

MUSIC from the USSR



The music of

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Performed by

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Melodiya Records

distributed in Ireland by
Repsol Limited
4 Crampton Quay, Dublin 2

Ireland's political and cultural review

Number 15 March/April 1990

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Politics and the illusion of politics

'ANYONE who adopts a know-all attitude and argues that the collapse of authoritarian dogmatic communism is a victory for capitalism is lying through their teeth.' Thus the German novelist Günter Grass responded to right-wing triumphalism in the wake of the collapse of 'actually existing socialism' in Eastern Europe.

There was no 'victory' but a self-inflicted defeat. A great and noble idea degenerated into tyranny. Even critics of communism like George Steiner acknowledge its original good intentions: '... the source of the hideous misprision is not ignoble (as was that of Nazi racism): it lies in a terrible over-estimate of man's capacities for altruism, for purity, for intellectual-philosophic sustenance.'

Good intentions are not enough. And utopianism can blind. There are no short cuts to socialism. As a leading Soviet reformer Alexander Yakovlev has pointed out

The experience of liberation teaches the absolute necessity of sizing up, above all, the potential price of progress, not only on the historical scale but with regard to existing, living people thirsting for happiness.

Where this maxim was ignored, the most horrible things became possible: a crime today for the sake of a better future, immorality for the sake of morality. An autocratic world perception and grisly delusions for the sake of eternal truths. Blatant injustice for the sake of illusory happiness. A bloody road strewn with the roses of tragic illusions.

The 'most horrible things' did come to pass. So, is socialism dead?

What we have witnessed in Eastern Europe is the collapse of 'state socialism' — the collapse of an attempt to skip over stages of history through an economic revolution from above, directed by a bureaucratic dictatorship. It was an attempt to build socialism — but it was not socialism. Instead it was a distortion of socialism

which combined backwardness, poverty and scarcity with repression and the destruction of civil society. A 'socialism' which nurtured nationalism and thrived on isolation. A 'socialism' without morality. In short a 'socialism' which was the exact opposite of everything the Marxist tradition stands for.

Socialism is certainly dead for those who identified it with Stalinism. But there are those who instead of burying Stalinism are busy dressing the corpse in the 'united colors of Benetton'. Peddling another revolution from above, they offer determinism in the name of dialectics, *dirigisme* posing as democracy, intellectual terrorism in the pursuit of intellectual hegemony.

A sudden and dramatic change of direction is proposed for the Workers' Party with the intention of pre-empting dialogue and debate. The party membership is required, not to think for themselves, but to simply accept the 'line' from above. The one thing the Stalinist must preserve is leadership, real or imagined. The party is the embodiment of history, and must be led by its natural leaders. Status is all.

The progressive slogan of the women's liberation movement, 'The personal is political,' is now harnessed to a project which seeks not to unleash creative energies but to enslave in a cult of the present which denies the future and demonises the past. 'The "I" in politics' is quickly transformed by demagoguery (which identifies politics and history with the ego) to 'I am the party.' Everything must change so that everything remains the same...

It is nonsense to claim that the collapse of Stalinism marks the end of the socialist project. On the contrary, the collapse has opened up enormous possibilities for the Left.

- The sickly shadow of Stalinism and the Cold War is lifted.
- European unity and the internationalisation of the Left's politics becomes a reality and an objective necessity.

● The possibility exists to transcend the old divisions between socialism and social democracy and to explore a new agenda for cooperation.

● The possibility also exists, and will become more concrete, for a reciprocal exchange based on the experiences of socialists, east and west.

But there are problems. As socialists, we have been robbed of our language by yesterday's discredited regimes. Socialism, communism, revolution — all of these terms need to be injected with new meaning.

The collapse in Eastern Europe has also called into question the possibility of a credible alternative society to developed capitalism. This is the question thrown at socialists by the Right. And it is seized upon by the newly-emergent advocates of 'social democracy' in our own ranks who insist that the Workers' Party must move to the political centre.

Would such a move make sense? Do we wish to foster a consensus? If so, who will benefit from it, and at whose expense? Do we live in a society free of contradictions? We do not. And our task today more than ever is to bring into play the subjects of these contradictions. The Workers' Party is nothing if not the vehicle by which the dispossessed — the men and women of no power, property or privilege — can mobilise to fight for their interests.

Do we see the Right moving to the centre? It makes no sense to declare that the Left is dead. Unless we have reached the end of history, and arrived at a society without contradictions, without hope of progress, a present without a future. Is that what is meant? If so, it should be said openly. In the meantime, while there is a Right there will be a Left. Dialectics, remember?

This is not to dismiss social democracy out of hand. But which 'social democracy' (if such it is) is being proposed?

Classical social democracy is in crisis. It has been tried, and it has failed. It led to Thatcher and Reagan. And now even in Sweden the bubble is bursting. The more creative elements within social democracy are searching for new ways of addressing society's problems, new agendas, new ways of involving people as the subjects of history and not merely its objects. Socialists should join in that search. Socialists and social democrats have much to learn from each other. Not least because they are beginning to realise that the limitations of both traditions stem from similar questionable assumptions — about economic growth, about the relationship of state and society, about political consciousness, about political practice.

We are being urged to abandon our search before it has begun and declare ourselves a social

democratic party of the centre. What can be said of the advocates of 'social democracy' and their argument?

● Such comrades claim absolute autonomy from the actual problems and needs of the working class. They see their role as High Priests of a 'renewal' based on an abstract morality and on organisation as an end in itself.

● They reduce the crisis in socialism to a crisis of language, ideology and imagery, divorcing it from the wider processes of social change and uneven and contradictory development in all spheres of collective and personal life. Their 'solution' implicitly denies a culture of mass democratic participation and explicitly ignores the new social forces.

● They exalt discontinuity and rupture, to the point of constructing a mythology around 'New Beginnings' and decisionism.

● This reduction of history to an eternal present, in which the very historicity of our presence in the world is denied, results in a cult of the 'Here and Now'. It therefore acts as a barrier to any learning, (if it hasn't happened on television, it hasn't happened), any progress. We are robbed of the past — and therefore the ability to learn. We are denied a future towards which to strive.

● It is but a short step to accepting the prevailing conception of technological innovation and the present state of capitalist development as the destiny of the West, and of its vocation of world dominance and the manipulation of nature.

The Workers' Party is not being asked to become a party of social democracy. We are being asked to assimilate to the political and economic establishment — to become a party of the Right.

That is not our destiny. It is not why we were created. We were born in struggle, and it is through struggle that we will renew ourselves. We are a party of the people, not some people's party.

The Workers' Party is a democratic, socialist, and working class party. It must remain so — and more. For we cannot stand still. The Workers' Party must also be a feminist party. A green party. A party of the new poor, of the unemployed and low-paid. A party of the consumer as well as the producer. A champion of personal freedom. A friend and ally of the Third World. An integral part of the European Left.

The Workers' Party is alive and well, and ready and willing to play its part in socialist reformation. Our contribution will be based on the outcome of free and open debate, not on barrack-room 'social democracy'.



A mixed blessing

CHRISTIANITY, it seems, is enjoying a revival in Eastern Europe, as communism crumbles. To some people, no doubt, this is a matter for rejoicing, but not for me.

To me, Christianity is an extremely depressing religion, and the Bible, upon which this creed is based, is a very unpleasant book. From Genesis through to Revelations, it is a catalogue of doom and gloom, anger, murder, and intolerance.

From the moment that Adam and Eve are evicted from the Garden of Eden, we can clearly see that God has it in for the human race, and for women in particular. Eve is most unfairly held to be more to blame for the Fall than Adam, and this is the flimsy excuse for the appalling repression of women through the Bible. In Deuteronomy, we are told that women are to be stoned to death for adultery, for not being virgins on their wedding night, or for being victims of rape. Women, in fact, are considered to be committing a sin simply by existing at all.

Not that men have an easy time of it either. God is busy smiting them as well, visiting dire punishments on anyone who displeases him, and he is

The news from Eastern Europe is not all good, according to LOUISE O'CONNOR.

very easily displeased. 'Thou shalt have no other gods but me' he thunders, and he instructs his followers to slaughter all blasphemers — that is, anyone who believes in any other god or goddess. Massive slaughters of whole nations were performed in the name of the 'one true god'. God commanded his followers to spare neither men, women, nor even children, but to murder anyone who followed a different religious faith. And that, as far as I can see, is the only crime committed by the unfortunates who were slain in their thousands, that of worshipping other goddesses and gods.

Do things get any better in the New Testament? No, they do not. Jesus has an entirely undeserved reputation, even among non-Christians, for being a kind and loving man. On the contrary, he takes after his father. He tells his followers that anyone who doesn't

believe in him will be doomed to eternal hellfire. At the day of judgement, the sheep will be separated from the goats, and the poor old goats will burn in hell forever. So much for 'gentle Jesus'.

And there is the justification of all the persecution of 'heretics' that has gone on for the last two thousand years. Untold millions of people have been imprisoned, tortured and killed in the name of this 'god of love'. For many centuries, anyone who followed a different religion was called a 'heretic' and was fair game for the blood-thirsty Christian hordes. Christianity has been spread through the world, often with extreme brutality. The Bible has been used to justify the repression of women, of homosexuals, and of anyone who doesn't agree with the Christian view of the universe.

In Britain Christianity has slowly been losing its power to terrorise people. I am deeply grateful that I do not live in a country where Christianity is enjoying a revival, and my sympathy goes out to those who do.

'Comment' © Channel 4 tv 1990

New strategies needed

A NUMBER of fundamental changes have occurred in the evolution of capitalism which require socialists to rethink some of our traditional slogans and strategies in order to provide an effective and attractive alternative to modern capitalism.

The nature of capitalism has not altered any more than the democratic ideals of socialism require revision. However, capitalism has successfully managed to precipitate a crisis in socialism by encouraging the Left to pursue bogymen that are no longer there and by manoeuvring socialists into untenable positions where the indefensible is defended in the name of either principle, dogma or misguided loyalty. It is unfortunate that so many socialists have obliged the conservatives by employing the rhetoric of the first industrial revolution to address the issues of the late twentieth century.

Two subjects spring to mind specifically in this context. Both are complementary and both relate to the development of the industrial model of production in the so-called 'liberal democracies'. Firstly, I will examine and analyse the industrial success of capitalist industry as an undeniable phenomenon. Secondly, I will examine the underlying reasons for the erosion of working class consciousness since the last war, a development which is not unrelated to the changes taking place in industrial production.

Initially, however, some observations about the nature of capitalism. Firstly, it is essential to recognise that capitalism is primarily concerned with economics. Outside of economics, capitalists diverge into a wide expanse of ideology from liberalism to fascism. They are united only in a belief in one peculiar form of freedom i.e. the freedom to accumulate personal wealth. Secondly, it is important to accept that academic capitalism is in fact a philosophy/ideology, and not just a synonym for the self interest of

If socialism cannot provide workers with a more desirable quality of life, it becomes meaningless, argues SEAN KELLY who says new strategies are required to provide an effective and attractive alternative to modern capitalism.

the ruling class. It is only honest to acknowledge that Mrs Thatcher, an avowed free market capitalist, is now moving to break up the cosy exclusiveness of the self regulating professions with the same defiance that she demonstrated in breaking up the closed shops of the trade unions. Milton Friedman, one of the great American gurus of the New Right, rails just as hysterically against the privately owned monopolies in the USA as he does against the state owned monopolies in Europe. The final observation to be made about capitalism is that there are no examples in the world economy of pure capitalism of the sort espoused by Thatcher or Friedman because it generally frightens the life out of most capitalists. In Ireland the introduction of free market capitalism would cause apoplexy in the business sector which has survived for years on grants, subsidies and handouts. Any attempt to expose the Irish farming sector to market forces would be regarded by the IFA as naked aggression. In most cases internationally, free market capitalism means exposing the working class to the market.

No great foresight is required to forecast the downfall of Mrs Thatcher at the hands of the British establishment precisely because of her attempts to introduce genuine free market capitalism. She is, by general agreement on the Right, going 'too

far'. The British establishment wanted the state monopolies dismantled but not their own monopolies. British employers wanted monetarism when wages were spiralling but it does not suit them now when credit (and the disposable income of consumers) is restricted. The Right in Britain wanted the public service to be made accountable and efficient but is aghast precisely because the public service is accountable and efficient. In short, British capitalists do not find capitalism greatly to their liking and would much prefer if the conservatives returned to good old style Tory corruption. Nigel Lawson's resignation may in fact have been a shrewd course of action for an ambitious right wing politician.

But there are lessons here too for socialists. In the 1987 UK elections, two thirds of the semi-skilled workers, 60% of trade union members, 55% of the semi-skilled and unskilled and 48% of the unemployed voted for parties other than the Labour Party. Slightly over 50% of Conservative voters were proletarian workers. The lesson to be learnt quite clearly is that the majority of workers chose an ideological option much more rigid and orthodox than the ideological option on offer from the Labour Party, and responded positively to the uncompromising ideals of Margaret Thatcher. Labour was seen as a divided, compromising and compromised puppet of the trade unions and other interest groups.

Arising from this is the question of class segmentation and the erosion of working class consciousness. At this stage in history it is more important than ever for socialists to revert to the clear definition provided for us by Marx — 'the working class comprises all those who exchange their labour, whether clerical, manual or intellectual, in return for a wage or salary.' It is a definition which has withstood the test of time but which few parties of the

left actually adhere to. At the *Humanité* festival in Paris last year I asked a veteran member of the Communist Party of Great Britain for a definition. He proceeded to define the working class in terms of about 10% of the British electorate. This romantic 'McAlpine Fusilier' view of the working class is as dangerous to socialism as it is patronising to the working class. My conversation with this comrade was particularly amusing by virtue of repeated references by him to 'the masses'. To whom was he referring? The Tories? It will be particularly ironic if the failure of scientific socialism is ascribed by historians to a failure to understand arithmetic.

