

The Responsibility of the Left in the West

Let us establish a daring hypothesis — one, however, which cannot be withheld from this kind of analysis of the prospects for a socialist alternative: the hypothesis of a *situation in which an alliance of communist and socialist parties, together with other forces of the Left, would in the long term accede to power in certain Western countries like, for example, France or Italy*. We fully realise that this will be extremely difficult in the present circumstances, and we do not wish to reiterate all the arguments which seem to point in the opposite direction. But such a possibility cannot be ruled out entirely in a new climate of international détente which would lead to the American commitment in Europe being phased out and to the gradual dissolution of the present military and political blocs. *This, in fact, offers socialists a hope*: the hope of socialist changes in society in the economically and politically most developed capitalist countries — in keeping with Marx's and Engels's forecasts, though with a delay of over fifty years. *Since the unexpected birth of a socialist society in Europe's most retrograde country brought the fatal disease of Stalinist deformations upon socialism, is one not entitled to hope that the new socialist reality in the developed countries would contribute to radical changes in the system as they exist in the East European countries, facilitating and accelerating the transition to democratic and humane socialist structures there?* Such hopes are encouraged by the efforts of those communist parties in the West European countries which advocate a pluralistic political system guaranteeing the preservation and development of personal and democratic freedoms (cf. especially the programmes of the Italian, French and Spanish CPs). If such socialist systems based on political plurality existed would it then be possible for communists like Milan Hübl, Sabata, Tesár, Litera, and others to be held in jail simply because they had advocated the same system in another socialist country?

If this prospect gives rise to hopes within the socialist opposition, can it be promoted and supported by the Soviet leading group, whose interest lies in exactly the opposite direction? Two completely different possibilities arise here:

1. In the midst of the process of socialist transformation these countries may have to face up to such a serious situation — pressure from the reaction at home, economic mismanagement and shortcomings, but also pressure from America or elsewhere or an economic blockade — that they will be compelled to ask the USSR and the Soviet bloc for material assistance as they have always done so far. Experience shows that their development will then probably proceed in an identical manner as in the other Eastern European countries, especially Czechoslovakia: at the international level, from a voluntary and enthusiastic alliance to increasingly stifling dependence; at the internal level, from the elimination of “reactionary agents” and political opponents of socialism (on the pretext that they weaken the state in a period of crisis) to the consolidation of “class unity” and discipline by uniting communists and socialists within a “united Party of the working class”; and later from the leading role of this Party in the country’s political life to purges of “revisionist”, “anti-socialist”, “trotskyite”, “liberal”, “zionist”, “individualist” elements etc. — with the same result as in the East European countries: the establishment of the “Soviet model” (united Party and authoritarian structures) and integration into the “worldwide socialist camp” (limited sovereignty, “guaranteed” by the USSR).

Such a development is not inevitable: one can reckon with the existence of traditions and socialist forces in these countries which would recognise the peril in time and oppose such a policy with greater success than has been the case in other countries. In this hypothesis a new “Yugoslav” or “Czechoslovak” affair (this time a French or Italian one) could usher in a conflict between the “centre” and the “periphery” whose outcome would depend on one factor alone: whether the will of the country was expressed by a personality of the rank of Tito, who refused to bow to Stalin’s pressure in the 1950s, or by a new Dubcek, who, with a broken heart, allowed the Soviet Army to march into his country as a guarantor of the future of socialism.

2. The other alternative is that the communist parties of these countries, and with them the socialists and their progressive allies, will wish to keep their promises and build a *socialist society of another type*. The alliance between communists, socialists and other political forces is based on co-operation between equal partners, the rights of political opposition are safeguarded, democratic freedoms, especially of speech and assembly, are protected, the workers participate in the management of the economy; an idea of

national sovereignty is fostered which is not in contradiction with international solidarity but does not contain any trace of interference and domination by the “world centre”. It is, in brief, a socialism which is supported by the majority of citizens and does not need to resort to repression.

This alternative would offer the peoples of Eastern Europe a new “centre of attraction”; it would be all the more vital and dynamic since it would be based on one or several concrete examples of democratic socialism, on a different concrete model of the socialist society. This would usher in a new stage of development of the international communist and socialist movement, which would be characterised by radical transformations within the communist, socialist, social democratic parties and the various left-wing trends, both in the “socialist camp” and in the capitalist societies. In this context the *socialist opposition in the East European countries would appear to be the natural ally of this new trend*.

