

# PROBLEMS

(Formerly: Problems Of Capitalism & Socialism,  
Problems Of Communism)

## THE STATE, REVOLUTION & SOCIETY, 1990

New Series, Number Three  
(Vol. 3, No. 4)

### Contents

<i>Skittled</i> (Editorial)	Page 2
<i>The State &amp; Revolution</i> (by John Martin)	Page 5
<i>State &amp; Society</i> (by John Martin)	Page 7
<i>Afterword</i> (Editorial)	Page 12

**Irish Political Review is a magazine which has been in existence since 1986. It was a follow-on from the Irish Communist. There was much interesting material produced in Irish Political Review, both stimulating to thought and giving an account of what was happening in society. At this lapse of time, the Irish Political Review provides a historical record of what happened a generation ago. Problems proposes to issue selections of articles from these early magazines, not necessarily because it would stand over every word that was said, but as an aid to recalling what is in many ways a different world.**

**Irish Political Review  
Volume 5, No. 1  
January 1990**

## **SKITTLED!**

*Foreign Policy Games Of The Super-Powers*

**Within six months the Kremlin has made a clean sweep of all the Governments of Eastern Europe except Albania—and Albania scarcely matters.**

The greatest challenge to Mr. Gorbachev was Sir Nicolai Ceausescu. But, in the end, it took less than a week to topple Sir Nicolai. Romania was the only state in which the overthrow of the regime cost lives in large numbers. And, as the regime was being overthrown, the name being chanted by the revolutionary millions was not Bush, and was certainly not Thatcher: it was Gorbachev. There is much more of a Russian presence in Romania now than there was a month ago.

Sir Nicolai was the only Communist dictator to be knighted by the Queen. But no doubt Deng Xiao-peng would have been knighted if he had shown any willingness to accept the honour. The good Communists, as far as Britain and America were concerned, were the Communists who were independent of Moscow. Unfortunately, the Communists who were independent of Moscow were not the more civilised ones.

Britain, which many expected to be in the vanguard of liberal development in Europe, was in the position of having to scurry off Sir Nicolai's bandwagon as it stopped rolling, and of jumping on the opposition bandwagon, whose existence was entirely unsuspected until it made the one powerful surge which toppled Ceausescu.

The sudden materialisation of the Romanian opposition is unexplained. The Western media, programmed to depict all that has happened in Eastern Europe in the past six months as a series of independent developments, has no interest in looking for a Russian hand in the Romanian development. But there is a *prima facie* probability that a Russian underground survived Ceausescu's purges and was active in the movement against him. That is, at any rate, more likely than the alternative supposition that an atomised and supervised Romanian society, which had hitherto shown no signs of an opposition movement, suddenly cohered into a revolutionary surge capable of accepting a couple of hundred thousand casualties in pursuit of its aims.

In China, where there is certainly no Russian underground, the popular demonstrations were put down. Gorbachev went there, and had to accept the fact that he was powerless there. He disentangled himself as best he could and made no protest when the inevitable happened in Tiananmen Square—the oldest street in the world.

The British establishment, having made Deng its hero and having imagined that he was a Thatcherite, made a fool of itself over the Tiananmen Square demonstration. It forgot what

China at large was and got carried away by the little bit of it—the infinitesimal bit—that the television cameras saw. And, when Deng drove his tanks over the demonstrators, Britain had to scamper back onside for reasons of trade and because of the need to put as good a face as possible on the handover of the people of Hong Kong to the Chinese State.

It is not easy being a megalomaniac British Prime Minister if one is neither very bright nor very powerful. And it is peculiar that this most insular and trivial of British Prime Ministers should have attained such popularity in Ireland—the SDLP praised her and desired her re-election, and Nuala O Faolain has admired her boundlessly in *The Irish Times*. In world affairs she is a lightweight whom it has suited the purposes of both Ronald Reagan and Gorbachev to flatter. In European affairs she has been well summed up by Edward Heath as “*a narrow little nationalist*”.