The working class in the late twentieth century is in a state of flux. There has been a dramatic displacement of production workers by machines. There has been a rapid increase in the numbers of service workers and white collar workers. The education and training of workers has improved. Workers increasingly identify themselves as consumers as well as producers of goods and services. Companies tend to concentrate only on core activities thereby creating a new class of contract workers and casual workers. Increasingly, in this new environment, different groups of workers see their interests as distinct and different. Other workers with redundant skills are antagonistic to workers with modern skills. Intense competition is limiting the ability of trade unions to negotiate higher wages with the spectre of rationalisation, bankruptcy or re-location. The working class is splintering into different segments, represented by different organs with a facade of unity. Eventually socialism must make a stand to re-unite the working class with a politically unifying agenda which demonstrates that the Left is setting the agenda rather than constantly reacting to developments. Such a political agenda will require imagination and common sense and those who propose the agenda will require the courage to withstand the wailing sirens of lost causes.

Another area worth looking at in some detail is the industrial model in Western Europe. The capitalist industrial model has proven vastly superior to its socialist counterpart in terms of production, technology, quality and consumer responsiveness. It is little consolation to live in the security of a socialist state and look across the borders at 'the poor manipulated workers' in the West who have all of the consumer toys. The political system in the Soviet Union might survive without *glasnost*, but it

cannot survive without *perestroika*.

After all, Marxism is about materialism and unlike organised religion, it promises happiness in this life. If socialism cannot provide workers with a more desirable quality of life, then it becomes meaningless. So why did socialism not bring about the superabundant economy that was promised?

'The absence of competition, motivation or initiative has created the same inertia in the industrial sector as it produced in the political arena.'

This is a particularly embarrassing question for marxists because according to the theory of marxian economics the socialist industrial model should be more efficient than capitalism. After all, in the socialist state the entire workforce is productively employed while capitalism has traditionally employed only 70-80% of the available male workforce, and due to competition engages in much duplication and waste of resources in advertising, speculation and other non-productive activities. So how come capitalism produces endlessly, innovates constantly and responds to change with alacrity while socialism is still labouring to produce a decent mass produced motor car.

The reasons for this are fairly self-evident to any visitor to Eastern European enterprises. The absence of competition, motivation or initiative has created the same inertia in the industrial sector as it produces in the political arena. Capitalism has a term for this phenomenon — it's called organisation dysfunction and results when decisions taken cannot be implemented. This level of bureaucracy has led many economic observers to speculate that there are more non-productive workers as a proportion of the workforce in the USSR than there are in the West and that estimate includes the unemployed.

The second primary reason relates to consumer responsiveness. Western industrialists are obsessed with the

consumer which is not to suggest that they do not manipulate the consumer at every turn. But socialist planners are indifferent to the consumer. This is not necessarily the fault of the planners. No branch of science is equipped to determine how many tins of baked beans will be consumed next year in the USSR. The endeavour is futile; the people will decide and industry must respond.

These issues of efficiency and flexibility go to the heart of *perestroika* and may well present the USSR with an unbearable dilemma. For the quality and availability of goods to improve the consumer must be empowered. For the consumer to be empowered he must have choice. In order to have choice there must be alternatives. Therefore there must be competitors. If there is competition there must inevitably be losers. If there are losers there must be unemployment, redeployment, restructuring or something which sounds equally ominous.

In researching this article I noticed one fundamental difference in capitalist and socialist economies. It was not that the economic techniques are any different. After all a distribution curve is a distribution curve in anybody's ideology and GNP is measured much the same in Moscow as it is in New York. The surprising distinction is that the two branches of economics are constructed on principles which are borrowed from two separate and different branches of science. In the socialist economic model the assumptions and vocabulary of sociology are liberally employed. Thus we read of resource allocation and distribution, needs analysis, alienation, unemployment, mobility, demography, and of course planning. This is the language of sociology. Capitalist economists offer a different subtext and concentrate on issues like leadership, motivation, dynamism, incentive, reward, punishment (by implication) and communication. This is the vocabulary of psychology, a branch of science encouraged enthusiastically by management scientists in the West and almost wholly ignored by socialists. In many ways psychology could be said to be the missing link in socialism. The basic premise of psychology — that everyone is different — appears to disturb some socialists but should not disturb any marxist.

The socialist countries persist in using the Fordist model of industrial production which has long been jettisoned by western industry. A huge body of research has been amassed in the West since the 1930s by a succession of social psychologists in what is now called the Human

Relations School. These include Mayo (1949), Maslow (1954), and Herzberg (1966) in particular. The origin of much of this theory lies in extensive research which was carried out in the Western Electric Company in the USA in the period 1927-32 and now commonly referred to as the Hawthorne experiments. The conclusions arrived at indicated phenomenal increases in productivity could be achieved by autonomous work groups with clearly defined objectives, minimal supervision, delegated authority and differentiated rewards. It is ironic that America was slow to implement the new production systems and they were first employed on a large scale in post-war Japan in what are now referred to as Quality Circles.

Socialism persists with the mass production techniques of the Industrial Revolution which subsumes individual effort into an anonymous mass, and has altered the model only by replacing managers by amorphous committees. The failure of much state industry can be seen closer to home in the performance of much of the Irish public sector. I am speaking here, of course, of *relative* failure as the Irish state sector performs reasonably well in relation to the pathetic state of the Irish private sector. However, if subjected to the litmus test of competition it has to be admitted that few state companies would survive in their present form. Their poor performance can be explained by:

Inappropriate Capital Structures — The debt/equity ratio in most state companies is grossly imbalanced and a debilitating proportion of income is devoted to loan repayments. The Irish state sector is owned neither by the state nor the taxpayers, but by the banks.

High Cost Production — The Public Sector is still a haven for protectionism, demarcation, over-manning, artificial overtime, and waste. The most prevailing characteristic of state industry, whether in Ireland or the GDR, is that the primary purpose of the enterprise is to serve the interests of those who work in it. This conspiracy of self interest encompasses defensive bureaucrats, incompetent management and moribund trade unions.

Political Distraction — The public service serves the goals of its political masters first and foremost. The more senior the public servant the closer he is to the relevant Minister and the more trivial his workload becomes. Most senior civil servants with budgets and staff greater than any private enterprise spend the bulk of their time preparing replies to representations and parliamentary questions on individual



cases which are of greater interest to their masters than the management and development of the vast enterprises entrusted to them. Operational decisions are decided not on the basis of commercial viability or common-sense but on the basis of what might swing a marginal constituency, or what might reward the fund raising efforts of a well connected contractor.

Scrutiny and Accountability — Risk aversion is deeply embedded in the ethos of the public service. Every public service manager who embarks on a £10 million project knows that if £10,000 is mis-spent that the Public Accounts Committee, the Controller and Auditor General, the media and a plethora of other official and unofficial scrutineers will howl in indignation. Naturally he will ensure that there are no risks and the project will be completed at £15 million because of the army of bureaucrats employed to ensure that no one manages to filch the £10,000. Everyone is happy.

Culture of Mediocrity — In the public service everyone is promoted on seniority regardless of talent, remains anonymous because only the Minister can take credit, never takes a decision because there is always some code of

practice to refer to, and is reasonably safe from anything unpleasant because at least four people are responsible for everything and therefore no one is accountable for anything. It is the complete suppression of the individual. Inevitably the best leave for the private sector where the ego and all its ingenuity is released.

It is important to recognise that few of the deficiencies which may be identified in state industry have anything to do with socialist core values. Socialism has no function in defending bureaucracy, inefficiency, or corrupt trade union practices. Socialism must also recognise one simple industrial reality — that an enterprise where income does not exceed expenditure is either bankrupt or is being carried on the backs of the working class. Profit is not a feature of capitalism — it is simply the result of a necessary mathematical calculation. Our first duty is to steer socialism away from witchcraft. Two and two is four and no amount of dialectics, no matter how elegant, will make it five. Our next duty is to recognise that wealth must be created before it can be redistributed. From here we may proceed to formulate an industrial policy.

One preliminary task which needs to be undertaken is to devise a manifesto for state industry which sets clear targets and objectives and places considerable distance between the industry and the political apparatus. There should be no guarantee of either a monopoly or subsidy. Social services required by the state should be paid for by the exchequer to the relevant state company. Accountability should be focused on results and not on process or procedure. Companies should be permitted to float a minority proportion of the shareholding to private investors and staff in order to replace debt with equity and to provide workers with a financial stake in the enterprise. Remuneration for workers should be determined by each individual state company on the basis of performance, and pay relationships in the public sector should be scrapped. Companies incapable of profitability or likely to create a burden on the working class should be disposed of promptly. Consumer agencies should be set up to oversee the activities of monopoly enterprises, and clientist interventions by public representatives should be prohibited by statute. From here we may proceed to an industrial policy which has as its objective the creation of wealth. When sufficient wealth has been created we will have an opportunity to address the infinitely more desirable problem — what to do with it.

Too early to bury socialism

You have described the changes in Eastern Europe as 'a revolutionary transformation'. Do you see this as a revolution within a revolution or as a break with the tradition of 1917, or is it simply that the post war settlement has worked itself out?

That is not an easy question. Both aspects are valid. This is, to some extent, a break with the revolutionary tradition as far as the structural set-up of the system is concerned because the Soviet revolution became a bureaucratic, party-centred political system in the 30's and the original socialist ways were not really instituted in this political system. Many negative aspects unfolded and sprang from this distorted development of socialism. So socialism remained an aspiration which was not fulfilled in the practice of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. So I think this is a break-away from an unworkable socialist model. It can also be seen as a new experiment in laying down new foundations of a workable socialism, because this model, at least in Eastern Europe, was a kind of negation of capitalistic development and in many respects it was not successful — economically it was not successful. It was not adaptable, it was not really flexible, it didn't bring real liberty, real freedom. So this is a correction process in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union in a crisis situation. I would stress this crisis situation because there is very deep crisis in the society; not only economic but social and moral. **Can the defects in the Soviet and Eastern European model be simply ascribed to Stalinism or the legacy of Stalin, or do they derive from a systemic failure of Marxism/Leninism?** I don't think they're built into Marxism/Leninism and I have to differentiate between Marxism and Leninism because Marxism was a theoretical framework, an explanation of the capitalist system. Marx didn't provide a formula for institutionalising socialism. He didn't talk about a one



PADDY GILLAN spoke to György Szoboszlai (above) a member of the Hungarian Socialist Party who visited Dublin recently.

party system, party rule, party bureaucracy or a state form of socialism. He was working on the theoretical aspects of a society which has to be more developed than the capitalist society.

Lenin was different in my view because he had the task of putting into practice these values and how to find an alternative to underdeveloped capitalism in an underdeveloped country. And Lenin, I think, knew very clearly that this was a means of modernisation of a less developed society. I would like to stress the further fact that in *State and*

Revolution Lenin didn't mention the role of the party — actually he didn't mention the word 'party'. He was talking about how to control the state, how to institute popular control and this was the Soviet form. But very shortly after the revolution it turned out that this control could not easily be institutionalised in a developing country in which a modern industry had to be created. So I think this was not the failure of the original concepts because these original concepts reflected the original problems and we face very different problems in the modern world. So we have to adapt ourselves to the needs and necessities of new problems.

But Stalinism was a failure. Stalinism as a political system, as a state party political system must be condemned as a failure; and it really failed. It was distorted and it turned out not only in Eastern Europe but also in the Soviet Union that this bureaucratic model, this very centralised model doesn't really work. **You say that it's too early to bury socialism and that socialism as a concept is not affected by what's happening in Eastern Europe. A cynic might say that concepts 'don't butter any parsnips'. Surely the big question socialists must answer is can socialism work?**

A different kind of socialism can work, I think. A human socialism can work, a practical socialism can work. Socialism as a concept is still valid. The problem is how to institute it in a modern society, in modern mass production in a modern world economy where there is a world capitalist system and this is the challenge for Eastern Europe. We have to operate within the world capitalist system and we have to adapt ourselves to it. I think the values of socialism are not confined to Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union. Socialism is the only real concept in Western Europe in different ideological streams in different parties, social democratic parties, communist

parties, socialist parties. In this respect I think socialism is much more valid nowadays than before.
You spoke also of the need to develop a democratic model of socialism. Could you very briefly outline such a model?

Yes, this is in our conception, in the conception of many socialists is a kind of third way between modern parliamentary capitalism and state socialism. And we are in a state, at least in Eastern Europe and in Hungary, we are in the state where we have the choice. It's relatively easy to democratise our system, we have to introduce democratic control over the political decision-making process; we have to democratise the state machine.

The introduction of a multi-party system is a pre-condition for democratisation, but it's not easy to democratise the distribution of wealth. It's not easy to democratise production and we have the possibility nowadays to alter the distribution of wealth and to create a new ownership system; because as I mentioned in my lecture, the ownership system didn't change too much. We have state ownership in Hungary and our immediate task will be to create a mixed economy in which social control can easily operate, can easily be created.

