

Prime Minister's  
Engagements

(2)

Prime Minister

— Have  
read  
you many  
look

like to

read William

Waldgrave's

two speeches

if you have

time

CAF

## Eastern Europe

*[Relevant documents: the First Report from the Foreign Affairs Committee (House of Commons Paper No. 16 of Session 1988-89) on Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the Observations by the Government on the Report (Cm. 708), the Minutes of Evidence taken by the Foreign Affairs Committee on 19th July 1989 (House of Commons Paper No. 523-i of Session 1988-89), the Second Report from the Trade and Industry Committee (House of Commons Paper No. 51 of Session 1988-89) on Trade with Eastern Europe, and the Government Reply contained in House of Commons Paper No. 51-i and -ii, Session 1988-89.]*

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now Adjourn—[Mr. Goodlad.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Before I call the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, may I say that once again there is a great demand to take part in this debate? I propose therefore to put a limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 11.30 am and 1 pm. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members who are called to speak before then, or even afterwards, will bear the limit broadly in mind so that their colleagues may have an opportunity of participating.

9.40 am

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. William Waldegrave):** The fact that you, Mr. Speaker, must begin our proceedings with that warning surely is welcome, because many hon. Members, particularly Conservative Members, are present to debate the extraordinary, fascinating and encouraging events in eastern Europe.

This is the end of an extraordinary period in the history of Europe. It has been an artificial period, unprecedented in our continent's history. For year after year and decade after decade there has been confrontation. The traditional cultures of what used to be called Christendom were split down the middle, and connections that had been close and intimate for centuries were forced into an artificial confrontation that was not of our seeking in the West.

I always remember the moving passage in that great book, which will be familiar to many hon. Members, of Primo Levi's account of his return from Auschwitz. On his peregrinations ultimately to Italy, whence he came, he travels through the Balkans and parts of Russia in a strange and wandering journey. He arrives at a tank park of Soviet tanks. He had been liberated by the Red Army, for which he felt affection, as many must have done. He sees, with despair, the following phenomenon taking place: great posters, one of which is illustrated in one of our national newspapers today of the war-time leaders—Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin—being taken down by the soldiers and replaced by a new poster which read "Onwards to the West". Primo Levi felt his heart sinking as he saw the whole thing starting again.

Confrontation was imposed on us in the West by Stalin and by a ruthless policy about which the truth is now most movingly beginning to be told in the Soviet Union. The famous article in the "Literary Gazette" by Dashichev, which a year ago for the first time in the Soviet Union set out the truth of the myth that had been fed to the Soviets that they were under threat from the West. How moving it is to see the truth being told in the Soviet Union and in eastern Europe. The artificial confrontation from which we are emerging was not necessary for the security of the

Soviet Union. The huge overhang of forces that faced us in western Europe was started and directed by the dreadful policy of Stalin.

We are privileged to be living at the end of that pathological period in European history, and we must express our joy and look to the future. It is not possible to design the policies that we need for the future unless we analyse carefully why changes are occurring and what caused the end of that confrontation. It is impossible to ignore the moral bankruptcy of that system. Great writers such as Solzhenitsyn, Milan Kundera, Havel and Markov, have written works that will become, or have already become, classics of literature which lay out that moral bankruptcy. There are great pillars of literature if one doubts that that system was morally bankrupt.

The two things that brought down the system—it had artificial strengths that kept it going long after allegiance to it was withdrawn, if ever there was any allegiance—were the interaction of its economic failure and a completely different perception of the world in the Soviet Union.

We saw the economic collapse throughout the 1970s, such as the mounting debt, which sometimes was rather foolishly pushed at eastern countries by the West and which did not solve problems but in some ways exacerbated them. We saw problems developing in Poland and Hungary—two countries that have the highest per capita debt in the world. We saw Khrushchev's vain boast to bury capitalism become not only unlikely but laughable in economic terms. We saw the widening gap in technology and, now, as the veils are drawn, even in countries that were said to be relatively strong such as the German Democratic Republic, we see the full extent of the system's economic weakness.

Economies that have been so weak for so long produce dire results. Let us consider the health statistics, which perhaps are the saddest, in Silesia where a combination of environmental health standards, which would make anyone in Britain weep, and environmental pollution worse than anything that we have seen for 100 years or more, have produced a catastrophe in that proud province.

The conditions for change were clear—there was no moral force left in the system, if ever there was any, and the economic collapse left citizens saying, "Our leaders have done nothing for us, even at the pragmatic and practical level of supplying goods in the shops, decent health care or looking after the environment."

But that alone would not have been enough. On three or four occasions since the war the people of eastern Europe have tried to shake off the imposed system. We saw, but could do nothing about, the suppression of those desperate attempts for freedom, because the Soviet Union—the great super-power of the East—took the view that its interests were served by ruthless maintenance of an imperial provincial system manned by hundreds of thousands of soldiers and satellite puppet Governments.

But then came Gorbachev, who seems almost the best disproof of Marxism. According to it, individuals should make no difference, but I cannot believe that things would have been quite the same in Europe over the past five years if Gorbachev had not come to power.

**Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton):** The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. Plekhanov, who was one of the founders of Marxism in Russia, wrote a book in which he argued strongly about the role of the individual. If the Minister would care to read the book that I wrote about



# House of Commons

Friday 1 December 1989

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

## PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## PETITIONS

### Untreated Sewage (Discharge)

9.35 am

**Mr. Rupert Allason** (Torbay): I have the honour to present to the House a petition that has been drawn up by the Torbay branch of Friends of the Earth. It has been signed by 10,374 constituents and visitors to my constituency. It is on the subject of the discharge of untreated sewage into the Channel. That is not to say that the beaches of Torbay are any less attractive than those anywhere else on the south coast. Indeed they have awards from Europe. Torbay has unrivalled mackerel. Nevertheless, there is growing anxiety about untreated sewage and there will be grave problems for the future development of the south-west if we continue to pump out untreated sewage. The petition states:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will acknowledge that we the undersigned wish to express our anxiety over the unacceptable levels of untreated sewage being deposited by tidal action onto many beaches in the Torbay area of South Devon. We are concerned that such pollution could pose a threat to the health of not only the residents of—and visitors—to Torbay but also to fish stocks

and other marine life off South Devon's shores. We therefore call on the Secretary of State for the Environment to press for immediate remedial action, including the setting-up of a permanent sewage treatment facility to serve the Torbay area.

*To lie upon the Table.*

## Deaf Television Viewers

**Mr. David Tredinnick** (Bosworth): I have the honour to present a petition of 1,900 signatures on behalf of the deaf and disabled and their supporters in my Bosworth constituency, from the county of Leicestershire and elsewhere. One thousand nine hundred people signed the petition because on television there is insufficient use of subtitles. That means that several million deaf and partially deaf people in Britain cannot understand fully or appreciate the programmes which the rest of the United Kingdom takes for granted. The petition reads:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will ensure that legislation be passed placing an obligation on television channel operators to make their programmes more accessible to deaf people by using Teletext subtitles, sign language or other means and to reach complete coverage by a fixed date.

And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray etc.  
*To lie upon the Table.*

## BILL PRESENTED

### LANDLORD AND TENANT (LICENSED PREMISES)

Mr. Secretary Ridley, supported by Mr. Secretary Waddington, Mr. Secretary Patten, Mr. Gummer and Mr. Redwood, presented a Bill to repeal section 43(1)(d) of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on 4 December and to be printed. [Bill 8.]



the future of the Labour party, he would see that I mentioned the fact that the individual plays an important part. It should never be overestimated, but, my goodness, it should never be underestimated.

**Mr. Waldegrave:** I am willing to believe that the hon. Gentleman, for whom I have much affection, is a revisionist of the best sort, but Marx was not, and in "Das Kapital" the individual is portrayed as the epiphenomenon only of underlying forces.

I do not believe that Mr. Gorbachev is the epiphenomenon of anything. He is a man of courage and vision with whom we shall have many arguments about the future shape of society. He has made a difference, and if he had not come to power events would have been different. He asked three questions—I paraphrase and simplify the positions that have been put forward in many speeches—that shook the world. First, he asked why is the Soviet Union threatening the West? What is the point of this huge overhang of forces? What is it doing for the interests of the Soviet Union?

Secondly, what have the Soviets got from 70 years of attempted confrontation and destabilisation around the world, summarised under the old slogan "The export of the revolution"? Where has that got the interests of the Russian people, or the people of the Soviet republics? They have some allies around the world—Cuba, North Korea and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, which I am visiting the day after tomorrow. I am not sure that Mr. Gorbachev thought that the score was enough after 70 years of work—

**Mr. Donald Anderson** (Swansea, East): And Ethiopia.

**Mr. Waldegrave:** Yes, and some parts of Ethiopia, although revisionists, as they are called by the Tigreans, are under attack there, too.

Thirdly, the question to which we are directing our attention today is, why should a free Hungary, Poland or Czechoslovakia threaten the security of the Soviet Union any more than a free Finland?

Those are the three questions, and President Gorbachev's answers have transformed the world. He gave the same answers to those questions as, roughly speaking, we would have given in this House—that there was no point in the overhang of military forces for the security of the Soviet Union, that the Soviet Union and her people have lost nothing and the world has lost much from the export of the revolution for 70 years, and that free countries in central Europe would not threaten the Soviet Union. Those answers have transformed the background to our debate.

**Mr. David Nicholson** (Taunton): In the interests of realism, should not my hon. Friend add to that analysis of Soviet policy the myth, which the Soviets have propagated and which is based on an element of reality, about the shock and horror inflicted on the Soviet Union from May 1941 and the Soviets resolve never to allow that to happen again?

**Mr. Waldegrave:** Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend and I shall return to the genuine security needs of the Soviet Union in a moment. However, we should not underestimate the fact that the Soviet Union is now telling the truth about the events which led to the Barbarossa invasion, because it is laid out in the article by Dashichev to which I referred earlier. He asks why the British and

French should have trusted the Soviet Union. How could they, when they had watched the purges and the internal slaughter in the Soviet Union in the 1930s? The West needs to consider and respect the true security needs of the Soviet Union.

**Mr. Robert N. Wareing** (Liverpool, West Derby): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Waldegrave:** I must be careful or I shall be in trouble with Mr. Speaker for taking too long.

**Mr. Wareing:** Does the hon. Gentleman think that, likewise, we should be candid about the role of the British Government before the second world war, particularly at the time of the Munich crisis, when we gave sustenance to Hitlerism in Germany?

**Mr. Waldegrave:** I do not agree. Every publication we get from the Soviet Union makes it more difficult to maintain the old thesis, with which all right hon. and hon. Members were brought up, that it was the West's failure which caused the war. The Soviet Union's cynical alliance with Hitler opened the way, and the Soviets are saying that themselves. It is not wise to be left behind the Soviet's own analysis.

Our response should be extremely joyful, but we do not have the luxury of being able to put aside our policies for the future. One may ask why we need a response. The countries are becoming free. Why do we not continue to mind our own business? We do not have that luxury. My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) put his finger on one reason, and there is another.

The first reason is that the conditions which have allowed the Soviets to change their analysis are based on the view that their security is not threatened by the development of free countries in eastern and central Europe.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to respond and to answer President Gorbachev's question in the same way that he did. We must make it clear that there is no threat. We must respond generously, quickly and sensibly to the offered negotiations in Vienna on armaments. We must say that NATO will work with the Warsaw pact to bring about a contractual peace in Europe, whereby the security needs of both sides are respected at the lowest sensible levels that can be achieved. Treaties must be verifiable and detailed and must not be easy to break without detection. Therefore, they must be carefully drawn up, and experts must ensure that we do not rush into any euphonic, slapdash work. We must respond properly and generously to the needs. That is what is now being done. We should recognise the historical background that linked European countries for hundreds of years, and that both sides have legitimate security needs.

The second reason is that the key to the change has been to only the moral bankruptcy and economy incompetence of the collapsing system but a change in perception in the Soviet Union. It is incumbent upon us to remember that it is not inevitable that that change in perception came about. There is no inevitability in history. That kind of historicism may have been a principle in Marxism and Hegelism, but nobody believes in that nowadays. The trend could be reversed—it has been once before and it could be again—but I do not believe that that is likely and none of us hopes that that will happen.



[Mr. Waldegrave]

As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton, the Soviet Union has a right to a minimal insurance and we must maintain the structures of the Alliance. One does not have to look at the map to recognise that western Europe is not defensible without its allies across the Atlantic. We must remember and clearly understand that. The maintenance of the North Atlantic Alliance is long term, for as far ahead as we can see, and will be essential as our part of the insurance. Doubtless a lower level of forces will be deployed, and we will have a different relationship with the Warsaw pact as we begin to discuss how to build confidence and to work together to maintain the structure of peace, but we need the insurance as much as the other side.

In terms of security, our response has to be welcoming but careful, and that is the path which the western Alliance has gone down, and to our great joy the eastern alliance has followed us. That is the most marvellous change that any of us could hope to see.

What about our economic and moral response? Nature abhors a vacuum. Into the vacuum left by the disappearance of artificially imposed doctrines new ideas will flow. What is most extraordinary about the values which are emerging in the freedom movements in eastern Europe, which all right hon. and hon. Members understand in spite of argument across the Chamber, is that they are the values of liberal democracy. That need not have been so. Who were the last people to rule Poland or Hungary before the war? Pilsudski and the regent Horthy.

Old-fashioned nationalisms could have re-emerged from the darker corners of European history and posed a different kind of threat to the values which are so dear to this House. However, it is an achievement for what we impertinently call western values—although I do not know how they can be called western when they are shared by Japan, the Pacific rim countries and Botswana—that the crowds in Wenceslas square and the Solidarity trade unionists think that their national freedoms are intimately bound up with the establishment of free democracies, market economies and plural societies. That is a marvellous moral achievement. Already, the only real alternative is flowing into the vacuum. It is the only alternative which works economically all round the world and, politically, it provides the only safe way to maintain allegiance to political institutions. We do not need to worry too much on that score.

**Mr. Harry Barnes** (Derbyshire, North-East): Is the Minister suggesting that we have something to offer as a liberal democracy to help the developments that are taking place? If so, should we not take the high ground rather than actions such as have been taken during the past 10 years which undermine the democratic rights, civil liberties and freedoms that have operated in Britain?

**Mr. Waldegrave:** I do not want to stop the hon. Member from having our local argument about where, within the structures of a free society, we should put the rights of the collective against the rights of the individual. It is his privilege to be elected to come here and to seek a Government which would put those provisions in some slightly different place, but it is intensely provincial to

think that the arguments that he and I have, passionate though they may be, are on the same scale as those in central and eastern Europe.

I do not think that we need fear the continuance of any vacuum on the moral or on the economic side. Many of the ideas on those subjects were written by people who come from those countries. They know the books just as well as we do. Many eastern European countries have traditions that go back at least as far as ours, although they have sometimes been interrupted. The first genuinely free Parliament in Europe, it may be argued, was in Poland. The Polish Sejm in the 1780s and 1790s had rights rather further advanced than we had at that time. It was suppressed, but the ideas and traditions exist, now to be resuscitated with the full weight of popular movements behind them.

On the immediate economic side, there are things that we must do. The Communists have left these countries—Poland and Hungary are the worst—in varying degrees of debt and desuetude. They have left them in a pretty miserable shape. Even the German Democratic Republic, which used to be put forward as a good example, is discovering that the debt is far greater than was admitted. The anxiety which we can now see developing in the GDR, as it begins to understand the weakness of its economy compared with the Federal Republic of Germany, will be one of the interesting phenomena of the next few years and may lead it into a little caution in terms of its relationship with the FRG.

We who have resources must take some steps to help. We are. I believe that the principles that we and other countries have argued are right. There is nothing to be gained by piling further debt on these countries. Rushing at them with credit is not the answer. They have had that in the past, and look at the debt that they now have. They need help with what Mr. Gorbachev calls perestroika—restructuring. They need help with the fundamental restructuring of their economies. We must help with debt rescheduling, and will do so.

I am happy that the International Monetary Fund is getting relatively near agreement with Poland and is in discussion with Hungary, but debt relief must be made contingent on the type of changes in the economy which will help those countries to generate their own wealth. That sounded hard-faced in the early days when it was first formulated, but it is increasingly receiving support from all directions. We in Britain have been right to say that, where possible, we shall make grants rather than loans. It is not very kind to lend to somebody who is already in deep debt, claiming that one is helping him.

We took advantage of one of the welcome visits of one of the great heroes of these changes—Lech Wałęsa—this week. The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), who is with me on the board that deals with these matters, will welcome the fact that we have doubled our fund for Poland and subscribed \$100 million to the fund for stabilisation of the currency, which is a key part of the brave financial plan that the new Solidarity-led Government in Poland have produced.

The other countries which will meet soon in the group of 24 at Brussels are putting together substantial quantities of financial and economic help, but aimed all the time at restructuring the economies, and watching all the time to see that the restructuring is marching in step with the political reforms. That is not a luxury. It is essential. The assent, allegiance and solidarity in the ordinary sense of



the word to carry through the difficult reforms that will be necessary in some of these countries will not be achieved unless the political institutions are there to carry the people with them.

**Mr. William Cash (Stafford):** Does my hon. Friend agree that, as Mr. Delors is here today speaking to our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister about the prospect of a federal united states of Europe, it would not be in the interests of the people of western Europe to move in exactly the opposite direction to which they are taking over there?

**Mr. Waldegrave:** I am coming to the institutional response from western Europe. My hon. Friend makes a valid point. We know that a debate on these issues is raging in Britain and in Europe, including some of the central and eastern European countries. If my hon. Friend will allow me to build it slightly more into the structure of my speech, I shall come to that matter.

For the future, we have to have a security structure. I like the phrase used by Edward Mortimer, who is one of our best journalists on these matters. He said that we should think of the Alliance as something rather like the scaffolding of the common European house that we are building. We need it. We need the capacity to talk, to agree common positions and then to negotiate. It is not a bad analogy.

On the security side, the objectives are clear—to avoid the big East-West conflict and to avoid the next problem, which one might call Balkanisation. If anyone doubts the dangers of a Balkanised central Europe that there could be, he should read the marvellous book by Donald Cameron Watt about the diplomacy of the last two years before the second world war. I do not think that our security will be much advanced if there are dozens of warring and squabbling little states all seeking alliances with each other and fighting about their boundaries. That is a legitimate objective, and we must see what institutions we have to deal with the problems.

