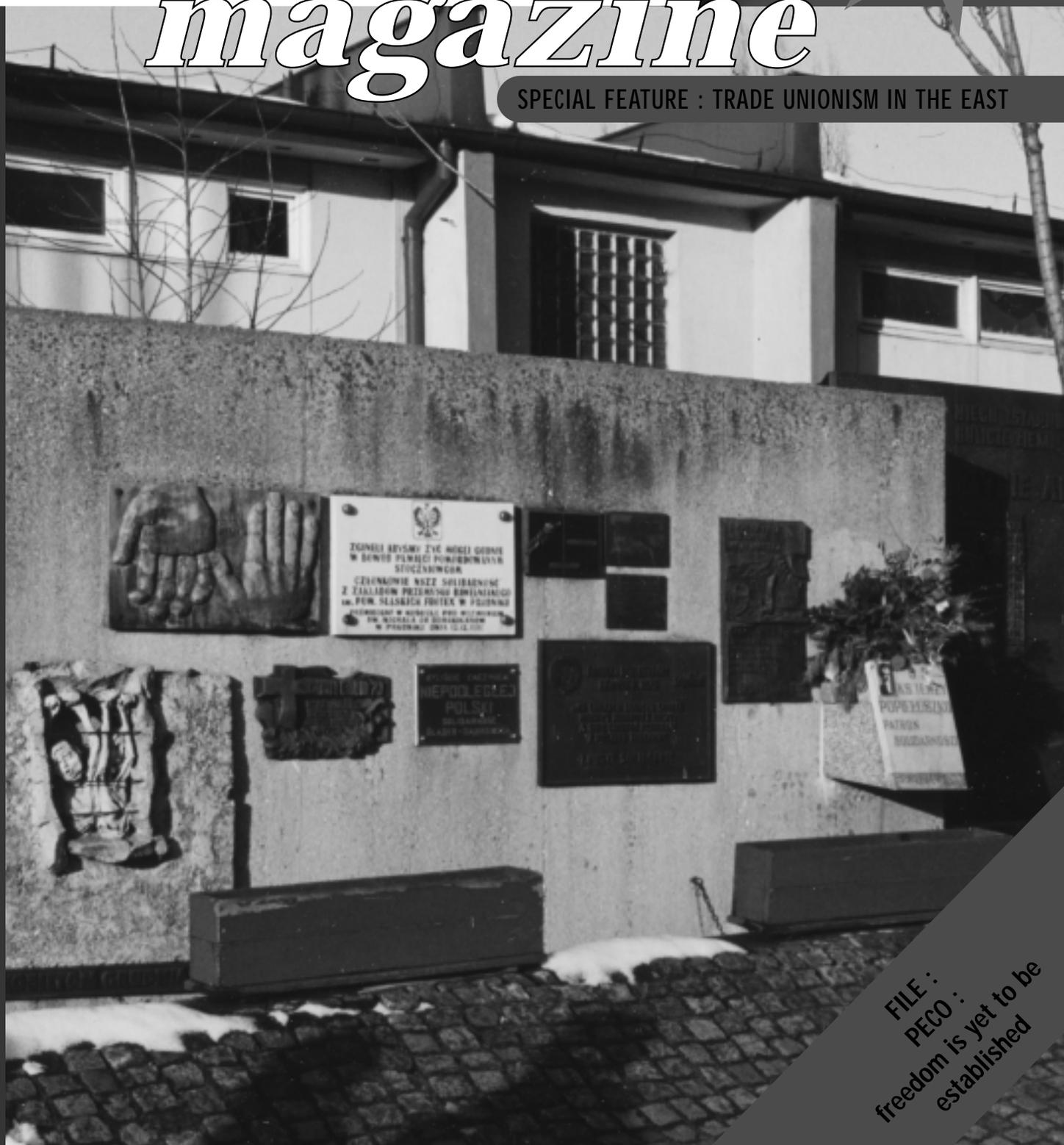


LABOR

magazine



SPECIAL FEATURE : TRADE UNIONISM IN THE EAST



FILE :
PECO :
freedom is yet to be
established

78th year, number 2001/3

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Picture :
Gdansk (Poland): mon-
ument to martyrs of
independent trade
unionism

PROFILE

Her smile became famous at trade union meetings. Regina Rekesiene, General Secretary of the Federations of Lithuanian Workers (FLW), has henceforth made a niche for herself in this environment: "The people who see me from outside could take me for someone weak or superficial. It is true that I see life as a game. In reality I am quite strict, sometimes sad, but despite everything, I always keep an optimistic vision. I sometimes have the terrible impression of remaining the little girl that I was, but all things considered, this helps me in my work, to view situations in a more open manner."



Regina Rekesiene:
"When you do not know what
to do, you must ask for advice".

Beyond the obviously false superficial appearance, Regina Rekesiene is someone who has consequently had ideas, well before getting involved in trade unionism. "At three years, I saw a helicopter for the first time, and I run three kilometres behind it. From that day, I had the desire to fly. It was during the Soviet era, and to be a pilot, one had to go through a very strict commission. The opportunities were limited, especially for

A WOMAN GENERAL SECRETARY OF A NATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION IS HARD TO COME BY. HOWEVER, THE YOUNG GIRL WHO WAS DREAMING OF FLYING HAS BECOME AN ACTIVIST BY CHANCE, OR NEARLY, THANKS TO THE DEMOCRATISATION MOVEMENT OF HER COUNTRY, LITHUANIA.

Regina Rekesiene

women, and more so when one came, as I did, from a poor rural family. But the dream was so strong that I did the impossible to achieve it. I was able to enter the flying club, I was one of the very few women there, among 60 men, and it was there that I learnt to become a leader. I ended up becoming a pilot, whereas no one believed it. That formed my character."

DISTRESSED AT BEING ELECTED

From a flying club to the head of a trade union, would it therefore be only by a bird's flight that a good dose of the unforeseen would allow one to cross over? Regina Rekesiene worked at the university, and was there when Lithuania began to change, at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Sajudis ("movement", in Lithuanian) was born in 1989, mainly under the direction of leaders of the academic world. It was not a trade union, like Solidarnosc in Poland, but the social dynamics were similar. "It was an exciting era with a lot of debates. One felt that the people had confidence in the future."

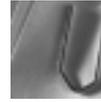
That is when the true commitment of Regina began, but not without difficulty. During the Soviet era, she recounts; everyone was automatically a member of a trade union, but without really any involvement in activities there. "In 1989, we had the

opportunity to elect company directors. Certain institutions took advantage of this to elect at the same time, trade union leaders. I was one of them. I only accepted to be a candidate in a scientific institute because I did not think of the possibility of being elected at all. All the same, I was chosen, and this distressed me because I had no idea of what to do in a scientific environment, which hated trade unions in the Soviet Union. They thought that as a woman, I was weak, and that it would be easy for them. Three days later, we began to discuss how we would work and what we wanted. Gradually, I felt myself given a responsibility because the people had confidence in me to defend their rights."

LEARNING TO KILL

Very quickly, however, the changes in the country showed some ambiguities. Many of the leaders seemed to be only interested in their political career, others joined the Sajudis movement to destroy it, and to prevent it from succeeding. This did not prevent the future General Secretary of the LDF from pursuing her commitment. "I began to reform the trade union, with colleagues who worked in other centres, in such a way that no one could destroy what we were doing." Then, the responsibilities followed. The organisation gained strength and entered into a dynamics of exchanges between all trade unions and the Republic.