How would you respond to the following comment from Carmel Roulston (*Making Sense* 14): 'Many in Eastern Europe seem to prefer the risks of free market capitalism to the certainties of centrally planned socialism. Part of the exchange is also democracy and freedom which they

'A human socialism can work, a practical socialism can work ... socialism as a concept is still valid.'

also judge to be worth the risk of unemployment and inequality. Those critical of capitalism, especially those of us who have experienced the effects of unfettered free market systems, have now to face the question of whether and how it is possible to replace private ownership and control, to remove exploitation without introducing centralism and stagnation? Yes, this is the real problem: how to diminish centralism. How to introduce new kinds of controls, popular controls; not only at central level — government level, the parliamentary level — but on the local level as well and how to introduce controlling mechanisms on enterprise level, not only in the traditional trade union form on the basis of the separation of work and capital, but also enabling workers to control the forms of

ownership. In Hungary there is a pretty strong co-operative movement, agriculture is actually a co-operative agriculture and we have a good basis in creating an ownership, a mixed ownership and co-operative system in agriculture and in some parts of the economy (not in the whole economy because it cannot be done), in some parts of the economy they can create real workers' control and I think this is at least as important as the pluralisation of the political process which is depicted in Western mass media in a sensational manner. It is a real change but I think other changes are more important. We are changing the political system. It is much more open and democratic but we have to find guarantees to institute not only a pure parliamentary system but to retain those elements in the political system and the economy which were positive in our state socialist development.
To conclude, are you optimistic about the future of socialism?

I don't think there is a universal socialist model any longer, so I am talking about Eastern Europe. There will be differences among these countries, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary... it won't be an easy process. In a multi-party system anti-socialist elements operate and in Hungary there is a danger that socialism as a party movement will be pushed out of parliamentary power so we may lose the next election. But I think social influences are much more important, or at least as important as parliamentary control. On the whole I am optimistic.

c o n t r i b u t o r s to this issue

Louise O'Connor
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COLM BREATHNACH and FEARGHAL ROSS make the case for 'a socialist theory and practice that can take us beyond the failed paths of "actually existing socialism" and social democracy.'

SOCIALISM: A THIRD WAY

THIS ARTICLE IS INTENDED AS A CONTRIBUTION to the developing debate within the Workers' Party — a debate which is long overdue. We write as party activists, concerned not only with developing party ideology but also a new political practice. Theoretical discussion has been badly neglected in recent years. Hopefully, the current debate will remedy this.

The dramatic events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have put many issues back on the socialist agenda. They are mostly issues which other parties began to address a long time ago but which the WP, to its detriment, has been scarcely aware of. However, while these events raise fundamental questions, the real debate must take place within our own political reality and within our own terms of reference.

Historical communism has failed and there is no existing credible alternative to fall back on. The WP must now participate, along with others in Europe, in the creation of a new socialism. A socialist theory and practice that can take us beyond the failed paths of 'actually existing socialism' and social democracy. It is in this sense that we speak of a 'Third Way'.

The very idea of a socialist society as a valid and achievable goal is under sustained attack from a variety of sources. However, if we look at the magnitude of the problems we face, what possible alternative is there but a socialism freed of Stalinist deformations? Capitalism has survived remarkably well but its contradictions are still massive. Poverty and all that goes with it is a reality for one-third of our society and for two-thirds of the rest of humanity. The threat of nuclear and other wars, although diminished, is not gone. Democracy is being restricted instead of extended in many parts of the 'free world'. Environmental destruction is at a crisis level. Capitalism is not concerned to harness the huge resources and technology available to modern society to solve the

problems which confront us.

We clearly have a long way to go to achieve the basic requirements of dignified human existence for all. However, as socialists we also want much more than this, because people need much more. They need to make sense of their world, to leave their imprint on it, to enjoy it in all its diversity. Since the emergence of class society, the majority have been excluded from the great advances in culture and learning. Modern capitalism has continued this exclusion and has distorted the nature of culture and community.

The only socialism worthy of the name is one which seeks to enable people to realise their full potential as human beings. Our challenge is to revitalise the reshape our socialism to this end.

THE WP'S PROGRESS TO DATE HAS BEEN IMPRESSIVE in terms of the history of the Irish Left but, outside this rarified world, it can be seen to have been steady rather than spectacular. Modest electoral success has not been matched by organisational advance or expanding influence within broad sections of the population. There are still no signs of the party breaking out of the 5% ghetto.

There are many differing perceptions of exactly what the WP stands for. This had led to diverse labels being freely used by commentators. This confusion and lack of clarity, not only exists outside the party but also within. There has been no significant ideological development within the WP for the past ten years. Any development that has taken place has been forced by immediate political necessity rather than research and analysis. The party has thus tended to react rather than initiate. It has not been able to cope with new demands. Its theoretical framework has been inadequate and this inadequacy has led to an inability to deal effectively with these demands. The WP needs a direction, a strategy and a clear vision of the society which it seeks. And these needs are urgent.



The current debate should mean more than a mild identity crisis for the WP. It must mean a fundamental assessment of our own political and ideological development and of the choices which are open to us.

The fact which we must now face is that there are no simple choices anymore, no blueprints, no models. Rarely, if ever, in the real world is there a straightforward choice between neatly constructed alternatives and in this sense, perhaps, the 'Third Way' as terminology can be misleading. We do not suggest that there is a ready-made alternative, nor do we propose some halfway house between orthodox communism and social democracy. Building socialism (as a distinct political, economic and social system) within advanced capitalism requires a move beyond these two traditions and the associated simplistic dichotomy of 'reform' or 'revolution'.

WHILE THE PACE OF CHANGE IN EASTERN Europe has surprised everyone, the nature of these regimes comes as no great shock to most on the Left. Over the past twenty years or so, a critique of 'actually existing socialism' has been developed to varying degrees both by the New Left and the major communist parties outside of the Soviet bloc. The fact that most of this (along with much other debate) has passed us by is sufficient cause for us to now assimilate the lessons of Eastern Europe and analyse exactly what type of societies existed there. This is obviously also important in another respect. The public perception is that we are aligned politically and ideologically with many of these regimes and parties. For this reason, and in order to clarify our own thinking, we need more than a superficial analysis of what went wrong. One such analysis which we should avoid is one which insists that the factors of corruption, inefficiency, reactionary residues from the old society etc., all eventually combined to lead to the downfall of these regimes. While all these factors certainly had a part to play, surely the point is that the conception of socialism held by these parties was fundamentally flawed. Therefore one cannot speak of an essentially correct model which was badly managed, but of a model which was incorrect and doomed to failure.

The two main features of this model (as patented in, and exported from, Stalin's Soviet Union) were a monolithic one-party state and a command economy. The highly centralised command economy failed to deliver the goods and produced a level of environmental pollution that would put any capitalist to shame. The effect of the one-party state (if we can mechanically separate the two for a moment) was even more profound. For all the claims about a new higher form of democracy and worker participation, these societies were actively anti-democratic. The absence of pluralism, of any meaningful debate, of a civil society, denied basic civil rights and led to stagnation at all levels.

Instead of hegemonic leadership of the working-class and other forces, the party's 'leading role' meant party control of every sphere of life. The party and the state fused into one bureaucratic mass. A new bureaucratic strata came into existence whose interests were tied in with the perpetuation of the system. Over all this hovered official adherence to the pervasive world-view of Marxism-Leninism.

If it is so difficult to find justification for this model in classical marxism, as the majority of marxists now accept, where did it come from? As usual, there is no single answer but a series of inter-related factors which can explain this tragedy and failure of historical communism. We can begin with the political and strategic answers which Lenin advanced to the issues which faced the socialist movement at the start of the century. The insurrectionary model of the Russian Revolution was assumed to have near-universal validity by the member parties of the Communist International. The power and prestige of the Soviet Revolution and State were enormous at that stage. The degeneration of that revolution under Stalinism, the narrowing of Marxism into a dogmatic creed, the circumstances in which CPs came to power (with the backing of the Red Army) and the societies which they controlled, characterised in most cases by lack of democratic traditions and an underdeveloped economy, all combined to create 'actually existing socialism'.

If as we have claimed, there is no readymade alternative, what then of social democracy, the other dominant tradition in the workers' movement? As an ideology and in power, social democracy has also failed, although its failure has certainly not been as dramatic nor as brutal. To argue that it has not failed would be to judge it according to the limited horizons of modern social democracy. A movement that initially stood for the transformation of society has increasingly come to mean no more than a modernised, regulated capitalism. Recent social democratic governments in France, Spain, Australia and New Zealand (which gave us 'Rogernomics'), have presided over economic policies nearly identical to those of other developed capitalist countries. This is not to deny its progressive nature in comparison with many other forces. Several of the social democratic parties are mass parties with working-class support, whose terms in office have generally (although not always) benefited working people.

The social democratic movement has had its own crisis, which it is just beginning to come out of. The post-war social democratic model of the Welfare State, based on a consensus between capital and labour, facilitated by an expanding world economy, gradually came unstuck when that expansion ended and decline set in. Keynesianism has been upended by the new economic situation of the '70s and '80s and cannot be resuscitated. It has been replaced instead by a 'New Realism' (exemplified by the British

Labour Party under Kinnock) which is waiting to return to power after the failure of monetarism and the widespread disillusion with that philosophy. Their new agenda for change however is strictly limited.

The fundamental problem of course is that modern social democracy has abandoned the socialist project. It has decided to settle for a 'reformed' capitalism and a mixed economy. This has gone hand in hand with a formal rejection of Marxism (e.g. the German SPD at its 1959 Bad Godesberg Congress). For the roots of this failure, we must look at the early history of the socialist movement.

THE MODERN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT has its origins in the Second International, founded in Paris in 1889. The German Social Democratic Party (SPD) was by far the largest and most influential party within the International. Marxism became the dominant influence within the movement although it still competed with other trends, such as anarchism and syndicalism, particularly in France and Italy where industrial development had not reached the same level as Germany and the working-class was numerically weak. It was, therefore, in the SPD that the main debates on the strategy of social democracy took place. In comparison to modern social democracy, the SPD saw itself and was seen (at least until 1914) as revolutionary, and had as its aim the wholesale transformation of society. The problems that the early SPD faced are familiar; what balance should it strike between parliamentarianism and extra-parliamentary struggle, to what extent should it pursue partial reforms within the existing system, what attitude should it take to alliances with other classes and parties, and how would it dismantle capitalism.

In the programme it adopted at its 1891 Erfurt Congress, the SPD formally adhered itself to Marxism. The programme was drafted by Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein who were later to become the two opposing poles in the 'revisionist' controversy within the party. Throughout the 1890s, Bernstein engaged in polemics on the relevance of Marx' legacy and the strategy of the SPD. He rejected the then relevant (and quite mistaken) notions that capitalism would automatically self-destruct and that the proletariat would become increasingly impoverished. Instead Bernstein saw the emergence of a new 'Middle Class' the seemingly unlimited potential for growth of capitalism as evidence that, 'the harmonious development of capitalism could lead through interruptedly to socialism'.

Bernstein was strongly denounced by the intellectually-dominant left of the party. His views were condemned by the 1899 Congress of the SPD and later by the International. However, Bernstein saw himself (quite rightly) as bringing SPD theory into line with its practice. The SPD had quickly become engulfed by the logic of electoralism, by conservative trade union influence, by the bureaucratisation of its apparatus and by a policy of piecemeal reforms without any accompanying broader strategy of transformation. Bernstein's assertion that 'the movement means everything... what is usually called the "final aim of socialism" is nothing', was the reality of the political practice of the party. With hindsight, it is no great surprise that the SPD voted for War Credits in 1914. The subsequent break-up of the International brought that era of Social Democracy to an ignominious close.

Much of modern social democracy can be traced back to Bernstein, primarily the belief in gradualism and the cumulative effect of reforms. It is a belief that history has shown to be profoundly mistaken. We would also argue that just as modern social democracy is not a credible alternative, neither is there a 'classical' or pure pre-1914 or

pre-Keynesian social democratic tradition that can be usefully resurrected. Even those social democrats (such as Kautsky) who rejected Bernstein (and who didn't later go with the Communist International) had no particular strategy for the transformation of society. The early social democratic movement's respect for democracy is certainly in stark contrast to the attitude of later 'Marxist-Leninism', but it has little else to offer. We must look elsewhere for the strands of a new socialism.

THE PAST TWENTY—FIVE YEARS HAVE SEEN A level of debate on the Left unheard of since the early years of the socialist movement. The divisions in the post-war communist movement, particularly the rise of Euro-communism in the '70s and the emergence of the New Left after '56 and '68 have produced major intellectual contributions to new directions for socialism. We stress directions, plural rather than singular, as a wide variety of positions have been formulated with no real unity, although there is a certain amount of convergence. What the major debates have all pointed towards is a fundamental questioning of the assumptions about socialist advance and the nature of socialism itself, held by both 'Marxist-Leninism' and social democracy.

The concept of a Third Way is primarily associated with the left of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in the '70s but has also been pursued by many other marxists both within and outside of the communist movement. However, it would be wrong to see it as some sort of discovery of the '70s. Since the beginning of the century, there have been individuals groping towards this perspective but, the weight of the two traditions and of historical circumstance were against them. The major figure whose work has underlined the notion of a Third Way is Antonio Gramsci, the great Italian marxist and communist leader. While imprisoned by Mussolini in the '30s, Gramsci sought to grapple with the problem of revolution in the developed world. His writings have been quite central to debate on the Left since the '60s.

We want to examine what we believe to be the crucial areas of this debate in order to outline our own conception of a Third Way. We propose to briefly deal with the relationship between socialism and democracy, the changing nature of the working-class and its potential as an agency of transformation, the economics of socialism, an appropriate strategic model for the advance to socialism within the conditions of advanced capitalism, and finally, the implications for our political practice.

