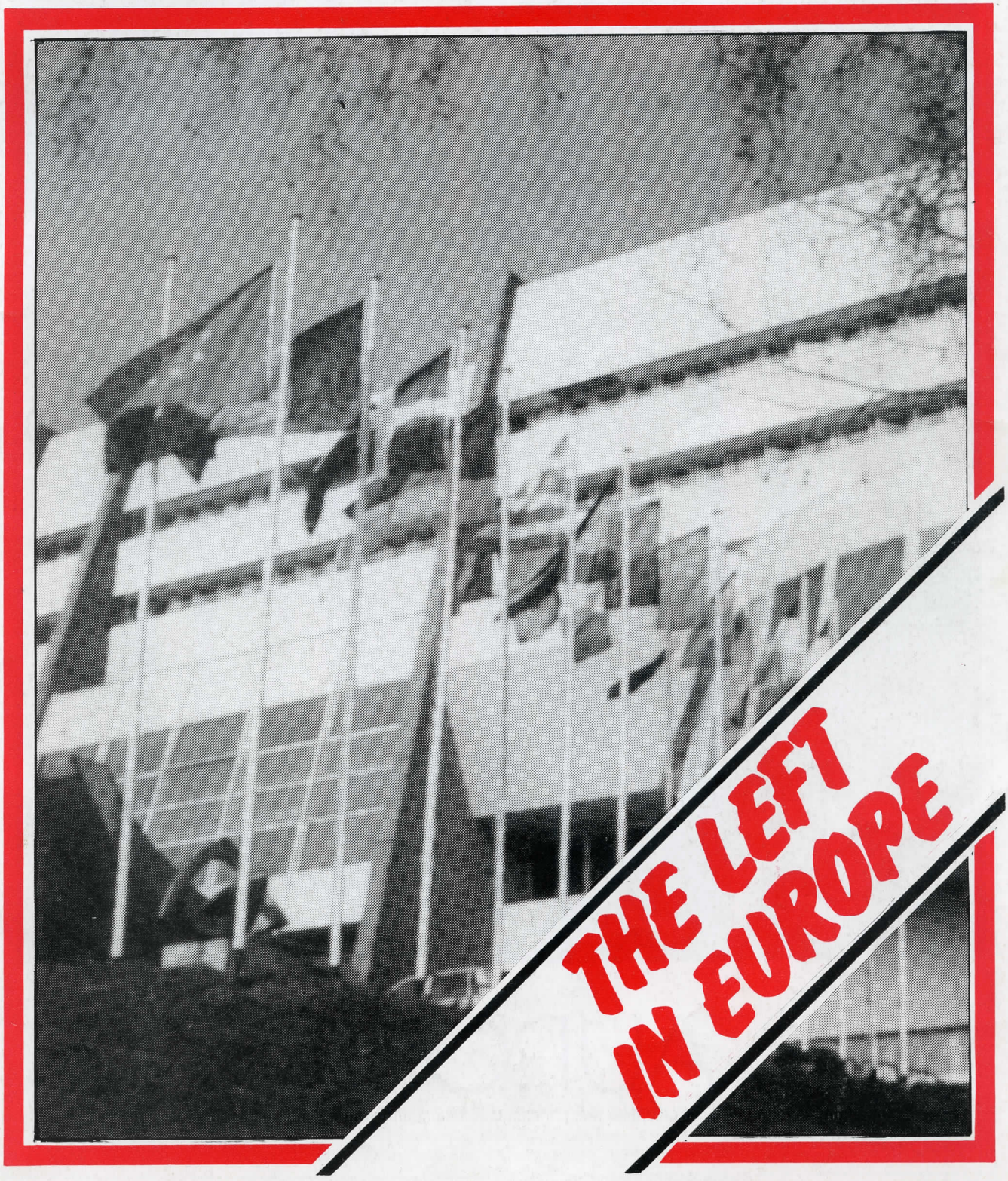
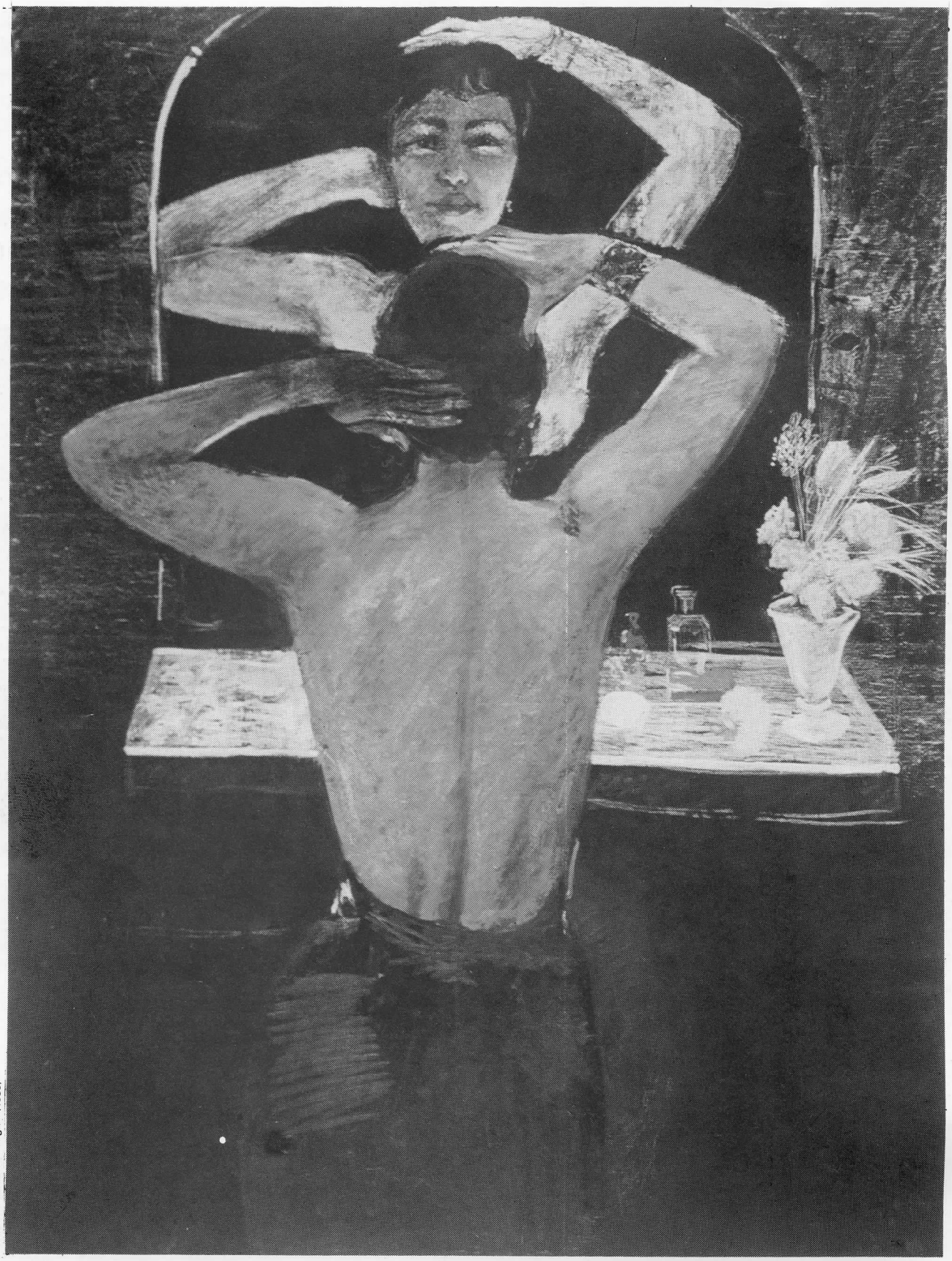
making SENSE

ISSN 0791-0770
No. 14 January/February 1990
Price 90 pence

Communism in crisis
Britain after Thatcher
Book reviews



THE LEFT IN EUROPE



Alexander Deineka: 'Night' (1935)

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Distributed in Ireland by Repsol Ltd, 4 Crampton Quay, Dublin 2

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SENSE

Ireland's political and cultural review

Number 14 January/February 1990

Published and printed by Repsol Ltd.
30 Gardiner Place, Dublin 1. Telephone 01-741045
Editor Paddy Gillan

SENSE

An end to winter

1989 WAS A YEAR of joy and tragedy for socialists. The joy lay in the ending of the harsh winter of Stalinism; the tragedy was that it lasted so long.

The Stalinist model of socialism was brought to Eastern Europe by the Red Army liberating it from the Nazis. Stalinism in turn was rooted in 'war communism' which was born of the Civil War in Russia and the beleagured Bolsheviks' attempts to make a political revolution while simultaneously undertaking an industrial revolution. 'War communism' gave way to Lenin's New Economic Policy in the Twenties but was abandoned under Stalin who created his own model of socialism, using Lenin's heritage but distorting it.

'It often happens in history, Dmitry Volkogonov, a recent biographer of Stalin, wrote, 'that the triumph of one man becomes the tragedy of a whole nation.' The tragedy was compounded, not only in the Soviet Union but also throughout Eastern Europe, by the failure of the socialist countries to reform following the death of Stalin.

Stalinism thus lived on long after his death. This warped version of communism — a mixture of vulgar marxism and straightforward bullying — was light years from the self-governing socialism and ideas of social emancipation which Marx, Engels and Lenin had worked for. But it survived Nikita Krushchev's mild attempts at reform and later helped shape the years of stagnation under Leonid Brezhnev.

The Stalinist model could not command the respect or support of those it claimed to serve. Democracy went by the board, political life was largely a sham, while the command economy failed to deliver the goods. As for dissent, Stalin's example (as described by his biographer) was followed to the letter: 'Stalin was not merely ruthless to his political opponents. He believed that any point of view other then his own was opportunistic. Anyone not with him was regarded as an enemy... the idea of duty, which he understood as unqualified obedience, prevailed over the idea of human rights.'

The bright shining vision of socialism blinded many socialists to the defects of Stalinism. Many of those who were not so blinded were intimidated into silence and collusion. Others simply sank into either cynicism or despair, and were lost to socialism. And those who found that they could chose neither silence nor cynicism risked liberty and even life itself.

Yuri Andropov was the first Soviet leader to fully grasp the true nature of the Stalinist legacy. But it was left to Mikhail Gorbachev to confront the crisis. In launching his programme of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, Gorbachev recognised that economic reconstruction on its own would not remedy the ills of the Soviet Union. He saw the need for both a truly democratic society and a law-based state. Despite obstruction — sometimes at the highest level — great advances have been made on the democratic front. And while this progress has not as yet been matched in the economy, the process of socialist renovation has won almost universal respect and admiration — albeit for differing, sometimes contradictory, reasons.

The above 'almost' is particularly appropriate to Eastern Europe where old guard leaders paid lip-service to *glasnost* and *perestroika* but continued to rule in the old way. The people said 'No', the Soviet Union made it clear it wouldn't intervene, and one by one the regimes crumbled. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe must be recognised for what it is. As the South African communist Joe Slovo has pointed out: 'We have to face up to our failure... these were popular revolts against unpopular regimes. It's no good complaining this was some kind of capitalist conspiracy. We did it all on our own.'

So where does socialism go from here? The words of Antonio Gramsci are worth heeding.

> What is needed for the revolution are men of sober mind, men who don't cause an absence of bread in the bakeries, who make trains run, who provide the factories with raw materials and know how to turn the produce of the country into industrial produce, who ensure the safety and freedom of the people against the attacks of criminals, who enable the network of collective services to function and who do not reduce the people to despair and to a horrible carnage.

In other words, no messers or meglomaniacs but sober, sceptical, socialists. Sceptical? Yes; socialists must never be blinded to their common humanity. No vision, however bright, can justify Tiananmen Square or Timisoara.

Stalinism is dead. Long live the idea of socialism and the practice of democracy!

Communism in crisis

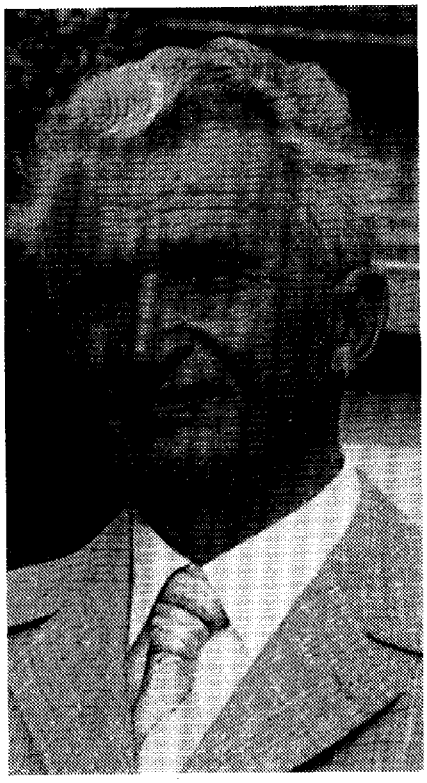
THE PACE of change in the countries of Eastern Europe can prove inhibiting or even unnerving for those who make a profession of studying or commenting on them. Certain events in themselves have been unexpected, unpredicted and the rate at which such events have occurred has astonished all observers. Few, for example, would have imagined that the Romanian dictatorship would have crumbled and fallen within a week.

All of this makes the task of judging what is likely to happen next in what was, or what remains of, the communist world seem beyond the capabilities of mere mortals. Is this process of rejecting one-party rule by communists to be confined to Europe as some believe? It seems most unlikely that Cuba can postpone reform indefinitely though the role of the US in Central America does provide some justification for the party there to stick with the status quo. Vietnam has already introduced a plan for economic reconstruction which seems likely to have political consequences, and China's elderly leaders cannot contain forever the Democracy Movement, in spite of Tiananmen Square.

Communists, socialists and marxists in the West faced with events already happening and those in prospect have begun the enormous task of assessing their implications both for the countries concerned and for marxism and socialism in general. The question which must be put, even amid the relief and rejoicing is that of defeat. Are we witnessing a defeat for communism, and for marxism and socialism in general? It must be accepted that this has been a serious defeat — albeit a self-inflicted one — for all three. Certainly the Italian Communist Party has given its verdict by its decision to abandon the designation 'communist'. Coming as it does from a party which remained 'communist' even when on the point of being excommunicated from the

'The Soviet's clear signalling to the old guard in Eastern Europe that they could no longer rely on Soviet military help to crush opposition left them with few resources to restore the old order.' CARMEL ROULSTON considers the events which have rocked the socialist world.

international communist movement by Chernenko for its criticisms of Soviet domestic and foreign policies, this rejection carries a lot of weight. For



The evil of banality

the Italians, at the very least, the split in the international workers' movement which separated 'revolutionary' from 'reformist', communism from social-democracy and which was one of Lenin's principal goals in setting up the Third (Communist) International, is at an end. Historical communism, in other words, has no future.