Was Regina motivated? "I think that that had always been in me. At the flying club, we were a small group, but each person had serious responsibilities towards the others. We learnt there to help one another. When I was elected for the first time, the people had confidence in me to bring about a change and my experience in having responsibilities helped me to find



Signs of a revival

A few months to the 25th WCL Congress (22- 27 October), which will take place in Romania, this LABOR edition focuses on trade unionism in Central and Eastern Europe. This region of the world carries in itself, the hopes, and first signs, of an important trade union revival. Under the heavy yoke of communist regimes, monopoly was the rule. What is more, it was practised in a very questionable relationship between the State, the single party and the trade union. It was not exactly the tripartism desired by the WCL, since confusion reigned there and, in the final analysis, workers did not have any say during this era.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, many independent trade unions were born. Moreover, they contributed to a large extent, to changes in society. The former communist organisations continued to exist, under other names and facades. They had not yet given up their methods.

But the important fact lay in the emergence of an independent trade unionism, also undoubtedly in transition, but capable of imposing itself as an unavoidable social actor.

This does not always go down well, especially because communist pretension to collectivism is now provoking a backlash of individual if not individualistic reactions, which also affect the rate and type of unionisation. Everything, like the so-called false equality established by these regimes, actually unmasks great injustices between men and women or among communities. But the tree of difficulty must not obscure the forest of hope. After all, trade unionism in the West was not built in twelve years either.

For the WCL, organising a congress in Bucharest, means to first recognise the fact of democratisation in motion. It is also to underline the enormous challenges that await countries of the region: social protection, privatisation, migrations, unemployment etc.... Finally it is to show the solidarity of men and women workers of the whole world towards their colleagues in Romania and the CEE countries, confronted with these challenges, and who have to find their place, a dignified place, in the new social model to be built.

Social rights are never obtained as a gift; they are the result of the struggles of the stakeholders, structured trade unions and workers, who are trained and bound together.



Willy Thys,
General Secretary

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ANALYSIS

Trade Unions in transition in the East

THE BERLIN WALL FELL IN 1989, AT THE SAME TIME AS THE ROMANIAN REGIME OF CEAUDESCU. POLAND AT THAT TIME HAD PLAYED A PRECURSORY ROLE IN TRADE UNION FREEDOM. TWELVE YEARS LATER, TRADE UNION PLURALISM IS AN ATTAINMENT, ON PAPER IN ANY CASE. BUT FROM THERE TO TALKING ABOUT FREEDOM OF ACTION, THERE IS A WIDE GAP.

Is communism a paradise for workers and for trade unions? Twelve years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the illusions have disappeared. Even where the rate of unionisation was high, they were due to automatic affiliation, not voluntary on the part of workers.

“During the Soviet era, everyone was automatically a member of a trade union, but without really being active”, recalls Regina Rekesiene, General Secretary of the Lithuanian Federation of workers, member of the WCL. Moreover, the trade unions registered in the Party-State-mass Organisation trilogy, were the channels of transmission of political power for workers, and not the place of expression for them. Not to mention the fact that the State was also the largest employer, which contributed to a total confusion of respective roles.

Today, the pendulum has the tendency of tilting in the other direction, that of mistrust towards collective organisation. *“Individualisation acts as a reflex to the previous collective thought”,* according to Peter Seideneck, of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). This is what Anna Oulatar of the ETUC confirms: *“Communism is not created from real collectivity. With the dismantling of single parties, the main problem becomes individualisation.”* She affirms, besides, that paradoxically, *“there is nothing like communism to break collective direction”.*

TRADE UNIONISM OF SERVICE

In reality, it is not so much the number of workers affiliated to trade unions that constitutes the main problem. As Bogdan Hossu, vice-president of the WCL for Eastern Europe, stated: *“Strangely, the degree of unionisation is not uniform enough in the different countries: 45 to 50% in Poland, 65% in the Czech Republic, 50% in Slovakia, 55% in Ukraine, 60% in Romania, etc. One cannot therefore talk about disaffection towards trade unions.”* One could even add Croatia (more than 60%) and Albania (65%, in any case according to trade union figures). And, if there is a certain disaffiliation, it is not necessarily more pronounced than in Western Europe.

The difficulty rather comes from the overriding concept of the role of trade unions prevailing among workers: a trade unionism of service, where the most important thing is in the advantages that one hopes to derive more than in the solidarity. Especially where the high rate of unemployment (60% in Georgia, 43% in Macedonian...) reduces as much the economically active population and almost makes employment a privilege. This explains the large proportion of business trade unions, which remain independent of any confederal structure. The dues moreover often remain blocked at the level of the enterprise, which is contrary to the solidarity between the strong and weak sectors. Not to mention the situations where these trade unions in enterprises are dominated by the employers' organisation.



A general characteristic : social inequality.



The strength of trade union organisations, as social actors, does not consequently come so much from the number of affiliates as from their level of structuring. For Peter Seideneck, “*within civil society, trade union organisations are among the best structured, the opposite, for example, of employers’ organisations. In all countries, they carry weight and play an important role.*” Without them, the situation of workers would be worse.

Two great models have appeared in independent trade unionism in the East, analyses Bogdan Hossu: “*There is on the one hand what I call the Polish model, also present in the Baltic countries and in the CIS. It consists in a trade union structure aspiring to be single and national, divided into trade and regional organisations. On the other hand, one finds in other countries a plurality of confederations, many of which were created after the fall of the Communists regimes. Before being national, these trade unions were trade-level, and several of them were confronted in their countries with the burden of the old State trade union structure, which persists.*”

PARTISAN HERITAGE

No doubt, Central and Eastern Europe present a great diversity. Between Slovenia, “*little Switzerland of Central Europe*”, and Croatia, which has mass unemployment, there is a world. However, the regions also present common characteristics.

One of these is eye-catching: the politicisation of trade unions. Yet today, trade unions called post-communists are very dependent on parties of the same trend, and in Bulgaria, for example, their links with the government prevents one from talking of real independence. The inherited structures of the previous era tend to preserve the link between trade union duty and political duty. But the way of addressing workers is different, more subtle. It is no longer a matter of simply transmitting decisions from top to bottom, but of convincing potential members that a single trade union is more effective. Bogdan specifies, “*Unfortunately for them, these structures maintain a method of internal operation which is hardly democratic, and the people avoid them. Consequently, the creation of each independent trade union attracts workers and weakens the former communist organisation. You understand why the latter hardly appreciates independent trade unionism.*”

But politicisation is also the result of trade unions born in reaction against communist power. For Peter Seideneck, there is “*a phenomenon peculiar to countries in transition, as compared to those where capitalism is*

more developed: political temptation.” He observes that everywhere, the leftist as well as rightist parties are in close relationship with the trade unions, and “*a number of bossy trade unions sit in parliaments*”.



Privatisation, unavoidable.

MISTRUST AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL

Is this avoidable? Perhaps not in the years 1989 – 1999, when one had to ensure that the change had actually taken place. When the manpower of the State is reduced and socially, there is nothing much to hope for in the short term materially, politics could be the place for future out-flow. But, Peter Seideneck adds, “*It is dangerous. Too much closeness to party politics could lead trade unions into an impasse. When there is plurality of parties, partisan interests within trade unions risk creating dissension.*”

This politicisation also risks widening the gap between trade union hierarchy and their rank and file, about concerns focused much more on strict trade union activity. Even within the WCL, some organisations make this mistake, at times sharing the same premises as the political party.

Solidarnosc, rightly or wrongly is at times the object of the same criticism: “*Solidarnosc has ensured itself a position in politics, but at the same time it is weakening*



itself, since it protects government reforms", according to the sociologist Andrzej Rychard (Courier international, 5 - 11.10.2000).

The fragmentation of organisations brought about by the already mentioned individualisation, risks being strengthened by it. Workers do not accept that their heads of department leave their trade unions to become parliamentarians or ministers, with the cortege of privileges attached to these functions. Whereas today, in most countries in Central and Eastern Europe (PECO), a leader of a well-structured trade union organisation could have more influence in matters than a minister for labour.