ONE OF THE GREAT IRONIES OF MODERN history must surely be the identification of capitalism and the bourgeoisie as the champions of democracy. It is ironic in that while the bourgeoisie had to struggle for a limited democracy in their fight with the feudal aristocracy, and appealed to the lower orders on this basis for their support, they later fiercely resisted the extension of that democracy. An extended democracy was forced upon them by a rising working-class. Marx and Engels' analysis of the democratic revolutions of 1848 first advanced the ideal that the struggle for democracy was an integral part of the struggle for socialism. The early socialist movement saw itself as the inheritor of 1848, and its function to extend democracy to the 'social' sphere.

The experience of 'actually existing socialism' and the orthodox Marxist-Leninist critique of bourgeois democracy have done great damage to the cause of socialism. Marxism-Leninism has caricatured the nature of bourgeois democratic system by depicting it as something imposed from above by the bourgeoisie and which is particularly suited to that class's political and economic interests. In



Marching for democracy in Moscow

place of this interpretation, we would argue that bourgeois democracy is the product of a struggle in which the bourgeoisie has had to concede ground to the working-class. The essential contradiction of bourgeois democracy, between formal equality and real inequality, is a contradiction to be exploited.

Socialists have to reclaim democracy. Not simply to put the ruling classes offside when they shout 'anti-democratic' and point at some 'socialist' regimes. Our perspective must be that neither democracy nor socialism are capable of being fully realised without the other. Democracy is a subversive idea. It must not just be a vague principle for application at some future date but an actual strategy for today, an integral part of our overall strategy for building socialism. Socialism must again be conceived as the means to human freedom, as the natural inheritor of the Enlightenment, of political liberalism, of human resources in general.

The task of developing democratic struggle is a very broad one indeed. We need a sustained critique of the limitations of formal democracy, of the increasing trends towards restricting the political arena and emptying it of any real substance. Democratic socialist struggle necessitates an extension of the sphere of politics (because as we will argue later, power should be seen as diffused

throughout civil society and not simply concentrated in the state-apparatus). Finally, we have to develop a vision of socialist democracy, of the specific forms of democracy appropriate to a socialist society, whilst avoiding utopian blueprints.

IT IS PROBABLY TO RISK UNDERSTATEMENT TO say that the concepts of class and class struggle are central to Marxism, and the working-class to its political project. A fact often remarked upon by commentators is that the first socialist revolution took place in a relatively backward country with a numerically small working-class. Much of the history of marxism since that revolution has been an attempt to come to terms with the questions which this raises, and also as to why the working-class in the advanced capitalist world has not led a socialist revolution.

Even though mass communist parties have emerged in several European countries, nowhere has the majority of the people been won over to the socialist project. Lenin put forward the concept of a 'labour aristocracy' to account for the conservative inclinations of a large section of the working-class, bought off with the plunder of imperialism. Since the '50s, claims have been made about the creation of a new middle class or the 'embourgeoisement' of sections of the working-class. In contrast, some more recent

analysis has argued for a theory of the 'proletarianisation' of this new middle class or alternately the rise of a 'new' working-class. At the root of this debate are the massive structural changes which have taken place in modern capitalism; the move of traditional heavy industry to the newly-industrialising countries, the creation of new scientific and technical strata and the rise of the non-productive service sector. The accompanying decline in socialist politics and class solidarity has led to a wide variety of views about the future of socialism. A fundamental question being, is the working-class still the natural agency for the transformation of society? Answers range from orthodox restatements of the 'vanguard role' of the industrial proletariat (mainly by the ultra-left at this stage) to the concept of a new bloc based around the 'new social movements', of which the working-class may be a part, but will not play a leading role.

The emergence of these new issues and movements has led to debate about their potential role in the transformation of society. It is claimed by the post-Marxists/neo-Gramscians that a new bloc of forces must be built up around the peace, ecology and women's movements, but that the working-class can have no privileged position in this bloc. This brand of politics is associated with the *Marxism Today* wing of the Communist Party of Great Britain. We believe a more sober assessment of the role of the working-class and of the transformative potential of these movements is needed.

The ecological crisis, the emergence of the women's movement, the struggle for peace have raised fundamental questions for marxism. They are not easily integrated into the marxist political project and have largely arisen outside of its influence. They are certainly of immense importance and value in their own right and should be supported by all socialists, but what potential do they have for mounting a challenge to capitalism? The associated question is how can they, or should they, be linked to the struggle of the working-class? It is necessary to specifically relate each of these issues to capitalism, to the ability of the capitalist system to accede to their demands. For instance, it seems clear enough that capitalism cannot deliver peace or an ecologically balanced world, certainly not on a long term basis. This does not mean that socialism automatically will, but should we not remould our socialism to ensure that it does? Capitalism has historically used existing oppressions to its own benefit, to divide the working-class and play one section off against another. This has been the case with the position of women (and of racial and other minorities). However, this is not to argue that they can be simply reduced to forms of class struggle (as neither can the questions of peace or ecology). We must engage with them not just at their intersections with class struggle, but also on a broader basis.

There is no revolutionary essence of the working-class. Marx's distinction between 'class in itself' and 'class for itself' should be remembered. Neither is the working-class one homogeneous mass. Even using a broad definition of the working-class, unity is still extremely complex, and there are other classes who cannot be included in even the broadest of definitions who must be won over. We have to keep pace with the changing composition of the working-class. The rise of the white-collar sector, the increasing casualisation and growth of part-time and low-paid employment, have been recognised but not responded to. The creation of a 'two-thirds' society is a definite strategy of the ruling classes. This political, economic and social marginalisation has serious implications. A much more rigorous analysis of the class structure of Irish society is needed.

The working-class, broadly defined, is still the natural constituency for progressive political change, by virtue of its position in society, by virtue of the fact that it has no stake in the present system. Capitalism has been on the offensive internationally, the left has been slow to react to change and to adapt its traditional methods of organisation and approach. However, the working-class must also become the representative of a broader movement for human emancipation if it is to succeed in building socialism. To use Gramsci's concept, it must be 'hegemonic', incorporate 'national-popular' demands and pursue an 'intellectual and moral reform'. This is not an easy task and one which we do not wish to oversimplify, but it is the only way.

Socialism has too often been seen as merely the outcome of 'iron laws' of history, of economic development. We have to develop a moral critique of capitalism, and a case for socialism which can incorporate new ideas of how people should live and relate to one another and their world.

THE ROLE OF THE MARKET HAS BECOME A widely debated issue within socialism. The failure of the command economies of Eastern Europe, of the Keynesian model in the West, and the rise of economic liberalism have all undoubtedly led to this debate. Before we briefly consider some of the issues involved, and at the risk of oversimplification, we want to restate some points which we believe to be fundamental to marxism; that a socialist society must be rooted in a new mode of production, that capitalism is an inherently unstable economic system (although it has shown a remarkable ability to adapt), that the market is the basis for class formation and leads to inequalities, recurring unemployment, huge concentrations of capital and enormous waste. In the search for a new economic model these facts should not be forgotten.

Much new thinking centres around concepts of 'market socialism'. In the real world, it is necessary to distinguish between intermediate and long-term programmes, between where one wants to go and how one gets there. We undoubtedly need to discuss the role of a market mechanism in the transition to socialism. A regulated market economy may be a step on the road to a socialised economy, but not an end in itself. It is no longer a question (if it ever was) of simply reeling off a list of companies to be nationalised. A new economic order will not be instituted overnight. Modern capitalism is a highly complex system with a transnational character.

We need a new debate about the nature of a socialist economy. Socialisation of the economy must still be our goal but the forms of that social ownership and control need to be thoroughly examined. Previous models of state-ownership in both the command economy and the social democratic state are clearly not what we want. We need new ideas based on democracy, participation and efficiency, whilst recognising the complexities of capitalism, of the world economy, and of the specific position of Ireland within that economy.

IF AS WE HAVE ARGUED EARLIER, THE PREVALENT dichotomy of reform or revolution is simplistic and inadequate, what do we propose to put in its place? The question of an appropriate revolutionary strategy for the advanced capitalist world is a central problem. We need a new theoretical perspective of revolutionary strategy. Gramsci's concepts of hegemony and 'war of position' provide the framework for that new perspective. First let us deal with our current conception of revolutionary change. In the Marxist-Leninist tradition "revolution" is under-

'Socialism must once more be seen as the means to human freedom, as the natural inheritor of the Enlightenment, of political liberalism, of human progress in general'

stood as the seizure of state-power and a change in class rule. Power is seen as concentrated in the state. He who rules the state rules society. The revolution is seen as an immediate and decisive moment and only after the seizure of state-power can the construction of socialism begin. In contrast we would propose a different view which provides a more accurate account, based on the complexity of modern capitalism, of the nature of power, of the state and of revolutionary transformation.

The concept of hegemony is the key idea in Gramsci's *Prison Notebook* and is the unifying core of his thought. Hegemony is a concept used to analyse how power is won and exercised in society. For Gramsci the power of a ruling class does not rest on force alone, but must be based on consent (backed up by force if necessary). The nature of power is thus seen as more than the ability to coerce, but includes the ability to gain and maintain consent: 'A social group can, indeed must already exercise leadership before winning governmental power (this is indeed one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power) it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises that power, but it must continue to lead as well.' Hegemony is thus based on consent. This consent is won by the rising class constructing a system of alliances with other classes (in which it must move beyond its own 'corporate' interests), by engaging in a process of ideological struggle (an intellectual and moral reform) and by taking up national-popular demands (i.e. popular-democratic struggles).

Gramsci thus sees the struggle for socialism as consisting of much more than taking 'state-power', as is usually understood. A rising class must first of all establish its hegemony over civil society (the chain of voluntary organisations, associations' etc... outside of the state-apparatus), before it can take and subsequently hold onto control of the state-apparatus. Gramsci's view of the state is therefore more complex than Lenin's. He distinguishes between the 'integral state' and the 'state as government'. The latter is the state-apparatus, while by 'integral state' he means 'political society plus civil society... hegemony protected by the armour of coercion'. This distinction again emphasises his view that power is not just concentrated in the state-apparatus but is diffused throughout civil society as well.

Using military metaphors Gramsci contrasts the strategy of the October Revolution, which he terms a 'war of movement' with the appropriate strategy for the developed democracies, a 'war of position'. The bourgeoisie are hegemonic in advanced capitalist societies and therefore cannot be displaced by frontal attack (war of movement). The 'war of position' is based on the recognition that 'the massive structures of modern democracies, both as state organisations and as complexes of associations in civil society, constitute for the art of politics as it were, the 'trenches' and the permanent fortifications in the war of position, they render merely 'partial' the element of movement which before used to be 'the whole' of war'. This war of position does not however rule out a war of movement at some stage, but the latter is now conceived as tactical, rather than as the essence of revolutionary strategy.

It is important to stress that within the war of position the assumption of control of the state-apparatus is still decisive, and furthermore that the hegemony of any class is based on its control over the means of production. Therefore the working-class cannot completely construct its hegemony until it has control of the state-apparatus and the means of production.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony is thus the foundation of a strategy for the advance to socialism as well as a conceptual tool for analysing society. It is a strategy of building up a bloc of forces, united behind a common ideology, under the leadership of the working-class. It is profoundly democratic as it asserts that the key problem of revolution is that of securing consent, and this is the only basis on which real power and social change are built. The revolution is a process, although not a smooth and painless process, which will include a qualitative change and the possibility of ruling class resistance. It also presumes the existence of a broadly-based and popular movement for fundamental change.

THE ABOVE OUTLINE HAS WIDE-RANGING implications for our political practice and the type of party we are building. It is clear that what we need is a mass campaigning party that is open and flexible, and committed to extending the sphere of politics. What is stopping us?

Firstly, as we have already argued, our lack of ideological development is a major factor. Another is the nature of the political culture in which we operate and a third the nature of our party.

It has long been acknowledged that Irish political culture is quite unique in Western Europe. Politics have not developed along class lines, between left and right. While the 1989 election showed signs of change it is not a foregone conclusion that it will continue. We cannot rely on 'modernisation' to lead to political realignment. It may certainly create impulses in that direction but we cannot take it for granted.

The political practice of a party which seeks to transform society must itself be transformative, we cannot replicate the practices of other parties and expect to achieve revolutionary results. A party which is genuinely revolutionary does not seek to substitute for the working-class, but to empower it. This is a lesson that has often been forgotten. The pressure of our political culture is very great. Clientilism and parliamentarianism are two traps which we must not allow ourselves to fall into.

The Workers' Party is a party which seeks to engage with reality, with the experience of the broad working-class. We have always recognised the dangers of clientilism and stressed that, 'we don't get people anything that they are not entitled to', that we are more principled than others. However people continue to see their problems as individual problems, faced by them as individuals, which can hopefully be solved by some other more influential individual, i.e. the politician. Are we in the long run working against ourselves by helping to bolster a system which mitigates against the development of class consciousness? We certainly need a point of contact but we should look long and hard at how we can undermine this individualistic



'The struggle for democracy must be integral to our strategy and our socialism'

political culture, and build in its place one based on class solidarity, mobilisation and politicisation. Ellen Hazelkorn has this to say about the effect of Irish clientilism: 'In Ireland clientilism is not merely a cultural or historic feature of rural life now appendaged onto the urban political scene. Nor has its existence and persistence been mainly the result of successful interventions by politicians. Rather, through clientilism the State has actively sought to deflect incipient conflict by channelling it instead into well established clientele networks, controlled by parties of the dominant classes. Clientilism is institutionalised within the very fabric of the State, and reinforced by a consistent effort to exclude questions that refer to class differences. In this manner protest is curtailed and the status quo enforced'. If we are to build a solid base for socialism in this country we must do more than 'work the system' (albeit more efficiently than others). We have to change the nature of politics itself.

