

# The Soviet "new left" gets itself organized

With social and political turmoil sweeping through the Soviet Union, a new democratic socialist left has begun to emerge. These new dissidents are not of the variety known to the West, but rather groups that look back to the founding principles of the 1917 revolution as they understand them. So far, this new left is diverse and groping its way. It consists of hundreds—perhaps thousands—of political discussion groups, many of which previously met more or less clandestinely in private apartments. Now they have proclaimed their existence as political clubs or seminars and have been joined by hobby clubs and study groups set up or approved by the Communist Party, but transformed by their members from obediently passive organizations into lively independent associations.

Nothing like this has been possible—or, to many, conceivable—since the defeat of various opposition tendencies and the consolidation of power by Josef Stalin in the late '20s. But the Soviet party is now clearly divided between conservative and liberal factions. And Mikhail Gorbachov's liberal faction, needing to expand its base of support, has been protecting—even encouraging—democratic socialist groupings if they accept the one-party state, even with caveats.

These new groups are the left equivalent of extreme nationalist and anti-Semitic groups like Pamyat (Memory), that exist under the protection of the Party's right wing.

The left groups held their first conference of Unofficial Democratic Clubs on August 20-23 in Moscow with official approval. It was organized by two of Moscow's largest new left groups, the Club for Social Initiatives (CSI) and Perestroika (Reconstruction). About 300 representatives from 52 groups from various cities agreed, despite numerous differences, to create two political associations: the Coalition for Social Initiatives and the Federation of Socialist Clubs.

A new In These Times correspondent, Alexander Severyukin (a pseudonym) took an active part in arranging this conference. The following description, translated and edited by Alexander Amerisov, is based on his report.

By Alexander Severyukin

MOSCOW

THE FIRST DAY OF THE CONFERENCE WAS DEVOTED to ironing out differences between various groups. Supporters of the Club for Social Initiatives (CSI) supported by an organization of young socialists from *Obschina* (Community) proposed a united front around a common program and principles. Another club, *Perestroika*, advocated a loose coalition of groups connected only by general principles.

*Perestroika* won, with creation of the broadly based Coalition for Social Initiatives, but a select number of groups from the coalition also established another political association, the Federation of Socialist Clubs. *Perestroika* joined the federation as well. Neither the coalition nor the federation admits anti-Semites, Stalinists or members of other extremist groups.

Although the Coalition for Social Initiatives developed no common program, its most principles were non-violence and

opposition to fascism, Stalinism and all forms of state oppression of grass-roots initiatives and organizations.

The Federation of Socialist Clubs, on the other hand, agreed on more specific aims. It stressed that power in the country belongs

## SOVIET UNION

to the people and that the people have the right to form their own organizations to represent their interests "without any intermediaries"—a direct slap at the legitimacy of the Communist Party's role. The declaration—due to the necessity of acting, as one conference participant put it, "within the boundaries of political realism"—recognized the "constitutional role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union," but insisted that the Soviet Communist Party "is not homogeneous. In the ranks of the Party there are those who are directly responsible for all the abuses and mistakes of the past." The federation's declaration added that it will align itself with "leaders and rank-and-file party members who represent healthy and progressive forces." The declaration reasserted its allegiance to the original aims of the Russian Revolution of October 1917 and called for abolition of class divisions in Soviet society and withering away of the state.

**Civil libertarian goals:** Among the federation's immediate aims are the legalization of unofficial political associations, democratization of the electoral system, struggle for the right to nominate candidates to the councils of representatives and to expand the power of the councils, and legal reform as it affects freedom of speech. The federation declared its support for Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov's program of marketization of the economy, while insisting that social security programs be maintained.

It called on Soviet authorities to cut the size and expense to society of the government bureaucracy, leave government-owned enterprises to their employees, democratize the planning system and create conditions for unhindered development of all forms of socialist property.

The federation also declared its solidarity with the struggle of revolutionary, national-liberation and democratic movements in capitalist and developing countries. The federation sees one of its most important functions in struggle against the growth of National-Bolshevik tendencies in Soviet society and the Communist Party. CSI's A. Wiseberg and *Perestroika*'s D. Leonov stressed that the federation must simultaneously take into consideration the existence of two forms of extremism: "grass-roots extremism" and extremism "from above" represented by those who feel threatened by reforms and resist them.

