

'A socialist party — that is the basic need of today'

Milka Tyszkiewicz, a member of the Socialist Political Centre in Poland, spoke to Workers' Liberty about the lessons for socialism from Eastern Europe.

How do you think a democratic system should work? What is your idea of a workable democracy?

I cannot say what a democratic Poland would be like because I cannot imagine full democracy in Poland within non-democratic surroundings.

In my opinion democracy should be based on mass cooperation of workers, employees, and consumers. Now in Poland there is 30 per cent of bourgeois democracy. But I think that full parliamentary democracy is not the end of democratic thought.

I can imagine more democratic systems, socialist systems of self-organisation from below.

Could you define socialism as you see it?

You ask what socialism means. What does capitalism mean? Does it mean the most developed countries, or Latin American countries? Does it mean the political system in Britain, or the political system in South Africa? How can I answer what socialism is when there is no socialist country in the world?

For me socialism means a direction. The most important aspect is democracy, democracy from below. Second, socialism means cooperation of people from less developed and more developed countries, working for democracy and the most basic human rights, not only the right to vote once every four years but also full employment, housing for everybody, education, health care for everybody.

For me, socialism is the fight for human rights.



Milka Tyszkiewicz

In Poland now, although the political monopoly of the PZPR has been broken, the state machine is still mostly run by the old bureaucrats. What policy do you think would be best for trying to replace that entrenched bureaucratic power by democracy from below?

In Poland we are coming out of a big black hole, 40 years of a monopolistic system and monopolistic power. In general, Polish society knows very well what a trade union is, but we are just starting on organising ourselves into political parties. We are starting our political differentiation.

We've got 30 per cent of parliamentary democracy, and we have got two great powers. On the one hand, there is the former Stalinists, who have now split into two political parties. On the other hand, we have Solidarity, the trade union. I think the next step has to be the creation of a political workers' or labour party which will fight for democracy from below. A socialist party — that is the basic need for today.

We face a great economic crisis. This is a problem not only of Poland, but also of other East European countries. An IMF plan was introduced in Poland at the beginning of January this year. I can't agree with such so-called adjustment which makes big groups of our society hungry. I disagree with the programme of our government. It has to be changed.

In my opinion, our economy needs great changes, but they have to be decided in Poland, by the people who are interested primarily in the situation of the Polish economy — not by small groups of rich people or bureaucracy but by all of society, not by the IMF or by some groups in the government.

A self-limited state instead of a self-limited revolution, in the context of Poland, is a great idea. But it can't work in Poland alone, or even in Eastern Europe, or Europe alone. It has to be introduced on an international scale.

But if in the coming months Polish workers mobilise against the austerity plan in a revolutionary way, and they want to change society, what form of government do you think they should introduce? Through what forms of democracy should they try to take control of society?

If there should be such an uprising — if — as in 1980-81, we have seen already how it works. Workers organised themselves in the factories, and also on the territorial scale. We saw the same in the uprising of the Siberian miners, who took control not only over atomised factories but also over a whole territory. They took control not only over production but also over distribution.

A new state would be organised from below, from the level of the factory, town or neighbourhood up to a general representation of society which would be a mixture of territorial self-management bodies, factory self-management bodies, different political parties, women's liberation groups, national minorities, and so on. The general model is parliamentary democracy, but based much deeper than here.

The reason why we call a workers' state a semi-state is that it would be democratic, it would be based on the majority, not the minority; but it would also be a state, in that if you make a revolution you must repress those who are against the revolution. The workers would need to arm themselves, they would need to fight the armed forces of the old system.

I am very wary of saying semi-state or state together with workers' control, because the border line between self-defence and repression is very thin. Sometimes, somebody who starts from self-defence can finish as the same Stalinist, trying to make socialism in one country, as we have seen for the last sixty years. Because of that, I don't like to use that phrase at all. I would rather avoid it.



Polish socialists protest

It's true that you cannot avoid the question of the state, but I think it has to be done on a more general scale. Sixty years ago, or in the time of Marx, the relationships between the working class, the state, and the flow of capital were completely different from what they are now. We have a different capitalism from sixty years ago, a different flow of capital between states, and a different working class, and different states.

In my opinion, you can't just talk about the relationship between the working class and the state, forgetting about foreign capital. You always have to consider them together, the working class, the state, and capital.

So what do you think the relationship between the working class and capital should be?