Nobody doubts that we have the institutions on the security side. We have NATO, and we have what I hope will become an increasingly democratised Warsaw pact. I refer to the reforms which the Poles are talking about. It is necessary to have such reforms so that the Warsaw pact is not the creature of one power but a free collection of states looking legitimately at their security interests.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) asked me about political institutions. What we do have? First and foremost we should consider the institution, the strange, complex and unique institution in the history of the world—hardly an institution really, but a sort of process—that is known by the inelegant initials CSCE, or the Helsinki Final Act. They are not household names except among the experts. Perhaps they are in the constituency of the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson)—he is lucky.

We should not forget that, in that process which the Helsinki Final Act embodies, took place one of the most extraordinary events in the history of the modern world. The Soviet Union, not in Gorbachev's day but under the Brezhnev regime, signed agreements which said that we had the right to question them about their human rights, and that we and they would join together in mechanisms for the resolution of disputes about borders, which has

now blossomed out into meetings and discussions about the environment, human rights, culture and a range of other issues.

Somewhere here, it seems that, in this collection of countries, which includes two alliances and the neutral countries, there must exist a germ of the new Europe. Within the institutions that we are developing we have the mechanisms we need to look in the long term at the difficult issues which remain and which must be solved amicably, safely and peacefully, such as borders in Europe.

We never had a peace conference at the end of the second world war. Perhaps we were lucky, bearing in mind what happened to that at the end of the first world war, which did not solve the problems. It is clear that, if that peace conference which we never had in 1945 were called, it would not be the institution to deal with these matters. The four powers alone cannot deal with them now. President Gorbachev has called for the CSCE—the conference on security and co-operation in Europe—process to be brought forward two years, and we shall have to consider whether that is sensible and practical. His emphasis on those institutions is welcome and wise.

This brings me to another piece of wisdom where dangerous forces could be at work and are not. It involves the two Germanies. I welcome the kind of structures about which Chancellor Kohl is talking. What he is doing is, no more and no less, trying to sketch out in institutional terms Konrad Adenauer's doctrine that freedom comes first. Then, with a changed structure in Europe, who knows what changed relationships might come about? Chancellor Kohl says that there are clear interests in common in the two Germanies with which committees can perhaps deal. He makes it clear that, before going down that road, there must be a partnership between two free countries with genuine constitutions. He lays down no timescale for that process. He does not seek to accelerate matters artificially. It is no more and no less than a modern reformulation in entirely satisfactory terms of the old Adenauer doctrine to which all of us in the West have been committed for years. 1?

The key institutions exist on the security side and the CSCE side, but one other institution, which has considerable support in the House and for which many hon. Members have done work, is relevant—the Council of Europe. We are committed to advancing the structures of the European Community, although there are arguments within the House and among the parties about the speed and direction of integration. The European Community will clearly continue to develop and to add to the wealth produced by and goods traded by its members. Although that will be an important room in the European house, it will just be one of the big rooms.

We in the European Community should not be too self-centred, as sometimes some people are, in thinking that only the magnet of the European Community has brought all these changes about. Other models have been influential. The success of the Finnish economy in the past 15 years, as a neutral country with a different tradition, and of the Austrian economy have had a profound effect. The technology gap which is opening up in terms of not only the United States but Japan and the new Pacific rim economies has had a profound effect in making people in central and eastern Europe think that other forces are leaving them behind. Of course, the European Community has been important as a great visible, local, economic super-power, but it has not been the only magnet.



**Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher):** Does my hon. Friend agree on the importance of the key role played by the Commission in co-ordinating aid to Poland and Hungary on behalf of not only the 12 members of the Community but the 24 countries which agreed on aid at the Paris summit? Does my hon. Friend agree that this has an additional importance? As Polish politicians have said, they do not wish to leave the system of the Soviet Gosplan only to become part of the Federal German budget? Therefore, the importance of matters being co-ordinated at Community level has political importance, not just economic importance.

**Mr. Waldegrave:** That is certainly true, and we pay tribute to Mr. Delors. The effectiveness of the organisation of the food and emergency aid, which will perhaps be vital to Poland this winter, and the naturalness of the idea that the group of 24 should delegate that task to the Community are a tribute to its institutions.

I am not arguing against that development or against our commitment to the Community, but the Community will not be the whole of Europe. There will have to be other structures. That is why the Council of Europe is important. It may take many years for many of these countries fully to "de-statisé" their economies and to develop the plural economies which the institutions of the West believe they will achieve. Those countries will, however, be able more quickly to sign the European convention on human rights and meet the tests that the Council of Europe uses for membership—full democracy, and so on. Hungary, Poland and others are likely to achieve membership if they introduce free elections and the rule of law. This validates the central purpose of the Council of Europe, which is therefore gaining in importance.

**Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East) rose—**

**Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes) rose—**

**Mr. Waldegrave:** I shall give way perhaps twice more only or my speech will be too long.

**Mr. Dykes:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the Community, having doubled its size since 1973, is not an entity that is anxious to keep its privileges unto itself but will consider further enlargements? Does he also agree that some of those eastern European countries may wish to apply to join when they have established parliamentary democracies? That could take some time, but it need not lead us to deviate from our treaty obligations and practical common-sense obligations to develop further integration in the European Community.

**Mr. Waldegrave:** Clearly no new membership applications will be considered in the immediate period ahead. We should be a little wary of assuming that all the countries of eastern and central Europe will ultimately choose to follow exactly our model of economic integration. They may, but let us see what happens. Perhaps it is wise not wholly to block such flexibility as remains within the Community so that we can welcome those countries.

**Mr. Rathbone:** My hon. Friend was kind enough to say earlier that he would give way. I return to his point on the Council of Europe. He correctly identified it as a bridge that already exists between this country and the East. Will he comment on the Government's apparent reluctance to

supply the necessary budgets so that the assembly of the Council of Europe, which is where parliamentarian meets parliamentarian, can do its job most effectively?

**Mr. Waldegrave:** Those matters are under discussion.

**Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point) rose—**

**Mr. Waldegrave:** I must give way to my right hon. Friend, but I am not being allowed to make much progress.

**Sir Bernard Braine:** Is my hon. Friend seized of the point that the people of Poland want food, not rhetoric?

**Mr. Waldegrave:** That is true. That is why we are giving them money to buy food, their first need. I will allow the debate between my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) and my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) to continue in its own time.

I shall end on a sombre note. There is much joy at present, but there are also some memories that cannot be forgotten and must be paid proper respect. The Russians are beginning to talk about Stalin's crimes—all honour to them—and one day they will begin to talk about Lenin's crimes. That is a matter for them. The Poles know that in Katyn there is a dark period in history that must be opened up. The Czechoslovaks are beginning to tell the truth and open the records of 1968.

These events are immensely important when societies have been corrupted by the ruthless suppression of freedom. The truth must come out. That is part of the healing process. Numerous individuals, many known only to their families, have suffered during this terrible period of European history. The House has a particular commitment to and fascination with some. The Russians came up to the fence on Wallenberg, but we have not heard the whole story.

Among the most welcome, and perhaps surprising, events of the past week have been the movements in Bulgaria. I do not believe that my officials—I do not insult them in any way—were wholly ready for the change in Bulgaria. I am personally pleased that an environmental movement—eco-glasnost—was at the forefront of those changes. The CSCE, which was discussing the environment in Bulgaria, played a great part in helping those systems to break the log-jam.

This House and this country have a dark memory of an event that took place at the instigation of the Bulgarian Government and it is just one event among many that we need to have cleared up—the murder of Georgi Markov. One day, we must have the truth about that. Let him stand as a symbol of all the changes. His book, published after his death by his widow, was entitled "The Truth that Killed". It killed him, but it has not killed the people in Wenceslas square, and thank God for that. His death is a sombre memory to remind us of the sacrifices that have so often gone for ever unrecognised, but it also inspires joy that such a sacrifice—we hope—will never be necessary again.

10.20 am

**Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton):** The Minister of State is right in saying that we are remarkably fortunate and privileged to be around in these stirring times. The events of the past year—even of the past few days—have



brought home to us just what it means to so many to come out of the darkness of tyranny into the light of freedom, which all too often we simply take for granted.

This debate is taking place at the exactly appropriate time, as the super-powers meet today on their warships tied up off Malta, as the European Community leaders prepare to meet in Strasbourg next week and as this week, the Czech Communists voted away their dominance. Seldom has there been a better time for the House to debate these momentous issues.

At almost this precise time last year, I stood in Wenceslas square in Prague, one of the most beautiful cities of Europe. That evening, I experienced an eerie feeling of silence in that crowded square just before Christmas, where people milled around in almost fearful quiet. I could not but reflect on the days and memories of 1968 when, as an idealistic student, I heard with despair the news on the radio that the Soviet tanks had entered Czechoslovakia and had crushed the life out of the Prague Spring. To remember that desperately sad day with the emotions that so many of us felt and to remember equally that uncanny silence in Wenceslas square last year, yet to see on television over the past 10 days the noisy, determined and vocal crowds in that same square is to feel a joy and a pleasure that are simply beyond words.

It took the Polish people 10 years to achieve their freedom and they say that it took the Hungarians only 10 months. It took the East Germans 10 days to achieve freedom and the Czechs took only 10 days to return the vitality and freedom for which they had yearned, and to bring back life to the heart of the city of Prague. To be alive in these stirring times is a privilege.

My friend John Roper said the other day that the eastern Europeans have turned science fiction into political science in only a few weeks. The impossible dream has become the commonplace reality as day follows day. What is all the more remarkable in this seismic change in Europe is the dignified, self-disciplined and orderly way in which revolution has happened, without violence, strife or even retribution against those who have visited misery and repression for four decades. The people themselves have almost politely taken back the power.

It was Berthold Brecht, himself a citizen of the German Democratic Republic, who said:

"The people has failed the government, Therefore we must elect a new people."

That is what the people have done, and we should cheer them for it.

As the Minister said, we must understand what all this was for. It is an impertinence and an insult to suggest, as the Prime Minister did in her Blackpool conference speech, that this is an extension of the torch of the Thatcherite revolution. She said brazenly:

"The torch we lit in Britain, which transformed our country—the torch of freedom that is now the symbol of our Party—became the beacon that has shed its light across the Iron Curtain into the East."

What demented drive! Let us remember the words of Alexander Dubcek, who called for

"Socialism with a human face", rather than this brainstormed fantasy. We are witnessing a revolution for freedom, for open expression and the right to make choices without intimidation. The brave people of eastern Europe were not embracing Thatcherism or any other ism, but asserting their right to choose a better system than the tired, old, failed Stalinism. That right must never again be taken from them.

**Sir Jim Spicer** (Dorset, West): I thought that I should not need to intervene as the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks were exactly in tune with the speech of my hon. Friend the Minister. However, as the hon. Gentleman has moved the goalposts, I look back in history. Does he believe that if the many Labour Members who, in 1983, were calling for the non-deployment of cruise missiles in Europe had won the day—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker)**: Briefly, please.

**Sir Jim Spicer**: On 22 October 1983, they were in Trafalgar square calling for no cruise missiles. Had they won the day, would Mr. Gorbachev have come on the scene and would all these events be taking place in eastern Europe?

**Mr. Robertson**: Yes, of course they would. If the hon. Gentleman had listened to the Minister, he would have heard an analysis that might have penetrated even his ideology. If he believes that I am breaking the bipartisan approach adopted this morning, I direct his attention to what the Prime Minister said bizarrely last week in Washington in the famous interview on CNN television. She said:

"Had there been a NATO in Europe between World War One and World War Two, I don't think that World War Two would ever have happened."

I ask Conservative Members to conjure with that answer. Do they believe that Herr Hitler would have sat down with Benito Mussolini to agree a communiqué with the western powers? One can only begin to think that the Prime Minister is losing all touch with reality.

**Mr. Patrick Cormack** (Staffordshire, South): I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman takes that line. Many people in this country and in Moscow believe that without the Iron Lady there might still be the iron curtain.

**Mr. Robertson**: Perhaps a few people believe that. I know that the hon. Gentleman himself has had a few disagreements with the Iron Lady and who knows where he will place his ballot paper over this weekend? She made a contribution—of a sort—earlier and there is little doubt that she was able to influence President Reagan at a critical time in East-West relations, but her contribution now is negative. That is a tragedy not only for individuals who are opposed to her—whether Conservative or Opposition Members—but for our country, as it can influence the pace of events.

**Mr. William Powell** (Corby) *rose*—

**Mr. Robertson**: I shall not give way because I must continue my speech and I have given way enough.

In Czechoslovakia, the Communist party is in retreat each day. In Poland, a non-Communist Government are getting to grips with nightmare economic problems that were left behind. In Hungary, the Communist party has been abolished, free elections are about to take place and a referendum only this week showed the Government's position defeated by the people. Even those in the Conservative party who, over the past week, have gone cool on the idea of free elections will welcome the fact that in Hungary—that marvellous country—which has already experimented with the fringes of the free economy—events are moving at such a fast pace.



[Mr. Robertson]

As the Minister said, even in Bulgaria what was regarded almost as the fixed permanence of Todor Zhivkov has gone and an era has ended. Instead of resorting to lynch law the people are resorting to the criminal law to deal with his spectacular excesses. Only in Albania and Romania does Stalinism hold on by its finger tips. We should not mince words about Romania which is one of the nastiest and most brutally corrupt police states in the world. The regime's bitter and indefensible campaign against the Hungarian minority and the state-sponsored vandalism of the Transylvanian villages deserve the world's condemnation. President Nicolai Ceausescu may have received 67 standing ovations in his six-hour speech to the cowed party congress but even as he speaks he knows that the ground is slipping away from him.

When we consider our approach to this new world, should not we, like those who have repossessed power in the East, work on the basis of optimism?

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley) *rose*—

Mr. Robertson: If those who marched in Gdansk, Leipzig and Bratislava had not believed that they might win they would surely have failed. If those who took strike action this week in Prague or went to prison in Warsaw and those who piled through the gaps in the Berlin wall had worried about destabilising the Warsaw pact or unscrambling the post-war settlement or had been paranoid about the impact of their actions on the European politico-military balance, they would have stayed at home and Herr Honecker, Mr. Kadar and Mr. Zhivkov would still reside comfortably in their luxury politburo apartments. The people who filled the streets and brought down the edifice of tyranny acted out of frustration, anger and impatience because they believed that their world was changeable if they wanted it enough.

Perhaps if we in the west could share some of that optimism and believe in what can be done if we care enough, some of the pessimism and misgivings that preoccupy many of our leaders would be put in perspective. To overrule that pessimism requires imagination and considerable vision. Tragically, it is clear beyond doubt that we have no chance of that from the Prime Minister. In the face of the most momentous events for a generation, the Prime Minister is going back, not forward, in time. Last year, in November, she told the *Washington Post*:

"We are not in a Cold War now. East and West now have a new relationship."

The *Washington Post* rightly headlined the interview:

"Thatcher says Cold War has come to an end".

Even our good old *Daily Telegraph* headlined it:

"Cold war over, says Thatcher".

But last week in Washington the Prime Minister was asked by CNN television whether she thought that the cold war was over. She replied that it was:

"Not over, but it's thawing."

The Minister's tone was remarkably different from everything that the Prime Minister has said in the past few weeks. With his renown, intelligence and intellect, is the Minister capable of explaining to the House and to the world how it is that the cold war was over last November but after a year that has seen the collapse of the Berlin wall, the abolition of the Communist party in Hungary,

the election of a non-Communist Government in Poland and the disappearance of the leading role of Communists in Czechoslovakia, suddenly it is on again? What is the logic of that? Perhaps the explanation is that the Prime Minister, suddenly finding herself without the enemy and the threat that provided the justification for her every prejudice is as transfixed and immobilised by the new situation as are the dazed ex-members of the Czech politburo whom we have seen on television over the past 10 nights.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that there is a difference between a threat which is an intention—we all recognise that that has gone—and a threat which is a capability? In the first six months of this year alone, the Soviet Union built another 1,700 main battle tanks. We would be foolish not to recognise that capability. We want action as well as intentions.

Mr. Robertson: We must look at intentions and capability. The United States Defence Secretary said in the last fortnight that the threat from the East is smaller than it has ever been since the second world war. The Prime Minister could say last November that the cold war was over, but, despite the changes that the Minister has outlined to us as if we were not aware of them, she now says that it is on again. Perhaps as Matthew Parris said in *The Times* a few weeks ago we are seeing before our very eyes the Prime Minister losing her marbles. In *Der Spiegel* it was said that the Pentagon is in confusion because after all its planning of worst-case options it has no best-case option to deal with the position now.

Faced with events in eastern Europe, the Prime Minister is like a beached whale, incapable of registering the scale of what has happened and uniquely incapable of seeing the potential before her. We cannot get away from the fact that she is unable to escape from her cold war prejudices and the time warp that she is in. Therefore, tragically for our country, we shall continue to be marginalised on the world stage.

Mr. Waldegrave: Does it make the hon. Gentleman nervous that the only hon. Member in the House who applauds his descent into hard-line partisanship is the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields)? I am not sure that he wants that support.

Mr. Robertson: That was not up to the Minister's usual intellectual standard of intervention. I am not descending into partisanship. If Britain is to make a contribution we shall have to contrast the Minister's measured and balanced approach to the amazing events in eastern Europe with the way in which the Prime Minister treats them. She is, after all, still the leader of the Conservative party and Prime Minister this week. It is not partisanship per se to underline her weakness in the face of such momentous events.

In spite of the Prime Minister's short-sightedness we must act soon on appropriately ambitious programmes to rebuild the economies of the newly free nations, to satisfy the expectations of their people and to consolidate the drive to democratic pluralism which gets so much easy applause from everyone in the West.

Such a programme must have a number of elements. We agree wholeheartedly with the Prime Minister on the first element. Mr. Gorbachev must be supported and not



destabilised by unilateral action by the West. The Minister stated with more power and force than the Prime Minister found herself able to do the truism that the momentous changes that we have witnessed happened only because Mr. Gorbachev started the process. Although events have taken place faster and gone further than he desired, it was he who pressed the button. By abolishing the Brezhnev doctrine he let loose the forces that we have witnessed. He, not the spluttering torch of Thatcherism, was the moving force behind the tidal wave engulfing the geriatric rulers of the old Soviet empire.

Mr. Gorbachev's problems at home are formidable. Perhaps that is why disengagement from the satellite states made so much sense to him. His economy is in deep trouble, with difficult decisions yet to be made, made all the more difficult by the emerging new oppositions and the elections due to take place this winter and in the spring. Furthermore, the tide of nationalism and inter-ethnic strife in the Soviet Union threatens it with about seven versions of the problems that we face in Northern Ireland.