For Peter Seideneck, *"a normal relationship between a trade union and political power must be confrontational, no matter the leaning of the government."*

THREATS TO SOCIAL MATTERS

Privatisation of public enterprises is another common challenge for trade union organisations in Central and Eastern Europe.

Privatising is certainly not the absolute evil. Privatisation has benefited some countries (more than 23% of the GDP in Poland since 1990), certain sectors (thousands of jobs created in the SMEs), certain social categories (young middle class, to the detriment

of retired people and civil servants). This is what makes neo-liberal economists say that the "transition" is difficult, but that the "sacrifices" are worth it, to achieve modernisation of the economies of PECO.

But, privatisation generally brings about in its wake restrictions to labour rights and workers rights, an issue that must however not be analysed in a doctrinal manner.

Here, one swings between two extremes. On one hand, maintaining a system of social protection typical of a rigid and planned economy, which at times is nothing but shared poverty, and on the other hand the search for immediate social protection equal to that of industrialised countries of Western Europe, which represents a Marxist position. Between the two, there is room for a system inspired undoubtedly by principles of European models, not of North American liberalism, but which, despite everything, is realistic and adapted to economic circumstances. Favourable circumstances, if one believes in UNCTAD, which indicated that in 2000 *"the flow of direct foreign investment to and from Central and Eastern Europe once again reached record levels"* (Communiqué of 20 June 2001).

Whether they are of communist or another origin, all the trade union organisations have an interest in resisting together governments which try to worsen labour rights, to the point of going against ILO Conventions. Even at times by wrongly invoking the requirements of European integration, as in Hungary, where the government wanted to replace social dialogue with less constraining forums. Or yet again by systematically limiting room for collective bargaining, by quibbling on the representatives of the most critical organisations etc. The new labour code submitted in December 2000 to the Duma, the Russian Parliament, was with the declared aim of *"putting the labour laws in line with the market economy"*, which means that the legal working day is increased from 8 to 12 hours, that individual contracts are encouraged to the detriment of collective bargaining, that trade unions see their role in the enterprise reduced to representation...

(Source: ATTAC, 5 December 2000).

INTEGRATION, NOT WITHOUT EVIL

European integration, everyone, or nearly everyone is for it. But beyond the agreement of principles, the modalities call for debate, also within the trade union



The European section of the WCL, invited by Solidarnosc.



world. In fact, the PECO organisations are not all in the same boat. At the European Trade Union Confederation, four types of organisations have been identified, according to two criteria: belonging to a country in negotiation, or not, to enter the European Union; as a trade union organisation, being a member or non-member of the ETUC. These different status could create tensions, as they also exist between organisations of Western or Eastern countries.

No one is saying it explicitly, but one reads between the lines that the period of hope, which followed the fall of the Wall, gave way to disappointment in PECO trade unions. As an impression of betrayal: there would be a conviction of a historic moment, at the beginning of the 1990s, when an integral European construction was possible. And now the West is creating new distinctions between countries.

Meanwhile, the stake is fundamental: build a European trade union bloc, without division. The ETUC is attached to this: *"Today, the PECO organisations, which are members of ETUC pay only 25% of the normal dues, but this is not so for members of the second zone: they discuss and vote like others. But it is true that we had to adapt our agenda and our methods, so as to take into account the specific issues of new entrants."* And as a reminder, at the beginning, *"colleagues of the East were rather in the position of silent observers"*, whereas only two organisations from the West attended the first meeting of the ETUC working group on European integration.

Things have evolved gradually, and according to Peter Seideneck, paternalism of the initial years has disappeared, and the time is no longer for the creation of specific structures for PECO trade unions. Some concerns have become common, such as the already mentioned social protection: if the countries which are going to enter the European Union have systems that are less favourable to workers, the risk of weakening social protection among current members of the Union, will be great in the end.

THE FEAR OF WAVES

However, divergences exist between the short-term interests of organisations in Western and Eastern Europe, for example with regard to the free movement of workers. Must this law accepted in the Union be extended to all the new entrants? *"Yes, immediately"*, replies particularly Solidarnosc (Poland), for whom there is no place to maintain two different

scales. *"Only when the salary of an applicant country will be 80% of Austrian salary"*, replies the ÖGB (Austria). In this country, as in Germany, the public is afraid of massive immigration, and trade union organisations exemplify this fear.

Must one be really worried about the waves of migrants coming from countries, which will enter the Union? This is not what the opinion polls say, but in any case, it is a question of principle: the ETUC recalled it, affirming that *"the free movement of workers is one of the four fundamental freedoms of the internal market"* (Communiqué of 14 December 2000). Consequently, if *"specific measures in the boarder areas"* are needed and if *"the periods of transition are unavoidable"*, the ETUC *"explicitly opposes a selective introduction of free movement geared towards particularly skilled workers"*. The draft of the European Commission stipulates a total period of transition of seven years, with the possibility of reduction after evaluation, and with the right for States to add three years.

The upheavals that the entry into the EU will bring about will only strengthen the challenges thrown at trade unions, typical of countries in transition, but the responses are made more complex by the transition that the organisations themselves must go through.

André Linard





THE WCL AND EASTERN EUROPE

In support of pluralism

THE WCL, FOR THE FIRST TIME, IS HOLDING ITS CONGRESS IN EASTERN EUROPE. THE CHOICE IS CLEAR: TO SUPPORT TRADE UNION DEMOCRATISATION AND STRENGTHEN THE ALREADY EXISTING SOLIDARITY WITH WORKERS OF THE REGION.

Before the difficult period of Nazism and fascism, followed by communist domination, some important trade unions of Central and Eastern Europe were members of the WCL¹. The totalitarian regimes that were subsequently imposed in the PECO were characterised by an institutional proximity between the party, the State and the trade union, and by the absence of trade union freedom. The independent organisations have disappeared, in favour of single and dependent confederations, for which the WCL has always shown mistrust: *"If trade union unity must be welcomed with satisfaction when it comes from an agreement reached between free trade unions, an imposed trade union unification policy should be considered not only as an advantage to the rights of association and trade union freedom, but as a fundamental gain to democracy."* Affirmed in 1964 by the Board of the IFCTU, ancestor of the WCL.

The emergence of Solidarnosc, in Poland, the agreements of Gdansk (1980), the more or less popular uprising depending on the country, subsequently shattered the foundation of trade union monopoly. Pluralism had regained its rights, without the practice always following declarations of principles. Many trade union organisations in Russia, for example, are still announcing figures of members based on old methods, where all the workers of a sector were considered as unionised.

HEADING FOR BUCHAREST

The first independent trade union of this region to become affiliated with the WCL was Solidarnosc. Others followed. Jan Kulakowski, close to Solidarnosc, was General Secretary of the WCL from 1976 to 1989. The WCL has since 1990 confirmed its enthusiasm for the re-appearance of independent trade unionism in the East by organ-

ising a confederal board meeting in Gdansk. On that occasion, a WCL plaque was put on a wall constructed in memory of the martyrs of trade union freedom in Poland.

In 1997, the WCL set up a regional liaison office in Bucharest. In 2001, it had affiliates in Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine and Romania, as well as in Kazakhstan, certainly in Asia, but also a former Soviet member state. Contacts were also made in Albania, Croatia and Kosovo. Some of these organisations are smaller, in terms of membership, but others, on the contrary, are pace-setters in their countries (Poland, Romania, Lithuania...).