Ten years ago there was a group of workers in France who tried to organise a beautiful socialist factory at Lip. They did it, but they forgot the relationship between their power and the power of capital around them. They ended up bankrupt, and before that they had to introduce some unemployment at their factory.

So talking about the relationship between the workers and power is not enough. They took power in their factory...

But they didn't take power in the state...

But taking power in the state is also not enough, if you compare one state to the rest of the world. Today, capital has much bigger power than the workers could have by taking power within one state. To talk of a semi-state only is dangerous, because

you can forget that it's not enough in one state — still, capital controls what you do.

What assessment do you have of the shape and tempo of the class struggle that will develop in Poland with the move to the free market and the IMF austerity plan?

It's difficult to talk about Poland alone. It's a dynamic process in Eastern Europe, and not only in Eastern Europe but also China, South Africa, Brazil — the election result of Lula. All these are small parts of the same process. This year might be very important not only for Poland but for societies in the whole world.

There is an incredible movement for democracy. For the first time in this century there is such a great movement fighting for democracy and for freedom and for human rights. I think that it can't be stopped that easily on the level of an austerity plan for Poland. That movement is much broader than just within Poland. It cannot be stabilised in Poland on the level of austerity measures. It can't work.

We face the problem of the reunification of Germany, of the destabilisation of the Russian state, of the danger of the limits of sources of energy. There is a great movement for ecological production. Probably we are somewhere at the beginning of changes in the world — not in the middle, but at the beginning.

The possibilities are open. The situation is very complicated, and because of that we should be concerned rather with the direction of our own behaviour than with prospects. My direction is for human rights, rights for full employment, for housing, for eating, for health care, for

clean food, clean life, forests... We should cooperate with every power in the world which tries to keep the same direction — political power, trade union power, democratic power.

How do you explain the way that the bureaucrats in Poland, whose whole system has been centred on state control, have suddenly become converted to the free market and privatisation?

I'm not that surprised. The Polish bureaucracy want more exploitation. They wanted to discipline the Polish working class. I think that the pro-market reforms, for them, mean new methods of disciplining the working class, not only through political or police and army measures, but also through economic measures.

If they had any connections to leftist ideology, they broke those connections years and years ago. So they are trying to cooperate with those powers who help them with increasing the discipline and exploitation of the working class, and getting bigger profits for themselves.

To what extent could you define the bureaucracies in Eastern Europe now as just tools or instruments of the Western bourgeoisie?

It's very difficult to say now, at the beginning of the changes, how big an initiative the bureaucracies in the East have. For example, I don't think you can't say that Mr Gorbachev has not made any initiatives on the world, or that he didn't put pressures on the Western countries...

Isn't there a distinction between the Russian bureaucracy, which is more solid, and

the East European bureaucracies, which had been propped up by Russia?

I don't treat the Polish bureaucracy as a separate power. Not so long ago, decisions about the Polish situation were made in the Kremlin, not in Warsaw. So for me the Polish bureaucracy is the same power as the Kremlin.

The decisions used to be made in the Kremlin. Do you think they will be taken now in New York or Frankfurt?

Margaret Thatcher is very afraid of Western Germany unified with East Germany, and she says it will be a big centre of controlling Europe. Maybe Frankfurt, maybe Tokyo. I don't know. Maybe in the Kremlin.

Do you think the Stalinist system in Eastern Europe has now collapsed completely, or could there be a comeback?

In Poland we had elections with 30 per cent of parliamentary democracy. The Stalinists keep power by controlling the National Bank, the army and the police, and Jaruzelski is president. Being realistic, one should say that the Stalinists still have power in their hands.

The question is whether the bureaucracy means the Stalinist party, or the Stalinist party is only an instrument of the bureaucracy. If the bureaucracy means the same as the Stalinist party, then the problem of the bureaucracy has disappeared. The bureaucracy has collapsed. But if the Stalinist party was only an instrument, a political measure to control the working class in Poland, then the same people have kept power, or part of power. The old bureaucrats are still very important in Polish political life.

I would like to be careful.

Why do you think the Stalinist systems in Eastern Europe have had this big crisis?

What does "Stalinist system" mean? I found in Britain that people say "Stalinist system" and they mean the political Stalinist party controlling society by a party-state system. But for me it means also a huge bureaucracy which controls political, economic and cultural life.