It is perhaps of greater importance than ever to study and understand the histories of these rejected regimes, their political structures and economic policies. Such study would not have the objective of saving face by re-definition, by discovering that at some point they deviated from the path of true communism, which could remain our goal for the distant future. A number of questions seem of central importance. One is that of immobilism, the inability of the ruling parties to take action to resolve economic and social crises which had been identified, in some cases as long ago as twenty years. The USSR may seem an exception here, with Gorbachev taking bold initiatives to resolve his country's economic stagnation. It should be remembered, however, that the problems which he is attempting to deal with were discussed in economic journals, at conferences and even in the speeches of Brezhnev in the 1970's. Gorbachev's own distinctive contribution is not that he has been trying to find a solution to the Soviet Union's economic difficulties, for any leader of the Soviet Party including Ligachev would have no choice but to do that, but that he has argued that economic improvements are inextricably linked to profound political and social changes. Nevertheless, the results of the programme of perestroika appear slight so far while time appears to be running out faster than before.

The immobilism experienced by these ruling communist parties was a result of the unwritten social contract with their citizens arrived at in the 1960's

and 70's. Having identified, openly or not, the impossibility of continuing indefinitely with repression on the Stalin model, the party leaderships sought to achieve domestic political stability through a combination of winning support — or at least tolerance — by offering economic prosperity while continuing to repress serious critics of the system. Economic security plus gradually rising standards of living were the incentive, while repression could take the form of economic punishment, with dissidents deprived of high-status jobs or a place in the education system. A number of important interest groups were directly or indirectly represented in the top policy-making bodies and had a veto on policy changes which might damage their interests. The socialist plan was expected to achieve economic efficiency plus economic growth while maintaining full employment and avoiding inflation. For the USSR, the plan also had to take into account the military spending which resulted from the country's super-power status, the costs of which to its citizens are still extremely difficult to calculate. The equations proved impossible to solve and in one country after another falling growth rates and shortages combined with rising expectations to create popular discontent which forced the parties to try more reform or more repression, or both. The populations in the countries of Eastern Europe were unwilling to make sacrifices for unaccountable regimes. Even in Romania, which is in many ways quite different from other East European states, economic hardship was a major cause of the popular rebellion. In the USSR, the party leadership is still hoping to find a balance between making the institutions of the state more accountable to the citizens while maintaining the one-party system, in the face of both working-class fury at the continued decline in wages and conditions and the nationalist pressure for more resources to go to certain republics and regions.

'Critics of capitalism 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'

Arising from this are the related questions of democracy and centralism, the market and the plan. Many in Eastern Europe at present appear 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 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. Pat Feeley's article (*Making Sense* No.13) goes to the heart of this matter, pointing to changes in capitalism which appear to render concepts such as unemployment and exploitation irrelevant. It is not at all clear, however, how well-established these trends are. Traditional industrial capitalism appears to be alive and well, ready to take advantage of the relatively highly-skilled and low-paid workforce in Eastern Europe, perhaps creating unemployment and stagnation elsewhere in the process.

In spite of actual or potential problems in the economy or elsewhere, the changes in Eastern Europe seem now to be irreversible. It is important to remember that an important factor in the success of the popular movements there has been the transformation of the USSR's foreign and defence policies under Gorbachev. Without wishing to detract from the courage and patience of the East European reformers, it must be stressed that the Soviet party's clear and repeated signalling to the old guard in Eastern Europe that they could no longer rely on Soviet military help to crush opposition left them with few resources with which to restore the old order. If Eastern Europe owes its new order in part to Gorbachev's reforms, Western Europe owes a debt of gratitude for the opening of new possibilities in the process of arms control. It would seem to be essential for socialists from all parts of Europe to take the opportunity to work out new ways of approaching the problems of international conflict and defence and to develop realistic policies on defence which will not be naive or restricted by the sloganising generated by the existence of the 'blocs'. We have to face up to the possible negative consequences of the transformation of the NATO/Warsaw Pact opposition, such as the increased incentive for states from both alliances to offload their sohisticated weapons on to third world countries. In a new situation, what will become of cherished ideals such as Irish neutrality? We need to think about such issues now, before options are reduced by a new international power balance. Reduced militarism and aggression in the West may help to encourage support for reform in the USSR, allowing the further changes which are inevitable there to take place at least relatively peacefully.

Nationalist Azeris demonstrate in Baku, Azerbaijan

RICHARD DUNPHY looks at the background to the demise of the Communist and Allies Group in the European Parliament, and details the issues which divide the two new groups which have emerged.

DIVIDED WE STAND

THE AFTERMATH OF LAST YEAR'S ELECTIONS TO the European Parliament (EP) saw the demise of the old Communists and Allies Group at Strasbourg. The leading communist parties of the European Community have now realigned in two new EP political groupings: Left Unity, which comprises the communist parties of France (PCF), Portugal (PCP), Greece (KKE) and the Workers' Party of Ireland (WP); and the Group for a United European Left, which comprises the communist parties of Italy (PCI), Spain (PCE), the Danish Socialist People's Party (SF) and the Greek Left — formerly the old Greek Communist Party-Interior — (KKE-E or EAR).

Although the formal split in the old Communists and Allies Group may have taken some observers by surprise, it was, in fact, merely the logical outcome of a process which has seen the major west European communist parties evolve diametrically opposing positions on the principal issues and problems confronting the European working class movement on the eve of the 1990s. The growing divergence between Europe's communists over the past two decades — masked, briefly, during the mid-1970s by the now distant phenomenon of Eurocommunism — finds its most dramatic expression in the conflict between the Italian and French communist parties — now separated by a yawning gulf on just about every important political, ideological and strategic question. The smaller communist and workers' parties, motivated by their own specific national concerns and their own politico-cultural traditions, have tended to align themselves with one or other of the two 'bigs' of the west European communist movement — PCI and PCF — without necessarily subscribing in full to the strategic vision elaborated by their 'bloc leader'. Thus, for example, the Danish Socialist People's Party — a non-dogmatic marxist party which originally broke away from the Danish Communist Party over the latter's hard-line support for the USSR — has aligned itself in the new parliament with the standard-bearer of 'new thinking', the PCI, whilst it is far from sharing the PCI's enthusiasm for European integration. And the Workers' Party, whilst contesting the recent EP elections on a platform which echoed the PCI's concern for a stronger European Parliament and implicitly accepted the inevitability of the integration process, has aligned itself with the PCF, PCP and KKE.

These reflections lead us to suggest that the formation of two communist groupings at Strasbourg does not necessarily mean that either will now achieve that ideological and political unity which eluded the old Communists and Allies Group. On the contrary, the old debates on fundamentals which reverberated in the past may well continue within *both* of the new formations. Whether either or both will now escape the sclerosis to which the old Communist Group was reduced, and succeed in constructing a healthy and productive internal dialectic, remains to be seen.

The divergences between the parties which comprised the old Communists and Allies Group were so fundamental and far-reaching as to rob the group of any real potential as an institutional actor on the European political scene. In fact, unlike most other groups in the EP, the Communists and Allies were forced to abandon the principle of majority decisions, leaving each component part of the Group free to pursue its own political line on each and every major issue. The lack of political coherence and unity was complicated by two further factors. First, the presence within the group of political forces, such as the Danish SF or the Greek KKE-E, which had formed as a result of splits within 'fraternal' communist parties; the broadening of the group to include such 'heretics' violated an old communist dogma rooted in a certain conception of discipline and suggested that the group would be more of a flag of convenience than a new forum within the ambience of the 'international communist movement'. The SF, for

Chamber of the European Parliament, Strasbourg

example, made it clear that its entrance into the Group was conditional upon its being spared any attempt to impose a 'communist line'.

The second factor was the presence within the group of the 'Allies' — largely Italian 'left independents'. There were often prestigious individuals, such as Altiero Spinelli, whose names lent weight to the group (and to the PCI in particular), but who insisted upon the freedom to pursue a role within the EP which went far beyond what the group as a whole could endorse. After Spinelli's election as a left independent on the electoral lists of the PCI in 1979, the PCF members of the Communists and Allies Group found themselves constantly having to disassociate themselves from his outspoken initiatives in favour of European unity. Spinelli himself spoke openly about the PCF as a political dinosaur whose democratic credentials were not to be trusted. His friend and fellow European federalist, Luciano Bolis, told the present writer recently that Spinelli had so little in common with the PCF members that he stopped attending meetings of the Communists and Allies Group (of which he was vice-president!), preferring the (quite separate) meetings of the Italian Communist MEPs.

The former secretary-general of the Communists and Allies Group, Gerard Laprat, may try to make a virtue of necessity by portraying the Group's total lack of politicl unity as a sign of 'the acceptance of diversity' (Laprat, 1985), but it is now quite clear that the Group had ceased to function as such long before its final demise.

In truth, the Communists and Allies Group broke up because it was no longer even a flag of convenience. To the Italian Communists, in particular, it had become a hindrance to that party's search for the construction of a new European left identity, and a source of electoral and political embarrassment. In short, an ideological white elephant, the sole *raison d'etre* of which could be traced to a shared (but, for the PCI, superceded) third internationalist tradition — a tradition which is now in profound crisis everywhere. In their enthusiasm to escape from the negative legacy of that tradition the leaders of the PCI are surpassed only by the leaders of the newly-constituted Hungarian Socialist Party.

Thus, it was the Italians who really initiated the 'split' and the formation of a new Group for a United European Left. As PCI leadership member Giorgio Napolitano stated: 'concrete choices, such as that of which group to belong to at the Strasbourg Parliament, leave no room for doubts as to the nature of the PCI as a party which moves on the same terrain and confronts the same problems as the major European socialist and social democratic parties' (*l'Unità*, 30 September 1989).

So what then are the fundamental divergences between the PCI and PCF, and the smaller communist parties which have aligned with one or the other? At stake are three deeply inter-related questions: how to respond to the process of west European integration; how both the c.p.s. and the European Community should react to the process of change unleashed in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe by Mikhail Gorbachev — but now, in some countries, going well beyond what Mr Gorbachev can have foreseen; and what exactly it means to be a communist in the Europe of the 1990s. It should be clear that all three questions are profoundly inter-related. At stake is a vision of Europe and of the European left in the 1990s. At the root of the articulation of such a vision is an analysis of the processes of economic, political and social change now taking place in Europe, east and west.

FIRSTLY, THE DIVERGENT RESPONSES OF THE

'All talk of an Italian path to socialism, or a "socialism in the colours of France" belongs to the past'

various c.p's to the first question: how to respond to the process of EC integration, or what strategic answer the left should give to the challenge posed by 1992.

The PCI, PCE and the Greek Left (EAR) all accept that the process of integration is in itself a progressive one — or at any rate is irreversible. In the words of PCI MEP Luciana Castellina, to resist European integration 'would go against the tide of history, like past attempts to prevent the creation of national states.' But these parties harbour grave and deep-rooted concern about the way in which integration is currently proceeding. Their concern is that the current process of integration will produce disequilibria characteristic of monopolistic development, heightening regional inequalities, eroding the gains of the labour movement — as mounting unemployment in certain sectors exerts downward pressure on wages and conditions — and increasing the powers of multinational monopolies at the expense of democratic control.

They point to the weakness of democratic control at the supranational level and the fact that the European left has wasted years bogged down in ideological debate about the pros and cons of EC membership whilst the forces of capital proceeded to learn and master the techniques of international lobbying, organisation and covert control. They admit that the struggle to redirect the integration process in a 'progressive' and 'democratic' manner will be an enormously difficult task.

But the PCI in particular insists that this struggle to establish democratic control over the integration process is the only way forward for the left in the 1990s: there can be no return to national protectionism, and no re-run of any project of 'socialism in one country'. In the words of PCI theorist Eugenio Peggio, 'It is necessary to insist that it is not possible to contrast the actual process of international integration by defending autarkic solutions, by remaining entrenched within national boundaries, by conducting a rearguard battle in the defence of backward social and economic interests.' In other words, the challenge now facing the left is the elaboration of a *European* path to socialism: all talk of an Italian path to socialism, or a 'socialism in the colours of France' now belongs to the past.

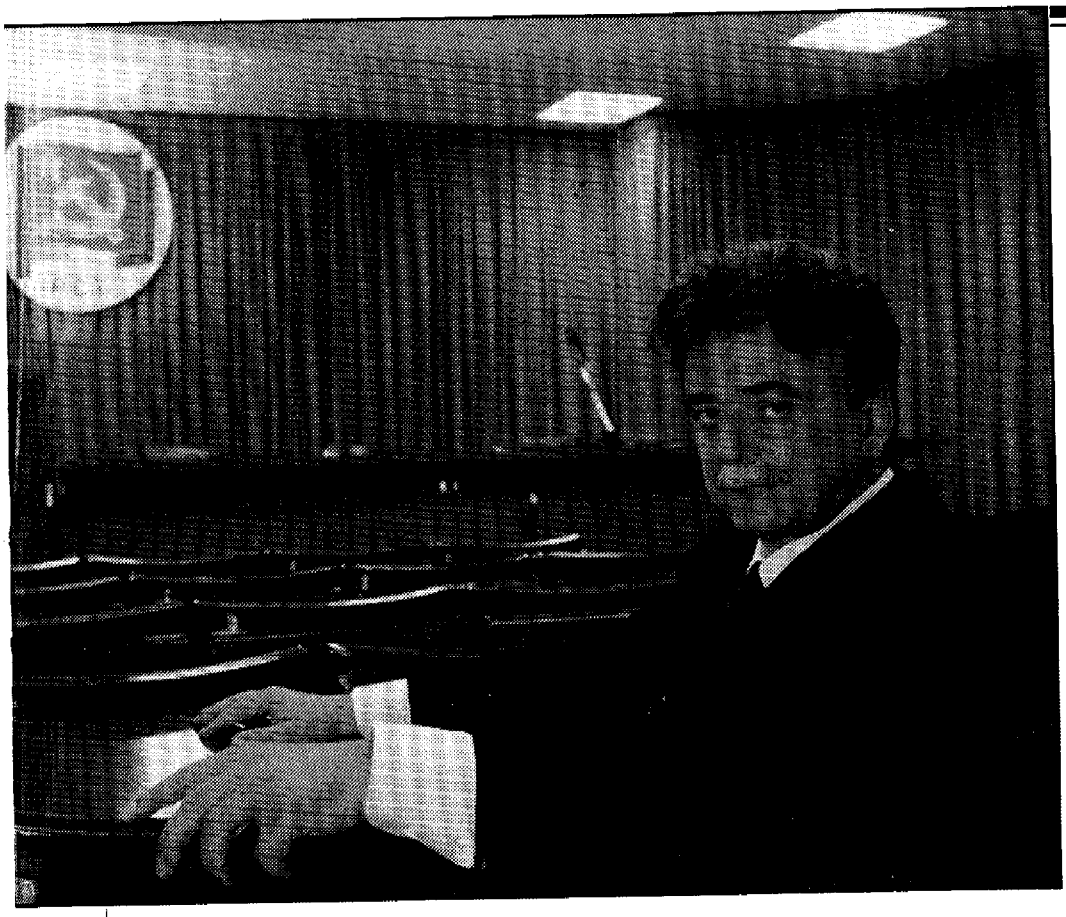
This long-held position of the PCI and the PCE has, over the past five years in particular, found broad convergences with the policy positions developed by the SPD in West Germany, since its return to opposition after the defeat of the Schmidt government, and the subsequent Europeanisation of its party programme. Moreover, the PCI has noted with approval that the failure of the socialist experiments of the Mitterand government in the early 1980s has taught many French socialists the futility of radical projects which do not look beyond the boundaries of France, and has broadened their European horizons (leftwing PCI theorist Mario Telo, in Garzia, 1985).