The WCL is not affiliating trade unions derived from former communist organisations; all its affiliates are free and democratic, born in the move of trade unionism independent of States or enterprises. This clear political option sometimes entails practical disadvantages, especially when the post-communist organisations are the only ones to inherit the assets of former single organisations; or when, as in Bulgaria, political power still continues to have its privileged trade union allies.

The next WCL Congress will be the first in a Central or Eastern European country. Romania is one of the CEE countries where trade union organisations are well structured, which explains especially, the choice of Bucharest as venue for the Congress. The WCL has two affiliates there: CNS Cartel Alfa and the "Confédération des Syndicats Démocratiques de Roumanie", CSDR (Confederation of Democratic Trade Unions of Romania). The President of Cartel Alfa, Bogdan Hossu, is Vice-President of the WCL for Central and Eastern Europe.

Thus Romania is a virgin land for the WCL, but not really an unknown territory.



Jan Kulakowski, then Secretary General of the WCL, welcomes Lech Walesa.

1. See especially Patrick Pasture: Histoire du syndicalisme chrétien international, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1999.



Clandestine printing office during the communist period ...

Similarities or differences? Homogenous block or different subregions?

The temptation to consider Central and Eastern European Countries (PECO) as one is great. However, explains Peter Seideneck, of the European Trade Union Confederation, "These countries had in common the pressure of belonging to the Soviet block, but with the disappearance of the latter, peculiar characters are developing". He however stresses that, despite their diversity, trade union organisations in these countries are confronted with similar

difficulties: privatisation, labour and workers' rights that governments are trying to challenge ...

For one does not destroy with impunity, societies in which, despite all their faults, a minimum amount of social guarantees are accorded to the population. Aspiring towards liberty in the former communist countries can lead to the other extreme, (which has already happened in Russia, for example): privatisation and outright liberalisation, without any State regulatory role likely to represent the general interest. A law of the jungle, which

divides the society into a minority of unscrupulous winners over resources, and an excluded majority. If this is the price of the fall of communism, was it really worth it, workers sometimes ask?.

Hence the importance to maintain safe guards, such as trade union freedom, which is not yet obtained de facto in throughout the PECO. The following pages give an overview of it, for nine countries of the region where national trade union confederations are affiliated to the WCL.

SOMMAIRE

BULGARIA
HUNGARY

LITHUANIA
MACEDONIA

GENERAL SURVEY IN A FEW
FIGURES ...

POLAND
CZECH REPUBLIC

ROMANIA
SLOVAKIA

UKRAINE
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ...



Bulgaria

SOCIAL ISSUES

Inflation and the loss of purchasing power, indebtedness of the State, representativeness of trade union confederations (see p.20-21). Salaries are not always paid on time.

TRADE UNION LANDSCAPE

The National Trade Union Promyana (WCL) declares 60,196 members in 9 sectors or territorial structures. The government has withdrawn the representative status of NTU by an illegal decree (annulled by the Supreme Court, but being applied any way).

The Association of Democratic Trade Unions (ADTU), which claims 52,000 members, suffered the same fate.

The Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB-KNSB) legacy of the single commu-

nist trade union, had 1,663,821 workers and employees in 1993, 1,060,000 in 1996 and 608,000 in 1999. It was known as a workers' national representative organisation since 1993. On its part, Podkrepa, which still has 154,000 members after having had 900,000 was established in 1989 as a dissident organisation at the initiative of a small group of intellectuals. At the time, it symbolised an alternative democratic trade union movement, before getting close to power.

Many members have left the big trade unions due to too much proximity to the political world. Some gave up their membership, others found themselves back into the Community of Free Trade Unions of Bulgaria (CFTUB), the Edinstvo Independent Trade Union (ITU) and the General Industry Trade Unions.

TRADE UNION FREEDOM

The Confederations which are not close to post-communist political sectors are subjected to discriminatory clauses, limiting freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining for democratic trade unions. The Committee on trade union freedom of the ILO published a report in March 2000 (no. 320) on this subject, but the government does not respect the recommendations of the Committee.

Strikes are prohibited in some sectors, whilst many enterprises, especially the small to medium businesses, do not follow the Labour Code or collective conventions.

Hungary

SOCIAL ISSUES

One of the best examples of transition. Privatisation is accomplished to a large extent, accompanied by social safe guards. Close to 80% of the GNP is now generated by the private sector. Economic growth is good (+ 4.1% in 1999) and the economic and social situation is generally stable. Hungary is a member of the OECD since 1996 and is negotiating its entry into the European Union.

TRADE UNION LANDSCAPE

The MszOSz (National confederation of Trade Unions in Hungary), product of the former communist body, remains the main confederation, despite a reduction of members (currently 465,000 workers and 250,000 pensioners).

Then comes the Forum for Trade Union co-operation (274,000 workers and 172,000 pensioners), LIGA (liberal background, 98,000 members), the national Federation of Workers' Councils (NFWC - MOSz), which is affiliated to the WCL and has 56,000 members, and the Independent Federation of Trade Unions.

TRADE UNION FREEDOM

The current government is centre-right, and hardly bothers to maintain contact with trade unions. There is low level social dialogue. The government has abolished the Ministry of Labour and has shared its expertise among the Ministry for Economy and that for Family and Social Affairs. In 2000, there has not been a tripartite agreement on salaries.

There is no problem of trade union oppression in the strict sense, but the law is evolving in an unfavourable way for workers' organisations.



Lithuania

SOCIAL ISSUES

See article p22-23.

The early part of 1990 was characterised by great economic difficulties following independence and the exit of planned Soviet economy. Many conflicts on privatisation took place. The GNP increased before falling again, whilst unemployment was high. Privatisation is on-going, but the State maintains an economic role.

TRADE UNION LANDSCAPE

Four trade union federations are recognised and have received a share of the legacy of the former communist trade union, according to a legal distribution. In 2000, however, there was the fear of seeing a part of these resources being used to fund electoral campaign of ex-communist parties.

Independent trade unionism emerged from 1988. The Lithuanian Labour Federation (LDF) is a member of the WCL. (See portrait of Regina Rekesiene on pages 2 and 24).

Lithuania (LDS/LWU) and the Lithuanian Trade Union Unit (LPSS,) are both members of the ICFTU.

The former communist trade union body was re-named National Body of Lithuanian Trade Unions in 1993, after merging with other organisations.

TRADE UNION FREEDOM

The right to go on strike is legally recognised, except for officials of essential services. But the procedures are very long.



Macedonia

SOCIAL ISSUES

The civil war is currently the dominant factor of the Macedonian context, which conditions socio-economic issues. Macedonia was the poorest republic of former Yugoslavia. The break-up of the latter has led to the loss of markets for her, whilst Greece, for political reasons, was putting economic pressure on the country.

The rate of unemployment is high: 41.4% in 2000. Inflation has however been successfully reduced from 200% in 1993 to 1% in 1999.

Macedonia has meanwhile, found new outlets in substitution of Serbia, during the war between the latter and Kosovo (1999). But it has had to also host numerous

refugees. Privatisation is largely accomplished, but it has given way to social tensions. In 1999, many work stoppages took place because of delays in the payment of salaries.

TRADE UNION LANDSCAPE

The Federation of Trade Unions in Macedonia (SSM) constitute the main federation in the country. It is the product of the former official organisation of Yugoslavia, whose assets it received. Independent unionism is represented by the Union of Independent and Autonomous Trade Unions of Macedonia (UIASM), affiliated to the WCL.

TRADE UNION FREEDOM

There is no law on collective bargaining, but the SSM speaks on behalf of workers in some tripartite discussions.





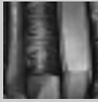
General survey in a few figures ...