"State extremism," they said, represented the main danger. But others thought grass-roots fascist groups were the real enemy.

**Official dilemma:** The conference placed Soviet authorities in a difficult position. On the one hand, the conference itself and all the participating groups (with the exceptions of the independent peace organization Trust Group and the club Democracy and Human-

ism) were officially permitted. Moreover, the conference declared support for Gorbachov's reforms and its participants saw political conservatives who oppose Gorbachov as their own enemies. But it is clear that the democratic socialist movement will jealously defend its own independence and will continue to put forward demands that go much further than Gorbachov or the Communist Party may like.

During the first several weeks after the conference, the official press was silent. Still, news of the conference spread throughout the country. A semi-legal congress of the All-Union Pen Club of Social and Political Initiatives took place in Taganrog right after the Moscow conference. Several delegates came directly from the conference in Moscow to tell about what happened. Weeks later, in the early part of September, a Forum of Informal Groupings took place in Leningrad, where the Moscow conference's decisions became an object of discussion. Conference documents are slowly getting into the growing unofficial press as well.

The official Soviet press broke its silence on September 5 with an article about the

## It is clear that the democratic socialist movement will jealously defend its independence.

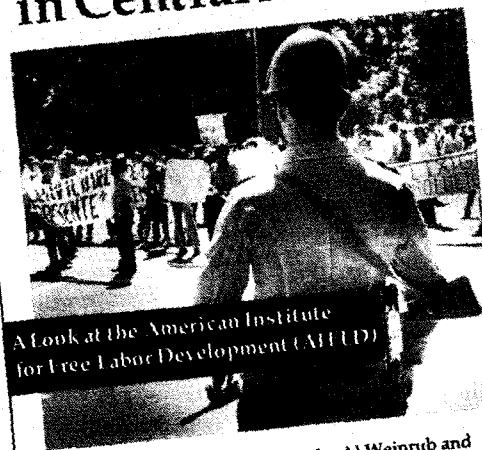
conference in *Ogonyok*, the country's largest illustrated weekly and one of the most controversial. The article, by V. Yakovlev, was positive but to pass censorship had to avoid any mention of specific conference decisions. The creation of the Federation of Socialist Clubs was not mentioned at all. Also unmentioned were demands to abolish preliminary censorship and to change the election laws.

All the same, Yakovlev's article played an important role. It opened the door to discussion in the official media about a Soviet "new left." And by recognizing the conference as fully legal, the article made it easier for groups that took part to gain access to the mass media and to recruit new members.

**Participating groups:** Among the groups that took part in the conference were many clubs of "revolutionary solidarity with Third-World struggle," which had been started by Soviet Communist Party's Youth branch *Komsomol* during the '70s. In their late teens and early 20s—unlike members of CSI and *Perestroika*, most of whom are over 30—the revolutionary "solidarists" came to the conference from organizations with names like "Faribundo Marti Brigade," "Che Guevara Brigade" and "Forest People." Stagnant Brezhnev-era leadership saw in the creation of these clubs a mechanism through which the revolutionary romanticism of Third-World struggles would patch up the Communist Party's waning legitimacy with the Soviet youth. The idea backfired.

Soviet propagandists were unable to limit the groups' focus to events in the Third World. The students touched on such subjects as "degeneration of the workers' state" and Stalinist repressions. They compared the pluralistic traditions of Latin American revolutionary movements, the experience of Chile under Salvador Allende and attempts to create a mixed economy in Nicaragua with Soviet "monolithism." It is interesting that although the independently created CSI, whose members include such former political prisoners as B. Kagarlitskii and G. Pavlovskii, was allowed to organize this conference, the officially organized clubs of revolutionary solidarity, which wanted to have their own conference, were recently denied such permission. □

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# AFL-CIO

Continued from page 3

trous," Herman Benson, director of the Association for Union Democracy, said of the Teamster readmission. "It's a final admission the AFL-CIO is completely incapable of doing anything about corruption in the labor movement. They talk of unity, but it's like the unity between a man and the poison he drinks."