The PCI, PCE and EAR further argue that a precondition for greater democracy is greater European autonomy from the USA. If the field is left open to the monopolies, the result will be a Europe which is more subject than ever to the US economy. Thus, they support measures designed to give effect to this autonomy, whilst being careful to stress respect for western Europe's historic political and cultural links with the USA. Amongst such measures are: coordinated and goal-directed industrial and structural policies, a unified European currency, a European Central Bank to exercise control over investment and speculative capital, and greater coordination of European foreign and defence policy to give western Europe a voice, distinct from that of the USA. (On the latter point, it should be noted that the Spanish communists — with full support from the PCI — fought tooth and nail against Spain's entry to NATO, and both parties are adamant that greater coordination of foreign and defence policy should not mean any broadening of NATO's membership). The PCI have long argued for the development of common social, regional, transport and energy policies but add that only a profound democratisation of the Community's institutions — and a massive strengthening of the parliament's powers — can ensure that such common policies serve to bring all of the EC into a new dynamic of development. This is the meaning of the slogan with which the PCI fought the recent European elections — 'We want to bring all of Italy into Europe, the South as well as the North.'

It will be noted that the PCI clearly regards the struggle for a 'social Europe' as an integral part of the struggle for 'democracy as a universal value', and vice versa. Put another way, one might say that the PCI regards the struggle for a social Europe as a precondition for an advance towards a 'socialist Europe' (a view apparently shared by Mrs Thatcher!).

The PCE and EAR agree with the foregoing analysis in all its essentials and in their recent campaigns have placed the emphasis upon a strengthening of the community's regional policy through a massive increase in the structural fund (which, the PCE points out, at present accounts for only 19% of the budget which is itself only 1% of the EC countries' GDP).

A final point is that the struggle for autonomy necessitates the creation of centres of democratic control over the activities of the multinationals. Central to this is the democratisation of the Community's institutions, particularly the Parliament. All of the parties belonging to the Group for a United European Left argue for a major increase in the powers of the Parliament, involving the transfer to that body of control over the Commission and of a veto over the Council of Ministers. Thus, whilst the PCI and PCE have opposed transfer of powers from elected national parliaments to unelected bodies of the Community, they advocate supranational democratic control. The Danish SF is less enthusiastic than its Group partners about the EP acquiring legislative authority. Indeed, the SF has a history of outright opposition to the EC which, though it has begun to change recently, is still reinforced by electoral considerations — witness the excellent performance of the Danish Anti-Common Market Coalition (which includes the small rival Danish Communist Party). The SF's reasons for staying with the PCI and PCE in their new parliamentary grouping — rather than joining with the PCF/PCP/KKE lobby — have more to do with the non-dogmatic and anti-stalinist nature of the party (see below).



Achille Ochetto, general-secretary of the Italian Communist Party.

MOST OF THE COMMUNIST PARTIES WHICH comprise the new Left Unity Group completely disagree with the aforegoing analysis of the integration process. The French communists argue that the EC is an instrument of American and West German dominated monopoly capital which has the goal of making the economy of France subservient to the monopolies and of shifting the burden of austerity measures onto the working class. The PCF reject entirely that the direction of the integration process can be changed by the left struggling from within to win political control at the European level. They argue explicitly for an alternative economic strategy based upon the premise of 'socialism in one country'. True, they emphasise their commitment to a Europe based on cooperation and 'friendship between the peoples' — but it is clear that what is envisaged is not a politically united Europe, but a Europe of sovereign states, each led by a communist party like the PCF. In other words, the 'alternative European vision' of the PCF implicitly assumes a Europe, east and west, in which 'socialism in one country' comes to pass more or less simultaneously in all the major countries.

The PCF's vision of the future of western Europe assumes the contours, not of the politically and economically integrated Europe of the federalists' dreams, but of a Comecon writ large. That is, of a voluntary alliance of sovereign nation-states led by communist parties whose fundamental theoretical and ideological point of departure is that of their respective national roads to socialism.

A number of conclusions follow from this analysis. First, the supranational aspects of the Community — the European Parliament included — are seen as constituting an attempt to undermine and subvert efforts by progressive governments in the member states to chart their own nations' roads to socialism. Therefore, the first task of the communists should be to fight against all moves to increase the powers of the European Parliament or other Community institutions, and to oppose any qualitative change in the nature of the Community.

Second, the left must totally oppose the Single Market and all that 1992 stands for, in particular. The French communist central committee member, Bernard Marx, has written that 'one can expect no good to come of the single market.' The political precondition for the defeat of the single market is a mass struggle of the 'peoples of Europe' against any further moves towards European integration.

Third, it is fool's talk to speak of reform from within through the left fighting to change the direction of integration. Those — such as the PCI, PCE and SDP — who talk thus are, it is implied, the dupes of monopoly capital. What is needed is a struggle in defence of the sovereignty of the nation state. Thus, the fight to defend national independence — and perhaps nationalism itself — becomes objectively progressive at this stage in the development of west European politics. The PCF therefore speaks proudly of itself as the only French party represented at Strasbourg which fights so that 'the French nation (might) re-establish its sovereignty in monetary and financial matters ... only by re-establishing its sovereignty will France be strong enough to act in the international arena for accord between the people and for new forms of co-operation...' (Marx, 1989).

The PCF does not actually call for withdrawal from the Community, (although the logic of its policy would seem to tend in that direction). Perhaps this is for electoral reasons — although electoral opportunism is scarcely a convincing charge to level at the PCF. More likely it is because the economy of France — a founder member of the Community, after all — is so closely integrated with that of its partners. What the PCF proposes is a rearguard struggle to halt the integration train at the station it had reached prior to the advent of the Single Act — and perhaps roll back a few stations. In other words, the PCF, in the short term, envisages a Community which would retain its old form as a tariff and trade association. The way to achieve this is through a struggle to exploit the contradictions inherent in

'Is the dismantling of the old model an historic necessity to clear the deadweight of the Stalinist legacy from the shoulders of the communist and socialist movement?'

the completion of the single market so as to frustrate the entire project. In this respect, it is interesting to note the implicit acknowledgement by Bernard Marx, in the article already cited, that Mrs Thatcher — in her approach to Europe at least — is an objectively progressive bourgeois politician!

The PCF's partners — at least the PCP and the KKE — are more forthright in advocating the withdrawal of their countries from the Community. In the meantime, they share in full the main thrust of the PCF's line of analysis and the conclusions which stem from it.

The alternative advocated by the main constituents of the Left Unity Group — the Workers' Party is a singular case here — is that of strong leftwing national governments which would embark on programmes of large scale nationalisations, in an effort to break the hold of monopoly capital on their economies, and resort to protection if necessary. Such governments would establish firm national control over trade relations and would resort to increased bilateralisation in pursuit of trade diversification. Increased bilateral economic ties would also extend to the 'socialist' countries of eastern Europe (assuming, of course, that such countries remain 'socialist'). Meanwhile, the left should oppose any enlargement of the Community, any qualitative change in its nature, and any attempt at social harmonisation (seen as a smokescreen behind which monopoly capital will harmonise downwards, to the lowest social level), fiscal harmonisation or diminution of national sovereignty.

EUROPE'S COMMUNISTS ARE EQUALLY DIVIDED about how to react to the rapid pace of change in the USSR and eastern Europe. Hitherto amongst the most pro-Soviet of western communist parties, the French, Portuguese and Greek parties are finding that the rapid pace of change in the 'socialist' countries is presenting an increasingly difficult challenge to their political identity. In theory, of course, these parties fully support the 'policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union led by its General Secretary Comrade M.S. Gorbachev'. But in reality things are more complex.

It is no coincidence that the aspect of Soviet policy which these parties have chosen to highlight is Gorbachev's drive for peace and disarmament — i.e. the least controversial and most 'ideologically sound' plank in the new Soviet platform as far as orthodox Marxist-Leninists are concerned. The PCF in particular has over the past two years been involved in an energetic campaign in favour of the Soviet peace initiatives.

On the question of glasnost and political and economic reform, the position of the PCF, PCP and KKE is less clear. The KKE and PCP have for many years attacked the profit motive and the market mechanism as anathema, and are clearly perplexed, to put it mildly, to find the Soviet leadership embracing such notions. Thus the Greek communist press, for example, has carried a number of articles recently warning of the dangers of revisionism in the USSR and hailing the achievements and the potential of socialist central planning in language now abandoned by the Gorbachev wing of the Soviet party. The Portuguese party has come down firmly on the side of Yegor Ligachev in the Ligachev/Yeltsin debate, signifying that it shares many of Ligachev's concerns about the pace and direction of perestroika and glasnost. And prior to recent changes in the German Democratic Republic, both the PCP and KKE were vocal in support of that country's government.

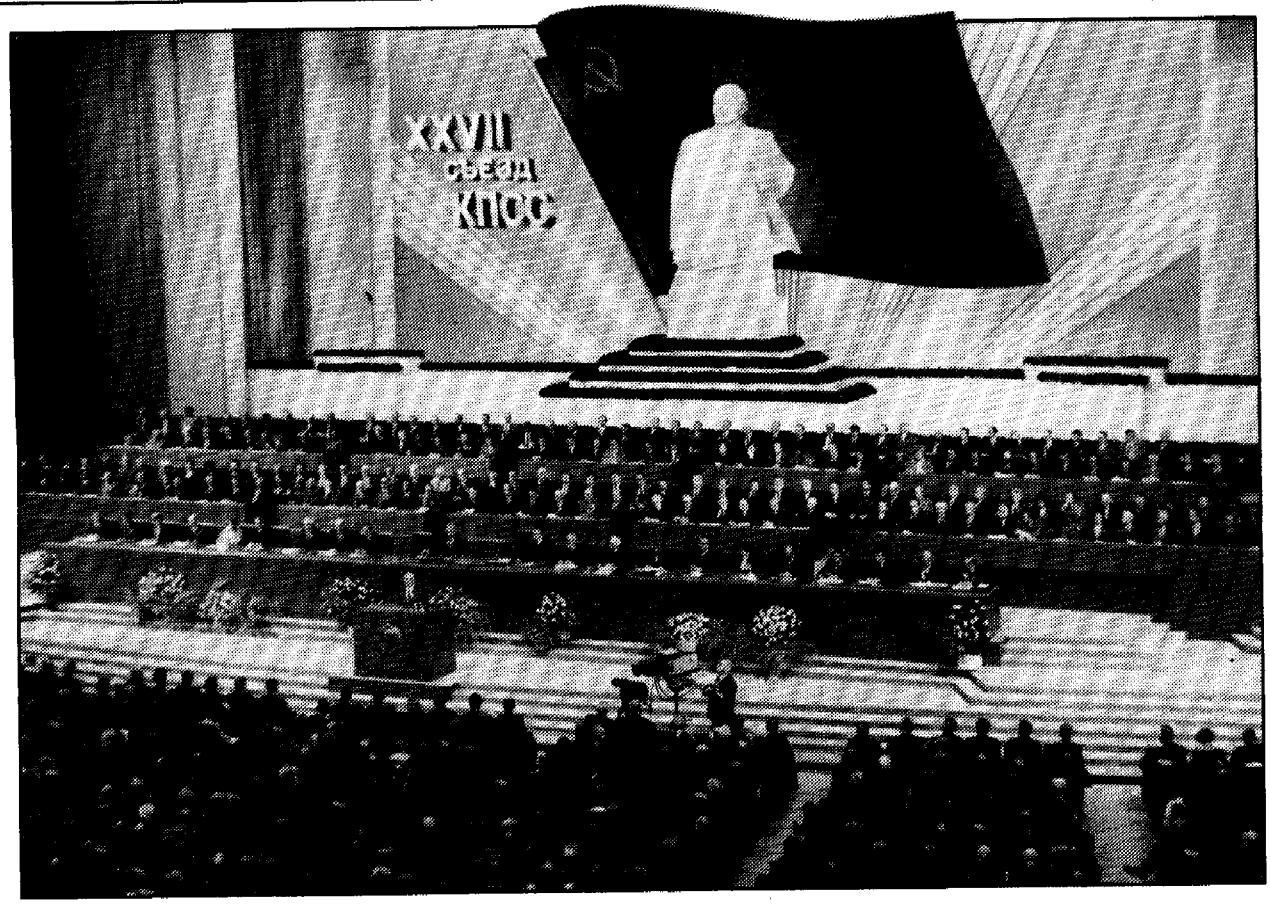
Political change in Eastern Europe is clearly even more worrying to these parties. PCF General Secretary Georges Marchais recently worried aloud, at a PCF rally in Paris, about the danger of a 'counter-revolutionary turn' in Poland and Hungary, resulting in an 'historic set-back' for 'socialism'. These worries are undoubtedly shared by the PCP and KKE leaderships.

At root, these parties still regard the old, neo-stalinist political and economic model — with the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' equated with a monopoly of power by the ruling communist party, with centralised control of the economy and with a monolithic socio-political system — as 'socialist'. Whatever faults the system might have had, it was socialism.

The problem is that that system is now in profound crisis, and in several countries such as Poland, Hungary and perhaps before long the USSR itself, that crisis is entering its terminal stage. No one, of course, not even the reform-communists themselves, knows exactly what is going to take its place. Reform communists — east and west — have produced a pretty sustained and rigorous critique of neo-stalinism, but have been less successful at articulating an alternative vision or model of what a post-stalinist socialist society might look like. It now seems certain that several of the former peoples' democracies will revert to capitalism, re-entering the (capitalist) world economy in full, and perhaps obtaining at least external association with the European Community by the year 2000.

Is such a development part of the inevitably painful birth pangs of a new, thoroughly de-stalinised European left? Is the dismantling of the old model an historic necessity to clear the deadweight of the stalinist legacy from the shoulders of the communist and socialist movement? Or does it represent a betrayal of the achievements of the working peoples of the peoples' democracies and a huge strategic set-back for the world communist movement? There is little doubt that the leaders of the PCF, PCP and KKE see the process of change in the east as closer to the latter than the former; and are deeply concerned that events there will lead to a strengthening of western imperialism.

Relations between these communist parties and the Gorbachev leadership are strained not merely by the danger processes which they suspect glasnost of unleashing; or by the demise of the Brezhnev Doctrine which they seem to bemoan. Two other factors are at work. The first is an increasing tendency of Soviet commentators, emboldened by glasnost, to turn the searchlight of criticism and accusation not only upon domestic neo-stalinism, but upon the dogmatism of the USSR's hitherto loyal defenders within the world communist movement. The second is the tendency of reform communists, renovators or 'dissidents' within the PCF and PCP to invoke Gorbachev and



Europe's communists differ on developments in the Soviet Union

perestroika in legitimation of their own position.

After the defeat of the PCF in the 1988 presidential elections — when the PCF sank to an historic low of 6.7% — the Soviet newspaper *Izvestia* published an interesting commentary. The leading Soviet political analyst Aleksander Bovine, commenting on the 'severe defeat' of the PCF attributed this to the fact that the PCF lacked any programme capable of attracting broad strata of the French population and that its tactics and strategy were out of date with respect to 'the new conditions created by the restructuration of capitalism.' And he added: 'The negative processes and phenomena which have long been characteristic of our own country weigh equally heavily on the influence and authority of the French communists'. (*Izvestia* 3/5/1988).