LIST OF COUNTRIES	POPULATION (MILLIONS)	GDP/INHAB	HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX (UNPD)	INCOME RELATION BETWEEN 20% RICHEST AND 20% POOREST	RATE OF EMPLOYMENT	RATE OF UNEMPLOYMENT
ALBANIA	3,1	2804	0,713	ND	52,8	17,6
BÉLARUS	10,3	6319	0,781	2,9	ND	2,3
BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
BULGARIA	8,3	4809	0,772	4,4	54,2	12,2
CROATIA	4,5	6749	0,795	3,9	ND	18,6
ESTONIA	1,4	7682	0,801	6,7	66,0	5,1
HUNGARY	10,1	10232	0,817	4,5	54,2	8,0
LATVIA	2,4	5728	0,771	5,3	61,7	9,2
LITHUANIA	3,7	6436	0,789	5,2	64,8	6,9
MACEDONIA	2,0	4254	0,763	ND	40,3	41,4
MOLDAVIA	4,4	1947	0,700	6,0	ND	1,9
POLAND	38,7	7619	0,814	5,3	60,8	10,6
SLOVAKIAN REPUBLIC	5,4	9699	0,825	2,6	60,3	15,6
CZECH REPUBLIC	10,3	12362	0,843	3,5	67,6	6,5
ROUMANIA	22,5	5648	0,770	4,2	70,8	10,3
SLOVENIA	2,0	14293	0,861	4,2	65,1	14,6
UKRAINE	50,9	3194	0,744	4,8	ND	4,3
YUGOSLAVIA	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
RUSSIA	147,4	6460	0,771	12,2	ND	13,3

Moscow ●

The figures are taken from the UNDP World Report on Human Development 2000, except for the data on the rates of employment, which stem from Employment and Labour Market in the Countries of the Central Europe, a publication of the Statistical Office of the European Communities - EUROSTAT, Theme 3 - Population and Social Conditions. All data date back from 1998.



Poland

SOCIAL ISSUES

Poverty is a major challenge. In 1999, 16.5% of the Polish people earned less than half the monthly expenses of households, and 6.9% lacked the barest minimum. These two figures are increasing ; the income gap between the richest and the poorest has risen from 5.3 to 1).

Social discussions, as in other countries, centres on some broad subjects:

1. the move from a planned economy to a market economy, restructuring and privatisation of businesses, liberalisation of markets
2. the micro-economic strategy to ensure balanced growth
3. security and social protection.

TRADE UNION LANDSCAPE

NSZZ Solidarnosc spearhead of the struggle for trade union pluralism, is the largest federation, with about 1.1 million members. The trade union, which is affiliated to both the WCL and ICFTU, has been locked in discussions because of the political choices made by some leaders.

The Alliance of trade unions of all Poland (OPZZ) claims 3 million members, but independent studies put the number at about 800,000. It is the modern version of the federation established by the communist power in 1984, when Solidarnosc was banned. The OPZZ has no international affiliation.

TRADE UNION FREEDOM

Poland has ratified the fundamental ILO conventions, which are generally respected, and the labour law is evolving positively. Some employers, mainly in the private sector, however, do not respect it, preventing the unionisation of their workers.



Czech Republic

SOCIAL ISSUES

The Czech Republic is evident of the great success of the socio-economic transition, just as to a lesser extent, neighbouring Slovakia and Slovenia. These three countries have the highest human development index (HDI) in the region. Liberalisation has affected 4,000 big enterprises and many smaller others. It had been compounded/compensated by social concerns, but in 1998-1999, austerity measures had to be taken and the unemployment rate increased. This movement was attenuated in 2000, especially following the inflow of foreign capital.

During the "velvet divorce" from Slovakia, the Czech Republic inherited the most dynamic industrial sectors.

TRADE UNION LANDSCAPE

The organisation with the highest number is the Czech federation and Monrovia of trade unions (CMKOS). It was established before the break-up with Slovakia, known at the time as Czechoslovakia Federation of trade unions, and it inherited the legacy of the former communist trade union body. The federation was not in favour of the break-up, but had to resolve it. The current CMKOS dates from 1992 and is a member of the ICFTU. It is defined as an assembly of voluntary

groups and isolated trade unions. Its president is a member of the Senate without belonging to a party.

The other national organisation, the Federation of Christian Trade unions (KOK), is a member of the WCL.

TRADE UNION FREEDOM

The risks of becoming unemployed are used to dissuade workers from joining trade unions. The last report of the standards application committee of the ILO also cites a few discrimination problems in access to employment in the Czech Republic. The conclusion of collective conventions remains problematic.



Romania

SOCIAL ISSUES

Privatisation and the problems raised by businesses considered as unprofitable have led to social tensions. Miners especially, have been directly affected. The last few years have witnessed a reduction in economic activity and therefore an increase in unemployment. If inflation has reduced, it is still high. (see art. p 17-19)



TRADE UNION LANDSCAPE

Romania has four large federations. Two of them are affiliated to the WCL: the Condédération des Syndicats Démocratiques de Roumaine (CSDR), (Federation of Democratic Trade Unions in Romania) and the Confédération nationale de l'organisation syndicale (CNS) Cartel Alfa., the (National Federation of Trade Unions). Two others are members of the ICFTU: the Bloc national syndical (BNS), (National trade union block), and the National Federation of free trade unions of Romania (CNSLR-Fratia), successor to the communist trade union organisation, which survived for only five days after the fall of Ceaucescu.

TRADE UNION FREEDOM

In January 2000, improvements were made to the law on strikes, but violations of this right continues. Many businesses prevent de facto unionisation. The Romanian law concerning the nomination of trade union representatives is not in line with convention 87 of the ILO on trade union freedom.



Slovakia

SOCIAL ISSUES

Slovakia is the most industrialised country of the former communist block, but in rather old sectors.

Economically, the country is not doing badly, even if the unemployment rate increased from 15.6% in 1999 to 18.6% in 2000.

State enterprises are in the process of privatisation, sometimes with foreign capital. This can lead to production restrictions. In certain sectors like education and health, salaries are lower than national standards.

TRADE UNION LANDSCAPE

The most important organisation in terms of number is the Federation of Trade unions of the Slovakia Republic (KOZ), established in 1990 from the transformation of the communist trade unions, from which the KOZ inherited all its legacy. On its part, the Independent Christian Trade Union of Slovakia (NKOS), member of the WCL, has been in existence since 1993 and has only been able to count on its own resources to develop. It is present in the rail way industry and science education. Slovakian law limits the activities of NKOS by giving monopoly of collective negotiation to the majority trade union.

TRADE UNION FREEDOM

The trade union freedom is recognised theoretically in Slovakia. The activity of minority organisations is however restrained by the legal dispositions which break pluralism and strengthen the monopoly of the KOZ. The standards application committee of the ILO has pointed out defects in the law on strikes.





Ukraine

SOCIAL ISSUES

Since its independence, the Ukraine has tried to develop a diversified economic potential. But, as in Russia, the transition has produced side-effects: corruption, monopolising of wealth by business clans... Growth was only positive from 2000, but inflation follows. Average salary is low. On the contrary, the informal economy is important, which enables a rela-

tively reduced unemployment rate to show officially.

TRADE UNION LANDSCAPE

The federation of Ukrainian Trade Unions (FPU), successor to Soviet trade unions, which inherited all its legacy, brings together the large majority of workers; it claims 20 million members. As in Russia, such membership is largely passive, linked to the benefit of social insurance. The FPU, in conflict with the government on the issue of unpaid salaries, has established the All Workers' Party of Ukraine.

Independent trade unions also exist, among them Solidarity of workers' unions of all Ukraine (VOST), affiliated to the WCL. Their membership is estimated between 100,000 and 300,000.