The corruption issue is historically important. When the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations merged in 1955, CIO leaders like Walter Reuther insisted on an ethical practices code. Among other stipulations, it did not allow union officials to remain in office after

they took the Fifth Amendment in court, as Presser has done with the Teamsters.

"Just what the organization needs, more gangsters and right-wingers," one union official quipped. Several officials worried that the move strengthens the conservative forces in the AFL-CIO. It increases the chances for either Food and Commercial Workers' Wynn or Building and Trades' Georgine succeeding Kirkland instead of heir-apparent Secretary-Treasurer Tom Donahue or someone more liberal.

"It will move the AFL-CIO to the right," Clothing and Textile union Vice President Ed Clark said. "On the Teamsters' part it's a cynical ploy to gain protection, and for the AFL-CIO it's easy money." Kirkland denied that readmission would help protect

Teamsters from a potential government trusteeship, although unions strongly oppose such a move.

**Public perceptions:** The Teamsters make it easy to understand why the new "Union Yes" advertising campaign faces tough going. AFL-CIO polls and other surveys show that a majority of Americans believe most employees don't need unions; that unions are too weak to protect members; that unions increase companies' risk of going out of business; that unions should have less influence; and that the large reduction in union membership is good for the country. Majorities also believe that employers should take a tougher line with unions; that union members don't work as hard as others; that labor leaders aren't very honest and are out of touch with members; and that unions undermine productivity.

To counter such overwhelming negative images, the media campaign will attempt to show how unions give workers a voice on their jobs and strengthen the individual's quest for respect, according to the Labor Institute of Public Affairs (LIPA) director, Larry Kirkman. Using individual workers backed up by stars like Dolly Parton, Dionne Warwick and Kris Kristofferson, the ads will show workers saying yes to unions as well as the goals to which unions say yes, Kirkman said.

The campaign is intended to help organizing efforts and to "raise the threshold level of respect of the labor movement among the general public," said Nick DeMartino, LIPA assistant director. "But it's also to provide a definition of trade unionism to a new generation of workers who don't understand it."

The new image campaign is meant to show

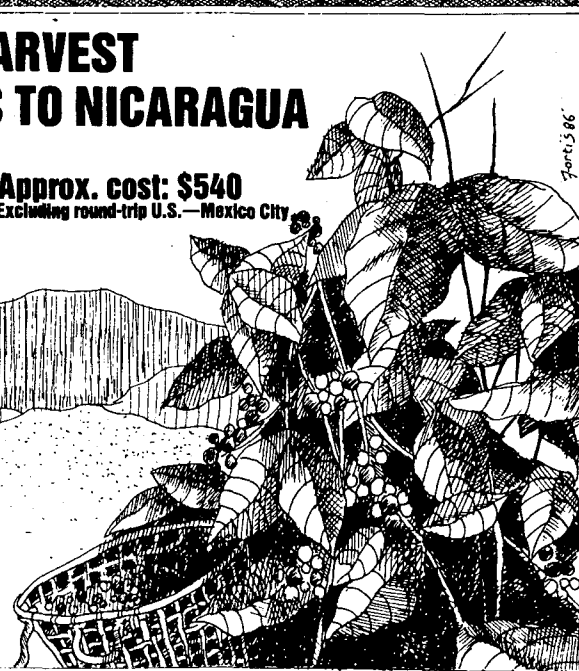
unions less in the position of overt conflict with management, especially since most workers tell pollsters they don't feel themselves in such a situation. Unions will instead be portrayed as problem-solvers.

Although some union public relations specialists worry that the campaign may lean to the "soft sell" and downplay the "struggle" aspect of unionism, the LIPA directors say they and their professional ad agency are attempting to lay some basic foundations for union support among a very hostile public. **Central American stand:** At least on Central America policy, the AFL-CIO is now more in tune with the broad American public. The growth of union opposition to U.S. policy in the region, along with the Iran-contra hearings and the emergence of a Central American peace plan, have worked to constrain conservative forces in the AFL-CIO.