Many communists and democrats in Eastern Europe have set their hopes on this kind of development and consider it the only way to reshape the systems existing in their countries. I can remember what a leading figure of the Prague Spring said on returning from a “pressure trip” to Moscow: “From now on socialism can only be saved by the communists of Western Europe, who have no Soviet tanks standing outside their windows.” An interesting reflection, even though it shows a lack of deep knowledge of the complex logic inherent in the international communist movement.

Many members of the socialist opposition, while voicing the wish to see such a tempting prospect come true, are concerned with the following question: what will happen if democratic socialism comes to power in some Western countries in the present situation while “existing socialism” in the USSR and Eastern Europe still holds fast to its bureaucratic structures and is considerably stronger, above all in the military sphere? Is it not more likely, in this case, that it will first be influenced by authoritarian socialism, then eroded and finally dominated by it? This question ought to worry not only the members of the socialist opposition in Eastern Europe, who are anxious not to forfeit their great hope, but equally their Western comrades, who would face the same danger of seeing the very meaning of their struggle go to pieces.

Jacques Julliard wrote in *Le Nouvel Observateur* on 28 August 1972: “Historically speaking, democracy in the socialist countries has so far always been smothered under the impact of three factors: civil war, foreign intervention, and the existence of an all-power-

ful Party organised on the Leninist pattern." For the West, an addition should be made: "Total lack of knowledge of the Soviet model." True, the attitude of communists and other members of the Left in Western Europe towards the Soviet Union and the régimes in Eastern Europe is less euphoric and more critical today than it used to be. But this is still a long way from a thorough analysis; there is a tendency to criticise details rather than the principles of the matter, especially where the Soviet Union is concerned. Any radical criticism is met with the accusation of anti-Sovietism and "playing the enemy's game". Yet this is precisely the pattern on which repression in the Socialist countries works.

Such phenomena are in no way confined to the countries in which the communist party is in power. They already exist within the revolutionary movement even at the stage of preparing for a struggle for power. *They must be analysed and fought here and now if one is to prevent a return to the same "deformations",* the same mistakes, which can no longer in fact be described as "deformations", because they have been the rule and not the exception, and have apparently so far been an integral part of the process of building socialism.

They must therefore be reckoned with; they must be examined and analysed well before accession to power. One must assess to what extent they are inevitable in the process of building a new society and seek the means not of avoiding them completely, which is impossible, but of overcoming them. This does not offer a fool-proof guarantee against a repetition of such phenomena, but it does make it more probable that the "new course" will not suffer the same disaster.

This task cannot be mastered by the members of the socialist opposition in the East European countries alone. There must be an awareness of these problems among communists, socialists and Marxists in Western Europe. *They must support these efforts and consider them a decisive element of their common struggle. This is a crucial problem for the future of socialism: either it will be proved by practice and force of example that there can really exist a model of socialism other than the Soviet — authoritarian and bureaucratic — one; or the entire theory and practice of socialism must be subjected to a new analysis, a new assessment, and consequences must be drawn from these.*

A New Alternative

When we look at the programmes and demands of the various groups of the Soviet opposition and of the opposition forces in the other Eastern European countries, notably Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia, we notice, despite many differences stemming from conditions in the countries concerned and notwithstanding different formulations and tactics, a number of fundamental demands and objectives which together make up a political opposition platform. But we must not forget that apart from the socialist opposition in the USSR and in the East European countries there exist opposition groups and individuals who reject socialism as a system and show a preference for a Western type of parliamentary democracy, or who advocate a state system based on Christianity, or authoritarian régimes with an anti-communist nationalist character. These groups may enjoy some measure of support among sections of the population who have been disappointed by the existing system which professes to be socialist. But if we take into account their development so far and the division of the world into Soviet and US spheres of influence, these tendencies have no chance of influencing future events.

What then are the major objectives of the socialist opposition in Eastern Europe?

1. To maintain the nationalisation of the means of production but to transfer them from the present state ownership to popular ownership, with a broadening of the range of various forms: from State ownership which is suitable for large industry, to group ownership which is advantageous for medium-sized and smaller establishments; to co-operative ownership which is suitable for services and various crafts as well as for agriculture and trade. Some groups have come forward with the demand for "workers' " or "factory councils" as a form of self-management through which manual and white-collar workers are to decide production plans, technical equipment of factories, the distribution of surplus value and the appointment of managers and leading officials. However, this demand is raised only seldom by the Soviet opposition, where the tradition of workers' struggles is much too remote, while the socialist opposition in

Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Poland gives it top priority. In a number of East European countries the opposition envisages the existence of a private sector in the service sphere, though with strict limitations and supervision laid down by law so as to prevent any exploitation of workers or accumulation of private capital. The Soviet opposition places greater emphasis on the need to raise the efficiency of production and management in the economy and not so much on self-management and workers' control.