TRADE UNION FREEDOM

In 1999, the adoption of the trade union law was perceived by the independent trade unions as an attempt to weaken them through obstacles to the acquisition of national status. The constitutional court has declared several clauses of this law unconstitutional, and a report to the standards application committee of the ILO has pointed out the contradictions with convention 87 on trade union freedom. The right to strike is limited in the public sector, without knowing whether the former Soviet clauses remain applicable.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION...

Trade Unions of the World, (5th edition 2001), edited in English by John Harper Publishing, p. 410

This document is very interesting. It presents an overview, per country, of the socio-economic situation and the trade union organisation, as well as a list of existing federations. One sometimes sees in it a certain tendency to underestimate the importance of WCL organisations.

Annual Report of the Committee of Experts for the application of conventions and recommendations, ILO. A wealth of information on trade union freedom in the world.

Annual Report on violations of trade union rights, ICFTU.

Addresses of WCL organisations in the Central and Eastern European countries that have a web site:

Poland : Solidarnosc: <http://www.solidarnosc.org.pl>
Romania: CNS Cartel Alfa : <http://www.cartel-alfa.ro>

Liaison Office of the WCL for the PECO:

Olga Nicolae,
Word Confederation of Labour
Splaiul Independentei, n° 202, cam. 324
Bucharest, Sect. 6
Romania
cmtest@cartel-alfa.ro



ROMANIA

Between agony and ecstasy

The economic situation in Romania, in the year 2001, is not bright. At the macro-economic level, there is imbalance between domestic demand and supply, that is, between demand and consumption of the population, public institutions and investments by economic agents as against Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

This difference between demand and supply must then be covered by imports which, internally, leads to inflation and low national productivity and low standard of living of the population; and externally, to balance of payments deficits. The current Nastase government is proposing, at present, to correct this imbalance through economic development, combined with the reduction of inefficient segments of domestic production, that have hardly any outlets.

With regard to financial policy, the level of taxation has progressively increased, and the exchange rate policy, essentially with regard to the dollar has been restrictive, which has led to the accelerated devaluation of the national currency. A cut in industrial production faithfully reflects the economic policies. In the past four years, only the year 2000 experienced an increase (by 8.2%).

PRIVATISATION DISCUSSED

The only sectors where there has been improvement are transport and telecommunications, trade and tourism, real estate and public services. Paradoxically, all the statistical data show that labour productivity increased by 8.6% in 2000 as compared with 1996.

ECONOMICALLY OR SOCIALLY, ROMANIA'S SITUATION DOES NOT AROUSE ENTHUSIASM. POVERTY AFFECTS MORE THAN 50% OF THE POPULATION. SOME FIGURES LOOK BETTER, BUT ARE THESE BRIGHT SPOTS SHORT-LIVED OR LONG LASTING?



Romanian megalomania of the Ceausescu era ...



Agriculture, left ...

The negative trend of the GDP negatively reflects on the GDP per inhabitant indicator determined on the basis of the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). Romania has since then joined the queue of countries applying for membership to the European Union.

In the export sector, the country has recorded progress with regard to light industrial products, metallurgical products, those of the machine industry and raw materials. Countries with which Romania has trade relations, are mainly those of the European Union and the United States, but not excluding the countries in transition. Local products are exported and have had success in developing countries, which stimulates economic growth and has a beneficial effect on the current balance of payment.

Privatisation dynamics has been positive. Until now, 83.8% of all the companies that fall under the assets of the Authority for the Privatisation and Administration of State Participation, have already been sold. Privatisation operations scheduled for the year 2001 are those of the industrial complex SIDEX at Galati, the biggest iron and steel industry of Romania, and the ALRO company at Slatina, the largest exporter of aluminium products in South-East Europe.

In most cases, however, privatisation is challenged by trade unions. They fear the non-fulfilment of contract clauses and "savage" social policies on the part of the private buyer, which have led to collective dismissals.

SHORT-LIVED CURE OR IMPROVEMENT

During the first months of this year, sectors in which there was an improvement were agriculture, where

one anticipates a relatively strong production in wheat and maize, and tourism. The Romanian coast is in effect better managed than in the past and the plan for setting up "Dracula land" (an attraction park near the legendary Dracula castle) is nearing completion.

With regard to the recent inflation trends and foreign exchange reserves, preliminary statistics on the first half of May, indicated a low result from 1.7 to 1.8% to the initial expectations (2 to 2.3%). If prices finally increase from 1.8 to 1.9%, that is below 2%, it would be the lowest rate of the past five months. Interests in public obligations have also gone down.

The foreign exchange reserves of Romania have passed the level of 3 billion dollars, the payment of 80-100 million dollars recorded in May has made it possible to improve the rate for the

long-term foreign debt. Despite everything, economic analysts are relatively circumspect, waiting to verify whether the on-going reform will bring about sustainable results of the structural adjustment and not just the forced maintenance of low prices of public services (water, gas, electricity...), or a restriction in

internal consumption. With regard to inflation, experts are waiting to see whether its reduction is a result of the structural reform and a sign of the "cure" of the economy.

POVERTY: 50%

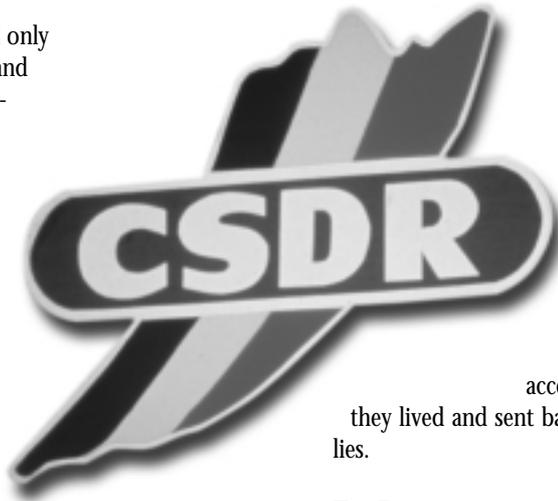
There is a very close relationship between economic and social situations. More than 50% of the population of Romania live on the verge of poverty. At the end of last year, purchasing power of salaries and pensions was 20% lower than in 1996. The unemployment level reached 10.5%, whilst the ratio between the number of active workers and the number of retired persons (level of dependence) is 1 to 5. The number of persons below the poverty line has increased from 6% in 1989 to 44% in 2000, and the level of external poverty rose from 8% in 1995 to 17% in 1999. According to 1998 international statistics,





Romania was surpassed only by Moldavia, Russia and Albania, as far as poverty lines in Europe are concerned.

The main causes of this situation are the state of the economy and the issue of poor social protection. The Nastase government has pledged to take the first corrective steps as from June 2001, through the implementation of some legislative bills as well as the Laws concerning the guaranteed minimum wage, the national social assistance system, unemployment insurance and the stimulation of the workforce.



fined" for long in a State institution nor even in the family from which they come. In the case of Bucharest, the capital of Romania, the police, first of all, will undertake a "cleaning-up" programme of beggars and street children. They will be rounded up, grouped

according to the region where they lived and sent back under escort to their families.

The Bucharest police hope that at least some of them will not return to the capital to live off public sympathy that way.