It is enormously important to help the President of the Soviet Union, but it will not be easy. It can be done in three ways. First, we can throw away finally the artificial and outdated COCOM mechanism which prevents technology exports to the Soviet Union. If we see that our security is better ensured by helping Gorbachev, it is crucial that the Soviet Union has the technology and intellectual tools to rebuild. Secondly, we can urgently explore ways in which the Soviet economy can come back into the institutions of the world system. That will be difficult, but it is not an impossible objective. Thirdly, we can release military expenditure and in that way also help ourselves.

To listen over the past two weeks to the speeches of western leaders exhorting the importance of the continued existence of the Warsaw pact is to believe that one is almost hearing hallucinations. After all these years when the Warsaw pact was rightly condemned as being an extension of the Soviet machine, all of a sudden we are now to believe that it alone will allow a stable transition from the secure, tested, familiar, manageable European order, which we all nevertheless used to denounce, to the new order which nobody has yet worked out because nobody was planning for the victory that has just happened.

It should go without saying that there must be an acceleration of the arms control process at all levels. I welcome what the Minister said about that. It should also go without saying—there was nothing in the Minister's speech about this—that modernisation of the Lance missile system is now simply a redundant memory, as politically impossible as it is militarily unnecessary. If the American Defence Secretary can say that the risks are the lowest since 1945, our planning and expenditure should reflect that fact. This new scenario has implications for our troubled economy which is over-dependent on military expenditure in many different ways.

We must be imaginative about the aid and assistance that we give. I agree wholeheartedly with the Minister that to add to the debt problems of the Eastern bloc countries is no way to help them. We must give them grants, not further credit, as far as possible. I welcome the announcement of the doubling of the know-how fund for Poland, for the increased food aid and the £64 million committed to the stabilisation fund for currencies. These are apparently new moneys offered by the Government and they go some way to meeting the criticism of

parsimony that I levelled at the Government a fortnight ago. But is that enough? Is the know-how fund, the advisory board of which is chaired by the Minister and on which I have the pleasure to serve, really getting £25 million more or is it getting an extra £5 million a year after the first five-year period, as a radio programme yesterday evening suggested?

**Mr. Waldegrave:** We shall pay £10 million a year for a five-year period, rather than £5 million for a 10-year period.

**Mr. Robertson:** I am glad for that clarification and it is right that that should be the case.

Will the Hungarian fund, due to start next April, be similarly doubled? What aid is contemplated for Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria when they reach the standards established by Poland and Hungary? I warmly welcome the change of policy on English language teaching as a beneficiary of the know-how funds. The expertise of the British Council, the BBC world service and the ODA can do much through teaching English to bring Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia into the modern business world.

On Monday the Prime Minister announced to the world on "Panorama" that German reunification was not on the agenda, but on Tuesday Chancellor Kohl spelt out his plan for that very objective. I note that the Minister warmly welcomed his speech and objective. The Prime Minister may assert that the reunification is not on the agenda, but if the Germans put it there, it will certainly be on the agenda. It does not need to dominate any agenda for the future, even when the paranoias of both the Kremlin and 10, Downing street happen momentarily to coincide. We cannot say that self-determination for the GDR is our priority and at the same time say that one outcome is not to be considered. What price the reassertion of democracy in that sort of world?

Two points must be borne in mind. First, there is no inexorable, inevitable path from the GDR to a new united nation. Indeed, the first response to Chancellor Kohl's declaration was from a group of GDR reformers who said that they valued the prospect of an independent, but non-Communist, GDR. Secondly, we must ensure that the future of the two Germanies remains a matter for all Europe, since neither population can pretend that it can act as though it were an island.

It is grossly insulting to forget that the Federal Republic of Germany is a mature, deeply rooted democracy where the post-war generation has built constitutional institutions from which we can certainly learn. It is no springboard for a fourth reich. It is important, however, that the domestic, political battle in the Federal Republic is not allowed to spill over into its fragile, exposed neighbour. Chancellor Kohl's party and the other parties must curb any temptation to use the issue for home consumption.

Above all, as we gaze in wonderment at the way in which our continent has been transformed in a matter of weeks we, who have revelled in the luxury and benefits of democratic traditions for 40 years, must not seek to impose our values and standards on those who will find their own, possibly different, way in future. We must be aware of the time available to grasp the opportunities. Many people say that if we act too quickly, it will all crumble before our eyes. They cry against action before



[Mr. Robertson]

everything settles down, as if these peoples and nations were some giant pot of soup. But if we delay, paralysed by caution, and if we do not offer the help needed, the forces of reaction that are still there waiting for failure will return. Delay would be fatal. That is why a response is needed now to capture the chance of a new order in Europe with all the certainty of the old order but, mercifully, without the terminal risks and miseries that 40 years of the cold war meant in reality.

Recently President Mitterrand outlined a great mission for the European Community,

"if it is something that can prove to be stronger than everyone's desire to be master of his own village."

There are some hopelessly tied to the idea of being mistress of their own village, but the rest of us can and should aspire to the greater mission.

10.47 am

**Sir Bernard Braine** (Castle Point): My right hon. Friend the Minister opened the debate with one of the most thoughtful, helpful analyses of East-West relations that I have ever heard from the Front Bench. I agree with everything he said. I hope that he will forgive me, however, if I say that this debate is timely for one special reason which has hardly been touched on so far.

Naturally events in eastern and central Europe have lifted our hearts in the West in a most remarkable way which none of us could have thought possible less than two years ago. Everywhere Communism is in retreat and whole peoples are demanding free elections, a market economy and a single European home. But between that demand and its fulfilment lies a gap full of uncertainty and even danger.

The test case is Poland. No people in eastern Europe suffered more at the hands of the Nazis and Stalinists. It is one of the saddest ironies of history that Britain went to war in 1939 to save Poland, that Polish flyers fought to defend this island during the Battle of Britain, that Polish soldiers fought alongside our own on almost every front with great bravery and distinction, but that victory for us brought subjugation for them.

Now for the first time since 1945 Poland has a non-communist Prime Minister and its face is turned with hope to the West. What are its immediate prospects? On 5 November the *Sunday Telegraph* reported:

"Living standards, already among the worst in the Warsaw Pact, have deteriorated further."

The paper went on to say that nobody yet blames solidarity Prime Minister Mr. Wazowiecki's Government. The Poles know perfectly well whom to blame, but the outlook is bleak. Inflation has now reached a monthly rate of 50 per cent.:

"In many places queues have gone not because the supply of necessities has increased but because the demand has been forced down. In the larger cities many people have become dependent on soup kitchens. The Polish committee for social aid estimates that one in four citizens needs help now to stave off hunger."

The witnesses to this are legion. Reverend David Thomas, rector of Canvey Island in my constituency, recently returned from a church mission to Poland. He has told me how he and a companion on a train journey encountered a student and wanted to share with him their enthusiasm for recent events. The student did not smile; instead he showed them a newspaper detailing a threefold

increase in the price of bread over as many weeks. Reverend Thomas told me that everyone he spoke to desperately felt the need for help from the outside world. This is also the message that Mr. Lech Walesa, the great hero of Polish resistance to Communist rule, is delivering here this week.

My purpose in intervening in this debate is to call for special measures to meet immediate needs, over and above what has to be done to rebuild the Polish economy and embark on the necessary work of reconstruction. The immediate needs are specific. Dr. Bozena Laskiewicz of Medical Aid for Poland Fund, which operates from this country, has written to me saying that the bad situation of a few months ago has deteriorated further. There is an acute shortage of food. Dr. Laskiewicz says that food has never been so expensive. People going out shopping have no idea how much money they will need for basic foods such as bread, butter and cheese. Fresh milk is almost unobtainable in the towns, while a woman wrote recently from Gdansk saying that she had been able to afford to buy meat only three times since August.

Lady Ryder of Warsaw, who telephoned me earlier this week, is the founder of the Sue Ryder Foundation. She has been closely connected with relief work in Poland ever since the end of the second world war. She tells me that an urgent appeal has been made by Bishop Domin, the head of the charity commission of the Roman Catholic church in Poland, who co-ordinates all food and medical help from the community and the outside world. He confirms that the food situation is appalling: dried milk and rice are unobtainable; meat prices have rocketed; sugar is not always available, I should like to quote what this remarkable lady told me only this morning:

"Four million people are now below subsistence level. Unless more food and medical supplies are sent within two weeks suffering will be intensified and people will die unnecessarily."

The outlook for health is bleak in the extreme. Life expectancy for both men and women fell in Poland between 1965 and 1985, according to official statistics, and since then is thought to have fallen still further. Infant mortality figures are probably the highest in Europe. There is an acute shortage of medical supplies of all kinds—anaesthetics, drugs, antibiotics, dressings, gauze, syringes, needles and much more. There is a chronic shortage of standard medical equipment.

Only yesterday, Dr. Zbigniew Religa, a cardiac surgeon who works in Katowice who is visiting here, told me that the shortage of medicines is critical and that basic equipment such as respirators is lacking. His message was clear:

"We need freedom certainly—we have been deprived of it for too long. But what we have will not last if we cannot feed our people and sustain their health."

With him was Dr. Andrew Sasnowski, a cardiac thoracic surgeon. He told me:

"We need help now, not next month or next year. Our new Government must be helped to stay in power long enough to complete the reforms and to get our country moving, but that will be impossible if our people do not have enough to eat and if their health deteriorates further."

Dr. Ian Stephen, a British orthopaedic surgeon from Kent who has worked with Polish doctors for many years, has told me:

"A popular revolution such as we are seeing in eastern Europe will falter and fail if people do not see the prospect of an improvement in the quality of life."



The message is clear: Poland needs help and needs it now. Winter is upon us; the Poles can hardly last until the spring. Only a short time ago we were bewailing the giant surpluses of food accumulated by the European Community and costing the taxpayer vast amounts of money for storage—hon. Members on both sides asked many questions about it. Let generosity be combined with common sense. Let us unlock the storehouse doors and ship the food to Poland. There should be no difficulty about distribution. Bishop Domin and the Church are well placed to help. There is close co-operation between the church authorities and the Sue Ryder Foundation. We need an immediate air lift, which would not necessitate a vast number of planes. Berlin was saved by an airlift in rather different conditions. I am asking for an airlift to Poland of essential supplies—and now. If anyone wants to help money can be received by the Sue Ryder Foundation and used to purchase supplies which can be channelled to Poland and distributed there in a matter of a few days.

I do not want to minimise the efforts being made by the European Commission to co-ordinate aid measures to Poland and Hungary and other nations in eastern Europe. We must reach out to all of them. I understand that progress will be reviewed in Brussels on 13 December.

Nor do I minimise the British know-how fund of £25 million the doubling of which the Foreign Secretary announced on Wednesday. That increase is timely, but I hope that I may be permitted to make a special plea. Britain owes a special debt of honour to Poland, which so far has not been repaid. At the end of our common struggle in war against unspeakable tyranny and wickedness Poland was betrayed. We had a hand in that—I am not casting aspersions, because we could do nothing about it at the time. Now that, by their own efforts, the Poles are throwing off 45 years of Soviet occupation and Communist misgovernment, the opportunity has arisen for Britain to repay the debt. I hope that we shall not fail to rise to the occasion, and will do so quickly.

10.59 am

**Mr. Peter Shore** (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I associate myself with the remarks made by the Father of the House, the right hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine). I am not sure whether Poland needs an air lift, but it does need massive food aid quickly to deal with a major crisis which will afflict that country this winter. The right hon. Gentleman was correct to stress the urgency of that. I also support the right hon. Gentleman's tribute to the Minister of State, because I believe that the Minister made a very penetrating and worthwhile contribution to our debate.

When the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, of which I am a member, reported in April, it was already clear that momentous changes were taking place in the Soviet Union and in eastern Europe. In the Soviet Union that was evidenced internally by the thrusting forward of measures designed to achieve perestroika and glasnost and externally by the quite remarkable changes in Soviet foreign policy in its handling of regional affairs—the speed with which the Afghanistan conflict was at least greatly eased by the withdrawal of Soviet troops—and through the new approaches to disarmament and the perception of

the world in which the Soviets live about which Mr. Gorbachev has spoken with such refreshing novelty on so many occasions.

In eastern Europe the changes were already clear in Poland and Hungary. Great demands were made everywhere for more democracy, for the end of Communist party monopoly of political power, for political freedom and for free elections.

Within the past few weeks and months the pace of change has quickened dramatically. There is a Solidarity Government in Poland. In Hungary we have seen the astonishing event of the Communist party dissolving itself and the way is now clear in Budapest for free elections within a relatively short time. I have no doubt that that will result in a non-Communist Government in that country. In East Germany, Honecker has gone and the iron curtain has been breached irretrievably. In Czechoslovakia the Communist leadership has been forced to change and they are setting up a new coalition Government including the major opposition groups.

I want to refer to three actions that symbolise the changes that have deeply moved me and, I suspect, others in this tremendously exciting and historic year of change. First, I felt greatly moved when I saw on television the formal state reburial of Imre Nagy who tried to lead Hungary to independence. He was seized, executed and flung into a pauper's grave. I stirred to see that man honoured and to see Hungary change its name from the people's republic to the Republic of Hungary.

Secondly, I was moved to see the people of East Berlin mingling once more with the people of West Berlin as those tremendous breaches were made in the Berlin wall.

Perhaps the most moving sight was that of Alexander Dubcek addressing 250,000 citizens of Prague in Wenceslas square. Only 21 years ago he and his regime were overthrown and Russian tanks rumbled through the streets of Prague.

When the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs reported last April, we asked two basic questions—was the Brezhnev doctrine dead and was the cold war coming to an end. We can give a pretty clear answer to the first question. God, what a difference it has made; the Brezhnev doctrine is dead. The essence of the Brezhnev doctrine, the right claimed by the Russians for so many years to intervene in the internal affairs of the countries of eastern Europe and of any other Communist country, has been dropped and discarded. That is now the official Russian policy.

Mr. Gorbachev made yet another remarkable speech in Rome yesterday. With regard to eastern Europe, he said specifically:

“Having embarked on radical reform, the socialist countries one after the other, are crossing the line beyond which there is no return to the past.”

That is a most welcome statement. It brings to an end the era of the Brezhnev doctrine which inflicted so much misery upon the people of eastern Europe.

With regard to the second question about the cold war coming to an end, again Mr. Gorbachev said something that underlines the new emphasis of Russian policy and new perceptions. In Rome yesterday he said that those in the Soviet Union

“have abandoned the claim to a monopoly on truth. We no longer think we are the best and that we are always right; that those who disagree with us are our enemies.”

We have now decided, firmly and irrevocably to base our policies on the principle of freedom of choice.”



[Mr. Peter Shore]

That opens up the possibility of quite dramatic changes and agreements that will benefit us all.

This debate is really about how Britain and the West collectively should respond to the dramatic changes and new opportunities that are being presented to us. I am hardly surprised that there should be such a plethora of summits as is occurring at the moment with the meeting in Malta today, the NATO meeting which will follow, the meeting a few weeks ago called by President Mitterrand in Paris, the summit meeting in Strasbourg and Mr. Gorbachev's call for an all-European conference. We have an awful lot to talk about and to decide if this great moment of opportunity in post-war history is to be used fully.

Once the principles of verification and asymmetric reduction of weapons by the side with supremacy in those weapons are accepted, as I believe they are, the way is open for a dramatic change in the levels of armaments held by the East and the West. There is great promise in the Start talks and perhaps even greater promise in the conventional arms reduction talks in Vienna.

I do not agree with the Government about rearmament. As a persistent multilateral disarmament, I believe that in the new circumstances it is wrong to delay for too long talks about tactical short-range nuclear missiles in Europe. If conventional force reductions reach the levels that I believe we can reach, there will be a great benefit to Europe, particularly given the great Soviet supremacy and superiority in those weapons, if we can agree on total abolition on both sides. I should certainly like the conventional arms talks to be speeded up and perhaps even extend the reductions beyond the already extremely exciting levels that have been proposed.

On aid for eastern Europe, the right hon. Member for Castle Point is right. This winter there will certainly be a great problem with hunger and perhaps even fuel famine in parts of eastern Europe. We should respond to that. Undoubtedly, some response is being made by nations individually and by the European Community collectively. We have not yet thought through the longer-term problems of what is happening in eastern Europe and the need for economic reconstruction there. Those countries will go through a sustained period of falling living standards, high unemployment and shortages of the most basic goods.

The new democracies which are emerging will be robust, because the recent experience of tyranny has burnt itself into the minds and hearts of the people of those countries. There will be no quick return to totalitarianism in any form. If we are to help to ease the weight of the profound problems of economic change in fledgling democracies, we must be seen to do so in a serious, co-ordinated way. We must turn our minds to that matter.

Further, we should offer at least the prospect and the choice of longer-term membership of the European Community. Many countries are interested in an association with the European Community, not only because of potential trade benefits but because, unlike the European Free Trade Association, the European Community has a range of additional policies and facilities which can be tailor made in an association agreement to assist the economies of eastern Europe. What was said in a somewhat controversial speech a year ago about the capitals of Budapest, Prague, Warsaw and Vienna being

just as much a part of Europe as the capitals Paris, Rome, Bonn and London is true. I wish to see a wider Europe which embraces all those countries as member states.

Because of the speed of change in East Germany, the problem of German reunification has suddenly emerged. It is back on the agenda. It is natural for Germans, both East and West, to wish to come together. We have long been committed to helping to realise that aim. We would be foolish to leave it out of our minds, but we should be careful. First, we must see the emergence of democratic institutions in East Germany. Secondly, although we suspect that we know the answer, the peoples of East Germany and of the Federal Republic must be given the chance freely to express their own wishes for the future. Thirdly, in all sense, we must realise that we cannot yet have the unity of Germany without the settlement of a peace treaty for Germany. We cannot have a reunified Germany when there are still, although much thinned out, several hundred thousand Russian troops in East Germany. That problem must be resolved, and it can be resolved only by talking sensibly and seriously with the Soviet Union.

Fourthly, my colleagues and I on the Select Committee who have been on recent visits to Strasbourg, Brussels, Rome, Paris and Bonn have found a rather odd reaction to events in eastern Europe. In western Europe there is not just the sense of great achievement, great challenge and promise, but there is a great push to create in the European Community something which is overtly federal. They do not seek to disguise it. When we discuss matters that are of great importance for the economic future of this country and our parliamentary institutions—for example, our attitude to economic and monetary union—we approach the issues dispassionately, with a view to identifying our national interest and others' interests in economic matters and in the effective retention of self-government.