For a party seeking to build the hegemony of the working-class, participation in parliament and local councils is essential, but must be seen as part of a wider process of struggle and transformation. Work in parliament should be an extension of broader extra-parliamentary struggles, it should complement rather than replace these struggles. The WP must be a campaigning party which is represented in parliament, not a parliamentary party which sometimes engages in campaigning activity. This is not to be disdainful of the 'bourgeois' parliament but to recognise what is necessary in building socialism — the active and conscious support of the mass of the people. It cannot be done any other way.

The role of a party is to lead, not simply to follow. We must constantly relate our demands to the actual level of working people whilst never losing sight of long-term goals, and bringing people along that road with us. A party may start out with very fine socialist principles but without a correct political practice it will descend into the mire of electoralism and parliamentarianism, and ultimately lose sight of its socialism altogether.

In a letter to Palmiro Togliatti in 1924, Gramsci complained that Bordiga (then PCI General Secretary) and other PCI leaders conceived of the party as being 'something suspended in the air, which develops in itself and for itself, and which the masses will join when the situation is propitious and the crest of the revolutionary wave is at its peak, or else when the party centre decides to initiate an offensive and stoops to the level of the masses in order to stimulate them and lead them into action.'

Organisational questions should not be seen as somehow 'neutral', as a simple matter of 'getting things done'. They

are profoundly political. Much criticism is directed at the WP both from left and right, over the use of democratic centralism as a method of party organisation. Most of this criticism has been opportunistic and nothing more than a caricature. The WP is formally more democratic than any other party, in terms of the potential ability of the membership to influence policy and direction. However in practice we have ended up with more centralism than democracy, and a low level of debate and participation?

The principle of democratic majoritarianism contained in democratic centralism, described by Lenin as 'freedom of discussion and unity of action' is certainly correct. Unity and discipline are essential to a serious socialist party. However there are several other issues we should look at when evaluating our practice of democratic centralism. It is a theory of party organisation developed in highly specific conditions, and while it was a huge advance over previous notions of spontaneity and emphasis on purely trade union struggle, does it actually fit the needs of a socialist party within modern capitalism? To what extent have we been cut off from people by the present criteria for membership and the level of work expected from members? Should we re-define the concept of party work, if as we have already argued, we must broaden the political arena — what implications does this have for the role of party members, for the party as a whole, for the party's relations with other organisations and movements? Has the form of democratic centralism in the WP been influenced by older organisational traditions in the history of the party? Can we have a real internal democracy without political education and the opening up of channels for debate? These are some of the questions to be addressed if we want a mass party, a party of struggle that is open and outward-looking and organically linked to the broad working-class.

WE PRESENT THIS OUTLINE OF A THIRD WAY AS a result of our conviction that the renewal of socialism is now more necessary than ever. There are no certainties anymore but still plenty of opportunities.

The struggle for democracy must be integral to our strategy and our socialism. The broad working-class is the primary vehicle for change but must build an alliance with other forces and see beyond its own corporate interests. New forms of social ownership have to be explored, based on the recognition that socialism has to be rooted in a new mode of production. Revolution should be seen as a process and the new society prefigured within the old. This we believe is the basis for a new democratic, transformative socialism.

Socialism is dead, according to EOGHAN HARRIS who insists that the Workers' Party should bury it, and nail its colours to the mast of social democracy.

THE NECESSITY OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

SOCIALISM DIED IN 1989. THE CAPITALIST MEDIA tried to pretend it has been killed by democracy, by which they mean capitalism. But in fact it committee suicide.

Socialism in the Warsaw Pact countries had been sick for a long time. It has lost the will to live. But in the end most communists went with credit. For the first time in history a ruling class with the military means to stay in power walked away to die. Across five socialist states, five great communist parties, all with armies and police forces available to crush dissent did not do so but stepped away from the spectre of Tiananmen Square and towards a future of victimisation. The Soviet Union is now the home of democracy. Because it nearly perished without it. The system which had survived the invasion of the infant Soviet Republic in 1920, the Nazi attack of 1939-45 and the Cold War of 1946-1989, this system which had survived at the cost of twenty million lives and beaten all foes became sick and stagnant because it could not meet the need of its own people for personal and political freedom, for that democracy which was the whole meaning of the French Revolution.

Mikhail Gorbachev lit the fire that melted the ice. He called his torches *perestroika* and *glasnost*. They still burn even though icy winds blow. Gorbachev's steely strength comes from his cold certainty that socialism is dead, struck down by two diseases: a toxic dose of economic dogma and a wasting illness caused by a lack of the fresh air and energetic exercise supplied by a pluralist system. In short, parliamentary democracy. And no matter if *perestroika* is put on the long finger or Gorbachev purged, the clock is set for modernisation and sooner rather than later social democracy will be the proper name for *perestroika* in the Soviet Union.

Socialism never had a chance. In 1920 the Soviet State was forced by civil war to take over the whole of civil society. War allowed no space for Marx's vision of social-

ism as a transition from late capitalist society to a self governing commune where civil society would carry out most functions and the 'state would wither away'. The Soviet Union was driven by Allied invasion instead to an extreme statist version of socialist economics which put a premium on state ownership at the expense of any other forms of public control, almost abolished the free market, and centralised all economic and political institutions. This pushed the people back. Civil society contracted as the state expanded. People became passive as they were cut off from control as producers, given duties as soldiers and ignored as citizens. Consumption was a critical criterion of this servitude because there was so little choice, no free market and continual shortages. Consumer choice, with all its contradictions, is one of the cornerstones of civil society.

In that period the only economic experiment that worked was Lenin's NEP. Today it would be called a blueprint for social democracy. The tragedy was not to keep it.

But hindsight is smug sight. Given the backwardness of Russian, the invasion of the infant Soviet Republic by the imperialist powers; given the need to industrialise at speed, first to fight the Allied imperialist powers and later Hitler's fascists, given the imperatives of ideology, imperialism and industrialisation it is hard to see from their viewpoint how Lenin and Stalin could have acted otherwise. Even aside from Stalin's personality, his cruel collectivisations and paranoid purges, even still there would have been suffering on a colossal scale once the Soviet Union decided to defend socialism. And what else could it do since socialism was the point of all of it. Given the Allied and the Nazi attempt to batter the shaky Soviet state back into barbarism, the only choice open to Lenin in 1920, as to Stalin from 1936 onwards, facing Hitler, was to dragoon and discipline or surrender socialism and their country to an evil enemy and sink to the level of a slave state.

What would any of us do in these circumstances? Faced

with a similar choice in Ireland, the Free State Government resorted to state terror in 1922.

TO EXPLAIN IS NOT TO EXCUSE. THE FATAL flaw was not in the execution, but in the enterprise itself. Socialism came too soon. Stalin was product of all this.

Stalin had seen two German invasions of Russia. Was it any wonder that from 1946 he strung a steel necklace of puppet socialist states all across Eastern Europe to face a Germany whose war criminals were being put on to the Atomic payroll of the Allied Powers? Should we be surprised that Stalin wanted an insurance policy against any future threat from a Germany that had twice cost the Soviet Union millions of lives, as well as the material means of creating a civilised society? Who could deny that even today there is a fear of a united Germany among social democrats and liberals? Is it in fact not true that on the German unity issue most social democrats are secret Stalinist sympathisers?

Socialism survived the war. But it had suffered severe mental and emotional damage. In 1946 it stamped out of the Soviet Union wearing the rigid mask of Stalin, speaking a zombie jargon, brutalised by war — and was given a hero's welcome in the West and imposed on Warsaw Pact countries as the model for all systems.

The Communist Parties became cages. Discipline was all, discussion was to a supplied script and party hacks were valued more than independent individuals whose clear conscience could have exposed corruption. People like John Peet.

Peet was a young Englishman who had fought alongside former I.R.A. men in the International Brigade in Spain when he was 20 years of age. In 1949, still only 34, he was head of Reuter's desk in Berlin when he went to a meeting of the German People's Council which was to set up the GDR. What he saw reminds us of the calibre of communists at the time:

The members of the People's Council who filled the hall — about 400 delegates — looked thin and over-worked; and although they had put on their best suits for the occasion, many of the suits were threadbare. For this was a meeting of the Activists of the First Hour, men and women who had tackled the task of putting the country on its feet almost before the guns fell silent, and for many of those present there had scarcely been a pause to take breath since they emerged from the concentration camps and prisons. (John Peet *The Long Engagement*).

Concentration camps and prisons. No wonder John Peet admired these activists. A year later, on June 12, 1950, he became a newspaper legend by filing a final report on his own defection to the GDR. Then Peet crossed into East Germany where he lived and worked until his death in 1988. In all that time, far from home, John Peet, unlike the millions of Germans among whom he lived, never ceased to fight for democracy and free speech, inside and outside the party. He was too courteous to speculate whether his obstinacy was due to the fact that he was English and not German. But his communist credo and prophetic insight are captured by the last entry of his diary written in 1985.

I do not think it is unfair to describe society in the GDR in some ways with a Victorian family. Father wishes only the best for his household. Many of his decisions are wise, but whether they are wise or not, his family has to conform without argument... As I write I can look out of the window of my comfort-

able flat in the centre of East Berlin at the side wall, less than a hundred yards away, of a huge building which houses the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of the GDR. All important decisions on the life of the country are taken here. I believe many of these decisions are wise. But they are arrived at without any public discussions of the pro's and con's and without any proper channel for dissent to be registered... Karl Marx said his favourite motto was 'De Omnibus Dubitandum' — doubt everything. The GDR ruling motto would appear to be just the opposite: 'Father knows best'.

And he had a final mordant question: 'In the 1930's when party members were mystified by events in the Soviet Union they were often assuaged by the glib phrase that you could not make an omelette without breaking eggs. In later years the broken eggs have become more numerous. But where is the omelette?'

John Peet's testimony reminds us — we can't be reminded too often — of the power of the person, the power of private conscience. Without this John Peet's socialism began to die. At first only its citizens noticed. Communism became a queue. By 1986 the Warsaw Pact countries' socialism was in a coma, brain dead and kept alive only by the Soviet Union's millions of troops, the most expensive life support machine on earth.

Until in 1986 Gorbachev switched it off.

And in that one dialectical gesture of genius he threw a switch that killed socialism, galvanised social democracy and gave capitalism a long-term lethal shock.

This is not whistling past the graveyard. In December 1989, at the end of the epic events that saw five socialist states collapse, the European Attitudes Survey of the *Guardian* newspaper showed that social democracy was now the most popular choice among European voters — a shift so recent that it is not yet reflected in the number of seats held in the European Parliament.

Modern history will date from Gorbachev's Revolution of 1989, even as Gorbachev looked back to Lenin's revolution of 1917, and Lenin looked back to the French Revolution. 1789 to 1989. Two hundred years that shook the world. How privileged we were to have seen the end of that great epoch. To see in 1989 the full flowering of the democratic forces that hurled feudalism from the face of the earth in 1789!

Gorbachev is great the people of the world said.

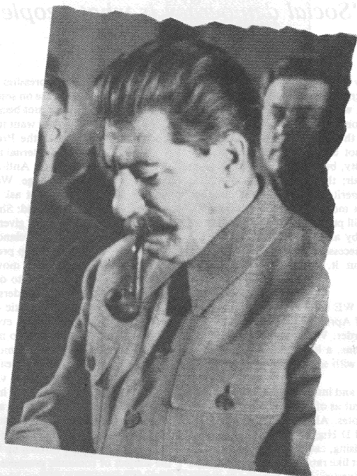
The left were the last group in Ireland to grasp the significance of Gorbachev. Some thought he would go away. Some hoped he would be put away. Still do.

No matter his work is done. Socialist economics are dead. Socialism without democracy is dead. Socialism without the person, the self is dead. Poor Clare socialism is dead. Go-be-the-wall socialism is dead. But Marxism is not dead. As long as capitalism lives Marxism will survive as its critique. Marxism is manacled to capitalism and will live as long as capitalism but as a criticism, and not as politics.

But to survive it must dump socialist economics.

LET US GO BACK A BIT TO GO FORWARD WITH Gorbachev. What is Marxism? Let us accept the classic definition that it is a rope of three strands: German philosophy, French politics and English economics.

The first two of these are in good order. From German Hegelian philosophy we get dialectics. The Workers' Party survived on its good grasp of dialectics. As Tomás Mac Giolla said in 1988, 'freedom is the recognition of the necessity to change'. Dialectics must never be dumped because they are built into the human project. So is French



Stalin: '...what else could he do?'

politics. From the French Revolution we get the central concept of democracy conceived as personal and political freedom. Democracy is demonstrably the hope of humanity and here to stay.

But the third strand of rope is rotten.

That's English economics. More noose than rope it slowly strangled the socialist states over 70 years, still chokes the Labour Parties of Britain and Ireland, and almost stifled the Euro-communist project some years back. The old rotting rope would have dragged us all back to drown — if Gorbachev had not stepped in and cut the rope with a surgeon's stroke.

Consider the dogmatic core of socialist theory: Labour is the sole source of value. The proletariat will get poorer and poorer and be driven to revolution and socialism. Even in capitalist states it will be alienated and estranged. The socialist state will abolish poverty by public ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. A centrally planned economy will deliver goods and services to the consumers more efficiently than the wasteful free market system. The crises of capitalism will be more frequent, deeper and wider and end in the terminal collapse of the capitalist system.

Every one of these dogmas is demonstrably wrong.

