'S WEEK

A miner's diary

The only surprise about Roy Lynk's OBE is that he hadn't got it before now.

Anyway, now he has got his reward for scabbing and for forming a yellow union.

Maggie Thatcher is attempting to crush free and independent trade unions in this country and promote employer-oriented yellow unions.

It's not just the UDM in the pits. There's APAP in the ambulance crews' dispute. The Tories aren't having a go at the ambulance workers just because they're ambulance workers. The reason the Tories are having a go at the ambulance crews, same as they did with the nurses, is because they're organised in effective trade unions.

It's exactly the opposite of what's happening in Eastern Europe. There, people are demanding free and independent trade unions as opposed to state trade unions.

Maggie Thatcher praises what is

happening in Eastern Europe and does exactly the opposite in this country.

The situation in Eastern Europe is very volatile. It could change from day to day. We are only just seeing the beginnings of change.

As socialists we shouldn't be afraid of that change, and see it as a continuation of the revolution rather than a denial of the revolution.

Of course, I suspect the dirty tricks departments of various agencies like the CIA are there on overtime. But I don't think that we should be afraid.

People poured through the Berlin Wall. If they picked a newspaper up, they saw that the British government is using troops and police against ambulance workers who are simply seeking to improve their standards of living.

It's no wonder they went pouring back through the Wall saying "We are going back and we're determined to build a better socialism."

There is a message there for us all — that if people are determined enough and committed enough and get organised, then they can move any obstacle — the Berlin Wall or Ceausescu or what not.

Paul Whetton is a member of Manton NUM, South Yorkshire

## Agencies conference 3 Feb

By Steve Battlemuch, Notts South DSS

It seems an almost weekly event that new agencies are announced to take over civil service jobs.

The government's master plan is to run virtually the whole of the civil service through private agencies. Civil service workers face massive attacks on their pay and conditions.

Yet despite all this, last December CPSA National Committee refused to call an official union conference to discuss fighting back. Instead, they deferred a decision until February's NEC. And by then it will be too late — with CPSA National Conference in May.

The NEC used the excuse in December that branches representing 25% of the membership — around 35,000 — were needed to call such a conference. But if they had the political will they could call one themselves. The NEC is ignoring the feeling amongst the

CPSA rank and file that something must be done.

Now the focus must shift towards the unofficial Branches Against Agencies conference on Saturday 3 February in Birmingham.

This conference is supported by the CPSA Broad Left and is jointly organised by Branches Against Agencies and the National Agencies Steering Committee, set up last September in Birmingham.

All CPSA branches which want to organise a fightback should register delegates and send motions (motions deadline: 15 Jan). Delegates and observers' fees are £5 each and branches can send the same quota they are entitled to National Conference.

Registration and motions to: Mark Serwotka, c/o 44 Glan Road, Gadlys, Aberdare, Mid Glamorgan CF44 8BN.

Conference  
Saturday 3 February  
11am  
Josiah Mason Lecture Hall  
Central Library  
Birmingham

## IN BRIEF

and workers will need to find another £12 a week to pay the poll tax.

A new report from Labour Research Department says that application forms for jobs still demand information that can be considered discriminatory and that should be removed, according to Equal Opportunities Commission guidelines.

A report published by the Low Pay Unit documents a relative decline in women workers' wages in the clothing manufacture industry. The Clothing Manufacturing Wages Council is offering a rise which would only bring the minimum rate to 52% of the Council of Europe's decency threshold for wages.

NUR and NUS members are currently balloting on merger proposals for a new National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport workers.

Signs are that there will be a new round of widespread wages struggles spurred by continuing attempts by the Tories to reduce inflation to 5.75% in the final quarter of the year by pegging wage rises, particularly in the public sector.

SOGAT members are to join NUJ in industrial action against Associated Newspaper's attempts to introduce individual contracts.