But, all the groups in the USSR and in the East European countries have one thing in common: they want to retain the collective ownership of the means of production, and they reject a return to private ownership of these means of production by capitalists, though official propaganda deliberately imputes this idea to them.

2. On the basis of collective ownership of the means of production, they demand the creation of a socialist political system which would genuinely guarantee the broad participation of the working people in the political and economic running of the country, as well as equal rights for all citizens. Here the main obstacle is the monopoly position of the Party and its identification with the state. That is why virtually all opposition programmes in the USSR and in the other East European countries underline the need for a *democratisation of the Party*, and the forging of new kinds of relation with people who have no party affiliation. In the USSR, as distinct from Czechoslovakia, no demand is made for political pluralism. One of the reasons is certainly that during the past fifty years they have had no tradition of party political confrontation. They demand discussion within the Party and debates on differences of opinion; that decision-making party institutions should consider alternative proposals and lastly, that the Communist Party must win the people's confidence and the right to a leading role by the correctness of its policy, which should be put to the population for judgement.

In the other socialist countries it is the need for a system of *political pluralism* which is stressed; the need for other political parties, representing the various interests of other groups in socialist society, to participate in political life and in decision-making. The relations between these parties and the Communist Party should be based on partnership and co-operation instead of that of a "transmission belt" acting on instructions from the Communist Party.

The various opposition groups are identical in defining socialist democracy as a system which grants its citizens more rights, more freedom and influence than bourgeois parliamentary democracy — and obviously also far more than a Stalinist bureaucracy does. It should be a combination of *representative democracy* in which the citizens choose their representatives by direct and secret elections at various levels and with a wide range of programmes and candidates, and *direct democracy*, which means direct participation of the citizens in the administration and supervision of power by workers' councils, by the self-administration of local government and by other forms of self-management.

3. Practically all opposition programmes "discover" the role of the trade unions to be that of representatives of the workers' interests in relation to the state body. It is recognised that under socialism, too, the interests of working people may well run counter to those of the state administration and that consequently *the working people must have their own autonomous organisations* such as trade unions, youth organisations, farmers' associations, women's organisations, co-operatives, associations of artists, scientists, etc. In addition to defending the interests of their memberships these mass organisations should be able to participate in decision-making, first of all by expressing their views on government proposals in their own independent press, and secondly by sending their delegates to Parliament and other bodies of workers' power.

4. All the documents of the opposition in the USSR and in the other socialist countries without exception place special emphasis on the absolutely guaranteed *freedom of opinion, assembly, criticism and information for all citizens*. The Left in the West frequently underrates this demand or views it as the expression of an intellectual élite which remains of no consequence for workers and peasants. But it is this demand, which the socialist movement has put forward right from the start, that is *the prerequisite of each and every democratisation process and of the mobilisation of the working people*. If the working people are kept ignorant of the actual economic situation in their own factory and in the state as a whole, of domestic and foreign policy, of the conflicts in governing bodies, of the various opinion trends etc., they will never be in a position to state their views on fundamental issues and formulate their own position; it will make them dependent on bureaucratic groups who speak for them and in their name. *Without these freedoms, even if they are only carried out gradually and partially, there can be no renewal of political life just as there can be*

no fundamental transformation in the USSR and in the East European countries.

Certain opposition groups, however, make the mistake of expecting pressure by Western governments to bring these liberties for them instead of waging their own struggle and exerting their own pressure on their ruling groups. In the USSR, moreover, the demand for tolerance within the country and the right to emigration, especially — though not exclusively — for the Jewish population plays a particularly important role; it is, of course, valid elsewhere too.

The intellectual opposition groups attach major importance to the demand for *freedom of the arts, science and research*. This may appear as an elitist demand confined merely to those whom it may concern or to the cream of the intelligentsia. But it is of major significance for the development of society as a whole, especially for the increasing elimination of the distinction between manual and intellectual work.