During the eighties there were two great centres of world politics—Moscow and Washington. Reagan restored Washington’s credibility as a world power after the international fiasco achieved by Kennedy and Johnson and Nixon’s domestic fiasco. But Bush looks increasingly like a silly little man who has neither the image nor the substance of a statesman. The CIA has come to power. And the CIA in power has the breadth of vision of a thug. It has made a complete mess of its effort to topple the small-time dictator in its puppet-state of Panama, whom it put in power a few years ago. International law has never had much reality to it. But after the invasion of Panama and the way it was justified by the White House and the British Home Secretary, it is a joke in bad taste.

Washington’s justification was in essence a statement that democratic states have the right to invade undemocratic states and overthrow their Governments. Mrs. Thatcher’s instant and uncritical support of Bush was a ratification of that view. The British Foreign Secretary was asked on BBC’s *Newshight*—by an exceptionally perspicacious and daring interviewer—whether the principle on which the invasion of Panama was being defended would not also justify an invasion of Romania. Hurd shifted ground and said the justification of the invasion was that an American soldier had been killed in Panama, and he had not heard that any American soldiers had been killed in Romania.

(Howe was an uninspiring Foreign Secretary, Major was a depressing one. But it remained for Hurd, who was supposed to restore the dignity of that once great Department of State, to drag it in the gutter. The killing of a German soldier in a state which he intended to invade was a device perfected by Hitler. Panama was invaded in December 1989 because it is due to take over the management of the Panama Canal in January 1990, preparatory to assuming ownership of it in 2000.)

A couple of days after Hurd made those remarks his Government, following the American, broached the idea that Russia should invade Romania. But Gorbachev maintained to the end the posture of masterful inactivity which has been his hallmark throughout this remarkable six months.

So what is the upshot of it all?

Bolshevik Russia has been sealed off from the politics of Europe ever since Lenin signed the Brest-Litovsk Treaty with the Kaiser’s Germany in March 1918. Lenin tried to get back into European politics by organising the Communist International, but the tactic proved ineffective. Then he tried the tactic of military conquest: but though it succeeded in Georgia, this tactic failed in Poland. A generation later, however, it led to an immense expansion of the Russian Empire.

Moscow’s last expansionist military venture was Afghanistan. When the Red Army moved in there, a Soviet diplomat was reported as saying that it would cost a million lives and take twenty years to bring that situation to order. That was a realistic estimate.

There was no possibility of military advance in Europe. The situation there was deadlocked militarily. The great object, therefore, was to get into the political game beyond the military frontier. Brezhnev, a conservative, was content to defend the *status quo*. But Russia is above all a state—an offshoot of the Mongol expansion—with a mission to extend its influence in the world. The expansion of the Russian state began before the British Empire was dreamed of, and continued as the British Empire declined. And so Gorbachev came after Brezhnev and resumed the mission of Lenin and Stalin.

His first enterprise was the “*peace offensive*” of the mid-eighties to prevent the updating of Nuclear weapons by NATO. He brought about a

great revival of the CND. But the CND failed (and the very effective propaganda of Michael Heseltine as British Minister of Defence had much to do with its failure).

The war in Afghanistan, being reminiscent of the war in Vietnam, worked against the growth of Soviet influence on West European liberal opinion. So Gorbachev called it off. But there was no wild scramble out, as in the case of Vietnam. And, against all expectations, Kabul did not fall to the guerrillas as Saigon did.

And then Gorbachev began to play ninepins with the Governments of Eastern Europe. In most instances, all he needed to do was say that there would be no Soviet military intervention in the affairs of the various states, and be believed. But, in the case of East Germany, he had to make a personal appearance and give many nods and winks before an opposition movement materialised. (And the Romanian affair must be rated the most remarkable conjuring trick of all time, because the conjurer never appeared on the stage at all, and the trick apparently performed itself.)

Thatcher was useful to Gorbachev in that she helped to guarantee the military *status quo* while he pulled the regimes of Eastern Europe apart. He clearly impressed her with something more than the routine charisma of power. He has that extra something which by all accounts Hitler had—the ability to charm and persuade by animal magnetism. In any case, she undertook to see to it that his military empire should not be challenged as he went about overthrowing the various governments in it—NATO became the guarantor of the Warsaw Pact.

The first object of the ineffectual Soviet attempts to play politics in Western Europe during the past forty years has been the neutralisation of Germany—and the unification of Germany has been the price it was prepared to pay for that object.