At Fords 32,000 manual workers have voted 4:1 for all-out strike action to start in January if Ford bosses refuse to re-open negotiations on the union's demands for a 'substantial rise', reduction in the working week, and 2.5% above inflation from November.

The NUT has called on the International Labour Organisation to hold an enquiry into the Tories' Teachers Pay and Conditions Act (1987) which allows the Education Secretary to impose pay and conditions. The government ignored demands by the ILO in 1988 to restore teachers' negotiating rights.

British Gas has offered GMB manual workers a 1 1/2 hour cut in the working week as part of a pay and conditions package including flexibility in working outside normal working hours.

Farm workers are demanding a 43% pay rise and cut to 35-hour week partly to compensate for the introduction of the poll tax. 40% of farm workers live in tied housing and have rates paid for them. According to TGWU representatives, average take home pay is £90-95 a week,



# SOCIALIST

## ORGANISER

### Stop Kinnock's plans to gut Labour conference!

# Solidarity is the way to win

**4.5 million people have signed the ambulance workers' petition. Proof of the huge reservoir of support that exists for our case.**

The task of every active trade unionist and socialist is to tap into that support and build effective solidarity action to make sure the ambulance workers win.

Right now, the dispute is in a stalemate. There are huge pressures on the Tories to settle — consistently, opinion polls show over 80% of the population back the ambulance workers. There are even signs that the knives are being sharpened for Kenneth Clarke. But there are also other pressures on Thatcher to tough it out.

A victory for the ambulance crews would give a massive boost to the demands of workers right across the public sector — inside and outside the NHS — so the Tories are determined to hold the line.

It should be very easy for our side to break out of this stalemate. We all know that the ambulance workers will not, should not and cannot take all-out strike action. They have to provide an emergency service. So it is up to other groups of workers to provide the muscle to help them win.

If we leave the ambulance workers to fight alone then their dispute will be much longer, harder and bitter than is necessary. The trade union and labour movement have been through too many avoidable defeats over the last decade to allow this to happen again. The wonderful, inspiring response so far shows that millions of workers are prepared to take action alongside ambulance workers.

**National TUC demonstration  
Support the ambulance workers!  
Saturday 13 January  
Assemble 11am  
Temple Tube  
The Embankment  
London WC1**

## Don't let us fight alone

"Other workers, because they recognise we can't take all-out action are thinking about the question of support.

"The TUC, however, has been noticeable for its great silence. But a call for a day of action is not unrealistic and should be looked at very closely.

"We have probably got



The action in London on 6 December has provided a glimpse of what is possible. Council workers, civil servants, and even steel erectors from the supposedly non-union Docklands, all took solidarity strike action. If we got a clear lead from the TUC then millions of workers would respond.

As a first step the TUC should name the day for a national day of action in support of the ambulance workers. This would be a bit more effective than the current talk of a five or fifteen minute period of silence in solidarity with the ambulance crews.

Such a day of action should be a bit more than a pleasant Sunday stroll in the park. The TUC should call action on a **weekday**. As a minimum, union branches and shop stewards committees should send delegations to solidarity rallies. But our aim should be **solidarity strike action** for either a day or half a day. The TUC should state clearly and openly that it will back any group of workers who take such action.

The Tories are unlikely to use their anti-union laws. They didn't dare use their laws against those workers who struck in support of the nurses or over GCHQ in 1988. Today the Tories are just as unlikely to use the law. Like jackals, the Tories only attack the weak, but the ambulance workers are strong.

more public support than the miners had, because no home is untouched by the NHS.

"What we don't want is for this dispute to go on for a year and then peter out in bitter defeat as happened with the miners."

A Merseyside ambulance steward

• We can beat the Tories!  
• Victory to the ambulance workers!

• TUC must call a day of action in support of the ambulance workers!

## Keep up emergency cover!

**This week's meeting of the ambulance workers' leaders will be under a lot of pressure to discuss the idea of an all-out ambulance strike.**

Many ambulance workers are now starting to see this option as the only way to break out of the current stalemate the dispute is in.