Discussions of the merits of economic and monetary union appear to have been swept aside in most capitals of western Europe. For various reasons, they are entranced by the prospect as part of an inevitable progression towards political union. They make no bones about it and they do not seek to disguise it, although they each have a different emphasis. Mr. Delors in Brussels will say that he is in favour of acceleration towards political union and the development of more federal institutions because he thinks that a reunified Germany would be too powerful, somehow or other they must embrace the new reunified Germany when it takes place, within a still tighter political structure within western Europe. That underlines the position of President Mitterrand in France.

As for the Germans, they feel that that is the price that they may have to pay to get west European support for their ultimate aim of achieving German reunification. We are in a difficult position. I cannot think of a more difficult European summit than the one that is to take place in Strasbourg on 8 and 9 December. At the moment, I can see no way in which Britain will not be isolated, and I can see great problems for us and for other members of the Community.

These events have great implications for NATO and the Warsaw pact. Clearly, the emphasis, thrust and content of great military pacts will change. I should like to see a slow period of change, because the Warsaw pact and NATO have had a stabilising effect not merely on relations between East and West but on relations between West and West and between east Europe and Russia. If we are to



avoid the Balkanisation of central and eastern Europe, the Warsaw pact should be phased out rather than abruptly torn aside. We should see the same in NATO, because, unlike any other available instrument, a NATO unified command, together with the transformation of the democratic instincts or wishes of the German people, guarantee western Europe and the world from a resurgence of German power and nationalism.

11.19 am

**Mr. William Powell (Corby):** The House has had the great benefit of listening to speeches from three distinguished hon. Members. I regret that the contribution by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) did not do him justice. As a result of what has been said, I shall be able to abbreviate my speech and I hope that that will benefit hon. Members who follow me. Personal circumstances will make it impossible for me to be here for the winding-up speeches and I apologise to Front-Bench speakers and other hon. Members for that.

I shall concentrate on Germany, eastern Europe and the Malta summit. The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) has said most of what needs to be said about Germany. I welcome the steps that are now being taken and which may well result in unification. My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) was probably right to use the word unification in a contribution earlier this week. Nobody should imagine that that will be easy to achieve. It will be necessary for genuine democratic institutions to evolve in the German Democratic Republic before much progress can be made.

That evolution may be obvious, but there is one aspect that I should like to underline; it receives little attention. It is that free elections do not guarantee democracy, and we know all too well of such elections which have failed to do that. One of the bulwarks of democracy is a legal system that is without interference from the Government and to which all people have access. The evolution of a legal system that guarantees and underpins freedom is absolutely essential in the GDR.

It is equally clear that there can be no sensible moves towards reunification unless there is currency reform in eastern Germany. That inevitably means that the deutschmark will predominate. That can be done by agreement at the outset or by the free floating of currencies with interchangeability between them. The rapid disappearance of the ostmark would be an inevitable consequence of that.

Plainly, a currency that officially ranks the ostmark to the deutschmark at 1:1 and which until about three weeks ago was 1:7 or 1:8 on the black market, and is now about 1:20 has no prospect of being able to survive. Anyone who imagines that it is possible to talk about progress towards the reunification of Germany without currency reform is not grasping reality.

As the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney emphasised, it is simply not possible to have a reunified Germany in which substantial quantities of Warsaw pact troops are stationed in one part while NATO troops are stationed in another. The whole world knows Abraham Lincoln's famous phrase that a house divided against itself cannot stand. It would be impossible to

create any kind of national unity in a country in which enormous numbers of troops from opposing military pacts were stationed.

Although I welcome the steps that are undoubtedly under way and which may result in the unification of Germany in due course, I hope that in Germany and elsewhere people will keep their feet on the ground so that this evolution can take place in a free, steady and organised way. Unless it does, there is a real chance of the whole thing coming unstuck in a spectacular way.

I shall now turn to our obligations to eastern Europe. My right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), the Father of the House, spoke with passion and force about the problems that are being faced in Poland. Now that the House is being televised and there is a chance to show verbatim what is being said, I hope that there will be considerable coverage in news and other programmes of what my right hon. Friend said. He spoke on behalf of us all and it behoves the Government and hon. Members to do all that we can to help. As the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney said, unless we are prepared to help, the chances of the movements that are now under way resulting in a sustained, growing and maturing democracy will be substantially undermined.

I should like to concentrate on an important aspect of the speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point. It will be necessary for the western European nations to invest in the East. That may be done by way of joint ventures or grants—all sorts of things are possible. We must concentrate on the infrastructure, if I may use that ghastly modern word. In an interview in *The Times* my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister drew attention to the fact that much of the food grown in the countries of eastern Europe is rotting and not getting to the people who could benefit from it. That is because there are no infrastructures of transport, refrigeration or proper storage.

All the facilities that we take for granted are chronically lacking and we should concentrate on trying to improve such facilities in the East. That must be done directly by the Government through agencies of the European Community and other agencies and, of course, by way of individual ventures. We must proceed on all those matters, and improving storage and refrigeration facilities must be given the highest priority.

The transport infrastructure in central and eastern Europe is inadequate. If the countries there are to develop and strengthen their economies, they must be able to improve that infrastructure. There is one major way in which the EEC can assist in that, and it is in the context of the rail and road facilities from central Europe to the port of Trieste, which was the port of the old Austro-Hungarian empire. The exports of Austria and Hungary passed through that port and its importance now as a major facility could not be greater.

The rail facilities from southern Austria, Vienna, Hungary, Slovakia, Bratislava and southern Poland are hopelessly inadequate. A huge amount will need to be spent, especially to ensure adequate rail facilities, and the only way in which that can be done is through the institutions of the European Community. We must concentrate on such projects in order to build up the economic resources of eastern Europe. I could say much more about that, but that would not be wise, having regard to the enthusiasm of so many hon. Members who wish to speak.



[Mr. William Powell]

The meeting in Malta between the President of the United States and the President of the Soviet Union is of momentous importance and the opportunity must not be lost by either of them. It is not my most important point, but I hope that the President of the United States will take advantage of this opportunity to have a word with Mr. Gorbachev about Mr. Mengistu in Ethiopia. Surely the time has come for the Soviet Union to draw the curtain on that little thing.

In Malta, the two presidents will have to face the fact that political developments in central Europe have now begun to outrun the pace of disarmament talks that are taking place in Vienna and nuclear disarmament talks. I do not want to engage in a debate with the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney about short-range nuclear weapons, but he made an important point that will have to be considered by the Government and others. There is no doubt that, above all else, the situation requires a substantial and continuing reduction in the huge conventional forces that the Soviet Union has stationed in eastern Europe. The West must make it possible for the Soviet Union to reduce the size of those forces. President Bush must be prepared to concede concessions, perhaps in principle only in Malta, but the details must follow soon as they can be completed.

The political imperatives of Europe now require the leaders of the Soviet Union and the United States to show some urgency and to go further than they may have seriously contemplated earlier in the year. If the momentum of the political developments outruns the ability of the military alliances to cope with those changes there will be an immensely destabilising force in Europe, which would be in no one's interest.

These are exhilarating times. The prospect of change and development is bound to engender great enthusiasm in us all. Today in Rome the leader of the Soviet Union meets the Pope. The Pope's first language, in common with our former colleague Stefan Terlezki, is Ukrainian. We hope that that meeting will result in freedom for the Ukrainian church and that it might ease some of the nationality problems presently encountered in the Soviet Union.

There is absolutely no doubt that it behoves our Government and the Governments of western Europe, the United States and the East to rise to the challenges of the momentous events.

**Several Hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. I must remind the House of Mr. Speaker's earlier announcement that from 11.30 am until 1 pm the 10-minute limit on the length of speeches will apply.

11.31 am

**Sir Russell Johnston** (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): The hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) was modest when he congratulated other hon. Members on their speeches as he made an effective contribution. If this debate had not been taking place on a Friday I am sure that far more hon. Members would be here. Although I welcome this debate it shows a rather mistaken order of priorities among the Government's business managers for them to put it on a Friday rather than on another weekday.

I go along with those who have already praised the Minister for the way in which he opened the debate. His speech was thoughtful, positive and demonstrated his sense of history as well as the fact that he has a great deal of political sensitivity.

What we are witnessing, as many hon. Members have already said, is a monumental change and the fulfilment of many dreams. Last Sunday I stood at the Berlin wall with a German friend and watched people chipping bits out of it just underneath the Reichstag. I chipped a wee bit out myself. It was an extraordinary experience to be there and it put a song in one's heart—that is the only way in which to describe it. The political climate has changed fundamentally, but the arguments, which are about peace, freedom, political pluralism and economic development and co-operation in Europe, are the same. Our capacity to advance those things, however, has changed in a miraculous way.

Some hon. Members will not see it that way. The hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Lamond) gave aid, comfort and praise to the thugs of the Honecker regime and he cannot have welcomed the scenes in Leipzig. Others will be suspicious and negative. Many people in politics require something either to hate or to fear in order to feel safe in a funny sort of way. It is destabilising to have that hatred or fear removed. The hon. Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) demonstrated that when we had our debate on the Community when he said:

"More potential damage has been done to the western Alliance . . . by the knocking down of the Berlin wall than Russia's massive armaments programme ever achieved. If the intention was to create uncertainty . . . these recent changes could be the most effective offensive Russia has so far launched."—[*Official Report*, 15 November 1989; Vol. 160, c. 410.]

I do not go along with that sort of thinking, but between the extremes I know that there is much good will, but a certain amount of hesitation.

On behalf of my party I welcome, without equivocation, what has happened. In common with the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) I pay particular tribute to Mr. Gorbachev who has been the engine driving the whole thing forward. It is difficult to imagine the enormous pressures that must be on him. I do not know how he does it.

How do we respond to the new situation? I do not particularly want to be brief, but rules are rules and I shall make four points only.

First, I agree with the Father of the House, the right hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), that the most immediate, absolute imperative in Poland in particular, but elsewhere as the need may arise, is that there is enough food this winter. Credit must go to Delors, but the Government should be active in this matter. Secondly, in the medium term, the assistance provided to the emerging democracies must concentrate on improving managerial capacity, infrastructure and the technological base of their industries. A substantial review of the COCOM structure is required. How does the Government's response measure up? They have done certain of the right things and I welcome the doubling of the know-how programme to Poland.

**Dr. Norman A. Godman** (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that part of the know-how



funds should go towards financing community newspapers in Poland as that would strengthen that fledgling democracy?

**Sir Russell Johnston:** That is a constructive remark and I agree that we need to strengthen the structure of democracy. It has already been said that those funds are not large and if the Government do not propose to do anything more bilaterally I hope that they will encourage more to be done through the Community in a collective sense.

I am told that no money from the know-how fund for Hungary will be spent until the next financial year, although the Prime Minister referred in Question Time last week to our helping Poland and Hungary. I hope that the Minister will tell us later whether we will help Hungary this year rather than next year.

Thirdly, I should like to quote from Chancellor Kohl who spoke in the Bundestag on Tuesday. I recommend his speech to hon. Members as he succinctly put his finger on a number of points. The best way in which I can make those points is to quote Chancellor Kohl who said:

"the surmounting of the separation of Europe and the division of Germany demands far-reaching and speedy steps pertaining to disarmament and arms control. Disarmament and arms control must keep step with political developments and, therefore, might have to be accelerated.

This is particularly true of the negotiations in Vienna for the dismantling of conventional armed forces in Europe and for the agreement upon measures to establish trust, such as the worldwide ban of chemical weapons. This also demands that the nuclear potential of world powers be reduced to a strategic minimal level. The up coming meeting between President Bush and General Secretary Gorbachev offers a good opportunity to add new impetus to current negotiations. We are trying via bilateral discussions with the countries of the Warsaw pact, including the GDR to support this process."

Are our Government doing that as well? I agree with the hon. Member for Corby that it is important to catch this tide. As a Liberal I am proud of the role of Hans-Dietrich Genscher in this process. I support his opposition to short-range nuclear modernisation in NATO at this time. I do not believe that that is necessary and I agree with what the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney said about that.

Fourthly, it is wrong to argue as quite a number are arguing—even the Minister seemed to imply this during his speech—that in this new position, one of our first responses should be to slow down the integration of the European Community. People are saying that we should wait. It is noticeable that the people saying that would say so even if the new events in eastern Europe had not taken place.

The idea that if the Community moves—as I would wish—towards ever more effective, economic, political and federal union, that will represent a sort of blocking off of the opportunities to the eastern countries, is a fundamental mistake. It does not do that. On the contrary, it will enable us to respond more effectively and coherently to change there, including the possibility of German reunification if the Germans take that choice and phasing from association to membership of the fledgling democracies in time.

Apart from wondering what we are to do about it, Members should simply be glad that these events have taken place and salute the brave people such as Dubcek who, during the years, have kept the flag flying and remained brave. As the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) said, this is a wonderful time to be alive.

11.40 am

**Sir Peter Blaker** (Blackpool, South): I agree with the final remarks of the hon. Member for Inverness, Nair and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston), particularly when he saluted the individuals who have been responsible for giving leadership in these exhilarating times in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. When considering the causes of these great developments, there is no doubt that they are principally internal both in the Soviet Union and the eastern European countries. But we should not ignore the part that we have played in NATO and the European Community.

For two years between 1981 and 1983 I was the Minister responsible for conducting the campaign for multilateral disarmament and deterrence. I found myself debating with CND and members of the Labour party all over the country. I was constantly accused of being a warmonger and worse and asked, "If the arms race continues, where is it all going to end?" The implication of the question was that it would all end in war. My response was quite different. I said that it was clear that the 16 per cent. of GDP spent on military purposes in the Soviet Union was an enormous burden which could not be kept up for ever. I thought that it was perfectly clear that the Soviet Union could not improve its defence capacity as fast as we could in the West, and if it came to a challenge—as it was then—between the two sides, the Soviet Union might in due course realise that the game was up, abandon its ambitions to expand its power throughout the world and, in the interests of its economy, make a radical change. I could not tell how long it would take, but I thought that it might take a decade or two. I was absolutely right, although I overestimated the time required.

We should consider not only the contribution that our unity and strength in NATO has made to these developments by showing that the Soviet Union could not achieve its external objectives, but the damage which would have been done if the unilateral disarmers had won. I am sure that the subsequent scene would have been different because the Soviet Union's leaders seeing disunity in NATO, would have been gravely tempted to continue their old ways.

What is the likely course of the east European revolution? Nobody could be more exhilarated by it than I. I played a part in the second world war, as did other right hon. and hon. Members in the Chamber. We particularly welcome what is going on because we can remember the horrors of those days and the dismay we felt when we saw east European countries subjected, one by one, to Soviet rule.

While there is certainly a reduction in the risk of war due to the events now taking place, we must recognise that there will be a great deal of turmoil in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. We have not yet seized the dimensions of what is likely to happen. We have seen only the beginning of the turmoil. These countries have no experience of elections, even to a parish council, let alone to a district council or national Parliament. They do not have a clue about how it is done. They have no experience of running even a free enterprise whelk stall. Until recently, even the whelk stalls were in the public sector. I am told that they are generally in the private sector now. I checked the position with Lech Walesa yesterday. They do not have the experience of running car factories or anything bigger than a whelk stall. They need enormous



[Sir Peter Blaker]

help from us and will certainly make great mistakes. It is well known that the shelves in the shops in these countries are emptier now than before the revolution began.

There is a difference between eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The eastern Europeans have nationalism and the excitement of liberalisation from Soviet control to keep them united and continue the momentum. They will need to rely on those factors. In the Soviet Union, nationalism is not a favourable factor to keep them going but an extremely dangerous one. In the Soviet Union, the Baltic republics, the Georgians, the Uzbeks, the Azerbaijanis, the Armenians and others will feel the need more and more to be independent of Russian domination. That is why Mr. Gorbachev insists that there should be only one party, the Communist party, in the Soviet Union, in contrast to the eastern European countries where it is accepted that there can be a multi-party system. The only thing keeping the Soviet Union together now is the Communist party.

So we should expect that there will be a great deal of turmoil, particularly in the Soviet Union. We do not know what the Russian generals think, but we should remember the point made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence that Sir John Hackett, in his book of fiction, "The Third World War", set the scene for the beginning of that third world war in the break-up of the Soviet Union. I am not predicting that there will be war, but he had a point about the dangers of turmoil.

What should we do? We should help in every way we can the favourable trend in eastern European countries and the Soviet Union. When he replies, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will deal with the urgent need for food aid in Poland. When I spoke to Lech Walesa yesterday and asked if Poland needed food aid, he said yes, but he did not insist that that was the principal need. He said that Poland is one of the richest agricultural countries in the world, but we have to get the Polish farmers to release that food. The food is in the barns because of the financial position and some means must be found to get it out. There may well be a great need for food aid this winter and I understand that we are providing £15 million worth of food aid, but I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend would clarify the situation.

What I find particularly exciting is the know-how fund. In the next 12 months the BBC external services will be training 40 broadcasters from Poland to run a free broadcasting system. They have absolutely no idea about how to do it. They are trying to do it at the moment and they are making enormous mistakes. We shall be training parliamentarians from Poland and Hungary on how to run a free Parliament. We are also training local government officers.

Mr. Walesa stressed to me that he wants British business men to invest in Poland to help sort out Polish industry. He said that many German business men are going to Poland. In a short time, Germany would buy up a large part of Polish industry if it could, but the Polish people do not want that to happen in a big way because of history and their feelings about Germany. They would like British business men to visit Poland and British banks to be set up there. He said that if a British bank is set up the Polish people will bring out from under their floorboards and mattresses the large sums of money that they will not

put into the Communist bank. They will put their money into a British bank because they could get it out if they needed it. In that way more funds from Poland will be available to invest in Polish industry.

We should not weaken our defences prematurely. We should proceed with disarmament by negotiation with the Soviet Union in the forums which already exist. We should certainly be forthcoming about what we are prepared to do. By our policies we have helped to create the prospect of a Europe transformed for the better. Helping that process to continue and helping to manage change so that it is for the better and not for the worse will be a task as complex as anything in the past 40 years, but equally worthwhile.