Under the conditions which exist in the USSR and in the East European countries the opposition can do no more than protest against violations of the law and deformation of socialist ideals, expose the worst injustices committed by the system, fight in defence of this or that member of the opposition, or at best try to bring about a partial improvement. It cannot, however, elaborate complex conceptions and programmes, discuss them with the working people, work out an organisational structure and so forth. It has the role of a beacon lighting the road in the dark, or of a fuse exploding in an untenable situation and releasing revolutionary forces, rather than that of a conscious "alternative" or a real political force. This applies in particular to the USSR, but also to countries with a political tradition such as Czechoslovakia.

Marxist theoreticians and politicians rightly criticised the Dubcek leadership and all those who held leading positions during the Prague Spring in 1968 for failing to give the entire process a clear conception, a political programme and correct tactics. Yet they forget that one needs time to work out a conception and tactics and that conditions for a political life must be created which is impossible under the rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy. That is why every movement for the renewal of socialism in the USSR and in every East European country will first of all take the form of a spontaneous outbreak with contradictory views and hazy conceptions. Differences will be cleared up, a programme worked out and tactics outlined in the course of development. This is precisely why oppo-

sition movements, groups and individuals such as Sakharov and Medvedev are of great importance for the future because at least in the initial stages they make possible a differentiation or a presentation of problems, thereby laying the foundations for future development.

Many of the objectives of the opposition in the USSR and in the other countries come under the same influence. And on this hinges the second important question: *how are these objectives to be implemented and translated into reality?*

After the Twentieth CPSU Congress it seemed possible to discuss and carry out some of these objectives within the Party, and within Soviet institutions. That is why most of the proposals were addressed to leading bodies of the Party, while a number of later "dissidents" participated in the work of various commissions and working groups which drew up alternative proposals for the leading Party and state bodies. Even after the fall of Khrushchev Sakharov addressed his well-known memorandum to the CPSU leadership, Yakir defended his ideas in the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences, and Roy Medvedev offered his study on Stalinism to the Party Publishing House.

When it became clear that the conservative forces in the leadership were not prepared to discuss these proposals but, on the contrary, to suppress them as expressions of a policy hostile to the Party, several groups and individuals made an effort to maintain their activities on a legal basis and decided not to embark on any kind of illegal activity. The initiative of Sakharov and of his friends in forming the Committee for the defence of Human Rights falls into this pattern. The Committee set itself the aim of campaigning for the rights enshrined in the Soviet constitution, and of protesting wherever valid laws were being violated. The first opposition groups in Czechoslovakia after the Soviet occupation likewise stressed their legal character (see the Ten-Point Manifesto of August 1969). In the same way, the criticism of the bureaucratic system of sociologists of the "Budapest school" was done in public and by official institutions.

As intolerance and repression were stepped up a number of opposition groups and individuals wondered what organisational forms to choose which would make it possible to attain the set objectives. This discussion went further in Czechoslovakia than anywhere else, as this study and the published documents show.

It became clear that possibilities for opposition activities within the Party were extremely limited after August 1968, and especially

after the Husak régime came to power. Consequently, the main task had to be to build up a socialist opposition movement outside the Party.

On the other hand the "Party democrats" in the USSR saw the only serious opposition current to be exclusively within the party and within official institutions. They considered this the only possibility of becoming active and of pressing for their objectives. But it is not clear to what extent this current has been successful in forming itself within the Party, and whether its sole objective is to back up the moderate wing in the leading bodies of the CPSU.

The socialist opposition in Czechoslovakia never ruled out the need and the possibility of acting within the Party and within legal institutions, in short whenever an opportunity should arise. Yet it opposed the erroneous view that there was no possibility for a political struggle outside the Party and the existing institutions. Instead, they arrived at the conclusion that in the given historical situation the crucial point of the opposition's struggle lay precisely outside the Party and that this was an independent political struggle. There were, however, different opinions as to who should be the mainstay and organiser of the struggle. Some leaned towards the view that a new illegal communist party had to be formed which would draw on the results of the Fourteenth CPCz Congress, thereby continuing the line of the Prague Spring. Others maintained that the Communist Party was far too discredited and that the existence of two communist parties would make the masses feel that this was a struggle within the Party among communists, which would in turn isolate the opposition from the people.