But an all-out strike is not the answer. Solidarity strike action is needed from other groups of workers. This could pressurise the Tories into backing down.

Withdrawing emergency cover will only play into the Tories' hands. Management would be waiting like

vultures for someone to die. Any deaths or mishaps will be ruthlessly exploited by the Tories in their dirty propaganda war.

It makes much more sense to keep up the policy of emergency cover, where necessary drawing in other groups of workers — like the trade unionists who work for British Telecom — to ensure that an adequate service is maintained **under trade union control**.

That way our side will keep the moral high-ground and thus make it easier to drum up the solidarity action we need.

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## Student loans: escalate the action

By Paul McGarry,  
NUS NEC (personal capacity)

**T**ory plans for student loans took a knock before Christmas, when all the major banks withdrew from the scheme.

Education Minister John McGregor is now looking to set up a government-sponsored firm to administer the system which is set to start this September.

The banks' decision is a major reverse for McGregor and a victory for students. The threat of a boycott by individual students and student unions clearly frightened off those banks who were looking to take part in the scheme. The stu-

dent market is a profitable concern for them.

What is needed now is a concerted campaign in the colleges on the basis of the policy on loans passed at Christmas NUS conference.

Student unions should organise activities, such as local demos, pickets of local Tory MPs' surgeries, rallies and occupations for the NUS Week of Action in February.

NUS NEC has been mandated to organise a national demonstration in London.

Activists should be looking to escalate the action after February, with a national wave of occupations, and aiming to build joint activities with NATFHE and other unions in dispute whilst maintaining support for the ambulance workers.

Constituency Labour Parties have until 28 February to respond to a document on "The Future of Labour Party Conference" circulated by the National Executive. Martin Thomas reports

**A**t first glance the document is low-key, tentative, and well intentioned. It even includes some good ideas.

The essential project behind all the sweet talk, however, is to abolish Labour Party conference as an effective channel for Labour activists to control the leadership in any way.

In the proposals currently being made by the NEC four points especially should be opposed:

• Postal votes for Labour Party elections and maybe for "major" policy issues.

• "Sifting" of resolutions for Annual Conference through regional conferences or Policy Commissions on which CLP delegates are not represented.

• Restructuring the NEC to add new sections elected by Labour councillors, by MPs and MEPs, and by regional conferences, and to ban MPs from standing in the CLPs section.

• Having conference only once every two years instead of every year.

Three points especially should be supported:

• Introduction of a "rolling programme" for the Labour Party (as attempted by the NEC in 1980). Major policy debates at Conference would be conducted in the form of amendments to that document.

• The right to amend or vote in parts on NEC documents and reports.

• More votes for CLPs at conference. At present the unions have 90 per cent of the voting power at conference, and the CLPs 10 per cent. The various reform proposals would change the ratio to 70:30 or 60:40.

Democracy is not just about voting: American politics proves that. The proposal to decide major Party elections and policy debates by membership plebiscites is a project to dissolve the Labour Party, as a body forming a collective opinion, into a loose assembly of individuals manipulated by the leadership.

The trade union leaders, like John Edmonds, who want to replace the trade union block vote by "one member, one vote", do not want to lose their say in the Labour Party; they want to have their say **less democratically**, in cabals behind closed doors, rather than in the more public, and thus more accountable, form of the block vote.

The "block vote" is often a bureaucratic steamroller. But the answer to that is to democratise the trade unions — a task without which the struggle for socialism is impossible anyway.

"One member, one vote" has already been introduced for Labour Party leadership elections. Even if we cannot avoid some extension of it, we should insist that the voting is done at **meetings, after debate**, rather than by post; such insistence can take much of the harm out of the procedure.

A handbook on the NEC proposals, complete with a model draft response, has been published by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and Labour Left Liaison under the title *Has Conference a Future?* It is available (price £2, cheques payable to 'CLPD'), from 10 Park Drive, London NW11 7SH. Make sure your CLP has a copy.