Labour could not be the sole source of value or empirically we would find that societies with a labour surplus would be the richest, when in fact they are the poorest. The proletariat did not get poorer and the only time it was driven to revolution was in 1989 when it pulled down a system of socialist states. And alienation is merely a patron-

ising middle class myth as work is the greatest source of satisfaction in society. The proofs poured in. Socialist ownership led straight to stagnation. Command economies could never meet consumer demand. The free market allocated goods and services better than any mechanism devised by socialism. Societies with a culture of work, like Germany and Japan, proved superior to any command systems. As for crises it became clear that once capitalism was 90% of any national economy the damage done by a crisis was confined, even internationally, as we saw in the stock exchange panics of 1989.

What's wrong with socialism? Ask the workers.

They wonder why if everybody gets the same anybody should work harder. They wonder how we will all manage without a market. They wonder above all how we plan to manage without the energy of entrepreneurs.

What's wrong with socialism? Ask them again.

They tell you that they fear socialism will take their freedom. They fear the steely state that gives them security from the cradle to the grave. They hate the notion of being watched and worried from above. They hate the stupid idea that we can manage without markets. They hate the whole stagnant prospect of constant centralisation, of markets mediated to the point of being meaningless, of closed shops for trade unions, of trammels on technology. They don't believe in the politics of begrudery. They admire people like Smurfit, Goodman, Tony O'Reilly. Only Trots think otherwise. They do not believe that full employment would eliminate the lumpen proletariat, now called an under class, and distrust that class as much as Marx. They back the

'Social democracy is what people need it to be'

British Labour Party's new welfare policy that says people must either be in work or training but not maintained as a class of mendicants — but wonder why it took so long to reach that commonsense conclusion.

People will tell you what they think: that we are not born equal, that 'equality' cannot be imposed without making life a misery for the majority, but that while life will never be equal it ought to be fair; that class and money must never stand in the way of merit; that poverty and ill-health must never cost a citizen a moment's concern because of the certainty that society will provide; that those who work hard should be rewarded by any standards you like, and that entrepreneurs are as necessary as dockers or dentists. No, let's be straight about it. Entrepreneurs are *more* necessary.

WE CAN ALL HEAR IF WE LISTEN. PROINSIAS De Rossa's Ardheis speech of April 1989 improved our hearing. But we must listen harder. We still seem to be saying 'hah?' to some key questions, a habit we picked up from hanging around too much with some stone deaf parties of the 'left' in Ireland.

Alienation, environment and international affairs are the three main left 'lines' that cut us off from people, from real life, and of course from votes. Alienation is very popular among the fans of Michael D Higgins and sees workers as alienated, blitzed by advertising, caught in a consumer cage against whose bars they beat like rats. Politically it takes the form of whinging about advertising and lotteries and anything people like doing; and pushing 'workshops' and making things with plasticine in place of proper capitalist ways of making things with computers and being paid for it. This is arrogant academic nonsense and profoundly patronising to the citizens of a modern democracy.

Environmental theory is the one that costs most votes because it ends up in such cul-de-sacs as a soft policy on crime and a hard line on spending money on 'social' schemes of doubtful value. Basically it discounts genetics, blames 'society' for every problem and plays down any personal responsibility for our actions. This is part of socialism's contempt for the person and ends up logically in the Nazi defence 'I only obeyed orders'.

Marxism is a materialist theory. Genetics has as good a claim to be a materialist theory as environment. People have more practical objections however. Why, for example would two sisters reared with the same chances end up, one in the Provos and the other one with the Workers' Party? Why do you find travellers from cramped caravans honest about money and accountants like Russell Murphy willing to embezzle their best friends? At the end of this environmental cul-de-sac we can see a typical Left crime policy 'The Criminal as Victim of Capitalism'. This can easily give us cop-out policy on crime of the 'Let's have more Community Workers and less Cops' variety, which is a policy on criminals and not on crime, and which shows profound moral ambivalence on spongers/terrorists/drug pushers/criminals. Marx and Engels had no such ambivalence. They saw criminals as potential police touts, and lumpen-proletarian Robin Hoods as robbing hoods. Crime comes in many forms and some of them are of social origin, but crimes against the person are evil and should not be condoned.

The third 'Left' dogma that bothers me is the mission to

save the world. My impression is that a good number of members share my unease on some of our supportive stances in international politics, not because we are against solidarity but because we do not want to end up supporting people who might stand up as the Provos of their society. The SWAPO revelations of internal repressions left a very nasty taste. So do aspects of Anti-Apartheid that attack all Afrikaner efforts to change. We should not accept 'Left' lines on these matters, but ask our own questions. Some questions that come to mind: Should we have a harder line against 'necklace' killings given our own problems with Provo terror in Northern Ireland? What can we do to help liberal Afrikaners to develop progressive politics given our support of any progressive moves in Unionist circles? In short can we stop jumping to our feet shouting solidarity slogans led by 'left' cheerleaders until we have worked out an independent and democratic — as distinct from socialist — position on this as well as every other question?

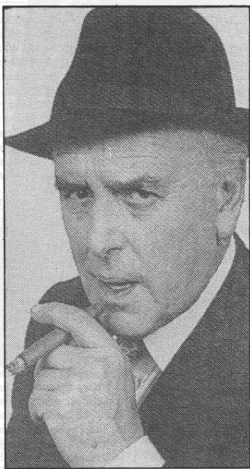
I am a Marxist. Marxism to me is, first and foremost, a moral system. When it is not moral I do not believe in it. I believe broadly in Marx's idea of historical materialism which means, simply, history viewed dialectically from a material stand point. I believe in class struggle — but that in a democracy it may not be a decisive element if social democracy is successfully pursuing a system of advance based on merit. And we must be adamant that lumpen proletarian underclasses thrown up by capitalism are not made the subject of romantic crusades as if such groups were the historic 'proletariat' of Karl Marx's vision. I do not believe the material base determines history, but neither in my view did Marx. I believe strongly in Hegelian dialectics as applied to political struggle. This is a dialectic document — that is I expect the consensus will emerge from conflict on these issues. I never believed in state ownership of industry but I do believe in forms of public ownership. I believe that nothing is determined except death and change. I do not think 'socialism' is worth the shedding of one drop of Protestant blood. I believe that the person and private conscience are the two great levers of history. So for me personal freedom is political, and politics is the pursuit of personal freedom. I am as much a Protestant as a Marxist in that regard.

WHAT WENT WRONG WITH THE SOCIALIST dream? Why did socialism in Eastern Europe not lead to a higher form of society? How did a system that set out with such a high ideal of humanity end up so inhuman? Was it the theory? Or man? The answer, as usual, is dialectical. The problem was Marx's theory of man.

Man is a creature of need in a field of scarcity. That was Marx's basic view of the historical project of humanity. Man would have to overcome 'nature' and 'capitalism' to reach the 'realm of freedom'. This theory assumed that man would act according to reason. Which may not be a correct assumption to say the least.

There are basically two views of human history. Call them the Limitless Vision and the Limited View. Where these two theories differ is in their view of the perfectibility of man. The Limitless Vision says man is infinitely perfectible and can create a paradise on earth. The Limited View says man is flawed and can create a hell on earth if not kept under control.

This simplification cuts a few corners but nevertheless



*'Entrepreneurs are as necessary as dockers or dentists.
No — they're more necessary'*

the struggle between Limitless Vision and Limited View is a constant and recognisable conflict in modern history and can be broken down into names: Panto versus Aristotle, Whig versus Tory, Robespierre versus Edmund Burke and indeed Lenin versus Stalin.

The Limitless Vision starts with Plato's *Republic* — which in passing we should point out is a place that badly needed a reform movement — and stretches through visionaries like Robespierre and Lenin to utopian communists like Castro in our own day. But there are dictators and dictators and Hitler and Stalin can't be put in the same pot. You could survive in the Soviet Union if you conformed. But a Jew dies no matter how badly he wanted to join the Nazis. Stalin, as his toughest critic Isaac Deutscher pointed out, cannot be judged a reactionary because his vision was progressive in aim although cruel in execution, whereas Hitler left nothing behind. A revolutionary like Lenin, no matter how harsh, commands respect as well as revulsion. We sense the grim grandeur of his bleak vision of mankind's march to the New Jerusalem, the City of God, to the 'realm of freedom' where man is perfect and at peace.

It's a vision to die for. People still die for it.

The Limited View has no such grandeur. It walks, indeed trudges, where others ride on a white horse. But it's a steady walk, starting with Aristotle and ending with Edmund Burke, and moving on to the future at a snail's pace. The Limited View says man is fallible and flawed. Since that is so, his political projects will be flawed too. Best to settle for something less. Like capitalism and democracy, defined as lots for some and a little for all.

It's a theory to live with, not for. Living without a vision

is like living without hope for humanity. Dead.

Which of these two views is true? Both of them. That's if you think dialectically and not dogmatically. It is perfectly plain that since the beginning of recorded history man has insisted on acting against his own best interests. It is the right most frequently exercised by the human race. Christians call it original sin. Communists call it anti-social behaviour. Call it messing if you like. But whatever we call it we can't pretend man is perfect. Otherwise we Marxists would not be having so much trouble right now, and listening to Edmund Burke saying 'I told you so'.

Edmund Burke, our greatest political genius, the man who flatly told the electors of Bristol that just because they had elected him did not mean they owned his conscience or voice, put the big question succinctly at the time of the French Revolution: 'How can man, who is not himself perfect, make a perfect revolution?'

No answer yet. Asinine answers used to be plentiful. At a Writers' Congress in Moscow in the 1950's, the French Communist writer, Malraux, listening to another interminable harangue promising universal happiness in a future workers' paradise, suddenly said 'What about a child run over by a tram car?' There was a stunned silence. But dogmatists are as resourceful as theologians and one such jumped up to give the party line to thunderous applause: 'In a perfect planned socialist transport system there will be no accidents...'

Except, we might add, accidents caused by the train of history running over the stalled socialist car.

The dialectical truth is that we don't know how perfectible man is until we are perfecting so to speak. We learn by doing. Perfectibility is not a final state but a process. What

we do know is that humanity throughout history has insisted on a Limitless Vision by night and a Limited View by day, so to speak.

Commonsense compels a dialectical synthesis of limitless and limited. Chances are that it will look something like social democracy. And that politics is about searching for paradise on earth with questions instead of stars in our eyes.

But when we get there remember only young children like dormitories, adult persons prefer single rooms or double rooms. Because adults are persons.

POLITICS ARE ABOUT THE PERSON. AND POLITICS are always personal. And when they are not they are inhuman.

Three more lessons from 1989.

Socialism said that politics was about the collective, about society, about the proletariat, about any number greater than one. And in 1989 the people of Europe, for the second time in two hundred years told us that was not so, and that politics is always about the person.

The individual person is the whole point of history. This is the message from the French and Russian revolutions. In 1789 the people of France told princes that from now on history would be about the freedom of the individual person and not just a history of nobles. Two hundred years later, in 1989, the people of Eastern Europe told the party the very same thing.

People won't tell us a third time.

The passion for personal freedom is the greatest of all political passions. It drove the French Revolution of 1789 to cut the head from kings, and it drove the Gorbachev revolution of 1989 to cut the ground from under the feet of dogmatists. The passion for democracy is the passion for the sense of personal liberty at the heart of democracy. And that personal liberty is about the sense of self.

We may not be immortal. But we feel immortal. We feel, each of us, that there will never be another like us. That is the feeling of every man and woman born on this earth, and it is a feeling so universal, so timeless and so full of truth that we must respect it.

1989. The year we were told to respect the self.

Revolutionaries who suppress self in the name of the revolution are certain to repress and resent the sign of self in others; socialists who think little of themselves are likely to think a lot less of others; socialists who give up their own right to speak in the name of history are likely to look up to others who exercise that right and who make them guilty.

POLITICS IS THE RULE OF STATES AND PEOPLES. Proinsias De Rossa in pursuit of political progress subordinated economic dogma to political need at the Ardfeis of 1989. Thirteen years before the *Irish Industrial Revolution* had done the same thing. Both departures were abused by dogmatists, and both brought enormous political benefit to the party.

Henry Patterson in his major new study *The Politics of Illusion* notes the positive aspects of the first departure: 'The IIR was the first major documentary evidence that a part of the 'republican tradition' was willing to accept popular opinion when it violated a central tenet of republican faith'.

What a pity that Ellen Hazelkorn and Paul Sweeney missed the significance of the second departure by what Patterson calls their 'critical' response to the De Rossa speech in (*Making Sense* 10). A pity that Hazelkorn and Sweeney can't see that in the same way as the IIR violated 'republican dogma to make political progress in 1976, so too does De Rossa in 1989 violate socialist dogma to the

same end.

Will this violation lead to 'opportunism'? This question is always put by people who have their mind made up that the answer is 'yes'. What they really fear is that it will lead to opportunists. Which they don't really want. Because socialist parties as well as attracting the salt of the earth, also get a small quota of losers who were so small they hoped we would never really get into power and just wanted somewhere to discuss socialism as a Wonderful Idea. Socialism is not someplace 'out there'. Socialism only exists if politics can give it life. Politics has the principal place in the process of historical change.

Marx and Engels were politicians.

MARX AND ENGELS WROTE A LOT. IT IS VERY EASY to twist what they said. Not so easy to twist what they did.

What did Marx and Engels do when faced with a practical political situation? Well the answer to that is well documented but not very well known on the left because it does not suit dogmatic socialists to have it known. The Paris Commune of 1870 was the biggest political test of the theories of Marx and Engels.

The Paris Commune sought their advice. Their answers were prompt, to the point, and political.

First, Marx advised the Commune against an up-rising on the grounds that it would be a 'desperate folly'. Second, he suggested no socialist rhetoric but urged the Commune to push a democratic line, 'Let them calmly and resolutely improve the opportunities of the Republican liberty'. Third, he hammered home the democratic point by closing his letter with the phrase 'Viva la Republique'.