The close co-operation of France and Germany in the Common Market and their joint determination that it should increasingly take on the features of a European state has in the past couple of years threatened to close off Western Europe to Russian ambition permanently. Russia needs a Europe divided into conflicting nation states. Gorbachev's game of skittles with the East

European governments can only be regarded as his response to Jacques Delors. He has thrown central Europe into flux, and he has put the unification of Germany on the immediate agenda of politics, in order to set Germany at odds with France, and ward off the projected development of the Common Market.

*“The Great Game”* was the name given to the struggle between Britain and Russia to get control of Afghanistan a hundred years ago. The narrow little nationalist in Downing Street (who is disgracing the name of Britain by her way of winding up the remnants of Empire in Asia) imagines that she is capable of playing in the greatest of all such games which is now beginning in Europe. She is Gorbachev's active ally in the attempt to restore the old balance of power game with Europe—the game which led to two world wars.

When Enoch Powell many years ago began preaching the doctrine that Britain should collaborate with the KGB to restore the old conditions of Europe it seemed the harmless eccentricity of a politician who had given up all hope of power. But that is now British policy in dead earnest.

The KGB (or its first form as the Cheka) was started by Lenin to be the essence of the Bolshevik regime. And it has not somehow evaporated during the past few years. Gorbachev does not act without the consent of the KGB. The KGB is the eyes and ears and intelligence of the state, as well as its sword arm. And it is the mobile element in the apparatus.

The KGB was certainly aware that the line of policy embarked on by Gorbachev would stir up a multitude of centrifugal forces in the Soviet sphere of influence. And it must be supposed that it considered the risks were reasonable ones to undertake in the pursuit of a great object.

We are about to live in interesting times, in which everything is again possible in Europe, including war. And if the development of the EC is aborted and a Europe of nation states is restored, then war becomes a virtual certainty.

## THE STATE AND REVOLUTION

Perhaps Marx was right when he said that history repeats itself twice: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. Those who try to recreate the glories of the past without taking account of modern conditions are doomed to failure.

Nevertheless, it is possible to look at the history of a country and see recurring themes. In the case of Russia there has been a pattern to its history. For centuries it has had an authoritarian state. Its only experience of anything resembling democracy was during the chaotic period between March and November 1917.

The problem with a society that is dominated by the state is that there is no impetus for social development.

In liberal democratic societies the state is responsive to new developments. This occurs in a country like Britain because the two main political parties which compete for state power must take account of the organised interests within the society: the political parties give coherence to the multifarious interests which the society exerts on the political system.

Of course, each of the main political parties has its own view of the world, which determines how it responds to the various interests in society.

The liberal democratic relationship of the state with the rest of the society produces quite conservative politics, because the state cannot implement reforms without at least the acquiescence of the society. Even the most radical of governments must take account of society as it is before it can contemplate how it would like society to be.

But the substantial reforms which are implemented tend not to be difficult to

reverse precisely because they have the support of the society. Also, substantial reforms, such as the ones implemented by the British Labour Government in 1945, tend to create new interests within the society, which make new demands on the political system. So, while progress is slow, it is steady and the society never stagnates.

The relationship of the state to the society in the Republic of Ireland is different to that of Britain. There is a massive consensus among the political parties which could be described as "*Catholic Nationalist*". The left wing parties have not deviated from the prevailing ideology and, in many ways, they are more Catholic Nationalist than the other parties. Witness Spring's defence of our sacred "*De Valera inspired*" neutrality and the opposition to the Single European Act of the Workers' Party, along with the '*Pro-life*' brigade.

Because of the consensus on policies among the political parties, competition for political power is based on which individuals should have the honour of forming a government, rather than which policies are the best. The populist, as distinct from policy-based, orientation of politics has led to clientism. Since all the parties are the same, the best tactic for getting things done is to go to the best individuals, or different individuals from all the parties. Some academics have argued that clientism has prevented the development of class-based politics, but it is probably more true to say that the absence of class politics has led to clientism.

The absence of competition based on policies has meant that the political parties lack the impetus to respond to new developments in the society.

Some of the most important issues in society are reflected by interest groups without reference to the political parties. During the divorce and '*pro-life*' referenda the political parties were sitting on the sidelines.