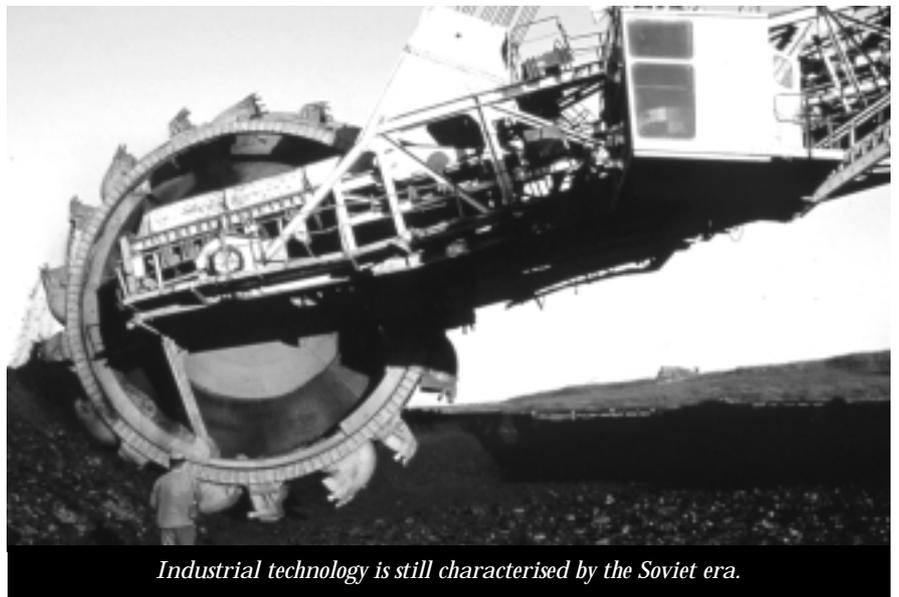
But this is only the syndrome of a deep-rooted social evil.

*Corina JIVAN
Public Relations Expert
CNS "Cartel ALFA"*

A project for the prevention of social exclusion also exists. In mid May, a governmental Commission against poverty and for the promotion of social inclusion was established. This Commission is not the only initiative of its kind, it has even been the fourth organised by governments since the 1989 Revolution. But the other three were not very successful.

STREET CHILDREN

A significant social factor for Romania – it is, besides, a condition for acceptance into the European Union – is the improvement of the situation of children placed in institutions. The current trend is decentralisation of protection services and their placement under local authorities. But considering the resource differences among the departments of the country, it is difficult to assume that the mayors of poor regions will be able to ensure a decent life for children. The Nastase government believes it can find at least a partial solution to this problem, through the reintegration of children into their original or "adoptive" families, with parents receiving assistance from the State. But this is very likely to be inadequate. The most difficult problem for the authorities are the street children, who are not easily convinced to remain "con-



Industrial technology is still characterised by the Soviet era.



LITHUANIA

Very feminine services

LITHUANIA IS NOT AN EXCEPTION: THERE AS ELSEWHERE, WOMEN, THOUGH QUALIFIED, FIND THEMSELVES IN LESS ESTIMATED JOBS. ONLY A MINORITY ESCAPE THIS, IN A CONTEXT OF GROWING POVERTY. EQUALITY, WHICH COMMUNISM CLAIMED TO HAVE REALISED, IS FAR FROM ACQUIRED.

Back in the old times, Lithuanian princesses did become not only noble wives, but also persistent seekers of social and political rights. Thanks to them, a woman's right to own property and to express her opinion at meetings was established in 16th century.

Lithuanian women always fought for the freedom of their land and for their rights. In 1918, when Lithuania regained its independence, they got the right to vote and to participate in the government while in the other countries this right was not established until after the second world war.

In recent years, finally, the Movement of Independence outlined a new generation of active women, not only political leaders, but also business-women.

Who are they? Lithuanian women are fairly highly qualified: 58.6% have graduated from universities and 70% from colleges. Unfortunately, they are working in fields of lesser importance, and the average women's salary makes only 75% of that of men.

WOMEN, UNEMPLOYMENT AND MIGRATION

Women account for more than a half the Lithuanian population (52.8%) and 42.9% of the workforce. Most of them work in the services sector – health care, social work, education, trade and maintenance in industry and agriculture. Household services are entirely a women's matter. So Lithuanian women exert a strong influence on the creation of the Gross Domestic Product.

However, this does not prevent the traditional labour market problems from cropping up: women's income is 30% lower than that of men. Women often hold the jobs that pay less or are of lesser importance, and their career opportunities are more limited than those of men. The spheres of international diplomacy, internal security, defence, finances, are hardly available to women.

But the main problem remains the fact that most men are not as active in family life as women are; and, conversely, women hardly participate in making decisions about the labour market.

Female employment was more than halved between 1994 and 2000. The rate of female unemployment is now over 12%. Access to paid employment has turned in a the primary need. More and more young women therefore emigrate in order to earn some money to provide for their children and families. In some case their husbands encourage them to do so, even though those women risk having to accept any job, landing in many cases in illegality or prostitution.

There is no exact information about what those women experience or what kind of moral harassment or pressure they suffer working abroad, for it is not possible to make such kind of investigation.

A FRAGILE MIDDLE CLASS

Female unemployment in Lithuania is the greatest challenge, for family life depends on it. It is the economic resources that enable women to provide for their families. But now, new employment conditions have emerged, making them socially even more dependent:



LDF picket in front of the Lithuanian Parliament, in Vilnius.



short-term employment contracts, part-time jobs, homework.

The pursuit of maximum profit strengthens the inequalities of men and women, both in public and in private life. The patriarchal system does not weaken; on the contrary, it encourages the exploitation of women.

For one kind of women, the market offers new opportunities, for others it leads to unemployment, poverty, humiliation, even the degradation of personality. The first ones occupy without hesitation the niches of labour market, business. The second ones are not as lucky. Those women, less qualified or holding jobs that are less in demand, end up in the bankrupted companies. It is true that personal character traits can exert influence, but there is a direct link between the level of female education and their unemployment. And since the salary is the main source of income in Lithuania, unemployment or a low-paid job is the main challenge. This is irrefutably a cause of the difference in riches.

16% of the people consider themselves living below the poverty line, 73.3% consider themselves middle class, 8–10% say they are rich. Thus, elite contains only a minority of women. The «poor» class is basically composed of young families and single mothers. The middle class for its part is very fragile. It would be sufficient for those people to be without a salary for a couple of months and they would land in poverty. Moreover, poverty is on the increase. Economic growth does not reduce it. Experience in other countries shows that only

a small part of this growth reaches the poor in society. The latter require a special strategy, and the key to it is definitely employment.

RESPONSES FROM WOMEN

Some women's organisations have developed structures in recent years. There are 20 at the local level, 23 nationwide, 10 at the international level and 4 registered in Lithuania as women research centres, in addition to 6 political parties. All of them communicate either through the Centre of Non-Governmental Organisations or directly by organising concerted actions on issues of consequence to women in Lithuania and worldwide.

In 1998, a Women's Committee was established in the Labour Federation of Lithuania (LDF, affiliated to the WCL). It unites all women participating in the actions of their trade union. The head of this Committee (currently Daiva Pagiryte) is a member of the LDF Council. Thus, the Women's Committee is an opportunity to take part in the decision-making process. It is a necessary condition for coming up with responses to the social situation of women.

*Virginija Kavaliauskiene,
journalist, Vilnius*



LDF picket in front of the Lithuanian Parliament, in Vilnius.



BULGARIA

Uncompleted Pluralism

TRUE OR FALSE TRADE UNION INDEPENDENCE? THE QUESTION TEARS APART THE BULGARIAN TRADE UNION PANORAMA. IT DOES NOT HOWEVER SUCCEED IN HIDING THE SOCIAL DIFFICULTIES, EXPERIENCED BY ALL AND CHARACTERISED BY A LOSS OF THE PURCHASING POWER OF WORKERS.

The policies of reform in Bulgaria begun in 1991 based on 'shock therapy' and did not bring about the anticipated results, resulting in a sharp decline in output. The economy hit bottom in 1991, when GDP dropped by 16.7%. The downward trend continued, with unemployment reaching 15.7% in 1993. In 1994, however the economy experienced relative stabilisation. Inflation peaked in 1994 at 121.9%, falling to 32.9% by the end of 1995. In 1995, the exchange rate of the Bulgarian lev remained stable and unemployment dropped to 10.7%.