But if Marx and Engels were such democrats, what are we to make of phrases like 'dictatorship of the proletariat'? Like many another phrase it is always taken out of context. Engels in his draft for the Communist Manifesto declared that communism 'will inaugurate a democratic constitution and thereby directly or indirectly the political rule of the proletariat'. The Communist Manifesto itself kept the democratic spirit of this by saying that 'the first step in the revolution' was 'to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class, to win the battle for democracy'. When Marx uses the phrase 'dictatorship of the proletariat' it seems reasonable to assume it is in that democratic context.

For Engels, who had more practical experience of politics and lived to see the rise of social democratic parties, the phrase had a particular and precise meaning. 'The democratic republic' he explained, 'is the specific form of the dictatorship of the proletariat'. (Selected correspondence p.486).

And it is Engels who spells out what he means by 'dictatorship of the proletariat': 'Do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was dictatorship of the proletariat.'

So let's look at the Paris Commune.

Surely if 'dictatorship of the proletariat' means what dogmatists and CIA men think it means, we will see Marx advocating 'socialist' measures by the Paris Commune. But Marx does not do any such thing. He stresses instead all the democratic demands with obvious approval. Here are the policies of the Commune, with his comments in quotes.

1. Universal Suffrage: 'The Commune was formed by municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage... nothing could be more foreign to the spirit of the commune than to supersede universal suffrage by hierarchic investiture.'

2. An Open Society: 'The Commune did not pretend to infallibility... the invariable attribute of Governments of the

TONY O'REILLY'S LAST GAME



Villain in 1976: 'Golden Boy' today

old stamp. It published all its doings and sayings, it initiated the public into all its shortcomings.'

3. Freedom of Religion and Separation of Church and State: 'the pay of the priest... should only depend on the spontaneous action of the parishioners' religious instincts.'

So much for 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and 'socialist demands'. Faced with a revolutionary situation the founder of communism urges democratic, that is, hegemonic, demands and not socialist slogans of state control. And why? For purely political reasons.

The Paris Commune, Marx agreed, should be a democratic republic with capitalist economic structures, ruled over by a socialist party with democratic demands.

Sounds very like social democracy. Sounds very like commonsense. Sounds like the policies pushed by Proinsias De Rossa at the Ardfeis in 1989.

Political commentators agree that, from the Ardfeis speech in April 1989 to his triumphant topping of the poll in Dublin in July of that year, Proinsias De Rossa played every card in the political pack with cool and courage, never looking back, never seeking cover.

When he headed the poll in Dublin he stood high on a heap of dead dogma. But democracy was alive and well. Dogmatists still can't seem to make the connection between dumping out old dogmas and political progress.

Commentators in the newspapers were surprised both at the content of De Rossa's speech and the lack of adverse reaction to it in the party. Apart from the cool response by Hazelkorn and Sweeney already mentioned, most members recognise the real advantages of the new realism.

Also they were well prepared for pragmatic policies.

From 1974 to 1979 the Research Section in a dozen pamphlets had carved out an original theory of Irish political economy which rejected state socialist economics, the politics of 'national' labour and the whole mess of Republican socialism that lives on the left of Labour.

These pamphlets were path-breaking for three reasons. Firstly these policies were not nationalist. From the *Great*

Oil and Gas Robbery (1974) to the *Land for the People* (1979) we attacked the national bourgeoisie, protectionism and 'Buy Irish' campaigns, thus parting company with the green 'left' and going on to build our strong European image. Second we were never 'nationalists'. State ownership was rejected in the *Public Service and the Profit Makers* (1975), and the *Public Servants for the Public Sector* (1976), in favour of the idea of independent commercial state companies like Aer Lingus and Bord na Mona. Third: politics came first and last. From the *Irish Industrial Revolution* (1976) to *Come on the Taxpayers* (1978), to *Land for the People* (1979), each and every pamphlet had a political point that took priority over socialist economic dogmas current at the time. The point of the *Irish Industrial Revolution*, the first class-based critique of Irish history since James Connolly's *Labour in Irish History*, was not so much to set out a policy of industrialisation as to make a complete critique of Irish nationalism with the object of cutting the ground from under the Provos and the parties of the national bourgeoisie who all shared the same green spectacles. The point of *Come on the Taxpayers* was not so much to set out a policy of tax reform as to build city and class consciousness among PAYE workers so as to challenge the dominant ideology that the farmers were the 'backbone of the country' — a policy which paid dividends in the tax marches of 1979. The point of *Land for the People* was not so much to set out a sensible leasing policy (not nationalisation) as to strip away the sentimental veils which allowed the rural bourgeoisie to dominate political life with reactionary values.

Thus was virgin soil upturned in the 1970's. Today these policies are conventional wisdom. But in the 1970's they were revolutionary and were bitterly opposed, inside and outside the party. But it was these policies which boosted our party into the lead in progressive politics. This is how Henry Patterson sees it:

At the same time as the IIR decisively shifted the focus of radical aspiration to the working class, it

'This simplification cuts a few corners'

challenged the fundamental assumptions about Ireland's domination by 'British Imperialism'. (*Politics of Illusion*)

By 1979 the Workers' Party was the major party of progressive trade unionists and especially white collar workers. The best and brightest joined our party. The scene was set for the big political push that followed. The General Election of 1989 was a product of that work.

So *Making Sense* (May/June 1989) makes little sense when, along with their reservation about De Rossa's speech, Paul Sweeney and Ellen Hazelkorn explain the rise of the party in the 1970s solely in terms of the fact that Labour was in coalition.

This is to downgrade the work done by the party and by the members and the Research Section of the Economic Affairs Department to carve out a leading role for our party — and does not accord with the perception of a professional historian like Henry Patterson who offers a more dialectical view: 'The dominant role which Sinn Féin, through its Research Section, played in the mobilisation of a left critique of the Coalition's response to the economic crisis, allowed it to attract substantial numbers of disillusioned Labour Party supporters.' (*Politics of Illusion*).

The fact is that the first call for a switch in socialist economic policies was made in a paper delivered by me as a member of the Research Section in July 1988 at the Workers' Party Summer School in Belfast, which was the first draft of the document you are reading now. Further, I wrote to Proinsias De Rossa in May 1989, withdrawing any sections in part two of the IIR which could be interpreted as advocating any form of state ownership as distinct from public political control. That is the correct Marxist response to changing circumstances.

The critical section of Proinsias De Rossa's speech was the distinction made between state ownership and public control. Public control, when exercised at a remove — through workers' shares, commercial public companies etc. — preserves the democratic principle and extends the power of civil society in the way Marx envisaged.

But even Marx did not approve we would have to define our politics as democratic political control over a market economy. Because that's what the people want.

By 'people' I mean no populist hold-all. What is meant is the democratic majority, 'those who work by hand and brain' and who in Gramsci's view are 'hegemonic' in society.

FREEDOM IS THE RECOGNITION OF NECESSITY, says Marx. Freedom comes from recognising social democracy is a necessity just now. Freedom comes from recognising that we must change, not just cosmetically, but as completely as the handful of men who walked away from their past and founded our party.

Proinsias De Rossa's speech of April 1989 anticipated the events of Autumn 1989. In street parlance it saved our ass. We went into a General Election with no dogmas dragging us down. And we reaped the benefits.

Social democracy proved a winner. Because, make no mistake, we fought this election on social democratic economics. Some people in our party still cling to the comforting notion that our election policies were 'socialist'. They were no such thing. We fought the election on social democratic policies. And made a massive breakthrough.

People who cannot connect the two things need a brain surgeon.

Socialism would not have won us this election. And it will certainly lose us the next election if we let it. But if we are sane people and not dogmatists we will not let it do any such thing.

Even the Communist Party of the GDR showed the door to dogmatists and invited social democracy in. That done it's ready to go into politics. Where it can do something practical for the workers. And about time too!

SOCIALISM IS A WORD THAT WILL SOON BE UNUSABLE. In Leipzig last November a New Forum speaker from the GDR told a crowd that there was little to choose between Stalin's Palace of Culture and the garish American Mariot Hotel. The crowd was sympathetic. 'There must be a third way for our socialist homeland!' The crowd laughed at him cynically, not because they were for the hotel but because he had used the word 'socialism'. As Martin Kettle of the *Guardian* reported (17 November) 'any mention of socialism, however democratic, is immediately tainted by associations'.

We do not know how much more dirt is to come. Nobody is saying that we should stop using the word 'socialist' overnight. What I am saying is that slowly and steadily the word will become as unusable as the word 'republican' became in our circles, although we tried to hang on to it for a long time. Too long in fact. Since it is going to hurt, best make it a quick divorce and get it over with.

The most dynamic parties in Europe are doing that: changing names and constitutions to take social democracy on board. The Italian Communist Party (PCI), the most creative in Europe, is dropping the word 'communist' and changing to social democracy in order to keep its commanding lead over the Socialists. The PCI keeps close links with another creative party, the SPD which is the largest in Europe, and far to the left of what we used to know as social democracy of the American-approved brand. Swedish social democracy is far to the left by our standards and commands 43% of the vote in a society which if it is not socialist in the dogmatic sense would suit any Irish worker down to the spotless ground. And some changes came before the events in Eastern Europe. The Spanish Communists subsumed themselves into a United Left coalition which promptly doubled its vote and may soon hold the balance of power. The British Labour Party is of course the real success story following a total revision of its policies by Kinnock and Gould, who met the three perfectly rational demands — to purge the Trots, to remain armed in an armed world and to stop the unions bullying the public and the Labour Party, and faced up to the crucial role of television in modern democracy by putting a professional communicator and committed social democrat, Peter Mandelson, in charge of their image. With a tough line on Trots, dole spongers and closed shops, the Labour Party looks set to seize the hegemonic position.

Those who don't change collapse. The French Communist Party (PCF) tried the Ken Livingstone line that what people wanted was 'real socialism'. That's what George Marchais offered the electorate, denouncing reformer Charles Fiterman as a 'social democratic traitor'. The PCF's share of the vote dropped from 20% (1978) to its present shaky 7%, from which it will certainly go down.

So any theological rearguard action to separate the public's perception of 'tainted' socialism from 'real' socialism will cut no ice, either in Marxist philosophy or at the polls. Explaining how we are really democratic socialists is like talking about 'real' republicans or 'real' Catholics. The political fact of life is that Fianna Fáil & Co. will fight the next election on Rumania if Spring will lend them the smears.

GORBACHEV IS A SOCIAL DEMOCRAT. Gorbachev has been pushing hard on *perestroika*. Right now his long-term aims are clear and backed by the best elements in his society. He wants a society where the state steps aside so that the public principle can step in, wants markets large and small, wants rapid technological change pushed by the trade unions, wants entrepreneurs to be given the red banner of Lenin, wants mendicants who can work to be confined to monasteries, wants a market economy mediated by an educated social democracy. In short he wants social democracy.

Gorbachev is out of step with the Irish Left. Gorbachev is trying to stimulate a market, the Irish Left wants to abolish it. Gorbachev wants to dismantle the state apparatus, Irish socialists want to extend it. Gorbachev thinks democracy more important than socialism; Irish socialists think socialism is all, and that democracy is merely a slogan of 'all peace-loving peoples'.

The Workers' Party is, thankfully, out of step with the Irish Left. Let me make a prediction. Unless we break cleanly and completely with the politics of the Irish Left as we broke with nationalism, we will remain a minority party. Our association with the 'Left' is doing us subliminal but severe damage which will soon be mortal. As a person who deals with media, my impression is that the word 'Left' is as attractive as the word 'AIDS'.

We have got to get off the treadmill of socialism versus democracy, of left' versus social democracy. We have to go back to our real communist roots, to the dialectics of democracy.

'THE FIRST STEP IN THE REVOLUTION BY THE WORKING CLASS IS TO RAISE THE PROLETARIAT TO THE POSITION OF RULING CLASS, TO WIN THE BATTLE FOR DEMOCRACY.' (*The Communist Manifesto*)

Karl Marx was a democrat. He was a democrat because he was a revolutionary. And he was a reformist because he was a democrat. All at the same time.

Modern Marxist scholarship has restored the concept of democracy to its proper place at the centre of Marxism, a concept which dominated debate in the communist and socialist parties until the Russian Revolution, and a debate which has been resumed again with fresh force thanks to the cogent and creative contribution of Antonio Gramsci who must rank with Marx and Lenin as a truly original thinker, the philosopher of revolutionary reformism in the era of modern democracy.

The notion of a revolutionary social democracy may seem a contradiction. That it should seem so is part of the dead legacy of dogmatism. But a dialectical view — and in Marxism there is no other — shows immediately that reform and revolution are not two choices but two strands of the dialectical rope of political struggle.

The phrase 'social democracy' is used by me throughout this critique in the sense that Marx and Engels, and indeed Jaurès and Gramsci, would understand it not as a state or form of government but as a political process, a dynamic of struggle, a carrying on of the communist ideal in the daily life of democracy.

What is holding up political advance by democratic and

workers' parties across Europe right now is the failure to make a synthesis of the theoretical work on democracy from Marx to Gramsci, and the lessons from the practice of progressive parties since the turn of the century.

Democracy, revolution and reform are one. The dialectics of democracy, revolution and reform make a coherent synthesis from Marx to Gramsci, a synthesis interrupted by Lenin, albeit with some misgivings, because of the special undemocratic conditions in Russia. And with disastrous results.

Karl Marx was a democrat. Every sentence he wrote on the prospects for revolution or reform is postulated on the prior existence of a democratic state, not as a static structure of course, but as a dynamic state where the workers struggle to extend democracy on a daily basis. Democracy to him was a revolutionary principle. The leading scholar of Marx's theory of revolution, Hal Draper points out that Marx's politics could be defined as '*the complete democratisation of society not merely its political reforms*'. (His italics). We saw this synthesis of reform and revolution in his Commune views.