The irrelevance of the political parties has resulted in the courts being left to mop up messy situations. While the Irish state and

culture has been intolerant of individuals not subscribing to the dominant ethos, the authoritarianism of the state has been mitigated by the legacy of British rule. The Russian state has had no such historical restraint. It has always had an unelected minority governing the country with the help of a repressive secret police.

Throughout the history of the Russian Empire, the state has suppressed all interests within the society. This has led to long periods of stagnation. Then some individuals, aware of how backward the Russian Empire has become, compared to Europe, decide to implement Revolutionary change. The same state apparatus which had hitherto been used to suppress resistance to the status quo then becomes equally effective in overcoming resistance to the revolution.

Peter the Great was an example of a Russian revolutionary leader. He spent many of his formative years in Europe. When he was the Tsar he decided he would consolidate the gains of the Russian Empire, so he mobilized the resources of the state to build a city in the marshes of Finland. The city was called Petrograd, now known as Leningrad.

V. I. Lenin was also the quintessential Russian revolutionary leader. Like Peter the Great, he was influenced by ideas from Europe. He was also frustrated at how backward the Russian Empire was, compared to Europe. In his famous pamphlet, **The State And Revolution**, he said that the state was an instrument of class rule. This was an accurate description of conditions in Russia. But Lenin, unlike the anarchists, was not prepared to abolish the state. The dictatorship of the bourgeoisie was to be replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The communists transformed the society. The country which had been defeated by Japan at the start of the century managed to defeat Hitler's forces and extend its empire to the centre of Europe by the middle of the century.

One of the ingredients for the success of the communists was the ideology that inspired the leaders and masses. But, after the death of Stalin, the leaders, and then the masses,

ceased to believe in the ideology. This engendered cynicism and the society reverted to its old pattern of stagnation.

Political stagnation coincided with economic stagnation. In the mid-1970s, following the failure of the wheat harvest, the KGB secretly bought up the grain supply on the Chicago market. It was a spectacular coup, but the KGB realised that it would not always be so lucky. The KGB, the eyes and ears, as well as the sword arm of the state, was the group most aware of the economic shortcomings of the Soviet Union, as compared to the West. It seems to be behind the new attempt at modernising the Russian Empire.

Andropov was the first KGB man who became general secretary. And his protégé, Gorbachev, acceded to power after the death of Chernenko. The new line from Moscow seems to have been reflected throughout Eastern Europe as was pointed out in the January issue of the **Irish Political Review**. There is the added possibility of disrupting the political union of the European Community, but Gorbachev has not yet delivered on the economy.

The Soviet economy is still in a mess. But it would be a mistake to assume that his political position is weak, as has been suggested by the Western media. While he has been failing on the economic front for 5 years, the so-called '*hard liners*' have been making a mess of it for 30 years. The only alternative to Gorbachev is chaos, which incidentally is not beyond the bounds of possibility.

Gorbachev is typical of Russian revolutionary leaders in that he is modernizing the Empire by importing European political ideas. But Gorbachev's task seems much more difficult. The ideas of glasnost and perestroika seem incompatible with the authoritarian nature of the state. If Gorbachev's revolution is about changing the nature of the state, rather than its goals, his revolution could be the revolution to end all Russian revolutions.

During the Brezhnev era, there was concern about political and economic

stagnation. The problem for communist intellectuals was to explain this within the parameters of the official ideology. Why was progress in the Soviet Union, an advanced socialist country, not onwards and upwards.

A leading sociologist called Shkhnazarov argued that a true communist society would take longer to attain because of the existence of various “*interests*” within the society. Since, according to the official ideology, the Soviet Union had reached a state of “*advanced socialism*”, classes and class conflict were abolished. But the society was not in harmony because of these “*interests*”, which Shkhnazarov had discovered. These interests were not in “*conflict*”, but were “*antagonistic*” to each other. Therefore, although there was no need for the communist party to abandon its monopoly of power, it did mean that the party would have to become more responsive to these “*antagonistic interests*”, if it was going to reconcile them.

When Gorbachev first embarked on his reform programme, my impression was that he was merely implementing the recommendations of Shkhnazarov. His main aim was to make the party more efficient in its response to social needs and therefore more effective in its control over the society.