A wounded PCF — shocked by such criticism from the country it had defended for so long — replied that the PCF's programme was well matched to the exigencies of modern capitalism, unlike that of the socialists whom Moscow was suspected of wooing, and demanded to know: 'Whom is this article destined to please?' (*l'Humanité* 4/5/1988). The incident — just one of many — demonstrates the dilemma of parties which echoed Soviet propaganda during the Era of Stagnation, only to find now that glasnost and the campaign against 'old thinking' does not stop at the Soviet borders as far as many Soviet intellectuals and political leaders are concerned.

Again, the strained state of relations with Moscow is emphasised by the embarrassment of seeing 'internal' dissidents (reform communists within the unreformed western c.p's) launch their own challenges to the existing party leaderships under the banner of *glasnost*. Take the Portuguese case, for example. Only last November the PCP leadership expelled from the party central committee (but not from the party itself) leading PCP reformer Zita Seabra, who had urged the party to adopt its own version of perestroika. She had previously been removed from the Politburo (in May). Ms Seabra has made it clear that the pro-reform wing of the PCP intends to battle on, and has nailed her colours to the Gorbachev mast, citing the Soviet 'second revolution' as evidence that the old methods of bureaucratic control and administrative repression are redundant.* For the moment, the leadership of Alvaro Cunhal appears uncertain as to how to react without provoking the traumatic experience of criticism from Moscow. The leading reformers have been excluded from the party inner circles, but a simultaneous 'opening' has involved explicit acceptance that communist parties in the Gorbachev era must tolerate 'frank and free' internal discussions.

BY CONTRAST THE PCI AND PCE ARE ABSOLUTELY delighted by the process of change in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, noting with pleasure that events there are moving much faster than could have been anticipated a decade ago. The PCI's relations with the Kremlin have improved noticeably lately — an improvement which has been greatly helped by Soviet acceptance that 'ideological condemnation' of the PCI for its eurocommunism and its critique of Brezhnev's USSR throughout the 1970s was not only wrong, but served to retard the process of renewal within the world communist movement and the USSR itself. (*Kommunist*, Moscow, January 1989). The present Soviet leadership has, in effect, accepted that the PCI was right, and the CPSU wrong, throughout that long and difficult period in inter-party relations when Berlinguer and Brezhnev stood at the head of their respective parties.

The PCI regards the new Soviet course as offering real

**Zita Seabra was expelled from the PCP at a meeting of the Central Committee on 3rd January 1990. — Editor.*

'To be a communist in the 1990s does not mean to assimilate to social democracy, but to recognise that a certain model of socialism rooted in statism — common to both the social democratic and communist traditions — is in terminal crisis; and that both traditions need to return to their common source — marxism — enriched by interaction with the best in the liberal democratic tradition'

hope for a democratic socialist renewal throughout Europe, based on the acceptance of the universal value and indispensability of democracy. Democracy, the PCI's congress early last year spelt out, means political alternatives — pluralism, democracy, and monolithism cannot exist side by side., Moreover, democracy is not to be understood as a path to socialism, but as the essence of socialism itself. 'Socialism is the extension of the democratic principle to all aspects of society, and consequently the extension of pluralism, of choice, to all aspects of life.' It follows that the one-party model, now in crisis and decline, is not to be lamented. After years of hesitation the PCI is now adamant on this point: the east was not socialist in any sense in which the PCI uses that term.

The changes in the east, then, are to be uniformly and enthusiastically welcomed. Most encouraging is the process in Hungary, where the new Hungarian Socialist Party looks explicitly to the SPD/PCI model for guidance. The PCI accepts that a transition to full-blooded capitalism may be on the cards in Poland, for example, but sees this, not as a betrayal of a socialism which did not really exist anyway, but as a staging post on the road from Stalinism — a road which must be travelled. Ultimately, the PCI would like to see a united Europe in which both the last vestiges of stalinism and neo-stalinism had been overcome and the free market economics of the New Right had been discredited — a Europe characterised by an advanced social democracy.

Towards this end, the PCI has pledged itself to work with all 'democratic, progressive and left forces', including those in the east — within and without the communist parties there.

WHICH BRINGS US TO OUR FINAL QUESTION: what does it mean to call oneself a 'communist' in the Europe of the 1990s? Obviously the question relates to all the issues we have discussed. Clearly, the answers are radically differnt.

For the PCF, PCP and KKE the answer is relatively unproblematical — at least as yet: to be a communist in the 1990s means much the same as it meant in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. A Marxist-Leninist party is one which roots its culture and ideology in the industrial working-class; appeals to other classes and strata — principally the peasantry and the intelligensia and white collar workers — to realise that their interests are best served by uniting under the leadership of the working-class; defends national sovereignty against the encroachments of multinationals and monopoly capital, thereby earning the right to speak for the nation, or the 'people' as a whole; and proves its internationalist credentials by stressing its solidarity with the Soviet Union, defending the gains of socialism in eastern Europe and the Third World, and supporting national liberation movements.

The problem is that the composition of the working-class is changing rapidly; the old communist sub-cultures rooted in the industrial working-class appear to be breaking down; the internationalisation of capitalism — leading to the creation of the Single Market — appears beyond the power of the western communist parties to halt; and the Soviet Union itself appears to have fallen prey to the virus of revisionism. As Gorbachev's talk of global inter-dependence, a fruitful dialectic between capitalism and socialism, and the rights of all European peoples to choose their own socio-political systems in a 'common European home' finds its echo in the softening of old ideological cleavage lines and the fragmentation of existing political camps, the post-War world in which the politics and culture of these c.p's are rooted is drawing to a close.

The PCI and its allies are also searching for an answer to the question of communist identity in the 1990s, but are coming up with very different ideas. Interestingly, it is perhaps this aspect of the PCI's political travail which most appeals to its allies in the Danish Socialist People's Party — rather than the acceptance of European integration.

Agreeing with Gorbachev that the years ahead will be marked by increasing inter-dependence, the PCI argues that the key question is who will govern the process of change, East and West, the left or the right? The key strategic necessity if the left is to govern and direct the process of change is for an internationalisation of the left's politics.

The PCI argues that the old dichotomy between Marxist-Leninists and Social Democrats needs to be superseded. Partly because the Leninists, or Third Internationalist tradition, had reached the limits of its potential; partly because traditional social democracy is faced with the task of responding to a new political agenda. The problems of both reflect the limits of a concept of socialism rooted in statism.

What is now needed is a common search for new solutions to the problems raised by capitalist re-structuration. In the first instance, this will involve the major left parties of the EC engaging in a search for a common strategy which would enable them to re-direct the process of integration in a democratic and anti-monopoly capital sense. Since the major parties of the EC left are Socialist and Social Democratic parties in every country except Italy, this means that the PCI and these parties confront similar problems and must 'move on the same terrain'.

So is the PCI simply a social democratic party? Does being a Communist in the 1990s mean returning to the fold of the Second International?

That certainly appears to be the conclusion of the current leadership of the PCI — hence their decision to recommend to an emergency party congress that the party name be changed. But it is clear that that's not what the majority of the party's members feel, or indeed what a sizeable section of the party's leadership believes.

The PCI has sought a unity with other left forces, East and West, who embrace the need for reform and 'new thinking', but this need not pre-suppose an organisational unity. Until now, the question of joining the Socialist International or the Socialist Group at Strasbourg has not been on the party's agenda. Rather, the party has sought an advance in the direction of greater political and cultural synthesis and greater strategic co-ordination. The party has argued for the creation of the Group for a United European Left in the European Parliament as a staging post on the road to the creation of a new broad left grouping which would bring together all those Communists, Socialists, Greens, New Left elements and new social movements which have 'succeeded in reappraising themselves and their own national and international circumstances' (Mussi, 1989). The problem confronting the party at present is that the collapse of a certain model of Communism in Eastern Europe has called into question, in the eyes of many PCI leaders, the feasibility of a Marxist 'third way' between Soviet style communism and social democracy. The leadership therefore has decided to seek greater integration with the major EC left parties and to concentrate on its search for a strategic synthesis with those parties, whilst maintaining relations with other left parties, large and small, Socialist and Communist.

The party's identity, the PCI leadership insists, can only be maintained if the Communists renew that identity through profound rejection of the legacy of neo-Stalinism and the political/cultural imprints of the Cold War era. This involves:

(i) the ending of the Leninist-Stalinist principle of democratic centralism in favour of internal party democracy (though factions remain banned);

(ii) an ongoing critique of the historic party leader, Palmiro Togliatti, who is now accused of sharing the moral and political responsibility for Stalinism; and a renewal of Marxist ideology through inter-action with other European traditions (such as the Liberal Democratic and the Catholic);

(iii) decisive theoretical and practical efforts to re-address the important gaps in Marxist practice and solve the questions left unanswered by Marxist theory — questions such as human rights, individual identity, relations between the sexes, and environmental protection.

To be a communist in the 1990s does not mean to assimilate to social democracy; but to recognise that a certain model of socialism rooted in statism — common to both the social democratic and communist traditions — is in terminal crisis; and that both traditions need to return to their common original source — marxism — enriched by interaction with the best in the liberal democratic tradition.

The questions confronting Europe's communists are therefore the fundamental questions confronting all left and progressive forces. Should the battle over European integration and monopoly capital be a battle to control, redefine and redirect the unity process; or a struggle to resist encroachment on national sovereignty and the rights of individual left-wing governments in power?

Is the demise of the neo-Stalinist model in the USSR and the East a necessary historical pre-condition for the relaunch of the left, or an enormous set-back which strengthens the hand of imperialism? Does the future of West European Communism lie in renewal (some might say metamorphosis) through inter-action with other political cultures; or in a struggle to take one's distance from social democratic revisionism and to defend the working class by resisting change? On all of these questions, Europe's communists are more divided than ever.

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The completion of the Single Market, the Social Charter, the drive for European political union, and the dramatic upheavals in Eastern Europe are the major items on the European Community's agenda in the 1990's. Where does the Left stand? PADDY GILLAN spoke to members of the three Left groupings in the European Parliament.

The quest for unity

The Left Unity Group programme envisages 'the establishment of a Europe based on the advancement of all the citizens' rights?' How do you see it being achieved?

Our basic philosophy is that we haven't proposed the single market and we haven't backed it up. We did that basically because it's a matter of big capitalism within the framework of untrammelled liberalism with all the industrial and social dimensions that entails. But since this single market is going to be a fact we have to take a stand on it in two directions: reduce as much as possible the negative effects, industrial and commercial, and second, intercede to ensure the workers' rights, those workers' rights which are endangered by the single market. In doing this we are not just taking a defensive attitude, the Group has proposed alternative politics.

For example, in as much as we have criticised the Social Charter, the Group has also made special proposals assuring the rights and liberties of the workers. This has led Proinsias de Rossa to make proposals in the Parliament to improve the Social Charter and give it a positive content trying to bring the workers' rights, the workers' security into the Charter. Finally, the single market, the way the Community wants the single market constructed may not really be what the institutions of the EC might want, due to the workers' struggles and because of contradictions between the consideration of what the workers may want and the member-states — then there are also contradictions between the leaders of the different European countries; even though the politics of austerity are the same for the EC countries as a whole.

The Left Unity Group seeks 'convergence and common actions with other Left and progressive forces in order to influence and change the policies of the Community and secure real gains for Europe's working people', but the history of Left co-operation in the European Parliament is not a happy one. The Communist and Allies group has been replaced by two groups and the Socialist Group tends in the main to cooperate with the Christian Democrats. What degree of cooperation can realistically be expected in the future bearing in mind that working class interests will require the strongest possible defence as the completion of the internal market draws near?

René Piquet, president of the Left Unity Group in the European Parliament, is a member of the French Communist Party

I'll start with the second aspect of the question — the rupture of the Communist and Allies Group. One fundamental aspect will explain everything. This is neither a moral nor a political judgement — I'll just keep to the facts. Our Italian comrades have, with the others in the group, a fundamental difference on the institutional questions. They want total supernationality, European political union. But for our part, this wasn't sufficient reason for not working together. We could have lived with that divergence. So what was the rest of the problem?

Our Italian comrades have decided to enter into the Socialist International and, in this Parliament, join the Socialist Group. So that is the reason why they couldn't stay with us and decided to leave. This will not prevent the Left Unity Group from looking for all possible solutions, searching not for a political union, but a union with the European Left, but including also the Socialists and the Greens, the Rainbow Groups. There are two reasons for working for the greatest cooperation possible: it would give more strength to our positions and help to separate the Socialist Group from the Christian Democratic Group. Because they have a tendency, those two groups to carry all the clout, call all the shots and the alliance is definitely not in favour of the workers.

In the debate on economic and monetary union we have voted for the Socialist proposals and the Socialist Group voted for ours. And that clearly shows a difference between the Right and the Left in the Parliament, the Right including the Christian Democrats. We would like to broaden that unity.

The Left Unity Group has expressed its concern that 'decisions at Community level are increasingly outside Parliamentary, popular and democratic control and are monopolised by bodies of a bureaucratic nature.' The group considers it necessary to strengthen the European Parliament's rights. How much stronger should these rights be and what consequences for member

'Democracy is necessary in society as a whole, it's also necessary for the practice of politics in my own party... if we don't take that road, history may pass us by'

states' sovereignty would a strengthened European Parliament have?

When Proinsias de Rosssa spoke on the Social Charter he made a very relevant comment. He said 'here we are discussing the Charter when in fact the Council has already spoken and the Commission has already worked out its plan of action without consulting Parliament. That is not acceptable.' Proinsias clearly stated the views of the Group. I'll explain myself. There are 'operational' rules between the different institutions: a way of working together. As a whole we don't want to give these institutions more power, because Ireland, France, Luxembourg, all the countries will lose sovereignty. Whereas within the EC institutions we would like to transfer responsibility and give most power to the European Parliament because it is the only institution where the people are represented by their Deputy. The Commission is a technocratic, bureaucratic institution with no responsibility to the people. The Council is not accountable to each national parliament. So we want greater authority for the Parliament with powers of control and the power to propose things.

All parliamentarians, whether they be from the Right or Left, will have to account to the electorate. So this would not reduce the autonomy, regarding decision-making, of any of the European countries. Respect for their sovereignty will stay and it gives the Community institutions a broader democratic dimension alongside the Parliament. Of course things are much more complicated than that but that's it in a nutshell.

How will developments in Eastern Europe affect the EC?

First, we welcome them and approve this development of democracy, liberty and freedom — conditions which are fundamental to the complete development of society. Second, these countries must themselves be able to decide on their own ecnomic, political, social structure. And the relations that we should develop with these countries should not be relations of dominance. What is needed are relations based on mutual respect.

But what is happening now is of great long-term historical significance, and apart from aid and cooperation required immediately, the EC will very soon find itself confronted with new political deadlines because the changes in these countries present the Commission with questions and problems they had not considered. Economic and political relations cannot remain the same. We, as the European Community, will have to take all these upheavals into consideration. In my opinion it will force us to improve relations, to work towards peace and cooperation and view things in a new light. The Community will have to open itself to these countries, maybe even include these countries. But such an enlargement would necessitate that the Community undergoes changes. That could lead the Community to bring about changes in the interests of the workers and of peace... A very interesting perspective, as a matter of fact, but of course no one can say exactly how things will develop.