THE DEBT BURDEN

However, the economy experienced a second downturn in 1996 with GDP declining a further 9.2%. There are several reasons for this downward trend and they are mainly found in the complex nature of transformation and lack of consistency in the reform process. Pseudo-restrictive policies resulted in the heavy indebtedness of state enterprises to banks, estimated at 525.6 billion lev (US\$226 billion; 1 lev = US\$0.4294) at the end of 1996. The government attempted to solve this problem by repaying 26 billion lev plus USD 1 billion of the total value of these loans in 1994. Similar measures were implemented in 1995.

The short-term effects were positive-in 1995 enterprises showed higher levels of economic activity and greater inflow of foreign capital was registered. However, the long-term effects were negative, as the stability of the banking system faltered at the end of 1995 and became critical in the first half of 1996. Fourteen banks, representing 33% of the total number of Bulgarian banks and 30% of banking sector assets, were declared to be under special surveillance and insolvent after April 1996. The central bank failed to discriminate between banks with temporary liquidity difficulties and those with serious solvency problems, and 75% of central bank deposits and credits went to commercial banks that were later brought under special surveillance.

DISAPPOINTED HOPE

The obligations of these banks thus placed a heavy burden on the state budget and the internal debt. The

budget deficit rose to 10.9% of GDP, due largely to the fact that the losses of public enterprises and the banks were transformed into public debt. The internal debt amounted to 5720 billion lev at the end of 1996. Inflation reached 311% in 1996, ten times its 1995 level. At the beginning of 1997 the economy approached hyperinflation, with price rises of 44% in January and 243% in February.

The failure of the Socialist Party government to achieve stabilisation resulted in mass discontent, led by two confederations: National Trade Union (NTU) and Association of the Democratic Trade Unions (ADS) which created the National Civil Movement *PROMYANA* (what means "CHANGE"). It was followed by the resignation of the cabinet and preliminary elections in April 1997.

The enthusiasm in society and hope for better life, which formed the basis of popular support for reform in the initial stages, soon vanished under these conditions. Restrictive measures had negative effects on all types of income; wages, pensions, allowances and savings. After the initial wave of impoverishment in 1991 and the second sharp decline in real incomes in 1994, there was a relative stabilisation in 1995. Still, those with low and very low salaries accounted for 66% of those employed. The negative trend continued in early 1997, when inflation caused. Another dramatic drops in purchasing power. Furthermore, after the decrease in unemployment from its peak of 15.7% in 1993 to 10.7% in 1995, it rose again in 1996 to 12.5%.

ILLEGAL DISCRIMINATIONS

In Bulgaria, as in other Central and Eastern European countries, nearly 100% of all employees were unionised prior to 1989. The trade unions were an extension of the interests of the sole employer-the state.

Now the situation is totally different. Today, the country has several confederations, which have tense relationships among themselves, rendered more complex by the attitude of the government.



The National Trade Union PROMYANA (NTU) is a member of the World Confederation of Labour. It was acknowledged as a representative organisation of workers at national level in 1997 by the Council of Ministers. The NTU has declared 60,196 members in nine industries and territorial structures. The Government took off the representative statute of the Confederation under an illegal Decree (abrogated in its main criteria from the Supreme Court of Republic) The census organised in this illegal way was contested by a number of trade union organisations in Bulgaria. There is a report 320 on the case from the Committee on Freedom of Association to ILO - March 2000. The Government does not observe the recommendation on the Committee. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, ex-vice-president of CITUB, insist in front of the Parliament to be accepted more discriminative clauses in the new labour legislation which to limit the freedom of association and the right of collective bargaining for the democratically trade unions.

The Association of Democratic Trade Unions (ADS), which claims to have 52,000 members, experienced the same fate.

DIFFICULT INDEPENDENCE

The organisations with most members are the Confederation of independent trade unions of Bulgaria (CITUB-KNSB) and PODKREPA. The former, heir of the single communist trade union, was founded in 1990 as «national voluntary organisation of independent and equal trade-level unions.» It was acknowledged in 1993 as a representative organisation of workers at the national level.

On its part, Podkrepa was formed in 1989 as a dissident organisation initiated by a small group of intellectuals. In the beginning the Confederation was symbol of the new alternative of the democratically trade union movement. That's why many workers became its members. Later the governing body of the Confederation changed the policy and started collaboration with organisations - already identified as satellites of the former communist party. In February 1993, Podkrepa was also acknowledged as a representative organisation of workers at the national level.

It is likely that the closeness of trade union organisations to the authorities resulted in the resignation of workers. The CITUB had 1,663,821 workers and employees in 1993, 1,060,000 in 1996 and 608,000



Press conference by trade unions of miners, April 2001.

in 1999. Podkrepa has brought together again 154,000, after having had 900,000.

Many of them have renounced their affiliation. Others found themselves in the Community of Free Trade Union Organisations in Bulgaria (OSSOB), which completed the trade union panorama with the Independent Trade Union Edinstvo (ITU) and the General Centre of Industry Trade Unions.

As in other countries of the former Soviet bloc, Bulgaria is confronted with the challenge of creating trade unions which are truly independent of the authorities. This objective has not yet been attained, because the government is trying to favour certain organisations to make them their allies.

*Pepita Stancheva,
NTU-Promyana*

PROFILE



Learning to pilot, a school of responsibility.

ways of fulfilling this expectation. All that contributed to shaping my character and in particular, I learnt that when one says they are going to do something, one must do it. If I do not think I can act, I prefer not to talk. But I must say that when I speak, people never know what this funny woman is going to do.”

With, some amusing or sad situations, according to how one looks at it, when among others, the new trade union leader underwent training at foreign trade unions and she learnt how to kill opposing organisations, particularly Christian trade unions. She says today, “It is very funny, because I finally became a leader of a Christian trade union.”

Today, Regina Rekesiene is one of the few women to occupy such a position in a national trade union federation. Is it more difficult for a woman? “Yes it is difficult because we live in a bizarre world, but as much for men as for women. It is the work. It demands a lot of love for people, for friends, for workers, for colleagues who collaborate with you. For a woman, it is perhaps easier to love people, because we are guided more by emotions.”

More emotional, really? Without fearing clichés, Regina repeats that women are more emotional “and can put more love into what they do. They take people as they

are, and treat them as such. Men are stricter, more rational. With the first attitude, your enemy becomes your ally, because he sees that you want to help him. It is a strength, not a weakness.”

THOSE WHO NEVER MAKE MISTAKES

Two more sentences enable the discernment of the personality of this leader. First of all, she says she has taken “too many” risks. Then, she is weary of “those who do not make mistakes”. Strange?

“When I became Secretary General of the LDF, I was separated from my husband, alone with three children and I had to think of providing for them. The trade union did not have money to pay me a salary because the branches did not have resources to pay dues. I accepted to work for three or four years without being paid. This is why I say that I took too many risks. But I took them, I had to hustle and I was exhausted. I am proud to have never begged for aid.”

There remains the issue of mistakes and this strange affirmation in a world where one must appear to be strong and be sure of oneself. Regina Rekesiene warns against people who believe they are always right, because she asks herself what happens to them the day they make a mistake. “Being a trade union leader is a great responsibility. One must write, speak, take decision sometimes very quickly, and one is often very

lonely. At times, I am afraid of making mistakes, but when I make them, I learn a lot. If you do not make mistakes, you are stupid, because you have not analysed anything and you improve nothing.”

She will not change, and she is proud of this. Proud to be “the same human being as the one I have always been. I am ready to do anything for my organisation, but without renouncing myself.” Is this also an attitude of women?

André Linard