

LEIF HOVELSEN.

1974

You have a good view of the proceedings at the Palais des Nations from the Press Gallery. You have a kind of bird's-eye-view. You can not only hear, you can also see what the delegates are doing - if they pay attention, read the paper, talk to each other, switch-off, think - or merely sit. And if you listen carefully to all the speakers from the rostrum, by degrees you get a feeling for what is happening in the world.

The unique feature of conferences under the auspices of the ILO is they call together not only representatives of the world's various governments but also those responsible for industrial life - employers, workers, and trades union leaders. This gives you an insight into the social, economic and ideological forces which are wrestling in human society, and a reflection of the many human ideas and feelings which mark our times.

The ILO conferences can also be a kind of barometer of the climate between East and West. This climate can vary from one conference to another. Six or seven years ago you felt the icy blasts of the Cold War both in the plenary sessions and the numerous committees; there were conscious attacks carefully planned and well co-ordinated. After this came some years of "milder breeze", and now in January this year (1974) during the entire course of the 2nd Regional Conference (ILO), and the European Trades Union Summit meeting, the barometer stood at "Fair". The warm breeze of détente and co-operation blew through the many halls and rooms of the Palais des Nations. It was evident that the representatives of the USSR and the Eastern bloc countries were striving on every level to act with constructive co-operation. This positive attitude from the Communist countries contributed to making a very effective conference this time; a sharp contrast with the 1st European Regional Conference (ILO) in 1955 when the Communist representatives put every possible obstacle in the way.

This rather unexpected change of climate was so obvious that it caused a certain insecurity among the Western European delegates. "What does this mean?" they asked themselves. "Is this genuine or are there tactical motives behind it?" A Scandinavian employers' delegate commented, "It is much easier when the Communists attack us than when they just smile."

This constructive spirit was equally evident at the Pan-European Summit Meeting, which 200 TUC leaders met during the 2nd Regional European Conference. The meeting which took place on January 19 was an event in itself. After 25 years of cold war and separation men were looking for new points of contact and co-operation.

In three previous articles we followed the developments which led to this Summit Trades Union meeting and something of what happened at that significant occasion. Now how can we evaluate the events of this meeting of January 19 and in what context can we understand the spirit of détente which so strongly marked the 2nd European Regional Conference?

The speech which was tensely awaited by everyone and which will be dissected and discussed more than any other, was that of the Chairman of the USSR TUC, A. N. Shelepin. He was formerly the Komsomol leader and head of the KGB.

Shelepin made his speech to a closed summit meeting, and neither the communiqué that followed it nor any of the TUC leaders of the West gave exact



word on what Shelepin had said. Certainly we were told that in general it had been a mild and moderate speech, but nothing more. This, of course, because one respects the fact that what is said at a private meeting is not given out to newshungry pressmen. Also it is not customary in the West to publish a speech made in such circumstances, and most especially when it deals with important international questions. However, the full text of Shelepin's speech of January 19 in Room No. 12 was published in TRUD, the Moscow Trades Union paper, on January 20. The headline was "In the interests of the working class". In the introduction TRUD points out that a historic event has taken place in Geneva, "the importance of which it is hardly possible to overestimate".

In his speech to the 200 TUC delegates from East and West, Shelepin expresses the hope "that this meeting will be a good start to a perhaps intimate multi-lateral co-operation within the Trades Union movement on all questions which are concerning the working class on our continent. And we here are very optimistic about this." He proceeds to name a number of common problems and continues, "our suggestion is that today we concentrate not on what divides us, but on what unites us. And there is much that unites us."

Shelepin then refers to the great tasks of our age; to secure peace, to increase détente, and to improve the climate in Europe. "We believe," he said, "that there are adequate, yes, indeed, unusually favourable conditions for co-operation between the European Trades Union movements, regardless of their ideological outlook and international connections. Nor need anyone fear such co-operation. No one shall gain onesidedly from it. On the contrary, everybody and above all the working class will gain from such co-operation. We have no aim, as some imagine, of having a 'leading Communist part' in the European Trades Union movement or of trying to make all our Western colleagues adherents of the Communist ideology. But equally we hope that you do not make it your aim to make us adherents of another ideology. There have always been ideological differences; there will always be, but that need not prevent our good relations, nor our co-operation in serving the working class and the interests of all workers ... We aim to look ahead and not behind."