In relation to Eastern Europe: are we witnessing the abandonment of a failed model or are we witnessing a process of renewal and what are the implications for socialists in the rest of Europe?

In my opinion, it is the abandonment of a model totally condemned by history, but not the abandonment of socialism. I share the opinion of Gorbachev, that it's a revolution within the revolution. It's an upheaval of a very historic nature for these countries. So what does that mean for the Leftist forces in Europe? There are two views. One view is that it is the death of communism, and the victory of social democracy as it has existed since the beginning of the century. Another view on the Left, which I share, is that it is a revolution within socialism which will lead to a modern type of socialist society deeply rooted in democracy, and which will give new hope to the socialist perspective. It's not an abandonment of socialism but a revolutionary transformation.

The last word on all this: what all that will bring about in the future I don't know. But we can only hope that this alternative will triumph. For parties like ourselves (even though there might be differences) that would be a very important step forward.

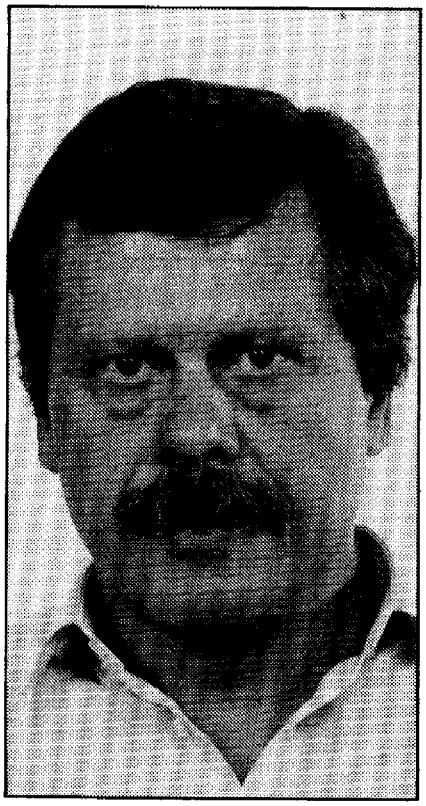
Finally, what are your hopes for socialism in the 1990's and how do you see these hopes being realised?

My hopes are these. As I see it there can be no evolution of society aimed at the well-being and progress of people without the setting up of a political system which would enable each human being to intervene in his or her life. The ever-growing complexities of life and society, the fantastic development of science and technology, the progress and sharing of knowledge and data, offers extraordinary opportunities to society on one condition: that all citizens have much more freedom, and many more personal individual freedoms so that they can have a say in the decisions made on their behalf. In other words, a society that avoids centralism and that confers more and more power to its citizens. And how do we do that? Well first, on the social level, in raising the standard of living of the workers; to fight unemployment, (and the lack of job-security) because there is no real development if workers are exploited. On the economic level there should be greater industrial democracy.

In order to achieve this, we must be very bold, very daring. We must get the workers and the population working together at community level and develop the actions of the workers, but on condition, of course, that the workers themselves decide on the nature of such action — that it will no longer be people like myself or my party who will decide what the workers should do. What I really mean is that democracy is necessary in society as a whole, it's also necessary for the practice of the politics of my own party. I strongly feel that if we don't take that road we won't reach our objectives and may even risk having history pass us by and find ourselves at the margins.

Looking to a better future

What, in your view are the major issues in the European Community today?
The completion of the internal market by 1992/3 is the main issue for Socialists and the united left who must ensure that the internal market is accompanied by a range of social measures to cover the workers, citizens and societies of Europe.
How does the Socialist view differ from other groups on the left as to the priorities for Europe?
I don't see any difference on many issues. I suppose the main issue for all of us on the left of the Parliament is to ensure the best conditions for the internal market. We don't want a situation where the conditions for workers, for citizens, will be worse than the conditions that we have now.
What are the prospects for Left cooperation in the European Parliament?
I think that they are very good; they have improved in this parliament and with the slight majority we are obliged to work together.
Is the Social Charter a sufficiently strong instrument to protect workers' interests in the era of the internal market?
The Charter is something like a constitution of a State, and the constitution alone does not protect anybody, but is the basis of organising life, law and society. The Social Charter should set the minimum conditions of employment and so forth in the Community. The Social Charter in this sense is not revolutionary, it is nothing new, but is simply the constitutional guarantee of the rights of workers and citizens.
How do you view events in Eastern Europe? Do they represent a victory for capitalism, a defeat for socialism, or do they represent the failure of a particular model of communism?
This question could be the subject of a major seminar, but I'll keep it very simple. I think that communism has failed totally in its objectives. I think they deprived the people of liberty, of rights that are very clearly established in the West. To give them some credit, I suppose that they wanted to establish greater social security and things like that, but they have failed on that score also, and the people had neither liberty nor more security. So what is taking place now in Eastern Europe is a real



Jannis Sakellariou of the Socialist Group is a member of the German Social Democratic Party.

new revolution, if you like, but we have to wait for the outcome of this revolution. That's why I don't dare to say how it will proceed, this revolution, in Hungary or Poland or in the GDR. Each people will find their own way, and decide on the system they want.
What are the implications of these developments for the EC?
Well, the implications are great. I suppose we are not prepared for it. We did not expect that such developments could take place in such a short time. For the first time in the history of the EC it is possible to speak in terms of a united Europe — all Europe, East and West. The Community could promote this process in order to strengthen peace and stability in Europe. This would free more resources to co-operate with, and help, the Third World. We could unite all forces in Eastern and Western Europe and end the atmosphere of conflict. Without all these conflicts we could fix our sights on a better future for ourselves and the Third World.
Do you think that the EC has a role in assisting democratisation in Eastern Europe?
Our role is not to interfere in the internal process of democratisation. We should support democratisation where we can with the resources that we can offer them when they ask for such resources, but we haven't a Marshall Plan or anything like that. Our friends in Eastern Europe know we are disposed to assist their efforts because the struggle for democratisation is connected to structural changes in the economy and these changes cannot be successful if they are not supported from outside. So this is our role, to give our economic support but nothing else. Politically, every country should search for, and find, its own way. And this will vary. The way of Hungary, of the GDR and the Soviet Union — every country will find its own way.
What do you consider are the implications of these developments for socialists in the rest of Europe?
Well let me begin by saying that we cannot continue to apply the old definitions. In Western Europe, you know, we have many parties which call themselves Social Democrats, Socialists. But social democrats in Sweden, for example, differ greatly from social democrats in Germany.

There are social democrats who are nominally 'socialist' but in terms of 'Left' and 'Right', the socialists in Portugal are much more to the Right than the Social Democrats in Sweden. So it is too early to say that now we can work very well with the Hungarian Social Democrats and we are going to work very well with whoever else. So we are open, socialists and social democrats of Western Eruope and the EC, the Socialist Group of the Parliament, we are open to co-operation with all movements that have the name of Socialist and Social Democrats — even for movements who haven't any such definition.

We have to consider the politics, not the names, of such groups, and in time it is possible that a party from Eastern Europe could be affiliated to the Socialist International.
Do you feel that there is a better

climate for friendly relations between East and West?
Yes. Of course. A comrade from Hungary addressed the congress of the SPD in South Bavaria in October. Recently a comrade from the Social Democratic party of the GDR spoke to the Socialist Group. Contacts are very easy and very simple now. Our comrades from the GDR and Hungary have the same problems that we have and are much closer to us in their concerns than those from another continent.
Europe today is a much safer place than it was, thanks mainly to Mikhail Gorbachev. The initiatives he took have greatly lessened tension between East and West. How can this process be further advanced?
I agree that this process is going in a very good direction. The contacts, the discussions, the collabortion in many fields is there. Gorbachev's initial

initiatives are now bearing fruit. It is not our place to guide him in any direction, but the process must be expanded to include more than the two world leaders.
In this regard, what role, if any, do you see the EC having in securing the improved climate of international relations?
The European Parliament has no institutional role in questions of security and armaments and things like that. We have sought such a role — not just the Socialists but all groups. including those on the Right — because we should have a say in questions of security and armaments and not simply be confined to drawing up rules about tractors.
What are your hopes for socialism in the 1990s? Are you optimistic about the future?
I belong to a party whose history goes back 126 years, but it's a very young party that's constantly learning and I suppose Social Democracy will continue to learn in the future. I think that the future is for socialism and for Social Democrats. This is confirmed by recent events, for example in the Italian Communist Party where developments will bring this party very near to us. Consider what is happening in Eastern Europe: the Hungarian Communist Party has changed its name and nobody would have dared think something like this two years ago. I think the future of society lies with social democracy.

Building Europe

Luciano Vecchi of the Group for the European Unitarian Left is a member of the Italian Communist Party

What do you see as the priorities for the Left in the European Community?
To build Europe; not only in the Parliament but party by party, movement by movement in every country. Concerning the impending unity of Europe our priority must be to develop the democratic character of the European institutions. This is a task not only for the Parliament which is of course very important, but it should involve left-wing forces all over Europe. We must recognise that decisions which were once taken at national level, are now taken at transnational level, so we have to, let's say, 'renovate' democracy on a multi-national level, a European level. It's not enough to build up a common market, we have to first of all build a European democracy based on real democratic institutions. This will require the participation of the workers, the participation of youth, of women, ecologists, pacifists, etc., in the decision making and building up of European socialism.
In building Europe and transnational democracy certain difficulties will be encountered, particularly in relation to the national sovereignty of the member States. So how do you see European democracy being developed?
First of all, our concern is to develop transnational democracy without abolishing the nation-state. Of course, the development of transnational processes means that these processes and institutions have to have real powers: some of the powers previously held by nation-states are now in the hands of transnational enterprises and located in the financial capitals etc. The real contradiction is not between European powers and national powers: the issue is whether European powers will be under democratic control or not.
Another dimension of building European democracy, of building up allegiance to the Parliament, is to demonstrate that the European Parliament can effect change. This requires firstly a transfer of powers to the Parliament. How do Italians react to this proposition?
Italian public opinion is strongly pro-European. At the time of the last European election, we had a constitutional referendum in Italy asking the people if they wanted the implementation of the European Union project as it was expressed in 1984 by the European Parliament and 88.5% of Italian citizens said 'yes'. The proposition was supported by practically all the political parties in Italy. On the other hand, the Italian Government is dragging its heels on taking the measures necessary to integrate Italy with Europe.
The history of Left co-operation in the European Parliament has not been an entirely happy one. There are now three formal groups; do you foresee more effective co-operation in the future?
Yes. Our group was founded not only to represent existing parties but is committed to developng a process of co-operation and stronger and closer relations between the different elements of the Left. We think this is necessary and also possible, but of course it is not easy because, as you already said, the history of the Left in Europe is marked by divisions.

But if the Left in Europe is to be effective, we must overcome national differences and not be bound by strict ideological perceptions of the issues facing us, nor by orthodoxy. Together we must work out a strategy for the future. Developments in Eastern Europe show that a phase in the history of the Left in Europe is at an end. We now have to enter a new phase.
How do you feel that developments in Eastern Europe will affect the European Community and how can the European Community make a positive contribution to the process of reform and democratisation?
What is happening in Eastern Europe is, I think, first of all very important because it shows that freedom and democracy are basic needs and the East European system clearly failed on this count. We (Italians) pointed this out in the past, but it is now clear to all. Although we do not know as yet how this situation will unfold, the traditional division of Europe into blocs is disappearing, iron curtains are

disappearing, there are new possibilities for a unified process of the peoples of Europe. I am not suggesting that the peoples of Eastern Europe should copy the model of Western Europe, it's up to them to decide what kind of society must evolve in their countries.

At the same time, we must pay close attention to these events; we cannot adopt a 'wait and see' attitude. We must help the process of democratisation and economic recontruction but without imposing preconditions. In this way, it will be possible to think of an enlarged Europe and European Community

What lessons can socialists learn from events in Eastern Europe? Has communism failed or are we witnessing the failure of one particular model?

This question is being debated in my party at present but in my opinion we can say very clearly that it is a failed model of society which was described as 'communist' by some, although I seriously doubt that it was. I remember that in 1976 Enrico Berlinguer, a former General Secretary of my party, taking the floor during a Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and saying that it is not possible to have socialism without democracy. Our distance from that kind of system is well established.

It is not very useful now to start an abstract or ideological discussion on whether communism itself has failed. I think that we have to be very concrete. Specific historical conditions gave rise to the communist and socialist movements, and they continue to exist but not in the same form as in the past. At the same time we have major new problems: the problems related with interdependency, the problems of environment, the problems of resources, of the contradictions between north and south etc. If we think of all the issues raised by the feminist movement, if we think of the new poverty existing in our society, if we think of the problem of racism, and if we consider new concepts of solidarity, of non violence, of justice etc., we have to prepare for a new era in the socialist movement in Europe and throughout the world.

How do you view the current debate in the Italian Communist Party?

From my point of view the debate is not simply about the name of our party; there are two aspects to it. The first aspect concerns the new international situation resulting from developments in eastern Europe and from other global problems I mentioned earlier. Arising from this is the need for the Left forces in Europe to find new and effective ways of cooperation.

The second aspect of the debate is domestic. Italy is the only Western European country in which for the past 40 years there was no alternative to the government. The government has always been based on the Christian Democrats which is, let's say, a very peculiar party, but could be considered a party of Centre Right.

Luciano Vecchi

The Left is deeply divided and a section of the Left has been in coalition with the Christian Democrats for 25 years. We are convinced that our country is suffering from this situation of 'blocked' democracy and we think that it's necessary to introduce new elements in the political scenario, it's necessary to bring together all the forces, all the energies which exist on the Left and which until now were divided. And we think that our party has to take this historical task very seriously. These are the basics of the debate and depending on the outcome the name of the party may change because a new political party will be born. This debate is taking place not only within the party but involves other forces outside the party.

Are you effectively speaking of a merger of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party?

No we are not. Of course we hope that in the future all the left-wing parties can at least cooperate in order to present a political alternative in our country. I think that in the present situation it is unrealistic to think of one party combining the PCI and the Italian Socialist Party and others. In fact a united party of the Left is not the issue. What we are addressing is the issue of establishing a point of reference for all the left-wing forces, all the democratic, progressive forces, (not only left-wing in the traditional sense), which are not satisified with the present situation and who see the need for profound change in our country. Of course it is not good enough just to oppose, there is a need to develop the cultural and political basis of an alternative.

Europe and the world today are safer places thanks in large measure to the initiatives taken by Mr Gorbachev. How would you see the peace process being further advanced and what positive role could the European Community play in this process?

What is really important in Gorbachev's approach is not the concrete measures taken to reduce the arms race, which are very important, but the change of philosophy. The new Soviet foreign policy is destroying the traditional category of 'friend' and 'enemy' and putting on the table the problem of co-responsibility, the joint responsibility of leading this world, not only by the superpowers but by all the peoples of the world and this is what is absolutely important. It is a very non-violent approach and marks a major new departure which has had a positive impact on opinion in the United States. I think that it's very important this disarmament process has started. Some agreements have been reached. Other we can foresee. But it is disturbing that negative attitudes still persist which could revive the arms race in the Nineties.