Recent convention foreign policy resolutions show a steady progression toward a less militaristic policy, this time clearly calling for "withdrawal of U.S. military assistance to the contras." It also calls for an end to Soviet or Cuban aid to the Sandinistas, but the two issues are not linked as before. "It's moved a long way from the last convention," said Government Employee union President Ken Blaylock.

"I'm proud of this organization for calling in clear and unequivocal terms for no military assistance to the contras," Clothing and Textile President Jack Sheinkman said. Now the hand of anti-contra union lobbyists will be strengthened in Congress.

In a week of image worries, the foreign policy shift was a move that improved the U.S. labor movement both in image and reality.



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By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

**T**HE NOMINATION OF SPANISH SCIENTIST Federico Mayor Zaragoza to head UNESCO may save the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization from the far-right Heritage Foundation's remarkably successful campaign to destroy it. The nomination came at dawn on October 18 after a week of emotion-charged balloting by the 50-member executive council meeting in Paris. It is up to the organization's general conference when it meets November 7 to decide whether or not Mayor will succeed Amadou Mahtar M'Bow of Senegal as director general.

If so, it may be harder for the U.S. and Britain to justify their boycott of the organization. The two countries left UNESCO in 1984 and 1985 following campaigns organized by the Heritage Foundation accusing the African leadership of anti-U.S., anti-Western "politicization." Mayor, a 53-year-old specialist in cerebral metabolism, means to cut back UNESCO's administrative overgrowth and make it over into a sort of think-tank to design international projects. The British Labour Party has indicated it will urge rejoining UNESCO if Mayor is confirmed as director.

Such a happy ending was not in sight when the election began. The Heritage Foundation campaign had succeeded in poisoning the atmosphere. The Africans felt victimized. And nobody else—not even the usually fair-minded Scandinavians—seemed to care enough about UNESCO to sort out the charges and countercharges.

As has been explained by Australian Ambassador to UNESCO, former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, to further its attack on the U.N. system in general the Heritage Foundation in 1983 hired American-born Owen Harries, who had served as Australian ambassador to UNESCO. Harries led the attack in the U.S. and later in Britain.

The press was responsive to the anti-UNESCO campaign because one of its prime targets was the idea of a "new world information order," no more than a discussion of how to improve communications in poor countries, but presented as a sinister machination of Third World and Soviet bloc countries to strangle the free world's free press. This ridiculous slander was accepted by most editorialists in the West, probably because of the chance it gave them to defend themselves heroically against a non-existent danger.

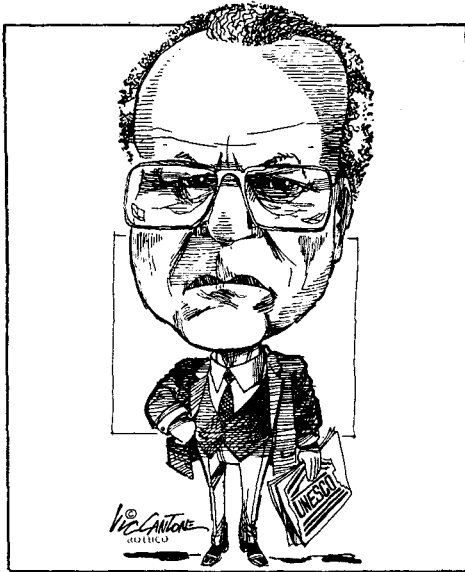
Not all the criticism of UNESCO was without merit. Indeed, some say Heritage aimed at UNESCO precisely because it was a soft target.

The worst of it was that the attacks on UNESCO's Senegalese Director General M'Bow, for incompetence, were interpreted as racist by the French-speaking African group in general. And in view of the Heritage Foundation's general attitude this interpretation has some validity.

Africa has more than its share of world problems and very few of the world's honors. M'Bow at the head of UNESCO has been one of the most prized. Politically, M'Bow emerged as a cautious colleague of the very pro-French ex-President Leopold Senghor of Senegal. It was an intolerable offense to Africans when the very moderate M'Bow was attacked in the Western press as a ferocious Third World "militant" simply for being African.