11.51 am

**Mr. Robert N. Wareing** (Liverpool, West Derby): I found the Minister's speech extremely interesting. It certainly did not sound like the usual Foreign Office brief, nor did it sound like a speech which could possibly have had the support of the Prime Minister, because it departed from the cold war rhetoric which still seems to be part and parcel of the right hon. Lady's speeches, as we heard the other day when she spoke in Washington. The Minister made a civilised speech, although I did not agree with all of it. I have only two criticisms of what he had to say.

First, there was a slight element of triumphalism in the Minister's speech. It is not true that people in eastern Europe are anxious for the unrestrained capitalism that the Minister considers is so beneficial for people in Britain. I remind the Minister that two thirds of the human race suffer in poverty. The overwhelming majority of those people live in countries which embrace the market system, and an unfair market system at that.

**Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** Where?

**Mr. Wareing:** The hon. Gentleman shouts, "Where?". Perhaps he has never been to Chile, El Salvador, India or Indonesia. I do not know what he knows about the system he supports but it has been abused in many parts of the world.

Secondly, I did not like the Minister continually referring to "the other side". We are entering a new era and we must have the vision and imagination that the Prime Minister lacks. Unfortunately, the Minister reflected that in his constant references to "the other side". I like to think of the working people of Europe struggling for a better existence and a better life, instead of the rhetoric that we hear so often from those who continue to believe and often have a vested interest in keeping Europe ideologically divided, backed up by two armed camps.

I welcome the great changes which have taken place in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. I particularly welcome the changes in Czechoslovakia as I was there enjoying the Prague spring, lapping up the air of freedom. I applaud the fact that Alexander Dubcek is now seen on the streets of Prague, freely moving about and expressing his opinions. I hope that he will play a part in the new Czechoslovakia.

I warn the other side—in this context, Conservative Members—that Alexander Dubcek is not talking about embracing free market capitalism. If Conservative Members want to refer to what he believes in, they should look at a copy of *The Guardian*, which published an article of his in early January 1988. He expressed his views about



Socialism with a human face, under which there would be a strong element of planning to deal with the problems of the environment and of the maldistribution of wealth. He remains a Socialist, and many of the people who are struggling for a better life in eastern Europe are struggling for democratic Socialism.

The most significant change, because of its impact on the rest of Europe, is that taking place in East Germany, about which I shall make most of my remarks. Some people are saying that there is a danger of a fourth Reich, and the other day Conor Cruise O'Brien made a foolish statement about that.

I am aware of the problems of people who lived in countries under Nazi occupation. I was a child at the time, but I remember living through the blitz in Liverpool. The West German generation of today is different. It was born and nurtured in a democratic political culture and is entirely different from the past. It has been lucky enough to live through a period when the economy has been mostly in boom, and it has not had the problems of the generation of the Weimar republic.

Today West Germany enshrines many human rights. It is not perfect by a long way, but it has far more human rights than we currently have in Britain. Its workers may not be all that Labour Members should want, but at least they have *Mitbestimmung* and the rights that are being developed under the social charter, which are scorned by the Prime Minister and many on the extreme Right wing of the Conservative party. The Germans have a good reputation for dealing with refugees, such as the Kurds, the Chileans and many others who have been persecuted by dictatorships throughout the world.

I do not think that we should or could stand in the way of German reunification. What would we say if there were an artificial barrier from the Wash to the Severn? We have a divide created by the Government between poverty in one part of the country and prosperity in another, but I am talking about barriers such as the Berlin wall, the barbed wire, and the minefields through Germany.

Some people argue that there would be an upsurge of German nationalism and extreme Right-wing political movements in a united Germany. I believe that the danger of that is greater in a divided Germany. Although the NPD and Republikaner parties are still small parties, they feed on prejudices against immigrants—against the Gastarbeiter, the Turkish worker and workers from Mediterranean countries. Although currently much sympathy is being shown in West Germany for its brethren from the East, this is the honeymoon period and there is a danger that a continuing flood from the East would result in an upsurge of extremism in certain parts of the country as expressed through parties such as the Republikaner party.

We must express our gratitude for what West Germans are doing for East Germans. I have visited West Germany several times over the past few months. The other week I was able to see the *bürgermeister* of Bremen offer hospitality to its twin town of Rostock, and its people came in hundreds of thousands to enjoy the freedom of travel.

We must remember that Bremen has 15 per cent. unemployment and that it has housing problems. However the immigrants have been dealt with generously by the Germans.

I understand that Bremen expects 18,000 people from the GDR to settle there in 1990. That is in addition to the

6,000 ethnic Germans from Poland and 2,000 from the Soviet Union who have already been accommodated by the city.

I hope that the Government will consider some of the premises that we could make available. For example, there are military barracks which could be used by the people coming from the East. We should help the Germans with the housing problem.

Reunification of Germany would certainly reduce the numbers coming from the East. However, Bärbel Bohley of the East German New Forum said:

"Without moves towards confederation the exodus from East to West will get worse, but financial help is the main concern."

I appeal for assistance to be given to the East Germans so that they can be fully wedded into a unified Germany. I want to see a Europe, including Germany, which is socialist and democratic and not oppressed by Stalinism or ruled by hard-handed Thatcherite philosophy.

12.1 pm

**Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton):** Many right hon. and hon. Members attended Remembrance Day services and remember the lesson that we read. We said:

"They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks."

I cannot remember any time in my life when I thought that we were closer to that ideal than when I took part in that service last month. Many people share that feeling as they look around and see that Communism is disintegrating and even dissolving itself everywhere, as the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) said, and the shackles of totalitarianism are bursting open and freedom is blossoming out.

We can all be forgiven for feeling euphoria and joy as we see Dubček addressing the crowds, President Gorbachev welcomed wherever he goes, Solidarity leaders taking power in Poland, democracy emerging in Hungary, the people forcing the Czech regime to surrender its supreme power and there are even stirrings in Bulgaria. But, we must not let the euphoria go to our heads. Many questions are being asked for which it is too early to give answers. We cannot look too far into the future with any great certainty.

Let us suppose that President Gorbachev fails—we have to contemplate that possibility. Right hon. and hon. Members on the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, who visited eastern Europe last year and who maintain contacts with people in both eastern and western Europe, appreciate that the domestic achievements of the Gorbachev regime are not substantial. The regime is not securely anchored. There are alarming food shortages, caused mainly by the food distribution system. There are doubts everywhere in eastern Europe about President Gorbachev's survival.

When I was in Moscow at this time last year, I was appalled by the apathy of the people and by their lack of vital enthusiasm for the reforms. Let us suppose that President Gorbachev were deposed and that the reforms he has introduced were brought to a standstill. Most of the people we have met who are in positions of power and influence in Europe believe that the advances that have been made would be halted and then reversed.

At times like these, the only safe approach is to keep cool heads, and to consider carefully what we can do to ensure that the processes of freedom continue.



[Mr. Ivan Lawrence]

My hon. Friend the Minister spoke of the immense amount of encouragement and support that we are prepared to give the reformers in the short term to show that the world is behind them. The immediate economic aid is welcome, as is the free food for Poland for the winter, the know-how fund for Poland and Hungary, economic reconstruction assistance, agricultural advice, manpower training advice and abolition of trade restrictions with those countries. Then there is the debt relief which I hope the IMF is considering, the European Investment Bank's permission for lending and financial activities and, above all, the encouragement of private industrial investment, perhaps most practically through joint ventures.

Our moral support—and even debates such as this—are important, as are the continuation and extension of unofficial exchanges in literature, culture and music. Even the kind of guidance that we may be able to give, although not all of it would be to follow our example, about how to run a democratic process.

There are, however, deeper considerations that we need to accept, perhaps reluctantly. First, we must do nothing to stir up Mr. Gorbachev's enemies in the Soviet Union. He must be sustained in power because all of this is his achievement and the process will continue only if he remains in power. We must therefore do nothing to destabilise Europe and frighten his enemies.

In military defence, it is crucial that there should be a steady reduction in NATO's forces in response to Soviet reductions, but there must not be a dramatic pulling out of troops. We must also bear in mind the fact that, if things go wrong, we will need a strong military presence in Europe. That is a vital consideration.

We must go easy when talking about the reunification of Germany. Nothing is more likely to make things difficult for Gorbachev than for fears to grow that the Warsaw pact is about to dissolve, as it must be dissolved if West and East Germany are to reunify. My colleagues and I on the Foreign Affairs Select Committee have just come back from Bonn. I was relieved to discover that, although there is much talk of reunification—only this week Chancellor Kohl reaffirmed West Germany's commitment to reunification—it is only an aspiration at this stage. Reunification is part of their constitution. West German politicians have always to remember in their speeches that it is an aim, but they do not consider it possible in the foreseeable future. We should not do anything to precipitate fears in the Soviet Union that reunification, and all that it implies for the Warsaw pact, is likely to happen in the near future.

We must not be quite so pressing in regard to economic and political activity. In this, I take a different view from many others who have spoken this morning. At a time of turmoil in the world we do not want any turmoil in the European Community, which will be the strongest source of assistance, in terms of economic and political power, to eastern European countries. This is not the time for our partners to try to force Britain against our wishes into central banks, common monetary policy, a common currency and a social charter. Doing that would cause disruption at a time when the real force and power of encouragement for eastern Europe will come from its neighbours in the West.

We will be of greatest service to eastern Europe when we in the European Community are strong and are not divided among ourselves. That means that those who are pressing for this revolutionary change in our relationship with the European Community should, in the interests of the reform of the East, lay off for the time being.

If we keep our heads in these explosive times and do all we can to help the reformers and not be unhelpful to Mr. Gorbachev, we will help to ensure that these great reforms and momentous changes continue. If we do things that are disruptive, we will only precipitate what many of us fear is possible; we may find that the reforms are not deeply enough embedded to be irreversible.

The one great achievement—which has not been mentioned, or perhaps I was not concentrating when it was—about which we must marvel and be thankful is that most of these reforms have taken place without bloodshed. It would have been so easy for the people to rise up, and to have been shot down. It would have been easy for the events at Tiananmen square to have been repeated in Wenceslas square and the other great squares of the capitals of those eastern European countries. We must keep uppermost in our minds the fact that at all costs we must not provoke anybody to react to these reformist movements by bloodshed. Keeping our heads and acting in a measured way are more likely than anything else to achieve the peaceful continuance of those reforms.

12.11 pm

**Mr. Eric S. Heffer** (Liverpool, Walton): Many of us have thought for a long time that, sooner or later, there would be a political revolution in the Soviet Union. Many Members and others argued, certainly during the Stalinist regime, that the extension of the Soviet system to various eastern European countries on the points of Russian bayonets after the second world war was the establishment of Socialism in those countries.

Many of us who are, I hope, genuine Socialists, have never believed that what has existed in the Soviet Union is a Socialist society. However, I am not certain what that society really is. Some of my friends say that it is state capitalism. Others say that it is a kind of deformed workers' state. Others argue that it is bureaucratic collectivism. I do not know what it is. All I know is what it is not. It is not a Socialist society. Hon. Members and others—including political pundits who are now writing at great length in various learned journals and newspapers—say that we are seeing the collapse of Socialism, but that is not the position. Socialism could only collapse in those countries if it had been brought into existence. There was a successful workers' revolution which had a form of democracy for a short period but, once Stalin was in clear control, it did not last five minutes. We know exactly what happened.

I have long been a Rosa Luxemburgist. By that I mean that I support the views that Rosa Luxemburg put forward. She was a Socialist who, incidentally, was murdered by Right-wing—

**Mr. Pat Wall** (Bradford, North): By so-called Socialists.

**Mr. Heffer:** She was murdered by the military who were supported by so-called Socialists in Germany at the end of the first world war.



I should like the House to know what Rosa Luxemburg said in an interesting little pamphlet about the Russian revolution which she wrote in 1921 and which was published in 1922. She said:

"Freedom of the press, the rights of association and assembly all have been outlawed for all opponents of the Soviet regime . . . on the other hand, it is a well-known and indisputable fact that without a free and untrammelled press, without the unlimited right of association and assembly, the role of the broad mass of the people is entirely unthinkable . . . Freedom only for the supporters of the Government, only for the members of one party—however numerous they may be—is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of justice but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on that essential characteristic; and its effectiveness vanishes when 'freedom' becomes a special privilege."

That sums up for me the view of a genuine, democratic Socialist and that is what Socialism means. Socialism means the development of the human spirit, the right of free association and the right to organise independent trade unions. Socialism means that one has more than one political party, free elections, free debate and free discussion.

I can say without hesitation, as a democratic Socialist, that the Soviet Union and eastern Europe are not Socialist. I must make it clear that I believe in revolutionary change. I want a new kind of society in this world, but it must be a free society in which there is a free human spirit because without that, it cannot possibly be a Socialist society.

I have been waiting for this day for a long time. I remember having a fight just after the war with two building workers who supported the Communist party.

**Dr. Godman:** Spoken as a true joiner.

**Mr. Heffer:** Yes, I trained as a joiner. I supported the East Berlin workers who refused to accept the changes in their normal working and went on strike. The two young Communists said that it was disgraceful for there to be an unofficial strike. I was amazed by their arguments and the dispute almost came to physical violence.

Many great upsurges developed after the war. There was the wonderful Polish Spring when we thought that this was it. There was the Hungarian revolution followed by the Soviet intervention and suppression. Again, I was on the side of the Hungarian revolution. There was the Prague Spring and its suppression. If one was a genuine democratic Socialist, one could not be other than on the side of the Czech people. It was marvellous to see Dubcek—who is actually my age—standing in Prague, not calling for bringing in capitalism, but for bring in Socialism with a human face. He was suppressed earlier for expressing that view and had he been in some other countries earlier, he would have been killed as so many were. Terrible purges took place in Stalin's Russia and after the war at Stalin's instigation. So many people were murdered because they stood up against Stalinism.

Unfortunately, Tito did not introduce the type of Socialism that I should have liked. It was not extended into the political field although greater democracy was created in the workshops. It was not the Socialism in which some of us passionately believe.

How wonderful it was to see Mr. Dubcek speaking again arguing for the things that he had fought for before his regime was overthrown by Russian tanks. Happily, Mr. Gorbachev has made it clear that the Russians will not

intervene to suppress the movement in eastern European countries so there is a great chance that they will come through.

Let us be clear that in the Soviet Union we are seeing a difference in the bureaucratic regime. Mr. Gorbachev has made a tremendous difference and I agree that the role of the individual should never be underestimated. Some of my hon. Friends were wrong when they said that it does not matter who is Prime Minister. I think that it does matter and the sooner that we get rid of her the better. However, that is a political point which has nothing to do with the arguments. The role of the individual is important. Certainly Mr. Gorbachev's role is important, but he reflects the view of one part of the bureaucratic structure. We must understand that another part of the structure is opposed to changes of any kind.

In the end there may be violence in the Soviet Union. There could be an attempt to overthrow what Mr. Gorbachev is doing. If he were removed some people might resort to arms to fight for him. The military itself might break into disarray. We must give every assistance that we can, and as a Socialist I shall do so. However, the aim will not be to bring in a capitalist system but to fight for democratic socialism as I have always done.

12.21 pm

**Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesend):** I welcome the debate. It is clear that Europe is heading for a period of political turmoil, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) outlined. It is also clear that we in this House must have a major rethink. That would not be best done along the party political lines advocated by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson).

Balkanisation occurs when a declining imperial power breaks up into sovereign nation states. Today in western, central and eastern Europe the old nation-state model that maintained particular sovereignty over its territory is no longer the effective model of political power. We are now talking about levels of political power and it is possible to envisage cross-border minority rights being agreed by cross-border and multinational agreements without raising the spectre of redrawing state boundaries. When considering the situation in central and eastern Europe it is important to understand what the long-term structures might turn out to be.

Yesterday, President Gorbachev spoke of a vision of Europe

"as a commonwealth of sovereign democratic states with a high level of equitable interdependence and easily accessible borders, open to the exchange of products, technologies and ideas, and wide-ranging contacts among people."

In the crisis in Communist regimes in central and eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, there has been a crisis at once economic, social, political, ethnic, national ideological, and moral, and, in an important sense, cultural and religious. It is important to mention an issue which has not been emphasised enough in this debate: the progressive role of the various Christian churches and other religious groups in the political changes which have taken place.

The nature of the religious culture of so many of these central and eastern European states—which the Minister mentioned in his reference to Christendom—means that those churches have been able to provide not only a focal point of opposition, but a means of cultural and political stability in the transference to new forms of democracy.



[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

The crisis has been one of a state system in which the state ownership and control of an economy has become disfunctional. It is also a cultural crisis because the role of the state and the party as the controlling apparatus of society, even within civil society, has meant that political and social life in those countries has been stultified. In central and eastern Europe, we are dealing with a post-revolutionary society which suffered from an externally-imposed revolution. Even within the Soviet Union we can see how the imposed central structure prevented the development of national aspirations, not only in the Baltic states, but in other Soviet Union republics.

Apart from Czechoslovakia, central and eastern Europe has little experience of effective democratic forms over a long period. We must recognise the developments of those central and eastern European regions—as many Opposition Members have argued—as forms of bureaucratic, oligarchic, collective regimes. Certain Conservative Members are wrong to see what is happening as a crisis of democratic socialism. It is a crisis of a form of collectivism.

Opposition Members do a disservice to their arguments when they pretend that some of the present Government's illiberal activities can be compared with some of the appalling tragedies of oppression in eastern Europe. Similarly, it is wrong for Conservative Members to argue that the collapse of these regimes heralds the end of socialism in the West. I call for a little bit of glasnost and perestroika between the major parties in the House as we try to understand events in central and eastern Europe.

I was glad that the Minister mentioned Bulgaria and the tragic incident that happened some years ago in London. I hope that we can rebuild our understanding with that small country with its population of 9 million. When the Secretary-General of the Bulgarian Communist party spoke to the Bulgarian Parliament on 17 November, he stressed the role of the national assembly and MPs in the legislative process. I hope that it will be possible for us to have observers to this Parliament not just from some of the other central and east European countries and the Soviet Union but from Bulgaria. When describing some of the changes taking place in Bulgaria, which, in contrast to some of the other central and east European countries are still intra-party changes within the Communist party, the Secretary-General said:

"Our society is on the threshold of a qualitatively new stage of development. The country's all-round appearance is changing every day and even every hour. The structures of the command and bureaucratic system are beginning to shake, the administrative idols of yesterday are going to pieces. The fresh air of changes has entered the political atmosphere."

It is wonderful to be able to quote such a statement from the present political leader of Bulgaria.