Negotiations between the two superpowers are very important but they are not enough. We must act in our own countries to change military doctrines, because there is now the possibility of ending the military alliances as we have known them. There is no longer any good reason for having so many weapons in the world.

What are your hopes for Socialism in the '90s?

I hope that the Left will renew itself in a very fundamental way. I hope that the Left will be European and international; capable of understanding and confronting the major problems of our age. This will not be easy, but otherwise the future will be out of our control.

The first half of the Eighties belonged to economic liberalism, the second to Gorbachev who showed us that the old ways of thinking had no relevance to today. I think the Nineties could be the beginning of a new age for socialism and socialist ideas all over the world.

Britain after Thatcher

AT LONG last Thatcherism is beginning to look vulnerable. It is possible if not yet probable that Labour will win the next election. Mainstream commentators tend to argue that Labour's lead in the opinion polls is due to the abandonment of policies such as unilateral nuclear disarmament, withdrawal from the European Community and major tax hikes which were making the party unelectable in the eyes of the public. With the so-called 'hard' left on the run it is now presumed safe to have a Labour government again. This view of things appears to be partially confirmed by the virulent criticism of Kinnock and the 'new model party' made by the likes of Benn, Livingstone and Scargill. There are however many British socialists who dismiss the simplistic or dangerous nostrums of the hard left while maintaining considerable scepticism about the ability or willingness of the next Labour government to implement a distinctively socialist programme.

Last year saw the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Communist Parties produce detailed policy documents. The most significant was Labour's policy review presented at its Brighton conference. Undoubtedly the most provocative document is the *Manifesto for the New Times*, published by what one rather waspish critic has referred to as the 'theoretical party of the *Marxism Today* journal'. There has certainly been no shortage of debate about policy and strategy in recent years. The pamphlet by John Lloyd and the volume edited by the Sheffield Group are direct contributions to this ongoing debate. Marquand's slightly more detached work is more historical in its focus in trying to explain the causes of Britain's economic decline, but also has much to say about the country's future.

John Lloyd's pamphlet *A Rational Advance for the Labour Party* is an eloquent polemic that advocates a

Now that the British Labour Party is beginning to shape up as a credible alternative to Thatcherism, GERARD O'QUIGLEY examines signs of new thinking on the Left.*

social democracy sharply distinguished from neo-liberalism and 'extreme visions and realities of socialism'. He argues that the policies of the Labour Party must 'fully accept competitive markets in goods and services, while developing a framework within which much more effective collective actions may be shaped, and the asocial effects of markets constrained'. For Lloyd Labour's task is to provide a framework for collective efforts that involve the citizenry in social and economic life. This would give the principle of citizenship real meaning and achieve a sense of social cohesion through the development of reciprocal rights and responsibilities. This would require the democratization of key institutions and of the constitution itself in ways that would facilitate the expression of political demands. Lloyd is very scathing about the way the post-Callaghan Labour Party manoeuvred itself into the political wilderness. He is unstinting in his praise of Kinnock because he isolated the far left, increased Labour's share in the opinion polls, began the move away from trade union domination of conference, changed defence policy and moved towards a pro-European position. Lloyd believes that these achievements would never have come about had Kinnock not emulated continental socialist party leaders like Mitterand, Craxi and Gonzalez and seized personal control of the party.

The editors of *The Social Economy and the Democratic State* met and formed the Sheffield Group following Labour's third successive defeat in 1987 in order to contribute to the renewal of socialist economic strategy and social policy. The group includes some well-known left-wing academics such as Andrew Gamble and Ian Gough. The book contains a foreword by leading MP and NEC member David Blunkett who was a pioneer of the new style municipal socialism of the early 1980s. The main theme of the book centres on what the editors regard as the 'missing link' in the Left's search for an alternative agenda, namely the 'refusion of economic and social policy in the context of constitutional reform'. The attempt to come to terms with the dominance of the Right since 1979 has elicited a wide range of responses. Some have been of a fundamentalist kind, arguing in effect that 'we must do for our class what Thatcher has done for her's'. On the other hand there has been a good deal of revisionism and an attempt to rethink the essentials of socialism. The iconoclastic brand of 'New Times' politics associated with *Marxism Today* has provoked fierce controversy. There are some discernable differences of approach in the Sheffield collection which probably has much to do with the question of just how much of the essentials of socialism is to be conceded to the new era of individualism, markets and consumerism. All the contributors recognise the importance of socialism

* The Sheffield Group (eds.) *The Social Economy and the Democratic State;* Lawrence and Wishart; UK£8.95.
John Lloyd *A Rational Advance for the Labour Party* Chatto Counter Blasts No.3; Chatto and Windus; UK£2.99
David Marquand *The Unprincipled Society: New Demands and Old Politics;* Fontana Press. UK£4.95

so that policies can be put before the electorate which are both socialist *and* compelling. There is a clear worry that the Labour leadership seems to be convinced by one argument that socialist policies are electoral liabilities.

Debates about political futures inevitably contain some interpretations, implicit or explicit, about the recent past. David Marquand notes that the political agenda today is to a large extent 'the product of rival neo-liberal and neo-socialist interpretations of the crises which brought Keynesian social democracy to grief in the 1960s and 1970s'. Marquand offers a highly engaging account of the politics of economic decline which goes back to the last century. He consistently develops the link between constitutional conservatism and economic failure. By the early 1970s the British economy was among the most vulnerable in the developed world. Rather than being a fact of nature, that vulnerability was 'a product of past choices, reflecting the moral and political preferences of those who made them'. (P.210). Britain's political elites never attempted to create a 'developmental ' state which might have vigorously championed policies of economic adjustment. In other words Britain's decline is not the result of economic failure *per se*: it is the result of a political failure to create the institutional means necessary to operate a mixed economy and a welfare state which could have commanded both legitimacy and consent.

Marquand's analysis points to the *specific* nature of British decline. He repudiates the notion that this decline originated with the abandonment of the early nineteenth century model of market liberalism. The problem was that having abandoned that model it declined to adopt either the Japanese or French model of state-led adjustment or the Scandinavian or central European model of corporatist-consensual adjustment. Marquand convincingly argues that some of Britain's most serious economic handicaps — above all her backward educational system and the comparatively poor quality of her human capital — 'sprang directly from the minimalist view of the state and could only have been put right by adopting a different view'. Certain hard questions follow. How can a culture permeated by possessive individualism restore the bonds of community? Granted that the common sense of nearly two hundred years is the chief obstacle to successful economic and political adjustment, how can this common sense be reformulated?

Neil Kinnock: isolated the far left

The Right has recognised the impossibility of muddling through with the old Keynesian social democratic consensus. Mike Rustin, in his contribution to the Sheffield collection refers to a ' 'new' bourgeois revolution' which has abruptly set aside the old gentlemanly patterns of regulated conflict based on custom and convention. The Right has attempted to replace the old consensus with the 'Free Economy and the strong state'. The Sheffield Group argue that the main direction of a democratic socialist project should be towards 'a social economy and a democratic state'. The contributors to the collection address a range of issues including the politics of health, popular social ownership, taxation, urban policy, anti-racist policies, citzenship and Basic Income, employment policy and economic management. All the contributors agree that new socialist policy initiatives must be based on a political vision which is decentralist, democratic and empowering rather than managerial, bureaucratic and statist.

Charlie Leadbeater in his chapter on 'popular social ownership' considers the question of how large international companies are to be controlled. The question — 'how can social ownership and control be achieved' — is a question of method. Leadbeater claims that this has often obscured a second question which the Left also needs to rethink: 'Why should these companies be controlled, in whose interests, to what ends?' (P.92). Obviously the two questions are linked Support for social ownership, a belief that social control can be exercised, in part depends on winning support for the idea that it *should* be exercised. Leadbeater rejects older models of state ownership on the grounds that they are neither feasible

nor desirable. He raises more questions than can easily be answered. Socialisation of ownership should concentrate on tangible collective forms of workers, consumers and citizen share ownership, through employee share ownership plans, wage earner funds, regional investment boards and greater industrial democracy within companies. This would form part of a strategy which would begin the process of socialising the economic life of civil society. This contrasts with older and unworkable models of a state owned command economy. In general the argument is for social ownership which combines efficiency and choice with regulation and accountability.

Central to any future Left government's strategy must be the linking of economic and social policy. Too often economic and industrial policy figure much more prominently than social policy. An alternative package of attainable economic and social policies would be based on the prioritisation of human needs, the development of a social economy to meet those needs and the commitment to a 'dual strategy' combining top-down and bottom-up initiatives to democratise the British state and British society. The Sheffield Group want to argue that socialism is primarily about utilising the earth's resources to meet people's needs. They are clearly worried about some re-thinking on the Left which concedes too much to liberalism, for example Roy Hattersley's urging the Left to choose 'freedom' as the watchword of modern socialism. Others argue that radical democracy captures the heart of modern socialism. The editors contend that such reformulations are not in themselves wrong, but are insufficient to grasp the core ideas of socialism.

'A good example of socialists attempting to engage with reality in an effort to achieve change which is both feasible and desirable.'

In general the Sheffield Group papers are an impressive demonstration of the growing sophistication of socialist policy making. In comparison with the Left's Alternative Economic Strategy of the 1970s and early 1980s, the Sheffield collection is superior both in method and vision. It is a good example of socialists attempting to engage with reality in an effort to achieve change which is both feasible and desirable. The book acknowledges that the Labour Party has learnt something from the past ten years and that there is no going back to the cul-de-sac of the past. The authors note that Labour's policy review process is of enormous significance but that it remains to be seen whether a new settlement between the social democratic and democratic socialist strands of the party can be achieved. In John Lloyd's pamphlet the distinction between current orientations and future possibilities is not always clear. Lloyd sets out his vision clearly and unambiguously and is probably a good example of what the Sheffield Group would regard as 'conceding too much'. All three books deserve to be taken seriously as honest and stimulating contributions to the renewal of the forces of the British democratic left.

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

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CULTURAL FRONT

Redeeming the past

QUANTITY is no guarantee of quality, we frequently announce to our friends and less trustworthy acquaintances and then proceed in practice to discount those writers, those painters — artists of whatever kind — who have not (been) delivered in bulk. We deceive ourselves about this, being no more reliable than those acquaintances we glanced at unsurely a moment earlier. The short career, the single novel author, the anthology or calendar piece are further reduced in our best efforts to maintain them. 'Chocolate-box' we disdainfully pronounce of the art while sustaining ourselves on just one more *nougat surprise* or soft-centred character study.

Doubtless, the unofficial and possibly unwelcome allies who boost the cause of a Yeats or a Henry James are partly to blame; the greatness of figures such as these two becomes absorbed (from certain angles) in the larger shadow they throw onto the disciplines of commentary, exegesis, and historical relation. My reservation is not reserved exclusively for the academic commentators, for there is a penumbra of imitative (or what seems imitative) work which surrounds great art, even preceding it. The injustice of the last case, the writer superceded by one who only does better what the little pioneer had bravely made possible, *should* rankle. And we come to a point where, with more conviction in our voices than we expected before we spoke, we declare in favour of the minor artist. It is the minor artist who signals the sustained normality of culture, who has striven at his canvasses, or on her typewriter when giants neither walked the land nor lent a hand. The discovery of such figures redeems the past and even offers some hope for the future.

In the catalogue compiled by Julian Campbell, the Carlow-born painter Frank O'Meara (1853-1888) is credited with twenty-four exhibited or recorded canvasses. When an exhibition was brought together only seven could be displayed, though three more were illustrated in a catalogue which had to bear the title 'Frank O'Meara and his Contemporaries'. Those augmenting contemporaries, those more prolific shadows, how they gang up colourfully on the minor artist, mindless of their own minor status in some other catalogue.

But O'Meara appears to fit his allocation, and to fit his paintings to it. The spectrum of his palette is not broad. Greens, greys and browns predominate, and the sole example of Roderic O'Connor's work ('Group of Poplars, Effect of Sunlight') looks positively garish by comparison. O'Connor's trouble is that someone will do this better very soon — someone signing himself merely Vincent. In particular contrast, O'Meara's historical obscurity brings together the sombreness of his colour-range with the repressive and narrow theme he works so well. In keeping with this he eschews the square-brush technique of his to-be-longer-lived contemporaries. In Campbell's words, he 'drew out his figures carefully, and applied his paint thinly and sparingly.' If the trees have a feathery lightness which recalls an earlier and brighter landscape world, the grid of canvas fibres scowls through a river surface as if to show that O'Meara's pictures are worn hard.

This texture matches exactly the human material he depicts. Toil is predicted or remembered as a young girl or bent old woman burns some leaves. The figures are usually women, and by implication women at work. Indeed, O'Meara's art is arranged within a very small number of overlapping images. Woman and water; fire and the moon — those four account for most of the central symbols of the work. In the picture Campbell regards as the painter's masterpiece ('Towards Night and Winter', 1885), a young woman attends a fire beside a pond, tossing leaves from the gathered hem of her apron or outer-dress. The shape of the raised hem and the colour of the apron are mirrored in the smoke which rises from the fire and blows away from her towards the water. In the background, there are the back-walls of village houses, mainly windowless.

From this concentration of a few images the paintings radiate, but they do not radiate very far from the central theme. The earlier 'Twilight' (1883) shows an elderly woman by a pond or river, and with the same fencing we see in 'Towards Night and Winter'. 'The Widow' (1882) also shows a woman by water, but on this occasion the figure is dressed elegantly if austerely: her veil blows away from her towards the river, just as the smoke and the raised hem will do in the great painting of 1885. Two late canvasses, 'Old Woman Burning Leaves' (c. 1887) and 'October' (1887), are virtually sketch and final version of the same picture. A moon shines in perfect circularity through the trees, and the figure wearing a head-band looks forward and downward. In the 'October' version nothing absolutely

Frank O'Meara by John Singer Sargent

'It is the minor artist who signals the sustained normality of culture... the discovery of such figures redeems the past and even offers some hope for the future.' HUGH MAXTON surveys the career of the painter Frank O'Meara (above).

Photo courtesy of Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery, Dublin

Photo courtesy of Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery, Dublin

'On the Quays, Etapes' (detail)

confirms that a woman is depicted, and not a man: the figure is virtually that of aged humanity. The latest work exhibited here, a drawing on canvas entitled 'On the Quays, Etapes' shows a very similar woman, with head similarly covered, and with a similarly strong nose. The background scene is a fishing village at work, and the woman is accompanied by a young girl carrying a basket on her arm. A group of elderly figures is mustered behind them, and behind these, the high chimneys and gable windows of the village.

The *oeuvre*, then, had the integrity of diminishment, declension, abatement. the word minor fits here, even after the most symnpathetic viewing. Yet I am not convinced that an explanation of O'Meara's work can be found by reference to the celtic mood or to the imminent Celtic Twilight of W.B.Yeats, George Russell, and others. Minority for them was a cause which they championed; they triumphantly withdrew from the metropolis to the parochial and from high culture to folklore. Yeats's early poems proclaim that their landscape is fully all that matters; O'Meara's paintings gradually and painfully reveal that nothing else endures. Or will endure, for the unstated implication of the paintings is of imminent death. A widow, another woman paused en route by an isolated wicket-gate or fence, an old woman burning leaves, her image departing along the quays lovingly mocked in her reflection and in her companion's young and upward gaze, that companion in turn recalling the young woman burning leaves...