Perhaps that was Gorbachev’s original intention, but he has found that the dead hand of the communist bureaucracy is irreformable without some pressure from the society, because it is not in the interests of the apparatchiks to make themselves more accountable. (Indeed, in many instances, the apparatchiks have quietly sabotaged the economic reforms by not implementing them, or by carrying them out in an inefficient way.)

But, by appealing to society, expectations have been fuelled, so that political reform has achieved a momentum of its own. In Brendan Clifford’s recent book on the French Revolution, the movement of events was compared to an opera. Initially, the Revolution had nothing to do with the masses. Their role was to appear on the stage every so often, make a fuss, and then depart to allow the main players to continue with the show. The problem was that the masses appeared so often, and grew so accustomed to appearing,

that the opera became about them.

While the masses are not at the centre of recent events in the Soviet Union, they are certainly a factor. Before the recent plenum of the Communist Party’s Central Committee, radical forces managed to muster 200,000 demonstrators on the streets of Moscow. The Plenum agreed to rescind article 6 of the Soviet Constitution, which had recognised the leading and guiding role of the Communist Party. This occurred less than two months after Gorbachev denounced Andrei Sakharov for daring to suggest such a thing.

This reform would seem to usher in a multi-party system. Gennadi Gerasimov, the Soviet foreign spokesman, said that a prerequisite for economic success was political freedom. It would seem that there is some basis for such a development. With the decline in Leninist ideology, the Communist Party has become less homogeneous. It is likely that, if political parties do develop, they will be drawn from the different groups within the Communist Party.

Many western commentators have been busy composing the obituary of the CPSU. But, while Leninism as an ideology is in decline, and has been for nearly 40 years, it is almost certain that the Communist Party will continue in some shape or form. There is no equivalent to the Polish movement, *Solidarity*, within Russia, and in the outlying regions of the Empire the main threat comes from nationalist movements.

The CPSU has shown that it has the capacity for reform. Gorbachev, in particular, has demonstrated an ability to adapt to changing circumstances: the true mark of a reformer.

Mao Tse Tung was once asked by a journalist what he thought the effects of the French Revolution were. He replied that it was too early to say. It is certainly too early to say how events will unfold in the Soviet Union, but I can’t help feeling that it would be premature to write off the prospects of a country which can produce an individual with the political ability of Gorbachev.

**John Martin.**

## STATE AND SOCIETY

### For The State

It is fashionable in the era of Gorbachev to see the State as the enemy of the people. But the reason why the Soviet State has been experienced as an oppressive force is that politics in that country has been filtered exclusively through the Communist Party. The State has been merely an instrument of the Communist Party, the means through which the Party exerts its control over the society.

Far from weakening the State, Gorbachev has in a certain sense strengthened it. He has attempted to make state institutions more independent of the Party and therefore more accountable to other influences within the society.

In general, the State is the means by which a society modernises itself and the means by which the working class participates in the running of the society. The capitalist class only needs the rudiments of the state, such as the army and the police force, to protect its property, which is the basis of its power. But the working class has *only* the state as a means of advancing its interests. It was for this reason that Marx described the working class as the most *political* class in history.

### The State In Ireland

The struggle for Irish independence

was not fought for the benefit of the Irish working class. It was essentially an alliance between the farming class and the Catholic Church.

The Irish farming class having won absolute ownership of the land under a Conservative Government did not want to pay taxes in order to finance Lloyd George's incipient welfare state. The Irish Church, having spearheaded the revival of Ultramontanist Catholicism throughout Europe, did not want to have any restrictions put on it by a liberal British government.

The dominant ideology of the nationalist movement was property-owning and Catholic. The ideology was later made explicit in the 1937 Constitution.

Both the farming class and the Catholic Church had an interest in ensuring that the state was weak and ineffective so as to give each the maximum room for manoeuvre. The state's sole function was to support their initiatives.

The farming class has also been successful in preventing state interference in its affairs. This can be seen in the area of taxation. Also, the failure of the rod license showed that this class was unwilling to relinquish control of the lakes and rivers of Ireland to the state. What was striking about this dispute was the rhetoric of the farmers. The state was characterised by them as an alien force. This class, which had fought for independence, had no hesitation in comparing the state with the British absentee landlords of the last century.