We look with confidence to the changes taking place throughout central and eastern Europe. In particular, we look to the importance of those changes for the cultural and linguistic minorities in the Soviet Union and the cross-border minorities. I was concerned, although not surprised, to hear the leader of the Romanian regime make a statement which seemed to signify some attempt to repossess Moldavia. Because Moldavian people speak a language which is very close to Romanian, that is no argument for the Romanian leader to assert that a new state form should be imposed to annex Moldavia. The

attempts of the Soviet Union to provide a degree of linguistic autonomy in Moldavia could result in other linguistic minorities within the Soviet Union achieving more effective linguistic and economic autonomy which appears to have been established between the Baltic states and Moscow.

Central and eastern Europe are moving towards a pluralistic democracy, but many recent developments have taken place because of the recognition, even by Mr. Gorbachev, that the national question is at the root of the re-establishment of democracy.

It is important to emphasise that there are different types of nationalism. There is the negative nationalism of nation states which oppress other nationalities and there are progressive forms of nationality such as the assertion of cultural identity which leads to a feeling of belonging to a particular group without that, of necessity, becoming a way of attacking the validity, independence or autonomy of another cultural group. In central and eastern Europe and on the borders of the Soviet Union cultural autonomy and cultural rights are being restated, but that should not necessarily lead to political breakdown of order or the repression of one minority by another.

1.1 pm

**Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): The scale of events in the past few months is driving all hon. Members towards a measure of consensus. Rather than go back over the wide-ranging discussion on a number of issues such as defence, perhaps it would be more helpful for me to concentrate on four specific points.

First, I endorse the message put so eloquently by the Father of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) and others about food aid to Poland this winter. This week I have also been in touch with Lady Ryder. It is quite clear from those discussions and from today's debate that the Government need to recognise that it is not much good being a free Pole this winter if one is also a dead Pole. Therefore it is essential that we intervene quickly.

I am surprised that my second point has not been touched on this morning. It relates largely but not entirely to Poland and concerns environmental pollution. Those of us who have travelled in eastern Europe are immediately aware that that is a great problem. Pollution is confined by no national boundaries. In their own interests, instead of concentrating on the economic use of their resources, and spending so much extra on reducing their smoke stack emissions by 2 per cent. or 5 per cent.—desirable as that may be—western countries should consider ways in which they can give practical help with the awful problems in some eastern European countries with all their impact on human health and the general happiness of the people.

Thirdly, I wish to discuss nationalism which has been discussed by my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesend (Mr. Arnold) and the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas). I have a Welsh wife and inevitably I am interested in the relationships between the particular and the general in our political systems.

What has happened in eastern Europe is that the release of the Soviet hegemony has allowed old pressures and old territorial disputes to reassert themselves. While we look back to the flashpoints of 1939, the corridor, Sudetenland or whatever, many issues still further back are likely to reassert themselves such as the treaty of Trianon, the



resentments thereof, or Teschen, Suwalki or the ethnic balance in the Carpatho-Ukraine. These are matters to which the Foreign Office research department no doubt addresses itself. They have not been aired in the House for many generations, but they will be raised again.

What I would say to those emerging from the period of domination in eastern Europe is that they have a duty and opportunity to work together to find a better way to resolve disputes. One of the great contributions of the European Community and the West is that we have found a way of making a better contribution to resolving the peaceful disposition of nations and their national and minority interests. Who now talks about the problems of Schleswig or Alsace? We found that we can accommodate those problems within a system of prosperity, where although national boundaries are not irrelevant, they are no longer the dominant issue of political concourse.

My final point, with which I wish to deal at greater length, is how we respond to eastern Europe. Inevitably, we are still driven by the old statist, even Marxist, analysis of relations between states. We say, "What should Britain be doing about it" or "What should the Government be doing about it?", yet it is much more a matter of how individuals relate to the new position. We want to join people together, not just Governments or political systems. The analogy that I should like to offer the House is microsurgery, the complicated joining again of blood vessels, arteries and muscles that have been severed by unnatural conditions over 45 years. The armoury of a civil society can be re-established in our common house in Europe.

The Government can give a lead through matters such as the know-how fund and, more immediately, through food aid. I should particularly like to mention the work being done by the Great Britain-East Europe centre. Next week, some hon. Members are training—that is a pompous word—Hungarians for their new political responsibilities. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) wished to be associated with these remarks, but I hope that the Government will recognise in their funding that this is an explosion of opportunities that must be taken.

Going outside the immediate sphere of Government and Government aid, the prime responsibility will be on business, which clearly is expected by the East. Closer economic ties are essential to increase prosperity and to bind its peoples together. The emphasis is on the importance of joint ventures, investment banking, sub-contracting arrangements and other ways of linking ourselves. I was particularly grateful for the remarks of the president of the Confederation of British Industry about economic links, and I should like the boards of the top 100 companies to consider as an agenda item whether or not, and if not why not, they should spend 1 per cent. of their capital investment on East bloc countries. Smaller companies should at least think about such a proposal.

It is not only a matter of business and economic relations, because all aspects of civil society—our clubs, academics, artists, the media, trade unionists, students and ordinary families going on holiday—should consider what they can do. Today, I am wearing the tie of the Hungarian overseas economic chamber of trade—a new bit of civil society that is being re-established, and it is a privilege in which we can all share.

I shall close on a specific point for my hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State

to consider. We know that to achieve success there must be travel from East to West as well as from West to East. It is still easier to travel from West to East, but travel is expensive for people in the East bloc, and we are compounding that by the British visa policy. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider some aspects of that policy over the next few months.

A visa charge of £20 is more than a week's wages for a working person, and it is a fortune for a student in one of those countries. I am not sure that it is cost effective, because visitors from the East bloc may spend money here, and, if they pay for their visa, we may pile up quantities of non-convertible currencies. A second problem is the availability of visas. It is not satisfactory for people to have to go for example from Riga to Moscow to get them.

Thirdly the coverage of visas is not sufficiently flexible. We need to look at ways in which we can encourage working visits. There are not as many worries about security now, because there are ways for visa policy to achieve that. The Home Office is clearly worried about other overstaying. I understand that fear, but we have to find ways in which people can come from the East on a working holiday, or a temporary assignment, earn a few pounds or some other foreign currency and take the money back to start a business—and good luck to them.

Great events are taking place and we must respond to them with breadth of spirit. There should be emotions of fear and hope together in all politics. I am anxious that our fears may be allowed to cloud out our hopes and theirs.

1.11 pm

**Mr. Terry Fields** (Liverpool, Broadgreen): I apologise for the fact that I shall not be able to stay for the winding-up speeches as I have to get back to Liverpool for a meeting.

The Minister will not be disappointed if he does not hear a non-partisan speech from me today. I do not have much in common with the Government or with some Conservative Members on many topics—

**Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** And not much in common with most of the hon. Gentleman's right hon. and hon. Friends.

**Mr. Fields:** Hon. Members would be surprised to learn what I have in common with my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson).

Everyone is overwhelmed by the breathtaking sweep of events in eastern Europe and its scope—from the Balkans to the Baltic. The scale of those vast working-class movements must be underlined. The workers, trade unionists, students, intellectuals and members of the police and the armed forces in those countries are joining together in the struggle for democracy and freedom.

It is amazing to see heads of state falling like ninepins in eastern Europe, and to see general secretaries of parties go, like so many of yesterday's clothes.

I say with some pride that only the Marxists within the Labour movement foretold the recent events in eastern Europe with any confidence. They did not have a crystal ball but they had faith in the working class, nationally and internationally, and in the inevitability of workers' movements in those Stalinist countries.

My hon. Friends the Members for Bradford, North (Mr. Wall) and for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) adequately exposed the political ignorance of Conservative Members, who said that what they had seen



[Mr. Fields]

in eastern Europe and Russia was either Socialism or Communism. That shows an ignorance of what Marx spoke about, and a lack of knowledge about politics.

The breathtaking speed at which events have taken place has even been amazing to Marxists. However, I am amused when people such as the Minister and Conservative Members applaud the coming to power in eastern Europe of people such as Egon Krenz. If we cast our minds back, we will recall that he made a statement about the events in Tiananmen square, which applauded that type of activity by the Chinese bureaucracy.

Next week, there will be the following early-day motion on the Order Paper:

"That this House welcomes the magnificent movements in Eastern Europe, for full democratic control over what happens in society and recognises that this outburst of discontent and opposition in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, in particular, reflects deep anger against the corruption and mismanagement of the Stalinist bureaucracy; sees the movement leading in the direction of genuine Socialism, not a return to capitalism; congratulates the workers of the Soviet Union, particularly the striking miners of Vorkuta, in the Arctic Circle, who are leading the struggle for better pay and conditions and for an end to one-party dictatorship; notes that their fight has been in the face of vicious anti-strike laws of a type that even Her Majesty's Government drew back from; believes that these mighty working class struggles deserve the full support of the British and international labour and trade union movement and considers that the only way forward for the peoples of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is on the basis of a return to the principles of genuine workers' democracy and socialism which formed the basis and inspiration for the October revolution."

[Laughter.] Again, ignorance is displayed on the Conservative Benches with regard to history and current events. Despite the gleeful rubbing of hands at the prospect of fresh markets by the party of big business, the demands of workers in struggles in Russia and eastern Germany take various forms.

The four demands that Lenin put forward were, first, the election and right of recall of officials. That has been undertaken. Secondly, wages should be no higher than the wage of a worker. Thirdly, there should be immediate transition to the position where for a time all become bureaucrats, and therefore no one becomes a bureaucrat. Fourthly, there is to be no standing army but the armed people.

There are four additional demands: first, free trade unions independent of the state; secondly, freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly; thirdly, the right to strike; fourthly the right to free elections with the participation of all political parties except the Fascists.

I have been in contact with workers in Russia, including the striking Vorkuta miners, and workers in East Germany. I have had messages from a town's workers' committee which say:

"We . . . were glad to receive your letter and share the principles which Lenin proposed for the creation of a democratic workers' state—there is no other way—and we also concur with your opinion about the need for personal contact in the name of strengthening the spirit of friendship and cooperation. We are devoting all our strength and knowledge for the building in our native land of a democratic state. We will defend the interests of the workers by all legal means open to us including strikes. With warm greetings from the members of the town's workers committee."

This is not a return to capitalism. It is the conditions of the October revolution towards which workers in Russia and eastern Europe are striving.

Another letter signed by a city workers' council set out clearly what they are striving towards. They are striving towards democracy and freedom. They are striving towards Socialism with a human face. Those slogans are equally vivid for workers in East Germany. Workers' councils in East Germany are demanding links not with rotary clubs and the Confederation of British Industry, but with workers. They want to establish a genuine workers' state in eastern Europe.

Reunification of Germany has been mentioned. According to people with whom I am in contact, workers in eastern Germany went to see Chancellor Kohl when the Berlin wall was opened. They saw that he was jeered and booed by West German workers. Despite good economic conditions in West Germany there is poverty and unemployment there. People tend to gloss over that. The East German people have emblazoned in their memory the history of the war and the Fascism which was brought about by the crisis of capitalism after the first world war. Emblazoned in their memories too is the crushing of the working class throughout Germany by the Fascist regime.

We applaud the free movement of people. We have plenty of facts, figures and statistics. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) referred to the 18,000 East Germans who are settling in Bremen. Although 3 million to 4 million people are travelling backwards and forwards between East and West Germany, very few of them are staying in West Germany.

I am the first to admit that, for many East Germans, the GDR is a prison of sorts. The wall is a symbol of that prison, despite the tremendous gains that have been made in health, welfare, education and other areas of life. The movements to West Germany are merely an expression of throwing off the shackles now the wall has been opened. East Germans are not in any way beguiled by capitalism in West Germany. It is bit like a child finding the garden gate open and wanting to go through, but quickly returning when it knows which side its bread is buttered on. They are not taken in by the West Berlin propaganda.

**Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe):** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Fields:** I will not give way, because other Opposition Members want to speak.

Most East Germans say, "Do not go. Stay and fight to reform our country." Reunification is not on their agenda, certainly not on a capitalist basis, although possibly on a Socialist basis as part of the Socialist transformation of the world.

Events in Poland underline the movements in eastern Europe. Jaruzelski has said that the Solidarity of today is very different from the Solidarity of 1981, when its aim was to defend the living standards of workers and have worker control of management. Unfortunately, that 1981 revolution was not completed but was overthrown by suppression. It did not come to terms with what was necessary to achieve proper democracy and, consequently, there was a setback.

With today's Solidarity, we have pontification from the intellectuals and the professional people about going a



little further. We need look no further than comrade Walesa who, on a recent visit to the United States, said to American business men:

"We seek buyers for 80 per cent. of the Polish economy." Is that in the best interests of the working class of Poland? Walesa said that the businesses could not find buyers in Poland because Poland was too poor. He told the business men:

"You can make millions and billions of dollars". Even the *Financial Times* was moved to contrast the atmosphere of militancy in the American Federation of Labour/Congress of Industrial Organisations—which is not noted for being militant but was reflecting the mood of American workers—and Walesa's appeal to the United States for capital.

Another feature of Poland is seen in the current position of a former dissident who is now Minister of Labour. He is now working to suppress the development of the workers' struggle. He said:

"For a long time people couldn't strike, so someone has to strike for them. That's what I did. I used to co-operate with strikes. Now I have to extinguish them."

That speaks volumes for what Solidarity and some of its leaders have become.

A contradiction has arisen because of the crisis and the direction that Solidarity has taken. Walesa has said:

"The system has cornered us in a cul-de-sac and I don't know whether we will save ourselves from civil war."

Taking power and obtaining freedom and a form of democracy do not obviate the crisis within the system. Walesa said:

"If the government forget about society—there will be a clash and I will be on society's side."

At the same time, he is trying to sell off Polish industry to the Americans. He said:

"I'm helping the government. I wish it well. But I must not forget where I hail from."

That contradiction shows the dichotomy in eastern Europe. The bottom line is what the younger generation of workers in the eastern bloc are talking about. A young leader of Solidarity has criticised Walesa's support for the government leader, saying:

"We are a trade union. Our leadership should be Unionist. We are too close to the government, too entangled. Our interests are entirely different. Government is an employer in this country."

We applaud the striving towards democracy, but what does democracy mean? What does it mean in the Third world? We have heard that two thirds of the world's population suffers from starvation and poverty, resulting in death. What is democracy in South Africa for millions of workers? What is it in Chile, where tens of thousands of workers have been trampled underfoot in the name of democracy? What is it in south and central America where united imperialism is interfering with it? What is democracy under capitalism in Africa? What is democracy worth in Britain for millions of workers and the unemployed, the sick, the people who cannot get into hospitals, the 10,000 pensioners who will die this year and the young who have no future except YTS?

The people in eastern Europe are not soft. They can read and understand politics. They understand economics, unlike Conservative Members. Those people see clearly the crisis within capitalism in Britain and internationally. They looked at the blip—such as it was—last October and they understand what is going on. They see the warning signs, and they may listen to the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the Dispatch Box warning of inflation rising

next year and of a recession in the British economy. They understand what is happening in America and throughout the western economy. Do you think, Madam Deputy Speaker, that they will grasp that nettle when they realise that there is an international crisis of capitalism? To what conclusions will they come?

The want to link up the workers' struggles internationally. While Mr. Walesa is selling off half of Poland in America, it is little wonder that the AFL/CIO is moving to a more radical phase. In May I was in New York at the founding conference at which trade unionists were forming a party of labour to challenge the parties of capital in the United States. They were proceeding not on the basis of privatisation and a free market, but with a programme of Socialism which will be an attraction to workers in eastern Europe.

The crisis in eastern Europe has nothing to do with Socialism or Communism; it is a crisis of the bureaucracy which has stifled the tremendous gains made in 1917. All went well under the plan until about 10 years ago, but now there is a sclerosis in Russian society. The Russians have spent the reserves that they gained previously and the economy is grinding to a halt. Those are the crimes of the bureaucracy.

The bureaucracy is not merely a handful of people at the top. The bureaucracy is not merely Mr. Gorbachev and one or two more in the Politburo. It is a vast, monolithic body made up of 20 million bureaucrats. It is a party nomenclature which has decisive control of every aspect of life, including the economy, families, children and lifestyles. It is a self-perpetuating elite which is depriving the working class of control. Mr. Gorbachev had to move and then reform the bureaucracy because of the pressure from below, but changing a few chairs around and changing the people on those chairs will not change what is happening. Since glasnost, there have been bigger shortages and democratic steps do not put food in people's bellies or build houses for those in dire need.

The slogans of the workers and the demonstrations of eastern Europe are clear. They are saying not that they want capitalism, but that they want to build Socialism, that there should be medicine for all and not only for the few, and that they should get the millions back from the Mafia and return them to the people. They call for power to the people and power to the Soviets. They remind us that the system of reserved seats for the party should be abolished.

The miners are currently struggling in Vorkuta and elsewhere. One of them, talking about perestroika, said

"The Government wants to operate Perestroika from above; we're doing it from below. Perestroika is going too slowly and things are getting worse."

Indeed, they are. Previously there was fear of repression, but that is dissolving. The miner went on to say that it is not so much a matter of being afraid, but that they have been

"taught for so long to wait and be patient. They could see we were patient. We believed in the 'brighter future' under Stalin, under Khrushchev, under Brezhnev. That's what we were looking forward to. Now people's psychology is that they are going to create Soviet power themselves."

That is a clear sign that those people do not want to return to capitalism or feudalism.

The conditions in Russia and eastern Europe have been described in other speeches today. The irony is that the Prime Minister especially applauds the workers' struggles in eastern Europe and, incidentally, the Vorkuta miners'



[Mr. Fields]

strike, which is illegal. If workers struck illegally in this country, the courts would be used against them. Despite the fines of £1,000 a head for the Vorkuta miners, the strikes are going ahead and, despite intimidation, workers are in struggle.

It is not surprising that such events should occur in Vorkuta. In 1938, the last remnants of the Left opposition who fought to defend workers' democracy were obliterated at Vorkuta by Stalin's agents. A striking miner's badge at Vorkuta says:

"The spirit of the fight against Stalin lives on in the miners."

When the coincidence of the Vorkuta strike and the Left opposition was pointed out, a striking miner in Donets strike committee said that that was the reason why he and his colleagues were so militant. The traditions and history of working class struggle are indelibly burnt in the memory of those workers and of British workers. Those whose relations participated in working-class struggle should remember that. Eventually British workers will have their say.

In the past, miners have been shot or put into psychiatric hospitals for striking. Now they are fearless of the bureaucracy and their independent organisations are springing up. We in the Labour movement have a duty to support the struggles and establish direct links with workers in other countries. I am proud and privileged to have done that and that messages from the British trade union movement have been read out in Lenin square and circulated among the masses in eastern Europe. Demands are being made for freedom, free expression, freedom of organisation and free speech and we must assist the workers in that.