The biographical account we have of O'Meara stands oddly in contrast with this. Photographs show him to be distinctive in his dress, even outlandish, among his fellow-artists. He had a reputation for vivacity, which recalled to some the heroes of Charles Lever's novels. He was a lady's man. Yet the biographical account has something else to add to the contrast of work and personality. O'Meara came from an Irish middle-class family which could trace its line back towards the sixteenth century. They were solid professional people, many of them medical doctors, with links to England and the continent — one O'Meara indeed had tended Napoleon in his final exile on St. Helena. This line of survival, in the fact of what is generally understood as the suppression of Irish catholic fortunes especially in the eighteenth century, might be read as persistence, endurance, strength. By this way of thinking the vivacious O'Meara is the culmination of a bourgeois application to life, an application now translated into artistic triumph. Yet those full, clouded, repressed scenes of feminine endurance unto death scarcely confirm such a positive interpretation. The painting speaks of a terminal condition, or a projection forward towards such a condition: what human community, or what aspect of the human spirit, is elegised in these paintings? None. But the inherited sociological categories are destabilised by such art.

Those sidelong villages, those quiet ponds lying in the ageless hollows of French soil, occupy permanently a place in the history of Irish art. Occasionally, Dr. Campbell wonders if a scene is Grez-sur-Loing or O'Meara's native Carlow. Indeterminancy between these two proposed locations can be read as an anticipation, even as an apprehension, of the descent into a liquified French earth of entire platoons and companies of Irish soldiers a generation later. Babylon. In O'Meara's timeless landscape of patient human figures, infernal machines lie in wait. For there had been a tension in those serene, scraped canvasses, a tension between timelessness and patience. And the moon, water, a woman, and fire, while they are not to be recruited to the Celtic Twilight, tick with occult potency.

Searching questions

Triona Dooney

BOOKS

FEMINISM AND THE RENEWAL OF SOCIALISM by Anne-Marie Graham; Independent Labour Publications; NPG

'(The men) had the future of their country and children to consider, and it was their duty as men and husbands to use their utmost efforts to bring about a condition of things, where their wives would be in their proper sphere at home instead of being dragged into competition for livelihood against the great and strong men of the world.'

This is not a quote from Family Solidarity or even from turn-of-the-century Catholic social teaching. The speaker was Henry Broadhurst, Secretary of the British TUC's Parliamentary Committee, and he was speaking in 1877. The way in which the entrenched conservatism of the British trade union movement which he embodied still bedevils many parts of that movement is one of Anne-Marie Graham's central themes.

Anne-Marie charts how the visionary socialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was overtaken in Britain by a narrowly economistic, reformist politics in what Bea Campbell has called 'the historic compromise with conservatism'. The socialist organisations patched up a deal with a non-socialist trade union movement in order to gain labour representation in Parliament. This resulted, among other things, in the limiting of women's aspirations to at best legal rights, at worst oblivion. The concept of the 'Family Wage' for men arose from the very limited view of possibilities for change which was the inevitable result of this conservatism. The attractiveness of the concept at the time is acknowledged by the author but she explains how its damaging effects are even today central to the wage structure, as it copperfastened the dependency of women in the home and was used as justification for low pay for women in the workforce. It continues to affect not just the wage levels paid to women but the very way work is organised. The world of paid work is premised on the assumption of a 'non-working' wife at home, even though the reality is now much different.

It is scarcely surprising then that modern feminism in Britain was partly a reaction against the traditional labour movement, which was seen as hostile territory for feminist ideas. Yet feminising the labour movement, constructing a feminist socialism, is, this book argues, of critical importance not just for women but for the labour movement itself. It is the key to weakening the conservative culture which has underpinned the British labour movement for so much of its existence. As the author puts it, the problem for women with the British labour movement wasn't so much a misogynist leadership as a reformist leadership.

Feminising the movement means prioritising issues and campaigns which affect most women: the ending of low pay, the provision of good, publicly supported childcare, the improving of conditions of part-time workers, the ending of the dependent status of women in state benefits, the recognition of a woman's right to control her own fertility. The demands are familiar to us all; so is the disappointing lack of progress on them.

There have, of course, been many gains for women, but, as Anne-Marie Graham remarks, 'these reforms simply allow some women to add to their duties as wives and mothers. We do waged work, we have a right of entry to public places, we can take up social, political and cultural activities *but we still, for the most part, have to do these things in addition to domestic work and often childcare as well.*' Little wonder then that women are still not coming forward in significant numbers in union or political life.

The book looks at the many facets of women's oppression, ideological as well as material. It examines the responses of the feminist movement to that oppression and teases out the different and sometimes contradictory strands within feminism today. Arguing that for real equality both men and women must change, and that both must be involved in the process of change, the author opposes a separatist feminism which would exclude men permanently.

The book contains an interesting assessment of the debate within the British Labour Party on sectional organisation of women. Within the federal structure of the BLP as it stands, with its powerful block votes, it is hard to argue against a women's section. But Anne-Marie Graham contends that this system has been bad for the party and for the trade unions as well:

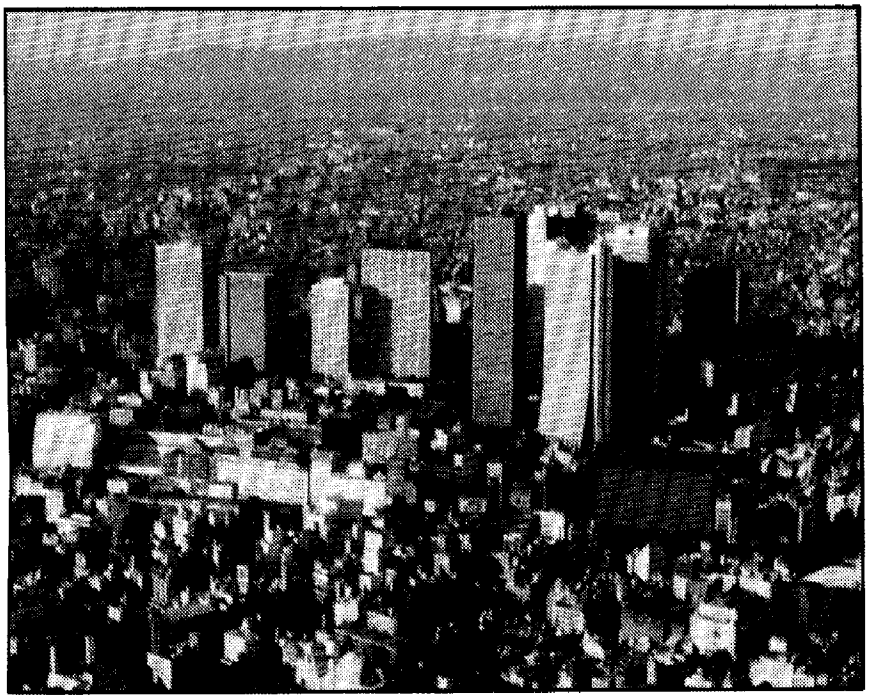
'This form of representation of sectional interest, rather than bringing together the diversity of working class experience and opinion to enrich our socialism, has in fact produced a dominant, non-socialist influence which has well nigh stultified the party. And at the same time, this relationship has adversely affected the trade union movement itself, by often subduing its legitimate extra-parliamentary concerns in the interests of over-riding electoral considerations.'

There sems little point in grafting another section onto a failed structure.

'What is needed is a thriving feminist current affecting every section of the party and an autonomous, strong, vital, campaigning and constantly evolving women's movement outside it, interconnecting through the individuals who are members of both.

Anne-Marie argues that some forms of positive action are essential but that measures which place a small number of women in positions of power without a parallel mobilisation at rank and file level are of limited value. She does not specifically address the question of quotas or reserved seats at different levels of an organisation. It will be interesting to see how the BLP's recent acceptance of the quota system works out in practice. She stresses the importance of building women's needs and priorities into the organisation from the ground up and feels that this, allied with the 'one member one vote' system, would give a stronger voice to women. While this approach is necessary, I am not sure that in itself it is sufficient to break through the multiple layers of barriers between women and political activism and I think our own experience of this approach could stand some serious examination at this stage.

Feminism and the Renewal of Socialism is about the British experience. It has, nonetheless, a much wider relevance, as well as some searching questions for all of us who are working to construct a socialism to meet not only the material, but the social and personal needs of human beings.



The Shinjyku business centre in Tokyo

The Japanese miracle

INSIDE JAPAN by Peter Tasker; Penguin Books; UK£5.99

ONE of the great changes wrought by the First World War was the emergence of the United States as the world's most powerful nation. Sometime during 1985, Japan became the world's largest creditor nation, and the US, the previous prime lending nation, became the world's largest debtor. Most of Japanese overseas assets were in the US, and most of the US's debts were owed to Japan. By 1995 Japan's overseas assets will have quintupled to $500 billion, making her the largest provider of capital that has ever existed. The developing countries will look to Japan to find their development needs, and the richer countries will be looking to her to preserve employment. Not alone is Japan the major supplier of capital and technology but she will become the dominant power in the shift of economic power from Eruope and the US to the Pacific basin.

Japan is now the world's fourth richest country per capita with the US lying sixth. Yet Japan's exports as a percentage of their GDP, are less than 10% (compared to 55% for Ireland). This indicates, of course, the size of her population and its consumption levels. According to Tasker's extremely informative book, Japan's recovery after the Second World War was slow initially. It took off at the time of the Korean War. Japan supplied billions of dollars worth of goods to the UN forces and when the war was over she continued to supply materials for the reconstruction of South Korea. As output rose, money was ploughed back into investment, setting off a virtuous growth circle for the next twenty years.

One reason for Japan's success is the ability to exploit the inventiveness of others. For example, the video was originally developed by a US company, Ampex, which produced a machine for commercial use. Within Japan there was fierce competition in the VTR market with the Matsushita Group beating the Sony-lead, Beta, which was generally recognised to be the better product. However, Sony struck back with the super compact digital model but within months the VHS group had stolen Sony's thunder by launching a smaller, slighter, cheaper camcorder which was compatible with the millions of VHS video recorders that had already been sold.

Similarly, the first memory chip was developed by a US company, Texas Instruments, in 1970, but copied by the Japanese after sponsorship by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) which has overseen the remarkable development of Japan's manufacturing industries.

MITI is like a very competent and all-powerful IDA which has a coherent strategy. It regulates R and D subsidies and in consultation with companies, decides what type of products should be developed and manufactured. Before the war the Meigi Government decided that only central government had the funds and organisation to develop factories, ship yards, and so on, to build the 'rich nation, strong army'. Nationalised industries were run, not for profit, but for long-term strategic interest. Wage rates were high and profitability was correspondingly low. Eventually the government sold off the business to merchant houses, such as Mitsui and Mitsubishi, at bargain prices. After the devastation of the Second World War, similar policies were used to develop the industry. Resources were directed away from consumption to strategic, heavy industries and a group of internationally-competitive companies were nurtured by MITI with subsidies, tax credits and supported by 'a plethora of low wage, low productivity suppliers. Once again the results were brilliantly successful'. 'The most influential ministries had the power of life and death over the sectors of their control. They could virtually shut down an industry, as MITI did to coal, or expand or cartelize it by 'administrative guidance', a system of directives which were not legally binding but which no businessman in his right mind would consider disobeying.'

One of the wonders of Japan is that the enormous economic power has not been translated into meaningful improvements of the quality of life for the Japanese people. While Ireland only has 43% of Japan's per capita GDP, we can console ourselves that our quality of life including many material conditions, are far better than those of the Japanese people, in spite of their hard and smart work. In addition to the rat-race and a fact-infested educational system, even high income Japanese people have tiny apartments. It may be full of the latest electronic gadgetry but the average salaried worker works longer hours and has shorter holidays than European or American workers. Japanese women only get 52% of male earnings and are hardly represented in positions of authority. The average commuting time in smog-filled Tokyo is 80 minutes, and social life is negligible. 'The average employee would spend a greater proportion of his life with company colleagues than with any other human beings, including parents, wife and children'.

The Japanese education system is extremely competitive and parents will spend a lot of money on part-time cramming schools. Ninety per cent of those who live in Tokyo go to such schools which can cost a fortune. In contrast, university is a doss period where a student 'takes a four-year holiday in which he clears his brain of the huge volume of information soaked up over the previous fifteen', according to Tasker. The Japanese recognise university as a well-earned interlude between the rigours of the academic and working life, and it is quite normal for students to attend only a handful of

lectures and seminars over the entire period. The rest of their time is devoted to part-time jobs, parties, hiking, lying around watching television and mastering the art of drinking in groups. According to market research by Nikka Whiskey, the average student owes one-fifth of his waking hours to this last activity — 'the only element of his university career that will prove its value in later life,' in Tasker's view.

The Japanese are not super-humans, however, and there are inefficiencies, some of them great, in the Japanese economy. For example, subsidies to the small agricultural sector are the highest in the world. Public works contracts are awarded in turns to construction firms who have previously agreed amongst themselves who should get it. And before its privatisation, the Japanese National Railways had more debts than Mexico and Argentina together. The Lockheed bribe scandal showed that the marketing techniques of major companies were not up to Western standards and there are tens of thousands of small, low-pay companies. And there is fierce competition from the newly-industrialising countries while a lot of young people are questioning the attitudes of older people.

Japanese trade unions are fairly docile and membership has dropped from 35% of the workforce in 1970 to 28% in 1985, largely due to the growth in service sector and small company employments. However, unemployment is very low, prices have only exceeded wages once in the ten years to 1986. Wage differentials between big bosses and ordinary workers are far lower than in the US and Europe. In Nissan no major decision is taken without the approval of the union. There is an unspoken trade-off, co-operation, in return for job security. Even the best managed Japanese companies contain around 5 to 10% of unwanted employees, and lay-offs have been avoided in major enterprises by redeployment. The unions had been more militant and there were many strikes after the war. Today, the Toyota union has bestowed membership on some assembly robots in return for no involuntary redundancies.

The similarity which Ireland has with Japan is that the party which has ruled since the Second World War, the LDP, is remarkably like Fianna Fáil. It is all things to all men and is a major consensus broker. The main opposition party, the Japanese Socialist Party, has a woman, Takako Doi, as leader and she has helped modernise the party. The Communist Party is possibly the best organised in Japan, with 400,000 members, five-times the strength of the JSP, but it is the fourth largest party, trailing after Komeito, the third largest, the JSP and the LDP. Komeito seeks the promotion of Buddhism in national politics and its only clear political line, accoring to Tasker, is world disarmament.

Peter Tasker, a financial anlyst, has written an excellent and very readable book which is informative both on facts and on the main trends and developments in Japanese society and economy.

Paul Sweeney

Encounters of the Third World kind

COLD WAR, THIRD WORLD by Fred Halliday; Hutchinson Radius; UK£14.95.