Shelepin goes on to point out that in the past there have been many bi-lateral contacts between the TUC's of East and West, but that now the time has come "to take new steps to forward a multilateral co-operation within the European Trades Union movement... it is clear that such co-operation must be based on the principle of non-interference in one another's concerns, on full equality of rights, on mutual respect, and a recognition of our contemporary realities." He continued, "I want to stress that we attach the most weight to co-operation, to common actions rather than to organisational unity, because we think the conditions are not yet ripe for this latter."

"What does the USSR TUC want from the European Trades Union movement? Several things. First, friendship and a genuine co-operation. Second, friendship and a genuine co-operation, and third, friendship and a genuine co-operation. This is our sincere wish."

Then Shelepin made certain suggestions, which later were the basis of the public communiqué after the Summit meeting and which broadly speaking have become the subject of study and work for the hoped-for next Summit meeting before the end of 1974.



There can be no doubt that Shelepin's speech gives the impression of a hand outstretched in genuine friendship and co-operation. And there may be those who will take him at his word and believe it. In his Nobel Prize speech Alexander Solzhenitsyn quotes a Russian proverb:

"Do not believe your brother, believe your own crooked eye."

This is a wise word in considering Shelepin, and for this reason Shelepin is pursuing a greater aim than friendship and co-operation. His speech of January 19 has a tactical gambit, a stage in a larger process, and framed accordingly. And to find what game he is playing we must dig deeper. What purpose then would be served by the Pan-European Summit meeting?

We can draw certain conclusions from the press reports and stories which European publications have printed about the Geneva meeting.

TRUD had an article on January 24 headed: "Unity of action a burning necessity in the international Trades Union movement", and wrote, "The position for those forces which have gone all out for unity of action and co-operation within the Trades Union movement, regardless of orientation or international alliance has been strengthened ... the gathering of European TUC leaders which took place in Geneva within the framework of the ILO Regional Conference was a most important stage in the development of co-operation within the Trades Union movement on the continent of Europe. The importance of this meeting can hardly be exaggerated ... unity of action within the Trades Union movement has become an urgent necessity and is in line with the times we live in."

Die Tribüne, organ of the East German TUC, commented on January 25, "This Geneva meeting is an important event in the life of the international Trades Union movement. Even though we must consider it as a first step, it is an extremely important step."

Neues Deutschland, the East German government newspaper, writes under the heading "The European Trades Union movement must become a factor in encouraging peace" (29 January, 1974) in an interview with Herbert Warnke, President of the East German TUC (FDGB), "Mr. Warnke stresses that the Geneva meeting was a clear advance, and a success for the workers and TUC representatives who have for so long striven for co-operation."

On February 16, TRUD had an extensive report of the Geneva Summit meeting by P. T. Pimenov, the representative of the USSR workers on the ILO executive, and one of the four men charged with the arrangements for the next Summit meeting to be held before the end of 1974. "Forge working-class unity" the article is headed. Pimenov sees the meeting as a logical outcome of developments which have taken place since 1970-71 - the East-West détente and the bilateral contacts made between the Communist Trade Union International made with the Western TUC's. He stresses again and again that the Geneva meeting was a fresh beginning of a Pan-European Trades Union co-operation, and that now the thing is to go further. Now we must implement the Geneva decisions and use the present favourable conditions as far as possible in co-operation and united action between the European Trades Union movements.

The undertone of all these articles is - the policy of East-West détente, the response to the efforts by the Communist Trades Union International to achieve unity and the steadily increasing crises in the capitalist world, compel us with



the inevitability of history to gather together "a mass organisation of Trades Unionists founded upon the class war". They confirm that all efforts towards Trades Union unity and co-operation must serve the aim furthering the principles of Marxism-Leninism.

One can only comprehend the last year's purposeful thrust on the plane of European and international Trades Unionism if one connects it with what is happening on the political plane.

The European situation must be seen as a connected whole. The thrusts by Brezhnev and Shelepin are in parallel. The Geneva meeting and the continuous battle for the European Trades Union movement are a step in the Kremlin's gigantic attempt to achieve a position from which they can exert a steadily increasing influence on the whole of Europe. And this is confirmed by the French journalist René Dabernat. He writes, "During the recent Summit meeting between Pompidou and Brezhnev just before the President's death, the USSR confirmed for the first time since the end of the War that they wished to become involved on a lasting basis in Western European concerns. This is the impression of the French delegation on returning from Georgia." (Reporter in the (Oslo) Morgenblad April 5, 1974).