When I was researching my speech for this debate I came across two statements made by Trotsky, to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North referred. Trotsky was a comrade in arms of Lenin at the head of the Russian revolution in 1917. He said:

"The vengeance of history is more terrible than the vengeance of the most powerful General Secretary."

When we see heads rolling in eastern Europe we realise how apposite Trotsky's words were. They were an indictment of Stalinism. More prophetically, he added:

"Crowds will fill the arena. They decide, they act, they legislate in their own unprecedented way."

The struggle is a continual challenge to the rule of the bureaucracy. The international working class has a duty and responsibility not only to support workers in eastern Europe but to join in the struggle against Stalinism in the East and capitalism in the West. The only genuine guarantee of peaceful co-existence and prosperity for all workers, not only in Germany but in all nations across the globe, lies under the umbrella of democratic Socialism.

I am proud to have participated in today's debate. Although my comments will not influence Conservative Members, I say clearly to the workers in eastern Europe, "We stand four square with you, we salute your struggle, and we look forward to the day when we shall live together under the umbrella of Socialism."

1.32 pm

**Mr. David Nicholson** (Taunton): I shall not follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) in his rewriting of history in the interests of Leon Trotsky. I

felt for the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) when the hon. Member for Broadgreen expressed solidarity with him but in view of the vexatious remarks of the hon. Member for Hamilton earlier, perhaps he deserved it.

It is a pleasure for me to take part in my first foreign affairs debate. I have three reasons for being particularly interested in this subject. First, my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) referred to the Great Britain—East Europe centre. I support my hon. Friend in his call for more funds for that centre because there is so much for it to do at present. Under the auspices of the centre, I was host to Hungarian democrats and Polish Solidarity Members of Parliament in my constituency. As part of a process that is taking place partly in Westminster and partly in local constituencies we trained them—although that is not the best word to describe it—in the practice of democracy. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) said that Poland and Hungary need to move on to local government elections. I was pleased to introduce the Polish Members of Parliament to the mayor and the chief executive of my local authority. They discussed the mechanism of holding local government elections.

The second reason why I am pleased to take part in the debate is that shortly before the last election I visited East Germany with several of my colleagues who are now my hon. Friends. I pay tribute to the role of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in the Federal Republic of Germany which has done much not only to bring together like-minded parliamentarians of western Europe but more recently to put such parliamentarians in touch with democrats in the Parliaments of Poland and other countries. We noticed the tremendous backwardness, the dreadful transport system and the limited supplies and choice of food in the shops in East Germany. Our guide in Dresden, who was not a Communist, to whom we warmed, and with whom we established a good relationship, was born, prematurely, I think, a few hours after that dreadful RAF bombing raid on Dresden in early 1945. There are lessons in that for the peoples of Europe to seek peace and to work together.

The third reason is that I am a part-time historian. I must apologise to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) who is right that Barbarossa was June, not May, 1941. I edited the diaries of Leo Amery, father of my right hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery), who cannot be here this morning. The House will know that my right hon. Friend was in Albania at the end of the war when the Communists were taking it over. Alas, Albania does not yet feature on the list of countries moving towards democracy. Leo Amery's interest in central Europe and the Balkans stems from the fact that his mother was an early Hungarian refugee. She was driven from Hungary in 1849 after an earlier Russian invasion.

I should like to give a warning about recent developments. My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry is right that our fears and warnings should not stop us hoping for and working towards a better world. But in 1848, the whole of Europe outside Russia had revolutions and by 1849 most had been suppressed. It was back to the ancient regime for most countries. We see the dangers particularly in Poland where the democrats may fail and in Russia where the Baltic states, Georgia and other sections



may break apart and the Red Army may clamp down with fearful consequences. That is why we must keep up our guard while hoping for a better world.

I pay tribute to the BBC which broadcast that dramatic report by Charles Wheeler two weeks ago. We have heard of the bravery of the people who are bringing the changes about. The crowd was gathered in the central square in Georgia and the Patriarch appealed to them to leave the square and go into the church because of an impending clamp down. The crowd shouted back, "No" and stood in silence. A few minutes later the tanks rolled in. Troops and others with weapons, including forms of drugs, moved in and we know of the dreadful consequences. Happily, those responsible for those dreadful events were removed from power in the Soviet Union and we must pay tribute to Mr. Gorbachev for that.

My second warning echoes what has already been said today: we do not want a return to Balkanisation. My hon. Friend the Minister said that in the two or three years before those countries were swallowed up, first in Nazi and then in Communist tyranny, they did not show any great fraternity towards each other. The Poles and Hungarians took slices of Czechoslovakia and the Hungarians and Bulgarians took slices of Romania. The borders of eastern Europe and the Balkans have no great certainty or legitimacy. My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry mentioned that in the context of German borders, and his point is well taken.

Even during the war, Leo Amery was working with Czech and Polish exiles to get them to work together for a better world after the war. Alas, they were not to have that opportunity.

Thirdly, there is a German proverb which runs, "Mann ist was er isst"—man is what he eats. That is a rather materialistic view of the world, but if Bismarck returned to us today he would say that Parliaments, constitutions and speeches are no good unless the people can be fed. That need was well expressed by my right hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, South and for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), who spoke of ensuring this winter that the Poles can feed themselves and put their agriculture and transport systems into some order.

Fourthly, I commend the work of the British Council and the world service, and of the churches in the West. The churches have been responsible for much of what has happened in eastern Europe. The Roman Catholic church in Poland and Czechoslovakia and the Protestant churches in East Germany have made themselves the focus for resistance and liberalisation.

Finally, I come to the role of the European Community. I remember the great debate in this country over entry into it in 1971, when my old friend, the much respected and late Member, Sir John Biggs Davison, told me that we must get our ideals right about entry into the EC. The Common Market, he said, is rather like taking in each other's washing machines—I suppose they could do with a few of those in eastern Europe. To many people in Britain the EC is either about taking in each other's washing machines or about the social dimension—the doling out of substantial sums, or the more sinister and controversial social charter.

The developments in eastern Europe offer tremendous scope for developing the Community as a sort of commonwealth of nations in Europe. This country has

done much to develop that idea. I hope that the European Community can rise to these challenges, and that Britain can, too.

Solzhenitsyn summed it up so well. Years ago he made the point that one day in eastern Europe the grass would begin to break out through the concrete, and that is what is happening. The grip of the Red Army, the Communist party and the secret police is loosening and freedom is breaking through the concrete. We must be on our guard, but we should welcome these developments. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister, whose diplomacy, together with that of the Foreign Secretary, has so large a part to play, to continue his work of bringing about a better future for all the people of Europe.

1.42 pm

**Mr. Bruce George** (Walsall, South): I apologise for not having heard the earlier part of the debate, for which the blame is exclusively attributable to British Rail—the 6.48 from Birmingham arrived at 10.15. I shall not go into that now, but when we eulogise our system and deprecate that of eastern Europe perhaps we should retain a degree of modesty and caution.

Nineteen eighty-nine has been a remarkable year and not only a year of anniversaries. It will be come to be seen as epochal in its own right. Most of its events have been positive, but we must not be too euphoric—there have been some disasters of which the world should not be proud.

Superpower detente has returned; the super-power leaders apparently even like each other. NATO has been getting its act together more—for instance, at the Brussels summit in May. There have been remarkable developments in western Europe and probably some redefinition of the relationship between the United States and its NATO allies.

We have witnessed the collapse of Stalinism and the redrawing of boundaries in Europe. I hope that we have seen the emergence of new and more secure borders there. I suppose that the timing of today's debate, coinciding as it does with the floating summit at Marasaxlokk off Malta, provides us with an opportunity to reflect on what has happened and to gaze into the crystal ball.

Many hon. Members have recently been to eastern Europe and there is a danger, into which I shall not fall, of seeing it from the perspective of those who have recently discovered it. If my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) had not shot off, I would have told him that I believe that it is an incredible impertinence for anyone to offer advice to Lech Walesa, one of the heroes of the 20th century, about what should be happening in Poland. I much prefer Lech Walesa's perspective of what to do for the future of Poland as seen from Gdansk than the perspective seen from Liverpool, Broadgreen. While I do not reflect official party policy in every sense, I am pleased to say that neither does my hon. Friend the Member for Broadgreen.

The situation in eastern Europe is confusing, and I am even more confused having heard my hon. Friend the Member for Broadgreen. Had he made his speech in any eastern European legislature over the past six months, he would not have received the silent opposition that he experienced in this House.

We are all aware that eastern and central Europe has had a sad, tragic and violent history. We have often seen



[Mr. Bruce George]

eastern and central Europe as faraway lands about which we know or care little. That indifference has been punctuated by extreme concern at times of crisis. Very few western Governments have even had a policy towards eastern Europe. The worst thing we have done is to ignore eastern Europe and to consider it as a mere clone of the Soviet Union. We seem to think that whatever happens in the Soviet Union is replicated in eastern Europe because that is where the Red Army is and where the Soviet Union has bequeathed its military, political, economic and social institutions. It was never quite like that. Some eastern European leaders tried within the parameters available in the Warsaw pact to encourage a degree of independence, if not autonomy, in Hungary and, to a lesser extent, in Poland.

The Soviet Union has historically seen eastern Europe as a colony. Those are countries in which the Soviet Union dumps its military products and substandard economic products. Those are countries which the Soviet Union can suck dry of their raw materials although I must admit that the drain on the Soviet Union in more recent years has, to a certain extent, overridden its earlier period of advantage over the eastern European countries. The Soviet Union sees eastern Europe as a cordon sanitaire and as an area from which it can gain surrogates to operate throughout the globe on its behalf. The Soviets see it as a territory which can best be described as the Soviet's means of forward defence.

All that is changing. Indifference has been replaced by deep concern. Nations that were exploited, subjugated, occupied, partitioned and ignored now occupy the centre of the stage. It must be more than a fad and more than people saying that they have been to several countries and we should do this or that and then tomorrow's issues might replace today's concerns.

We are all aware of the incredible transformations that have occurred. A few weeks ago, I chaired a session of the North Atlantic Assembly. On one side of me sat the assistant secretary-general of NATO and on the other sat General Lobov, the chief of staff of the Warsaw pact. If anyone had told me three months before that that might happen, I would have dismissed him as a lunatic or a romantic. We are all aware of mind-boggling events. No doubt there will be more.

We failed eastern Europe by not appreciating its diversity. We did not appreciate the fact that those countries have long histories of independence and, to a certain extent, democratic traditions. As has been said, we must be cautious. Totalitarianism embodies a single mass party, a revolutionary ideology, control of the media and of the armed forces and the use of terror. However, despite that, the model of totalitarianism as applied in the Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, in eastern Europe, could not eliminate the spirit or strength of institutions, nationalism and of the Church. In that respect, I must refer once more to the church of father Popieluszko—people who had been subjected to totalitarian ideology from the late 1940s.

With the president of the North Atlantic Assembly, I went to the town of Zagorsk, headquarters of the Russian Orthodox Church. I asked one of the priests, "How do you relate to the Communist party? How intimidated have you been?" He said, "You must remember that we recently celebrated our millenium. The Communist party came to

office in 1917. See things in that perspective. We will be around for many centuries after the passing of this type of regime."

I freely confess that, when I went to Czechoslovakia in the spring, I could see little sign of any mass movement. Oh yes, one met people from Charter '77 and one heard of the Jazz Section of the musicians' union and the exotic Plastic Children of the Universe, but nothing else. We did not know because we are guilty of making a swift analysis and then disappearing, but, under the surface was a mass movement which has now emerged. In Bulgaria, there is even less sign of any opposition to Communism, but it is now bursting forth. We should reflect upon how we have misjudged events in the Soviet Union and in eastern Europe.

There may be a Poszgay in Hungary, and there may be a Solidarity Government in Poland, but one must remember and offer some cautionary advice if they are prepared to take it. The Communist party is an uneasy coalition party. One has only to look at the history of the late 1940s to see how Communist parties in coalition with non-Communist parties ended up. Graveyards are filled with those who learnt the lesson too late and to their cost. Although I would pin my faith on Poszgay as a genuine democrat and on the Solidarity Government, we need a little more time to reflect on whether the Krenzes or the Mvladenovs of this world are genuinely democratic or whether they are simply following the words of Lenin—take one step backwards and two steps forward.

In the *The Independent* today, Rupert Cornwell referred to President Gorbachev meeting President Bush. He said that no Soviet leader has gone to a summit in such a degree of weakness. He reflected on the comparison with the Treaty of Brest Litovsk. From my reading of history, I remember that for the Bolshevik Government, it was a deliberate tactical retreat. I should want to be certain about whether what is happening in the Soviet Union is a tactical adjustment, a genuine conviction that the world is changing, or just a breathing space for the Soviet Union. Six months ago, I would have said that with even greater conviction. I am now much more open-minded. Perhaps we have made mistakes. Perhaps developments in the Soviet Union will show that the economic, political and military system that was inflicted upon the Soviet Union will be but history.

We must get our act together and get a better, coherent multilateral policy within NATO and the EEC on eastern and central Europe so that we can act together politically and economically and in terms of security. We must be positive and adventurous but not reckless. As many people have said, we are not yet certain whether the reforms are reversible.

We should not seek too eagerly to capitalise on the misfortunes of the Soviet Union. That would not be in our interests. We should not at this stage or in future expect countries such as Hungary or Poland to extricate themselves from the Warsaw pact. Whatever the defects of the alliance system today it must survive to bring a degree of order and coherence in the dangerous period that lies ahead. It is in our interests that the current structure of alliances survives. We should not tamper with alliances. We should encourage them and sustain them financially and economically and also offer advice. We have heard much of the Government's "know-how" scheme. A few weeks ago, I participated in the scheme in my town by taking two Polish MPs, one Communist, one Solidarity.



The local chamber of commerce has offered to send a team of its specialist to both of the constituencies in a couple of months in order to stimulate enterprise because they are almost totally lacking in that skill.

We should relax the rules on the co-ordinating committee of western nations on technology transfer, but we must remember that we need more of a track record from the Soviet Union before we agree to transfer highly sensitive technology that might be used for military purposes. A great deal of information should be exchanged on environmental matters, and the arms control process must be sustained. I have not yet talked to the Whips about it, but I am off to Vienna on Sunday as part of a North Atlantic Assembly monitoring operation to look at the confidence building talks and the conventional arms control negotiations.

We are living in exciting times and must take advantage of them. We must be prudent while not treating politics in the way that Geoff Boycott would treat his batting. Perhaps we should take chances but we remember that, ultimately, Governments are responsible for national security and should move at a pace that is consistent with that. The United States must remain part of the security equation in western Europe and we expect the Soviet Union to remain an integral part of that too.

When President Gorbachev talked two years ago of a common European home, he could not have imagined that the home which would emerge would be one of more democratic states. Countries within his military orbit have shown a disdain for the system within which they were compelled to operate. I am not good at crystal ball gazing, but I can foresee more and more nations seeking to join the European Community. I am not among the Community's most devoted adherents, but I strongly suspect that in future the Community will be greatly enlarged. That will be not only to our economic advantage but to our political and security advantage.

**Mr. Hugo Summerson** (Walthamstow): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You protect the rights of Back Benchers. At least half a dozen hon. Members who wanted to speak have not been called in the debate. We have constituents in the same way as those who have spoken have constituents. With the coming of the cameras more and more pressure is put on hon. Members to speak. People say to me, "We have not seen you on telly. When will we see you?" Surely the time has come to place more time limits on speeches when it is clear that many hon. Members wish to speak in a debate. The present system causes great resentment among hon. Members who have taken the time and trouble to prepare speeches and to be here but are not called.

**Madam Deputy Speaker** (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I regret the fact that a number of hon. Members have been in the Chamber the whole morning wishing to speak. As the hon. Gentleman is probably aware, Mr. Speaker used the Standing Order under which he has authority to limit speeches between 11.30 and 1 o'clock. That is the only Standing Order that Mr. Speaker could employ this morning and he did that in order to get as many Back Benchers as possible into the debate. I assure the hon. Gentleman that if he looks at my list he will see that most hon. Members who were called spoke for between nine and 10 minutes.

1.58 pm

**Mr. Donald Anderson** (Swansea, East): The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) has now achieved his wish and his good constituents will at least know that he is here.

This is a timely debate because it is being held on the eve of the summits in Malta and Strasbourg. It has also been a high-quality debate. It was started by the Minister from Olympian heights describing the moral decay of the whole Communist system. We have heard the visionary views of my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) who followed. We have had political insights from Liverpool and have listened to the experiences of many hon. Members who spoke about their sense of wonder at the scale and pace of what has been happening in central and eastern Europe.

Effectively, the foundations of the political and economic system established at the end of the second world war are now shaking. As the historians among us have pointed out, the crust of Communism imposed on the countries of central and eastern Europe by the limits of the advance of the Soviet tanks at the end of the second world war has dissolved. Underneath that crust is a thousand years of history with all the advantages, challenges and fears that derive from that, including the danger of nationalism, not only within central European states but within the Soviet empire itself, and the destabilisation that might follow if the process is not handled with care.

One needs a sense of history to understand the nature of the changes. Each of the countries of central Europe must be treated in terms of its own history. There is no monolith in central Europe. I noted that fact a few weeks ago when I was with a distinguished dissident from Czechoslovakia. He said that the engine of change in Poland has been the Church, that the engine of change in Hungary has been the Hungarian Socialist Workers party—it has now changed its name—and that perhaps the engine of change in East Germany was the information revolution which meant that people could readily see what was happening across the border. The human exchanges between that divided country also acted as a mechanism for change. He bewailed the fact, however, that there was no similar engine for change in Czechoslovakia. He said, "Alas, we are but small coterie of intellectuals who have no real chance of effecting change." Those small coterie of intellectuals have now been borne aloft by people power and we welcome that. We also welcome what is happening in Bulgaria, which has a special relationship with the Soviet Union because, in the previous century, the Russians liberated that country from the hordes of the East, the Turks—

**Mr. George:** The Ottomans.

**Mr. Anderson:** Well the Turks or the Ottomans, I listen to my hon. Friend on this.

We must be ready with our feet on the ground to address the challenges of the new system. We must accept, for example, that there will be profound changes towards conventional and nuclear disarmament. Despite what the Prime Minister preached during her recent visit to Washington, there must be serious question marks over the reasoning behind the short-range tactical nuclear weapons in the light of the changes taking place in central Europe. Those changes were underlined by the United States' Secretary for Defence, Mr. Dick Cheney.