Engels, too, was clear that democracy was the basis of socialism, was not only its foundation, but its method, the spirit that must infuse it: 'Democracy has become the proletarian principle, the principle of the masses. The masses may be more or less clear about this, the only correct meaning of democracy, but all have at least an obscure feeling that social equality of rights is implicit in democracy.' Note the 'equality of rights'. Democracy for Marx and Engels is not a personal equality but a formal state of equality of opportunity in law and in life that must take absolute precedence.

So much for democracy. What of reform and revolution?

Nothing could be more sectarian than to counterpoint reform and revolution. Capital from beginning to end never uses the word 'socialism'. The casual reader could go from cover to cover and think it is a text book on economics and social development. There is a lot about factory legislation. There is a lot that would be called reformist by a Trotskyite. That is because for Marx reformism was a revolutionary activity that had to be carried on within the perspective of revolution. And revolution was not a sudden seizure of power, but the transformation of the democratic state to such a point of democratic development that the transition to communism would be painless, so developed would be the organs of civil society, that civil society that is so important in the works of Gramsci. Because civil society lives with and within the bourgeois society in the democratic state, Gramsci rightly sees the task of a mass democratic party as being to fight a 'war of position' whose object is to hasten the revolutionary transformation to a higher state.

So the struggle is for democracy, reform and revolution in one dialectical strategy. Each of the three needs the other.

The actions of Lech Walesa show what happens when one of these strands is missing. Because he was a reformist and not a revolutionary he fought for better wages and then for capitalism. But not being a real democrat he took the factories from the workers and handed them over to capitalism instead of managing them dramatically in a way that would extend democracy.

The biggest mistake of Western communism was to counterpose reform to revolution. A moment's thought suffices to show how stupid that idea is. No progressive party can hold that support of the democratic majority without policies of reform. But no progressive party can survive without sinking into opportunism unless it has a



*'People want the sun, moon and stars.
And sooner or later that is what people
will get'*

revolutionary perspective. Once again we must stress that by revolution we do not mean a physical uprising — although these too have their place in the protection of democracy as we saw in Eastern Europe — we mean the point where the prospect of reform reaches the level where the revolutionary transformation to communism to the self-governing civil society can be carried out without bloodshed, or indeed enormous trauma. It may best be described as similar to the revolution which forced Western society to accept the equality of women, a process that was not violent but was physical, not only parliamentary but extra parliamentary, a reformist and revolutionary dialectic that is at once completed and hardly begun.

Social democracy then, must be defined by us as a continuation of the long tradition of reformist struggle by European progressive parties, and at the same time as part of the historic revolutionary struggle to move society forward towards the communist ideal of a civil society.

Social democracy in this sense is not a choice between reform or revolution, it is a choice both of reform and revolution. And it holds out no comfort for politicians around the left who think social democracy means putting on a suit and getting on 'Questions & Answers', or who see the Workers' Party as a machine for putting them in Dail Eireann. Nor can social-democratic politics be seen in exclusively parliamentary terms. One has only to think of the Peace Movement against the war in Vietnam, the Civil Rights struggle in the North, or the PAYE tax marches to see the range of political struggles open within the democratic system.

Social democracy for us subsumes the socialist project, becomes the political description we give to the Marxist synthesis of reformist and revolutionary struggle in the context of a democratic state, but a struggle never conducted in such a way as to damage the democratic principle, never in such a way as to destroy the state.

Social democracy, in this perspective, is a political process in which reform is conducted in a revolutionary spirit and revolution is conducted with a reformist restraint so as to keep the fabric of democracy intact.

The historical goal of that process is freedom. Freedom of the person in a civil society where, in the immortal words of the Communist Manifesto, 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'.

But there is, apart from revolutionary project a reformist 'right now' project. When the two can be fused we have revolutionary social democracy in action. That fused project in Ireland we call the National Question.

THE NATIONAL QUESTION IS THE CONSCIENCE of our party. It keeps us honest. Some people who hang around the Irish Left can't see this. They wish the National Question would go away and let them get on with 'socialism'. But socialism needs the unity of workers. And, given Protestant fears, that unity depends on a democratic solution.

The National Question is the Democratic Question. The Workers' Party is constituted by the Democratic Question. The Democratic Question is our dialectical destiny. We define it and are defined by it. Our party was not born in a conflict about socialism. Our party was born in a conflict about democracy. About the right of Protestants to their Northern State.

The solution to the Democratic Question, the marriage of true minds, lies like all good marriages in the careful cultivation of the sense of self of the other. We must not only tolerate, we must cultivate our two cultures. We must respect each others right to privacy. We must learn to love each other in increments.

When we defend the separate Protestant identity we show respect for all identities. When we defend Unionist rights — so difficult to defend down here — we defend all other minority rights from women to the poor in society. The Democratic Question is like a steel thread in the national coat and when we pull, out comes all that is reactionary, repressive and rotten in our society.

The Democratic Question gives us hegemony as Gramsci would see it. Hegemonic is holding the support of the great majority with a political project of concern to all so that project and party merge in the public mind. Peace is that project.

'SO COMRADES COME RALLY NOW AND THE last fight let us face...' (The Internationale)

A spectre is haunting Europe. The spectre of Social democracy, child of socialism and democracy.

Social democracy is socialism purged and purified. We cannot shirk this cleansing procedure which must be conducted in three dialectical stages: by criticising, by annulling, by transcending. We must criticise all aspects of our heritage without any cover-ups; we must annul what is wrong and we must transcend what is left and step up on dead dogmas to catch sight of the future.

The future is social democracy.

People want the sun, moon and stars.

And sooner or later that is what people will get.

CULTURAL FRONT

Towards socialist democracy

David Jacobson

NINE of the 15 pieces in the collection previously appeared as articles in *Marxism Today*. Not all of the articles justify reproduction (at least not in their entirety) as chapters in a book years after they were first written. Much of Roy Medvedev's piece, for example, could have been better summarised. Also inevitable is much repetition of factual information — descriptions of the rise and fall of the various Soviet rulers are repeated a number of times, for example.

Bloomfield's introduction summarises the emergency of dynamism under Gorbachev following the stagnation under Brezhnev. He devotes much space to an explanation of why the reform will be radical, drawing an analogy between Gorbachev's changes and those of Dubcek in the Prague Spring. Few would now deny the radical nature of the reform. Bloomfield also, however, raises the question of whether the Gorbachev revolution is the 'third way' between Stalinism and social democracy. Few, as yet, have a clear answer to this question.

Was Dubcek a socialist reformer? How similar are the Gorbachev reforms to those sought in Czechoslovakia in 1968? Why have they gone forward at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s and yet failed in 1968? This book, in a number of its chapters provides ways of approaching these questions.

Monty Johnstone, a leading member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, in his 1985 article 'The Case for Democracy', describes the continuing failure to introduce democracy into the Soviet Union. He quotes Deutscher approvingly to the effect that Stalinism's success in industrialising the country was its undoing, in that economic development and advancement in education would conflict with despotism, arbitrary mass terror and the 'primitive magic' of Stalinist ideology. However, he does not adequately show why de-Stalinisation was not comprehensive. He accurately foresaw the elevation of Gorbachev, and the introduction of reforms, but not the extent of the reform: it would be hope rather than analysis, he argues, to expect 'genuine socialist democratisation' like that undertaken in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

BOOKS

**THE SOVIET REVOLUTION:
Perestroika and the Remaking of
Socialism; Jon Bloomfield
(editor); Lawrence and Wishart;
UK£8.95**



What future?

In an excellent article first published in early 1987, 'Gorbachev and Reform of the Soviet System', Archie Brown describes the personnel and institutional changes introduced by Gorbachev. He emphasises elements of democratisation in politics, and such economic proposals as the introduction of self-management of industrial enterprises by managers elected by the workers, a notion which up to that time would have been rejected as Yugoslav revisionism. He also warns of the potential dangers of the nationalities problem. This warning, Brown emphasises in an April 1989 update, was more than justified. He is still optimistic about developments, however, seeing in Gorbachev's Soviet Union some realisation

of the need to approach these problems with responsiveness to grievances rather than outright repression (p.80). The nationalities problem has intensified even since then, of course.

Brown's update also describes the evolution of acceptance of political pluralism. It had been particularly taboo since the Prague Spring. Had the radical reforms been allowed to take their course in Czechoslovakia in 1968, they might have spread without encountering the same intensity of nationalities problems. But the leadership was at that time unable to see that this was in the Soviet Union's own long-term interests. Instead, they sentenced Czechoslovakia to 20 more years of oppressive government 'while simultaneously strengthening the hand of conservative forces within the Soviet Union itself'. In a sense, then, the Soviet invasion in 1968 merely postponed reform as the very 'political pluralism' it invaded to prevent became part of political currency. It was increasingly accepted as Gorbachev first saw a role for non-Party people in the upper echelons of government, and, ultimately, (though Brown does not say this) for other parties.

To continue the Prague Spring theme we can turn in this review to one of the last chapters of the book, that by Neal Ascherson, a reproduction of two articles he wrote, one in early 1988, and the other a year later. Ascherson argues, in the first article, that there is little Soviet awareness that *perestroika* or something very similar has been thoroughly explored and discussed in Eastern Europe for years. Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland all provide examples of attempts to reform the system by relaxing central control and introducing an element of market, which is the essence of *perestroika*. Dubcek himself seems to have been aware of this and in an interview published in *L'Unita* in the winter of 1988 declared that in his view Gorbachev would not have authorised the 1968 invasion.

Ascherson does not at this point agree with Dubcek, but a year later seems more convinced that the regimes of Eastern Europe would not be prevented from going in independent directions. His new fear in 1989, however, is that the type of dissension of which the

liberals of the Prague Spring were prime movers, is waning in Eastern Europe. The disquieting outlook now, he suggests, is of a revival and growth of *Blut-und-Boden* (blood and soil) nationalism, an example of which was the 'mindlessly right wing nationalist party', PKN, established in Poland in 1980 and later suppressed by martial law.

The Soviet Revolution is best read thematically, rather than chapter by chapter. The economy, and the market under socialism, Soviet foreign policy, women in the Soviet Union, and the Union and the nationalities problem, to name a few, are interesting themes which follow through a number of the articles. Some articles are better than others and some are more dated than

others. None provides an answer to Bloomfield's introductory question on whether the Gorbachev revolution is the 'third way'. What does emerge is that the struggle for reforms which the forces of conservatism resisted for decades, with varying degrees of success since the demise of Stalin, is now no longer resistable.

Righting a wrong

GETTING RUSSIA WRONG: The End of Kremlinology by Patrick Cockburn; Verso; UK£8.95

I HAD just taken up the position of TASS correspondent in Ireland when a prominent Soviet journalist came here for a short visit. On the eve of his departure from Dublin he suggested that we should write a book together on Ireland. Despite serious misgivings — our knowledge of the subject was poor — I was tempted to proceed with the project by the man's journalistic stature. But the fate of the book was sealed when my colleague said, 'We'd better start the book by demanding the Brits out of the North.'

Patrick Cockburn's book is a horse of a different colour. Cockburn was correspondent for the *Financial Times* in the USSR from 1984 to 1988 where he was an eye witness to *perestroika* which is in a sense the hero of the book. Cockburn took full advantage of *glasnost* which gave him free access to leading politicians, economists, political scientists and journalists to develop a thorough understanding of the revolutionary changes in Soviet society. As a result, the book is authoritative, informative, and — last but not least — entertaining.

The book is best approached by first reading some of the lighter pieces such as 'Siberian Tigers' which takes a look at lesser known aspects of Soviet life. Then switch to the analysis of Gorbachev's efforts to ride the tiger of *perestroika*. In this regard the book is a comprehensive guide to the political, economic, social and nationalistic problems confronting the Soviet people today. To Cockburn's credit, he not only raises questions but attempts to answer them objectively and with fresh thinking. I read with particular interest 'Mikhail Gorbachev and the end of Kremlinology', 'Gorbachev and the Soviet nationalities', and 'Unusual flowers' where Gorbachev's role in *perestroika* and the possibility of

his success or failure is discussed.

Cockburn is unusual among Western journalists in describing Gorbachev as the only man the Soviet people can rely on in their desire for a better life. Describing the Soviet leader as an outstanding political leader, he accurately describes Gorbachev's strong and weak points. Cockburn also gives a balanced account of Gorbachev's relations with the mass movements for radical reform. His observations on Gorbachev's relations with conservatives who give him grudging support because of the lack of an alternative are worthy of close attention.

Why has *perestroika* led to a worsening of economic and social problems? Is it to blame for the tragic events in Nagorno Karabakh, Georgia, the upsurge of nationalistic feelings in the Baltic republics? Why is there such a contrast between the failure of internal reform and the major successes in the

international arena. Cockburn doesn't provide the answers but points to where they may be found.

The new political thinking means the rejection of the use of force — 'persuasion instead of coercion', as Cockburn puts it. This has given people more freedom in pursuing their personal and group interests which don't always coincide with the interests of society as a whole. And the absence of a long-term strategy on the part of the Soviet leadership adds to the difficulties. But I found it difficult to disagree with Cockburn's contention that this is the only way that a new democratic socialism can be developed in the USSR.

The book's one weakness is that so much has happened since its publication. However, having read it, few people will get Russia wrong anymore.

Sergei Olenik

next issue
the debate continues

a crisis in
socialism?
by
Paul Sweeney



The Red Dancer (detail) Kees van Dongen

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Organisation: Workers' Party
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