But the state has been weakened by

other factors besides the prevailing ideology of the dominant interest groups. The Courts' power to interpret the constitution and strike down laws made by the Oireachtas also limits the effectiveness of the state. And it is restricted by the incoherent nature of our party system.

The political parties in this country did not arise out of any serious social dispute and therefore it is possible to find conservatives and progressives within the same party.

The political conflicts which generated the most passion in recent years, the anti-abortion and the divorce referenda, took place outside the party system. In the absence of coherence from the political parties, interest groups fill the vacuum.

The politician with the greatest political instinct in this country is Charles Haughey. He is the politician most interested in making the state effective and for that reason he is not liked by some elements within the political establishment. He realises that in order to achieve his objectives a politician must enlist the support of powerful interest groups. Haughey is pinning most of his hopes on the Programme for National Recovery. It is doubtful whether the debt crisis would have been averted if it had not been for the PNR.

During the World Cup it was said that the exploits of Jack's Green Army were more relevant to ordinary people than the deliberations of the Oireachtas. Well, that isn't saying very much. The real question is, whether the World Cup is more relevant to ordinary people than the PNR. Certainly, if the trade union movement were to opt out of the PNR, it would be opting out of politics. At present, the

PNR is the only means of advancing the working class interest.

There are many objectives which the trade union movement could pursue through a successor to the PNR. And there are two criteria which the trade union movement should consider when deciding on the objectives to be pursued:

*1. are the objectives in the working class interest?*

*2. is the state capable of delivering on these objectives?*

The most serious problem facing Irish society is unemployment and its effects, which include poverty and emigration.

One of the reasons for the failure of this country to solve the problem of unemployment is the dominant position of the farming class in the society. In most industrialised countries, an agricultural revolution preceded the industrial revolution. A surplus is created from the land which is then invested in industrial production.

In southern Ireland this did not occur because of the relations of production on the land.

In the nineteenth century, the peasant in the south lived at a subsistence level. Any surplus he created was appropriated by the landlord and was either invested in England or spent in order to keep the latter in the manner to which he was accustomed.

The Tory Government helped the peasantry to buy out the land it worked in 1903. This meant that the new landowners became absolute owners of the land. These farmers, who formed the

backbone of the independence struggle, have never been compelled to be productive.

Land is a scarce resource and therefore ownership of land by one individual is preventing the utilisation of that land by another individual. For this reason, most countries impose a cost on the ownership of this resource so as to ensure that only efficient farmers can work the land. But, just as Fianna Fáil failed to develop the potential of the lakes and rivers through a rod license, the Coalition Government failed to develop the potential of the land by means of a land tax. The best that could be done was to encourage inefficient farmers, by means of tax incentives, to lease their land to other farmers willing to have a go at the land.

An agricultural sector which is not subordinate to the needs of industry is definitely a handicap in formulating an industrial development strategy, especially since agriculture is potentially a more significant sector in this country than in other countries.

However, other countries, such as Japan, have developed industrially with an inefficient agriculture. But these countries have a coherent and effective state, something this country has not.

An example of the ineffectiveness of the state was shown when Albert Reynolds commissioned a study of industry's readiness for 1992. Frank Roche wrote a magnificent report on the failure of industrial policy. Reynolds has since gone to Finance, and the report has been left to rot.

Essentially the report argues for the state supporting winners in the private

sector, rather than propping up failed companies and merely delaying their inevitable closure. It identifies the top Irish company as Waterford Glass, which last received a Government grant in 1978.

However, the present writer doubts the ability of the state to implement the Roche Report, even if it had tried.

Another objective which the trade union movement could pursue is a redistribution of resources in favour of the working class, or to be more precise, a redistribution of control of resources.

In other regions, such as Scandinavia and the Basque country, workers have more control over their working environment. This control is guaranteed by their ownership of shares. The financing of these shares is borne by the state through direct purchase of the shares on behalf of the workers, and by tax incentives to companies to issue shares for the workers.

Karl Marx believed that the capitalist system was moribund because the interests of capital and labour were irreconcilable. The Waterford Glass dispute showed that management wanted workers to bear an increasing responsibility for the future of the company without gaining any power.