**A bad idea:** M'Bow served two six-year terms as UNESCO director general and at

# Compromise candidate may solve UNESCO's 'Heritage' troubles



Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, UNESCO's current director general.

age 66 could have decided to retire with honor. He had weathered the U.S. and British withdrawals with commendable calm. But then he and the African group, or at least the French-speaking African group, got the unfortunate idea that, because they were unfairly attacked, they were above criticism, and that to save their honor M'Bow should be elected to a third term.

This mistake was encouraged by the choice of a retired general from a military dictatorship that enforces Koranic law, Pakistani Foreign Minister Sahabzada Yaqub Khan, as the "pro-Western" candidate. The choice was another sign that the West did not give a damn about UNESCO. Amazingly, France, the home country and traditional guardian angel of UNESCO, backed this ruinous candidacy. There were rumors that Prime Minister Jacques Chirac's conservative government was thereby angling for arms contracts from Pakistan. The French ambassador to UNESCO appointed by President François Mitterrand, feminist lawyer Gisèle Halimi, sensibly resigned rather than vote for Yaqub Khan.

But when Yaqub Khan withdrew a couple of ballots later, Halimi's successor astonished everybody by switching France's vote to M'Bow. For a moment it looked as if France was trying to do the Heritage Foundation's work and scuttle UNESCO. For, whatever his past merits, a re-elected M'Bow would be the perfect target for a broadened campaign against the organization that could lead Japan and European countries to pull out.

But insiders say the French were thinking of only one thing: keeping the French language as the main language of UNESCO. They were against Mayor because he represents a bigger language group, the Hispanic. Socialists pointed to the Chirac government's handling of the election as a dismal diplomatic fiasco.

UNESCO had commissioned a scholarly work on the history of relations between the U.S. and UNESCO containing considerable material on the Heritage Foundation which its producer, the Institute for Media Analysis in New York, intends to have published. Although the work was still in semi-final manuscript form, the M'Bow faction circulated hunks of it as re-election campaign material.

But Western journalists had already made

up their minds. In the Paris daily *Liberation*, Marc Kravetz wrote incredulously that "the director general's entourage worked heavily to prove that the reproaches against him were a gigantic campaign of 'manipulation' and 'disinformation' fed by the 'Heritage

## UNITED NATIONS

Foundation,' an ultra-conservative American institution close to Reagan circles whose aim is supposed to be nothing less than the destruction of all international institutions once they aren't dominated by the U.S. A passably paranoid argumentation...whose main merit seems to have been to 'justify' M'Bow's new candidacy...."

The reality of American politics under Reagan is apparently just too crazy to be believed. The Heritage Foundation's campaign against the U.N. and its influence with Reagan are a matter of historical record. However, it is more comfortable to accuse Africans of paranoia than to risk offending American friends and contacts. In the poisoned atmosphere, there were traces of paranoia on both sides. Score points for Heritage Foundation.

But score more points for the Russians. Observers unanimously praised the Soviet diplomats as showing the most sense of responsibility. Mayor was something of a dark

horse, who did not even have the backing of his government, although a friend of King Juan Carlos. Russian diplomats privately admitted a preference for an undeclared compromise candidate, Islamic Prince Sadruddin Khan, former U.N. high commissioner for refugees, because he is from the Third World (albeit a multimillionaire) and because "he is too rich to put his hand in the till." In the end, the Soviet bloc abandoned its Bulgarian candidate to vote for Mayor in order to save the organization.

This was in line with the "major change" in Soviet policy toward the U.N. signalled by Premier Mikhail Gorbachov in an article in the September 17 *Pravda*, proposing creation of an international naval force for the Persian Gulf. The powers of the Security Council should be "used to the full," he said.

On October 15 the Soviet Union announced it would "soon" pay the \$197 million in back dues that the USSR has accumulated since 1945. In April 1986 Moscow paid its assessment for the U.N. forces in Lebanon for the first time. The U.S. is in arrears to the tune of \$414 million. This amounts to nearly half the unpaid dues to the U.N. and would amount to 65 percent once the Soviets pay. Unpaid debts will remain as Reagan's gift to the world.

Meanwhile, UNESCO may have been saved by Gorbachov...and the King of Spain. □

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