For sure the Stalinist parties have collapsed. That is easily seen in Poland, in Czechoslovakia, in Eastern Germany, maybe even in Russia. But when you look deeper into everyday life in Poland, you see that the same bureaucrats keep the same positions, mostly. There are some small changes at the top, but in the factories, for example, the same bureaucrats still control. In some factories there are more bureaucrats than workers. On the level of the economy, the bureaucrats are still in power.

There is still a long way before us before we will get out of the Stalinist system.

How would you define or describe the Stalinist system?

It is different in different countries. I can say what the Stalinist system *doesn't* mean. It *doesn't* mean only a state-party

political system of controlling economic and political life. It doesn't mean only keeping political control by the Kremlin; you have for example China or Angola, countries which are not connected to the Kremlin but it is very difficult to call them capitalist.

I don't think the Stalinist system can be compared with capitalism. What is capitalism?

Wage labour, production for profit...

Wage labour in Britain, or in Brazil?

Both Brazil and Britain have wage labour, at different levels...

Poland also has wage labour...

Personally, I think the Stalinist systems are state-capitalist, but other people would say that because the state rather than the market controls economic relations they are not any form of capitalism, but rather "bureaucratic collectivism"...

What would you call the Lip factory? Because of the big pressure of the market outside, they had to expel some workers. Could you call them capitalists?

Not really. But you can't necessarily use terms like capitalist, bureaucratic collectivist, or workers' state for one factory, only for a whole system.

You cannot compare systems just by seeing the relationship between the working class and the state. You have to look at the working class, the state, and the market.

So it's impossible to say what is better. Capital is not something which is separate in the West and in the East, it exists everywhere. We have the problem not only of the relationship between the working class and the state, but also of the relationship between more developed and less developed countries, countries which are in debt and countries which are centres of capital.

I can imagine Poland very poor if it is in the same position as Mexico or Brazil, so I think the question "what is better" is wrong.

What do you think is the best democratic or socialist way of dealing with the nationalities question in Eastern Europe?

Socialism means democracy and self-organisation from below. It also means self-determination from below. I don't know what the Ukrainian minority in Poland wants. I can ask them and they will decide what they want.

How far do you think the rights of such minorities extend? For example, in Kosovo, in Yugoslavia, the Serbian minority there demanded that Kosovo should be part of Serbia.

The freedom of movement of your fist finishes at the nose of your neighbour. If someone thinks that freedom means that he can hit the nose of his neighbour, he's wrong.

Freedom means the right of self-determination for everybody, not only majorities, but also minorities. It means

proportional decision-making.

Do you think there are lessons to be drawn from the experience of Stalinism for whether a planned economy is possible or how a planned economy should work?

The economy is planned everywhere, not only in the Eastern Bloc. The economy is planned much better in capitalist states, especially in the centres of capitalism, where the economy is planned for years in advance.

The economy in Poland has not been planned, it has been ordered. It's a sort of hand-made economy. It's a big difference.

My question about the planning of the economy is not if it will be planned, because it is obvious that it will be, but by whom. That is the difference between me and a rightist. I say that the economy should be planned by the majority, in response to their needs.

What are human needs? Not only profit. I disagree with Adam Smith, that everybody stands for gain. I think everybody stands for a good life, which means good housing, good food, a good place for rest, a good job, a good atmosphere around, good relationships between people, and no war. These are human needs, and the economy should be disciplined by those human needs.

What do you think should be the relationship between planning and the market?

Last September there was an IMF meeting in Washington. The IMF economists were horrified by the fact that they could plan for two or five years ahead, so they could make only short-term investments.

It's a wrong question. The question is not what proportion between the market and planning, but what the economy means — standing for gain or for a good life. The relationship between the market and planning is a secondary problem.

What do you think of the argument that Stalinism was a direct product of Leninism and Bolshevism?

It's a very complicated question. Stalinism was also a direct product of the human dream about paradise.

There have been many revolutions in the world, and millions and millions of people were involved in making those revolutions. I can't believe all the revolutionists in Russia, in Cuba, in Nicaragua, in China, were standing for profit, for power. There was quite a big number of people who wanted a better life in their countries, and not only for themselves but for society as a whole.

It's very difficult to know what the proportion is between human wishes and objective conditions. Maybe there is somebody in secondary school who will grow up and write the next volume of *Capital*.

So how would you explain how Stalinism arose?

That is the next volume of *Capital*!