Marx was brilliant in his analysis of the capitalist system, but his solution to the contradictions of capitalism was awry. The Soviet experiment has shown the disastrous consequences of attempting to abolish property.

It seems that property will continue to exist, even after capitalism as we know it is consigned to the dustbin of history. Advancing the interests of the working class means more property for the

working class. Workers' control over the means of production means workers' ownership of shares.

Unfortunately, although there is a great need for workers' share ownership, as the Waterford Glass strike illustrates, the social need is not matched by a demand by the workers for such innovation. Like the Roche Report on industrial development, workers' ownership is something for future Programmes for National Recovery.

If there is little demand for workers' share-ownership, the same cannot be said for reform of our health services. There is both a need and a demand for such reform. The health service was probably the main issue in the 1989 general election.

As a result of 1992, the position of the VHI as a monopoly health insurance company is becoming untenable. For this reason, the Irish health service is at a crossroads. In the next few years, the provision of the service will be either financed from private individuals or the state will assume a greater role.

The present half-private, half-socialised, service will be no longer possible. It is this point that the Commission on Health Funding addressed. Their Report comes out firmly in favour of a socialised health service.

But the Report recognises that, if the State is going to assume a greater role in financing the service, it will have to have greater control over the money it spends.

Up until the present, both the health and education systems here have largely been provided by the churches. The state has seen its role as supporting their

initiatives. But, with the increasing costs of health and education, the state has been forced to underwrite a greater proportion of their expenditure.

It is time for the state to assert itself in these areas. At the very least there should be an Education Act to bring education policies under public scrutiny, but above all the Trade Union movement should push for the full implementation of the Commission on Health Funding. It should argue its case in public. A free health service for all with state control to ensure value for money for the taxpayer is bound to have popular appeal. An end to the jumping of hospital queues by private patients is also likely to appeal to the public's sense of fair play.

Following the Dunne case, the health establishment is not in a particularly strong position to resist such a demand.

As has already been said, the Irish state has not proved effective as a reforming force. But experience has shown that, if one issue is taken at a time, progress is possible. In the past few years the Trade Unions helped to create a consensus in favour of a better deal for welfare recipients and, by and large, they were successful in this. If the trade union movement concentrates on winning over the public to the recommendations of the Commission on Health Funding, the other social partners will find it difficult to resist.

The successful implementation of the Report of the Commission will more than justify the Trade Union participation in the PNR. It will also place the state in a stronger position to take up the other challenges which need to be tackled in the interests of the working class.

**John Martin**

## Afterword

In 1990, when these pieces were written, the world was about to undergo a sea-change. Russian-style Communism was about to collapse—and Ireland was about to take off as a European economy.

With the benefit of hindsight, we now know that Cold War aggressiveness was instigated by the Americans, who took subversive hostilities so far as to subsidise Moslem militants to start a guerilla war against a progressive Government in Kabul that was disliked because it looked East rather than West. The intent—to draw the Soviet Union into committing troops in Afghanistan and draw it into a Vietnam-style intervention—was successful. But, in achieving its purpose, America has created a political development of seismic proportions. The Americans may have found the lever for tipping the Soviet Union over the edge, but the effects of turning Moslem activists into a political and military force continue to be felt with

increasing, rather than diminishing, force today. There is no knowing when that chain reaction secretly detonated by the American political and intelligence establishment will peter out. At present it continues to gather force and Western-style ‘progress’ begins to look increasingly insecure.

In 1990 Gorbachev was taken to be immensely far-seeing, a skilful politician. It is now clear that he lacked the skills of a statesman. Fooled by the false promises of NATO that it would not threaten the Soviet Union by establishing outposts in areas adjacent to the Soviet Union, the Russian President dismantled much of the defensive apparatus he had inherited and broke up the Warsaw Pact.

He set off a series of events in Europe that are still being played out, both in the former Communist countries and the European Union—not to speak of drastically diminished living standards of the plain people of the former Soviet bloc.

**Editor, *Problems***

## Subscriptions

to

## Problems

can be obtained  
and other publications ordered  
through the secure website:

<https://www.atholbooks-sales.org>