FRED HALLIDAY provides a cogent analytical framework for understanding post-war superpower rivalry in the developing world in this quick-fire but penetrating essay. The shortcomings of his analysis are not attributable to lack of thoroughness or intellectual vigour but simply to the fact that, perforce, it has been unable to encompass the dimension of the recent cascade of change in the socialist camp: the book was published in January '89.

The basic thesis running through the essay (which is actually a consolidated and elaborated series of journalistic pieces and shows the flaws of this) is that national, sub-regional and regional upheavals in the Third World post-1945 are best viewed within the characteristic parameters of bi-polar competition which emerged as a result of the new distribution of power following victory in Europe and Asia. The essential characteristics then are:

(a) The inevitable clash of the two opposing social systems, represented by the USA and the USSR, in zones well beyond their own or their formal allies' borders.

(b) The necessity always for the two powers to maintain some 'modus vivendi' against the background of the destructive potential of nuclear weapons, even in the most fraught circumstances of tension (e.g. the Missile Crisis).

(c) Notwithstanding the above, the fact that policy often emerged to cope with or respond to situations that had blown up in the Third World rather than those situations being manipulated and controlled by existing policy formulae. To illustrate his theses Halliday, in his usual non-stop and punchy style, swings us from one Third World conflict or revolution to another and from one decade of struggle in the developing countries to the next.

Within the parameters of the dominant theme, Halliday is particularly illuminating when chronicling the evolution of new thinking on the place of Third World conflict in the external strategies of the two superpowers in the 1980's. The Reagan era is seen as ushering in a distinct shift away from the traditional view of conflict between states (with attendant 'linkages') requiring various gradations of direct intervention towards one of non-conventional responses to include 'low-intensity conflict' minimising direct US constant involvement and maximising support to right-wing rebels (e.g. Nicaragua, Afghanistan); enhanced counter-insurgency support to friendly governments (e.g. El Salvador, Chad); improved diplomatic management in crisis-prone states (e.g. the easing out of Marcos in the Philippines and Duvalier in Haiti); worldwide counter-terrorism measures. (Recent events in Panama represent something of an exception here, determined by the atypical case of Noriega's drug peddling). On the surface, this policy would seem to have paid dividends for the US in that no change to a revolutionary regime has occurred anywhere on the globe post-1980. However, as Halliday emphasises, the low-intensity warriors were in disgrace after 'Irangate' and the regimes directly in their firing line — Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Iran itself etc. — have not been overthrown with the exception of the pathetic 'scalp' provided by tiny Grenada.

Halliday also trenchantly lays out the power constraints and resource limitations that have hamstrung the USSR in extending its influence in the Third World and forced it into a fundamental policy reorientation. First and foremost of these is the strain that lengthy conflicts and aid programmes have placed on the ramshackle Soviet economy. The spilling of Soviet blood in significant quantities in Afghanistan may have provided a special focus for discontent but even prior to this disgruntlement at the diversion of resources towards states of questionable loyalty and potentiality for socialist development was growing apace. Furthermore the USSR was always operating on a pitch marked out by the US as 'what (it) had crucially failed to do was to provide an alternative international economic system within which Third World states could reorient themselves away from capitalism'. Also, and linking back with the central theme, Soviet strategists were increasingly arguing that the essential

Soviet troops in Afghanistan

US/USSR global relationship should not be undermined by needless adventures in the developing world in support of (in some cases) highly dubious regimes.

In all of this probing of new ideas in Soviet foreign policy, (capitalism is not necessarily hostile to socialism there; few states are ready for socialist development; they represent a drain on scarce resources) the dominant image is of a superpower on the defensive. And, most importantly, this defensive posture has been seized upon and exploited by the opposite side (e.g. the pressure to withdraw from Afghanistan, Cambodia). Nevertheless although 'the USSR was placed under greater strain, it did not, however, simply retreat' and it has still succeeded, under different modalities, in bolstering its friends in the Third World.

The situation at the close of 1988 was thus best described as one of relative stalemate and Halliday next indicates the new ground rules introduced jointly to control affairs on some level of mutually guaranteed security. These hinge essentially on the joint impetus towards the settlement of regional disputes in the last two years or so. Examples of these would be the Iran/Iraq war, Chad, Cyprus, Cambodia etc, where months before few positive initiatives seemed possible. But Halliday cautions on too optimistic a construction being placed on this process. There remains a 'mosaic of intractables' in places such as the Lebanon, the Middle East generally, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Northern Ireland. What is more, fervent national feeling is being restirred in the most ominous fashion at more than a score of community intersections.

Halliday's central thesis is clearly and concisely argued and consistently tested against the data of recent events worldwide. He quite correctly keeps before us the duality of the superpower interaction with the Third World viz. that each is a variable of the other with forward management often being displaced by unplanned and hasty response to the momentum of particular political events. This interplay is complex and Halliday in his chapter on Reagan's America confesses difficulty in reading the change in policy direction either as the outcome of a purposeful deliberative process or as the product of organisational and political 'pulling and hauling' more in line with Graham Allison's analysis of White House decision making.

Halliday indicates that the 1970's Soviet theoretical construct of progressive forces being represented by a conjuncture of the socialist states, national liberation movements and workers' and popular movements in the capitalist world was already distinctly inadequate in the current decade. But today there is an acute conceptual problem even in demonstrating the internal configuration of any of the three individual elements. Critically, the very nature of 'real existing Socialism' in Eastern Europe is at time of writing a complete conundrum. Any interpretation, however, must admit not only system atrophy and decay but fundamental system failure. Whether rejuvenation, against the background of the crimes of the appartchiks or their blatant betrayal of the people's trust is possible remains a totally open question. The implication for this in terms of Halliday's area of study is clearly that the proxy effects of superpower competition in the Third World are impossible to call if one of the social systems currently defies description. Further, who is to say that the future competitive divide might not be totally of a different character with, for example, a newly established European and North American alignment in conflict with an amalgam of Eastern forces including Japan, China and the Asian N.I.C's? Even under such a scenario, however, the future role of the less developed countries would appear to be, as always, as so many theatres in the international 'great game' — a less than hopeful prospect for their populations.

Phelim Kelly

Not easy to fault

THE DYNAMICS OF IRISH POLITICS by Paul Bew, Ellen Hazelkorn and Henry Patterson; Lawrence & Wishart; UK£8.50

This is the complete version of Helena Sheehan's review, four paragraphs of which were inadvertently dropped in the last issue.

THE PRIMARY purpose of this book is to inform the international left, whose image of Ireland has long been dominated by a dated discourse on the national question and a particular paradigm of anti-imperialist struggle, about the more complex internal history of the Irish state. It is also intended to be of value to those in Ireland looking for a serious and radical analysis of the state.

It succeeds in its first aim. It is seriously and soberly informative. As someone who encounters abroad an image of Ireland fixated on the national question and is constantly frustrated by requests to address it within anachronistic terms of political discourse, I hope it reaches its intended audience and adds to their picture of the politics of 20th century Ireland.

At the same time, I am uneasy about it. It obviously fills out the picture for the authors in a way that it does not for me. It is not that I disagree with much in it. It is not an easy book to fault, as it is competent and constructive, indeed it is almost flawless in its own terms. It is just that I keep feeling that there is something wrong with it, that it is a few degrees off centre, that there is too much left out. I don't mean that there are facts left out. Of course there are, but every history must be selective and, within their own terms of reference, the authors' principles of selectivity seem defensible enough.

My problem is with their terms of reference. Although it is meant to concentrate on the internal history of the state, the book is too internalist and statist even to give a full enough perspective on the state, let alone the fuller dynamics of Irish politics. To focus so narrowly on the policies of the state and to put so much stress on the party political definition of politics is to distract on the one hand from the power of international capital and, on the other, from the complex politics of civil society.

It is not that the authors do not deal with these things. They do refer to international economic forces, to catholicism, to feminism, to demographics, to technology, to television. They are not unaware. They are not unsophisticated. It is just that these factors do not seem integrated enough into their analysis.

About imperialism, for example. They contest the sole focus of the (ex) colonised on the colonising country as the source of all evil and define imperialism as a structured international system, in which constantly transformed capitalist relations of production create a hierarchical chain into which the Irish Republic is inserted. It sets the limitations and possibilities for development. I agree with this, but I do not feel it adequately informs their analysis. It is offset and even distorted by their emphasis on the relative autonomy of the state and their emphasis on the central importance of internal factors.

One consequence of this is that they fail to deal with the radical transformation of this international system in which it is outgrowing its need for the nation state. To focus so much on internal forces within the nation state at a time when the power and relevance of the nation state are being so systematically stripped does not tell the full truth even about the nation state and the internal forces within it. In this sense, I think that it fails in its second aim and limits the sense in which it fulfills its first.

As to style, the book is academic in the sense that it is factually well-researched and conceptually rigorous, but it is not esoteric or inaccessible to a general reader. It is very clearly and straightforwardly written. It is also academic in the sense of seeming to accept the dominant academic ethos of objectivism. It comes across as detached and distant from its material. It is somewhat flat and thin and static. It is not vivid. It is not vital. It does not make you feel the living flow, the *dynamics* of Irish politics, which calls into question the accuracy of its title.

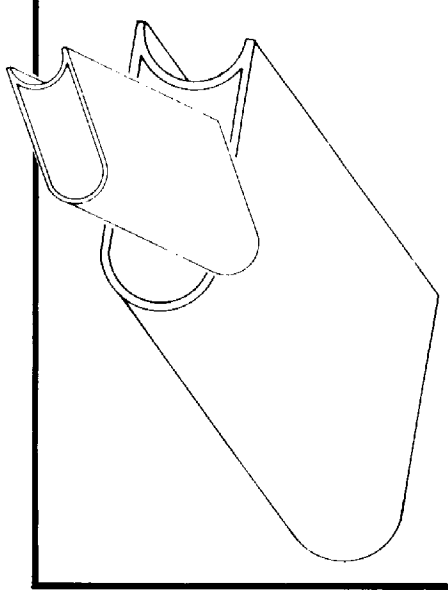
It is nevertheless a valuable book, especially in tracing the history of party political policy in relation to shifts in class forces from decade to decade.

It is particularly interesting in its account of the construction and reconstruction of Fianna Fáil hegemony over the working class. Their basic argument here should receive serious consideration from the Irish left. Because of its conjunctural location, Fianna Fáil has been able to play the role played by social democratic and labour parties elsewhere, made easier by the role played by the Labour Party in its integrationist tendency to put national consensus over class solidarity.

However, there has been in the last decade a breach in the ability of Fianna Fáil to maintain this hegemony, which opens up new opportunities for the Irish left. At the moment, they argue, the left vote is largely a protest vote. The ability of the left to take advantage of the opportunities offered by this depends on its ability to move beyond this to offer a coherent vision of an alternative social order to challenge this hegemony.

It also depends on the ability of the left to act for the advance of the left, to act for the advance of this alternative vision, and not just for the advance of a particular party. In that spirit, I welcome the constructive attitude in which this book by authors associated with the Workers' Party was given for review to a member of the Labour Party in a Workers' Party publication. Our common struggle to comprehend the world in which we must act transcends party boundaries. There are many dimensions to left co-operation.

Helena Sheehan



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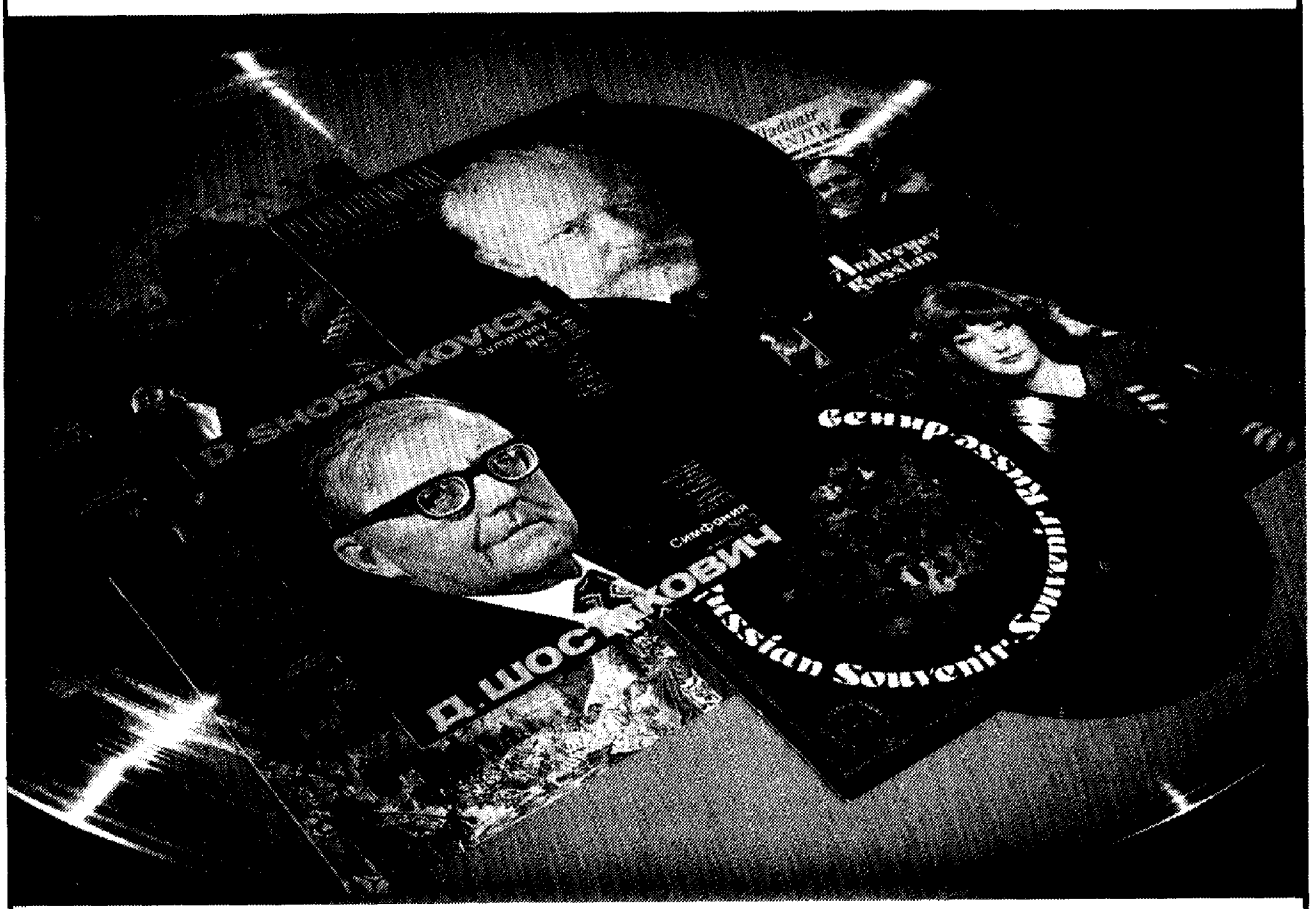
MUSIC from the USSR



The music of
Glinka, Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Balakirev, Glasounov, Dargonmyzhsky, Rachmaninov, Scriabin, Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturian

Performed by
David Oistrakh, Emil Gilels, Vladimir Spivakov, Victor Tretyakov, Moscow Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra, Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra, USSR Symphony Orchestra, Leningrad Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra

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Title: Making Sense, No. 14
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Date: 1990