The socialist opposition in Czechoslovakia is the first example of a political opposition in a socialist country. Its existence will unquestionably meet with a response in the other countries, including the USSR. At the moment it is too soon to conclude whether this form has proved itself in Czechoslovakia and whether — naturally in different variants — it can be applied also in other East European countries. The repression which the occupation régime set in motion against it in 1971-72 and which reached its climax in the series of political trials in summer 1972 only goes to prove that the ruling bureaucratic group was fully aware of the political weight of a socialist opposition and that it was determined to crush this opposition in Czechoslovakia before its example could find followers in the other socialist countries.

At the same time the Soviet leadership struck at the opposition in the USSR, in particular its most interesting journal, the *Chronicle*

of Current Events, which has become an important source of information on the activities of the Soviet opposition for the world public. At the same time it acted as a potential centre around which the various opposition groups and individuals could rally. The trials of Yakir and Krasin, the sentencing of Amalrik and Bukovsky, the detention of Grigorenko in a psychiatric clinic where he was to be completely silenced, and the campaign against Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, were aimed at destroying and demoralising the Soviet opposition even before it had had time to become organised and to establish contacts with similar groups in other countries in Eastern Europe as well as with the Left and the democratic movement in the West.

The form of open political struggle in which Sakharov, Solzhenitsyn and their friends stood up to this campaign of vilification deserves our admiration and solidarity. Yet some of their statements reveal the weaknesses and limitations of the Soviet opposition, particularly when they talk about the Western world and call on Western governments to force the Soviet leadership to agree to a democratisation in return for economic and other forms of co-operation. It would appear that these representatives of the Soviet opposition failed to recognise the true situation which has arisen out of the mutual interests of the Soviet and American establishments and their Western allies and which results in *the common interest of both partners to maintain the political status quo in the world*. This kind of notion also demonstrates a certain despair among the opposition or at least in some of its sections at the political indifference of the Soviet population, and a certain indecision on the question of how to obtain their objectives by a political struggle within the system and by the forces of the people. This demand to the West obviously gives official Soviet propaganda the pretext with which to brand not only Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn but the entire opposition as "enemies of détente and co-operation", which is of course untrue because it was precisely they who were among the first to press for such co-operation in which they saw a possible improvement in the situation. Yet they were disappointed; they had harboured unjustified illusions. This strengthened the hand of the communist parties which support the Soviet policy of peaceful coexistence and which can now accuse the Soviet opposition of joining forces with the champions of the cold war (see Moreau in *L'Humanité*). But the main reason for such a confusion of ideas lies in the fact that the Soviet opposition and similar movements in the East European countries — with certain exceptions — re-

ceive no help from communist and socialist parties and from the West European Left as a whole. That is why out of despair and because of their lack of understanding of the situation a section turned to those quarters where this support or at least publicity is forthcoming. This paradoxical situation was explained by the Italian Marxist Rossana Rossanda, expelled from the Italian Communist Party, in an article in *Il Manifesto*. She speaks of "*the considerable blame and responsibility which the European Left has to bear*".

The tragedy of the Soviet opposition lies in the fact that it is being condemned by communist parties for maximalism and impatience while the rest of the Left reproaches it for "liberalism" and lack of "class consciousness" as well as "reformism". Here we come back once again to another instance of the fetishism which burdens the international communist movement and the Left: the unbridgeable gap between "reformism" and "revolution". In countries like the USSR, where there is a certain basis for a socialist society, even though it is thoroughly imperfect, this point of dispute is absolutely irrelevant. As we have already demonstrated through the example of Czechoslovakia in 1968, *under certain circumstances, and given the activity of the masses, reforms can create the conditions for qualitative transformations of the system towards a more extensive socialist democracy so that the masses can in fact play a revolutionary role.*

Against this background it becomes clear that a truly revolutionary activity in the USSR and in the East European countries would today mean speeding up those reforms of the given system as would provide for a greater participation of the working people in decision-making and in leadership, even though such measures may prove to be entirely insufficient and would only gradually approach the ultimate objective — a democratisation of the Soviet system.

In the leadership of the CPSU a struggle is beginning to brew very quietly between the moderate wing, which considers certain reforms indispensable, and the representatives of the old dogmatic policy who fear reforms and change, which they consider an overture for upheaval and a threat to their privileges. The moderate wing concentrates for the time being on better relations with the USA, the Federal Republic of Germany and other capitalist countries so as to take advantage of new opportunities in the economy and in internal reforms. On certain questions the standpoint of the opposition coincides with that of the moderate wing, and the pos-