And here we are touching the very kernel of the problem of the policy of détente. On the one side a community of Communist states which denies détente, peace, and co-existence, but at the same time is working to conquer the world or at least to do all possible to shape it as they want it. On the other side, a Western world which also wants détente, peace and co-existence, but which neither seems to grasp the dimension of the challenges being made to it nor to do anything effective to meet them; quite the reverse - a world which takes such great liberties that liberty itself is endangered.

It is important to be clear that while we in the Western world pursue a détente policy which is pragmatic and almost static, the USSR and East bloc states pursue a dynamic and aggressive détente policy. We in the West want to ensure world peace. They in the East want to ensure World Communism. Détente and co-existence do not mean that the Kremlin has abandoned the thought of world conquest, or that the world revolution is ended. It continues, but with other means, viz., the tactics of détente and peaceful co-existence.

The fact is that we are in a new situation, a new phase in warfare which we in the West must learn the meaning of. Shielded by "an armed peace" we shall have to live in the years to come in a situation where "an irreconcilable and unceasing" ideological contest will affect every area of our society - and that on a global front. "The thrust for friendship and co-operation" during the International European Regional Conference and the Pan-European Summit Trades Union meeting in Geneva was merely one of the many thrusts in the battle to draw Europe into the Kremlin's sphere of interest.

"What justification is there for such conclusions?" This may justly be asked. "Is not all this exaggeration, and in any case is not the ideological age past?"

Through many years of study of the material available from the USSR and East countries, it seems clear that the warriors of Marxism and Leninism are still and steadily on the offensive. Since the 24th Party Congress in Moscow, March 1971, there has been a consolidation of the East bloc in a common line of foreign policy, a clear ideological demarcation with regard to the non-Communist world,



and a steadily increasing diplomatic thrust in the framework of the policy of peaceful co-existence; not to mention the military preparedness which has grown in strength and scope.

But let us rather go to the sources themselves and hear what the East bloc leaders have to say about détente and co-existence and the relation to the non-Communist world.

"We live in an unceasing ideological war which imperialist propaganda wages against our country and the socialist world, and which is pursued by the most refined methods and the most advanced technical means." (L.I. Brezhnev at the 24th Party Congress, Moscow, March 1971).

"The ideological battle will increase in scope and intensity - and this not in spite but because of the policy of peaceful co-existence." (Erich Honecker, party leader in East Germany, in his final speech at the 8th meeting of the Central Committee, December 1972).

On January 5, 1973, the Polish News Bureau (PAP) made this comment on the European situation: "The more Europe moves towards a practical co-existence and the more the continent becomes involved in the gradual dissolution of the two blocs, the sharper and more reckless will become the ideological confrontation between the two systems."

On 14-15 February, 1973 there was held a seminar in East Berlin on "Peaceful co-existence and Ideological War". The main speech was by Professor Herbert Häber, the director of "The Institute of International Politics and Economics" (of East Germany). He said among other things, "The phase which has made such a success of the introduction of the principle of peaceful co-existence by no means leads to a reduction of the ideological class war but on the contrary to an intensification of it. It is essential that we always fully grasp the central core of the policy of peaceful co-existence between states with different social systems. We regard this policy as one form of the class war whose aim is to avoid atomic war but at the same time to wage the inevitable class war between capitalism and socialism. In this war we are led by the interests of the workers, of socialism, and of the desire of all peoples for peace. Our adversaries pursue their own aims of the capitalistic class. Therefore peaceful co-existence is no idyll but a hard, dour battle."

During the development of the policy of détente the Kremlin and East bloc countries seem to have gained more confidence and security in the policy they are following.

"The security of peace and the development of co-operation between all peoples and states in agreement with the principle of peaceful co-existence, gives the community of socialist states the most favourable external conditions for the overall growth of its international contacts and the advance of Communism." (Kurt Hager, secretary of the East German Communist Party, Central Committee, and member of the Politburo; in Neues Deutschland, 29 December, 1973).

"Peaceful co-existence does not mean the end of the battle between the two social systems in the world. The battle will continue between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, between socialism and imperialism, until the final and complete victory of Communism on a global scale ... All forms of class struggle between the two systems - the political, the economic, and the ideological - are



in present circumstances closely bound together, so that one complements the other and according to the prevailing situation now one and now another takes the lead ... the colossal battle for the thinking of mankind which we see in the world today will most certainly be decided in favour of socialism, which demonstrates its unchallenged superiority in all areas of society." (Leading article in Pravda, 22 August, 1973 by Professor Fedor Ryshenko, "Peaceful Co-Existence and the Class War".)

It is interesting also to read a decision taken by the East German Politburo on November 7, 1973 about "Agitation and Propaganda". This long document was discussed at a conference held by the Central Committee of the East German Communist Party November 16-17. And in the decision they state, "The task of agitation and propaganda is, using our superior spiritual weapons to destroy anti-Communism, the chief political-ideological instrument of the imperialist bourgeoisie; also to destroy bourgeois nationalism, social democracy, revisionism and left-orientated opportunism. The purity and unity of Marxism-Leninism must be systematically defended against all attacks. In the present situation, the struggle between socialism and imperialism rages with special bitterness and sharpness on the ideological front. There is no co-existence here nor can there ever be. The socialist and bourgeois ideologies can never be reconciled. In this field of battle there is no armistice ... a firm class stance is also an essential factor for new victories in the class struggle and the confrontation with imperialism; a struggle which increases in intensity, which goes on at different levels and in varying shapes and thus embraces every sphere of society."

"Our sure compass is and remains the doctrinal teaching which Marx, Engels and Lenin have given us. In this particular phase of the international class struggle an extension of our ideology is a task of first priority." (Kurt Hager, Secretary of the Central Committee of the East German Communist Party, Member of the Politburo in Neues Deutschland November 4, 1974.)

In many ways this conviction of Kurt Hager sounds like a modern version of what Vishinsky, Stalin's Foreign Affairs Minister, used to say 25 years ago: "We will win the world, not with atom bombs, but with our ideas, our brains and our doctrines."

Looking at the offensive attitude which the Community of Socialist States seems to have, we are forced to ask, "With a self-sufficient Western Europe, plagued by strikes and internal political strife; with a USA whose authority and power of action has been weakened, and a NATO which is no longer what it was - why should not the Kremlin pursue its aims more certainly and systematically and purposefully than ever?"

This is a challenge we in the West must tackle for a long time to come. And it is exactly here that the policy of détente between East and West will benefit us. The strong emphasis by the East on making Europe a continent of peace gives us in the West a unique chance. At least, the chance is there if we understand how to take it. For it is in this policy that we in the West for the first time come into a real wrestling and confrontation with Communism - at the negotiation table, the committees, and in working out the numerous practical questions which will have to be settled on a peaceful basis.

Let us welcome it. For this is where the very heart of the battle lies. On issues of motives, aims, human values, freedom. But let us face the truth



squarely. This confrontation will be no easier for us than it has been and still is for the pioneer fighters for human rights Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn. They have been in a far more exposed position than any of us in the West, but the heart of the struggle is the same. It will demand as much courage, as much insight, as much inner strength - and not least, a new thinking and a responsibility which extends over the whole world.

It would be against nature to avoid confrontation. The Communist fighters are all set for it. Confrontations exist to be met. And, more importantly, it is perhaps the West's only hope and chance of being able to survive as a continent in freedom.

Europe stands at a crossroads. Where will Europe be placed in the power-structure which is now developing in the world? Will the next 25 years see the whole of Europe become a vassal state of the USSR? Or of the USA? Or will our divided continent succeed in finding its own way, and become a peacemaking freedom creating and stabilising Europe between East and West, North and South?

In the struggle which will decide whether Europe is to be or not to be a free continent, the working class and the TUC's of free Europe will be in the front line of the confrontation which the détente policy between East and West will force upon us in future years.

At the first important Trades Union Summit meeting which took place in Geneva on January 19, the Western TUC leaders were adequate to the challenge. Shelepin and the Communist T.U. International did not reach the goals they had set for themselves. They got nowhere with their ideas of establishing a common TU Secretariat, nor of setting up a Pan-European action team to discuss issues of common interest.

The question remains: "What will happen at the next T.U. Summit in the Autumn?" At the moment the Western T.U. leaders are following a policy of a pragmatic approach and this seems right for the moment. But it will lead nowhere in the long run. To avoid confrontation is not possible. It will come sooner or later.

The TUC's of free Europe should be better fitted for this conference and battle than most. They know from experience that it is a tough and bitter struggle to gain victory for human rights and basic freedoms.

Leif Hovelsen