[Mr. Anderson]

Ultimately, when the mists clear, there will be a new European security system and with it will emerge a new concert of Europe. At its core will be the current European Community with various constellations of countries in different forms of association with it.

I take issue with the Minister on his description of scaffolding now being built. The word scaffolding assumes that there is a blueprint and that a structure already exists. At this stage the view through the glass is dark and it is impossible to see the shape of the new Europe, either in terms of defence or politics. One should not too easily try to apply the analogy of scaffolding to structures that are not yet properly in place. The flight from the current position to what will be is exciting, but there will be substantial turbulence on the way.

We all have our own personal reactions and memories of what has happened. In the early 60s I lived for some years as a diplomat in Hungary and it was a joy for me this March to see the silent and dignified march of the people on their own national day.

We think of what president Gorbachev said when he talked of the common European home. Cynics could ask, "How can you possibly have a common European home with a wall through the front room?" That wall has gone and the concept of a common European home has become more plausible. However, we must ensure that there is at least a guest room for the United States in that common European home.

A feature of the current summit is that the superpowers will be unable to make decisions vitally affecting the interests of Europe and its component parts without reference to Europe. Gone are the days of the 1960s and the Glassborough summit or even the recent Helsinki summit when decisions that vitally affected Europe's security interests were taken above our heads. Now Europe is, and will increasingly be, a key player on the stage.

I shall sound a couple of cautionary notes. We should not be too heady or have too great expectations about the interim period. It may well be that for the immediate years we shall see increasing shortages and unemployment, as the subsidies are removed, and an increasing drain of skilled manpower from central and eastern Europe to the West. We should not be too light-headed about the depth of democracy in central and eastern Europe. Apart from the Czechoslovakia of Masaryk, the history of central Europe in the inter-war years and immediate post war years was that of autocracy, however benign—one thinks also of the Weimar republic. Therefore, the democratic roots do not go so deep and will have to be carefully watered and nurtured.

Western Europe must respond sensitively to the challenges which have been raised. So much of what we see is interlinked. For example, if we think of East and West Berlin, it is inconceivable in the new circumstances that, as one Conservative Member mentioned, the two currencies can co-exist now that the wall is down and there will be commuters who live in east Berlin and work in the West.

In the worst scenario, the very problems that forced East Germany in the past to erect the German wall—the movement of skilled personnel across the wall and the damage to the economy which resulted—will arise. It is difficult to envisage going back to anything within the

Germanies of the sort which led to the wall's erection. The scenario must be of increasing co-operation between the two Germanies, ultimately ending in who knows what.

At the moment, Germany is not on the agenda, Europe is. However, as the European picture clarifies, so the German picture will clarify. If we truly believe in self-determination we cannot stand in the way of self-determination on the basis of free elections in the two parts of Germany. That must be our position in relation to German reunification.

There was substantial consensus in our debate. The issues on which there was no consensus included the references to the Prime Minister. Had the Prime Minister at Washington and elsewhere spoken in the tones and substance used by the Minister today, the Opposition would not have raised any objections. The Minister avoided the stridency and ideological baggage which made the Prime Minister sound, as *The Sunday Times* correspondent said, so much

"like a figure from the past"  
in Washington.

I have already touched on the German question, which leads to the third area of difference—the relevance of what is happening in central Europe to integration within the Community. We have to be very sensitive and careful because we must show no sign that we are using the developments in central and eastern Europe as an excuse for slowing the process of integration in western Europe. It might be argued that the degree of integration within the European Community is part of the attraction for those in central and eastern Europe.

**Mr. Shore:** Does my hon. Friend agree that it is equally important that developments in eastern Europe should not be used as an excuse for accelerating in a reckless way the process of integration in western Europe?

**Mr. Anderson:** I accept that we have to consider the situation as Europeans, certainly not only *sub specie aeternitatis*, but in the light of fairly recent history. We have to work on the basis that frontiers and alliances are not immutable.

Finally, we have to invest in democracy. Right hon. and hon. Members particularly the right hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) have mentioned what should be done in the short term because of the immediate food crisis in Poland. Equally, we have to use our influence on longer-term aid with the IMF, the World Bank, and the Group of Seven and of course the European Community. We must mobilise our private sector in terms of joint ventures. We welcome the CBI initiative drawing on the know-how scheme for training middle management from those countries which have not had relevant experience of it in the past.

Institutionally, there have been developments in the Council of Europe, which has a much more extensive role to play in the current context as a bridge between East and West. I was recently in Austria where one can see the evolution of the old concept of Mitteleuropa with Vienna as the traditional capital. Other important areas include English language teaching, student exchanges, visa formalities and all the points which were set out with such foresight in the Select Committee report which my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) played a part in producing.

The landscape is changing rapidly. If we are adequately to respond to that we need historical insight. Now we see



but darkly what is evolving, but it is clear that the European Community will be the core of the new Europe with constellations of countries around it. It is a time of hope for which we need to pay a great debt of thanks to Mr. Gorbachev. Let us stretch out that hand of friendship and help to the countries of eastern Europe at this historic time of hope.

2.13 pm

**Mr. Waldegrave:** It is a pleasure to follow the speech of the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) who struck the note that the House wished to hear from the Opposition Front Bench perhaps a little better than the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) who spent most of his speech attacking the Prime Minister. History will answer the Prime Minister's critics. The period of response, strength and solidarity in the West led to the departure from the Brezhnevite regime of any hope of being able to compete through confrontation with the West, and the part that the Prime Minister and President Reagan played in that will be shown by history to be very important.

The hon. Member for Hamilton said that the Prime Minister was cautious, but the best answers to that were given by the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) and the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). We must be careful to ensure that we keep the alliances. When the Prime Minister talked about the dangers of the ice flow breaking, she meant not that she did not want it to break but that large chunks of ice in the river can be a danger to shipping, and that is no more or less than the truth.

So many good speeches have been made that I should run out of time mentioning them one by one. I must mention the speech made by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney, who spotted the fundamental importance of acceptance by the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact of the removal of asymmetries. Once that doctrine is established, there will be hope for a movement to true defensive alliances that do no more than secure our genuine security needs at a sensible minimum. The right hon. Gentleman was right about that, as was my hon. friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell), who made an excellent speech.

I say to the hon. Members for Hamilton, for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) and my hon. Friend the Member for Corby, who raised the subject of short-range nuclear weapons, that under the comprehensive concept there is a framework for dealing with the next stages of the negotiations. At a time when we are not seeking to disrupt alliances, we should not seek to overturn the agreement that was unanimously reached in NATO. We should use it for the next stages of the negotiations.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) interestingly spoke of the dangers and the promise of the right and wrong kinds of nationalism. We do not yet know whether the right kinds of nationalism will follow. The hon. Member for Walsall, South and my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) powerfully said that we do not yet know for sure what the outcome will be in the Soviet Union, which is why we must maintain our insurance. That is no more than prudence. As the hon. Member for Walsall, South said, the co-ordinating committee controlling East-West trade is

one element of that insurance. We do not know yet whether it is entirely safe to take down that part of our defences against the transfer of military technologies.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence), my hon. Friends the Members for Ruislip-Norwood (Mr. Wilkinson) and for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) said that although we immensely welcome the changes, at this stage we can only applaud what looks like a great turning point in history. As yet, we are not clearly into the new world. The changes in some of the countries that we have been debating, such as Bulgaria and the German Democratic Republic, are immensely welcome, but we are not yet in the new world. I suspect that Mr. Krenz will not be the answer in the GDR, and the Bulgarians are still talking about a more polite face for its regime rather than returning to its people the right to decide what regime they want to live under. Therefore, we have a duty to maintain the structure that has seen us through until now, particularly as it is not difficult to see how it can be adapted to manage peace, as it once prevented confrontation. The caution mingled with pleasure that we heard from many hon. Members is the right response.

We rightly heard much about how the newly emerging democracies should be associated with the other institutions of Europe. I spoke of the Council of Europe, and in a recent intervention the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney argued that we in the European Community should not be too inflexible. We should try to keep open different tailor-made associations, which I think was the phrase that the right hon. Gentleman used. That is exactly right, because one can imagine a variety of different patterns of association with the Community, with the European Free Trade Association and other institutions of Europe that will suit the traditions of particular countries.

I think that the hon. Member for Walsall, South was the only hon. Member who mentioned that we should not underestimate the diversity of traditions in eastern Europe. We are not talking about a monolith, although it may have looked like one because the countries were forced into a monolithic shape from the outside. Historically their traditions are more complex.

The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney was the first to introduce the subject of Germany, and other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Corby and the hon. Member for Hamilton also mentioned it. I think that they welcomed the tone of my statement about Chancellor Kohl's speech. We all know that reunification is a subject that has many reverberations, particularly among the older generation in Poland, France and Britain—and why not?

Surely, the Chancellor was attempting to sketch out the type of institutions which might be required to make a reality of the Adenauer doctrine of freedom first, and that conjunction of the two Germanies could take place only in a new Europe. We have all assented to that doctrine for 30 years or more.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine)—the Father of the House—made an impassioned plea, as he has done to me privately, about Poland and food aid, and many right hon. and hon. Members have joined with him. My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), the hon. Member for



[Mr. Waldegrave]

Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber and my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South also mentioned aid to Hungary.

I assure right hon. and hon. Members that the urgency of the situation is understood. Some \$114 million in food aid has already been sent by the European Community—that is a lot of food, and involves a lot of transport and organisation. Another \$45 million worth is coming from another group of 24 member countries and I am happy to say that further food aid is being urgently considered by the Commission.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Corby said, distribution is a considerable problem and we shall be doing well if we concentrate on how to get distribution better with some of our bilateral funds.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South made an interesting remark when he mentioned that Lech Walesa had told him that the problem was not to bring food from outside but to get it out of the barns and warehouses on the farms in Poland. What is the cause of that? It is only natural, because the farmers do not trust the currency, and that is a classic symptom of a country or a system which has inflation and the fear of greater inflation. People hoard goods, as they did in Germany during the great inflation of the old days. How can we deal with that? In the short term we have to send food, in the medium term we have to help the Poles develop a real currency. That is why we have put so much emphasis on our support for their stabilisation fund, which is an essential part of their financial package and is aimed at reforming the currency.

If people trust the currency they will put goods into the market, rather than doing deals on the black market and hoarding, which are the problems at the moment. That is why we have put a \$100,000 subscription into the billion dollar Polish currency stabilisation fund.

No right hon. or hon. Member mentioned the importance of opening up trade access to the Community, and nor did I so I too am guilty. I am happy to say that this week a raft of quantity and other restrictions on trade from Poland and Hungary were abolished, and more will follow for other eastern European countries as they move forward with their reforms.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) was fair enough to pay tribute to the role of the churches and so did my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) and the hon. Member for Walsall, South. They mentioned the Catholic Church in Poland and Czechoslovakia, and the Protestant Church in Germany. It was moving to see that great old man, Cardinal Tomisek, playing a crucial role when he used just the right words at the right time to bridge the gap and to help a movement which was essentially an intellectual movement among the intelligensia, as the hon. Member for Swansea, East rightly pointed out spread to the mass of people. His role in that was exceedingly important. It is funny now to think of Stalin's old saying, "How many divisions has the Pope?" He had too many for the Stalinists, that is sure.

We have heard some moving speeches, one in particular to which I must pay tribute, about the relationship of all these changes to democratic Socialism. It is not for Conservative Members to enter these matters as experts, but we must always know who our real opponents are and

who is linked to us by enough commitment and belief in the institutions of democracy. We must always know that there is a real bond between us although we argue passionately about the outcome of elections, the right economic policy and the rest.

There is no question in my mind about the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton, (Mr. Heffer), though I find very little to agree with in his view about how to run an economy. I have listened to him making passionate speeches against my party on many occasions, but I can assure my right hon. and hon. Friends, who I know will agree with me, that we know which side of the barricades he would have been on in 1968, and it would not have been with the Russian tanks—but he might have been explaining to the chap next door to him, who thought that he was fighting for capitalism, that he was very wrong-headed to do so. The hon. Gentleman would nevertheless have been beside him and standing up for freedom.

Rather more eccentric were a couple of other speeches we heard. When I was in Cracow recently, I was told—teased, rather—by the rector of the university there that we have more Communists in our universities than they do in Poland. It is clear that we have more Trotskyites in our Parliament than they do in Poland or elsewhere in eastern Europe. It is wonderful to hear the argument between the Trotskyites and the Stalinites. It is like hearing the man arguing against someone who says that the earth is flat. The Trotskyite proves marvellously that the earth is not flat at all. Not at all, it is clearly a large cheese floating in a bowl of stewed prunes. It is really wonderful to listen to the lunacy of it all.

I remember somebody once describing the events of 1917 in the Soviet Union as rather like a revolution started by Shirley Williams and taken over by the Kray brothers. I am not entirely sure that if, to make a remark in very poor taste, the ice-pick had been on the other foot, Trotsky's world would have been any more pleasant than that of his old mates who did him in.

We were on the wrong track today. My old job in the Department of the Environment was involved. It is for English Heritage to put a preservation order on such hon. Members. Soon there will be no such people anywhere. The poor hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields), who puts the workers' struggle as his sole special interest, will have to retire to his hobby, which is winemaking—a good hobby—and that will be the end of that. Meanwhile, it is a pleasure of a certain antiquarian kind to listen to these dinosaurs trundling about.

I read recently a clever and intelligent article written by a grand American academic who works for the Rand Corporation and the State Department—one cannot get much grander than that. He proved by logic that history had ended—that it was all over. At this very moment in the committee rooms of whatever the University Grants Committee is now called, I can imagine historians getting together in desperation in view of that thesis. What he meant by the article, which is worth reading, is not that history is over. What nonsense! He meant that "history" is over, that "history", as defined as an inevitable process by Hegel or Marx, is over. That narrow view of determinist history is indeed over. It is a concept that never had much intellectual force behind it.

The events of this year in Europe have shown that, far from history being over, a marvellous new chapter of history is opening up for Europe, one much more full of



joy, excitement, interest, and some danger too, than the gloomy and bleak chapter on which we hope to close the page.

*It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without question put.*

#### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

*Ordered,*

That, in relation to any Standing Committee to which the Census Order 1989 may be referred, Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c) shall have effect as if for the words 'one and a half hours' in paragraph (4) were substituted the words 'two and a half hours'.—[*Mr. Nicholas Baker*].

#### LIAISON

*Ordered,*

That Sir Ian Lloyd and Mr. Timothy Raison be discharged from the Liaison Committee and Dr. Michael Clark and Mr. Malcolm Thornton be added to the Committee.—[*Mr. Garel-Jones*]

### Trust Ports

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now Adjourn.*—[*Mr. Nicholas Baker.*]

2.30 pm

**Mr. Stuart Bell** (Middlesbrough): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the Adjournment on this important topic of the future of the trust ports. The concept of trust ports is of long standing. Of the 15 major ports, six are trust ports: London, Liverpool, Glasgow, Leith, Newcastle upon Tyne and Middlesbrough.

Trust ports were said to be non-profit making, in the sense that there would be no dividends but the profits would be ploughed back into the ports for the benefit of the users and, in a sense, for the benefit of the community. Trust ports were usually capitalised by fixed-interest borrowings and they were managed by boards, partly elected by port users and partly appointed by Ministers. There was also local authority or particular interest involvement.

I would not wish to leave the House with the impression that I am caught in any time warp in relation to trust ports. Nevertheless, it would be helpful to quote from the report of the Royal Commission on transport in 1930, which declared:

"We are further of the opinion that the best kind of authority to own docks and harbours is a public trust." Because Britain was an island and, certainly in those days, docks were the only means of taking cargo in and out of the country, it seemed right therefore and in the national interest that as assets they should be held in trust for all the British people.

Another review of the trust ports was that of the Rochdale committee, whose findings were published in 1962. The report suggested a number of ways in which the running of trust ports could be improved and added the following and, in my view, significant recommendation:

"In order to simplify the procedure for making such revisions and to reduce the expense which promoting private legislation means for port authorities, we suggest that in any legislation arising out of this report, the Minister of Transport should be empowered to approve amendments to port statutes by Order subject to affirmative resolution procedure."

This recommendation will have some significance as I develop my theme on the future of trust ports.

Middlesbrough is a trust port, or rather the Tees and Hartlepoons authority covering both Middlesbrough and Hartlepool is a trust authority where the assets are, in every sense of the word, held in trust for the British people, and certainly for the local community.

The Tees and Hartlepoons port authority owes its existence to and derives its powers from an Act of 1966, subsequently amended. That Act established the Tees and Hartlepoons port authority and made provision for the appointment of members to the board by the Minister—now the Secretary of State for Transport—vested the authority with duties and powers of authority and made other general provisions for the running of the ports.

There is no suggestion that the Tees and Hartlepoons port authority has been run in other than an exemplary fashion. I draw particular attention to its policies on equal opportunities and the employment of disabled persons. The authority has been and will continue to be fully committed to the principle of equal opportunity in employment. That has meant that recruitment has been



[Mr. Stuart Bell]

carried out on the basis of ability and without regard to race, colour, ethnic or national origins, sex, marital status, religion or sexual orientation. The authority gives full and fair consideration to disabled persons who apply for employment. If employees become disabled during their employment, every effort is made to keep them in the same job or to find them an alternative. The authority's training and career development is structured to ensure that disabled persons have the same opportunities as other employees.

Notwithstanding the observations of the Rochdale committee's report—that trust ports are essentially non-profit making—the Tees and Hartlepoons port authority turned out last year profits of £9.246 million, with a historic capital employed of £52.508 million and a return on capital of 17.61 per cent., which is an impressive record by any standards.

The Tees and Hartlepoons port authority is one of the leading authorities in the United Kingdom both in tonnage and profitability. It handles about 37 million tonnes a year and the majority of that tonnage is brought in and out by the oil, chemical and steel customers, who have private terminals on the river Tees. The authority also owns and manages two general cargo docks. There is the Tees dock, near the mouth of the Tees, which handles more than 2 million tonnes a year of general cargo, cars, steel and forest products. There is also the Hartlepool dock, which handles more than 1 million tonnes a year of forest products, cars, scrap and bulk cargoes.

With such a success story, one wonders why the Tees and Hartlepoons port authority wants to take itself out of the ambit of the trust ports and into the somewhat more risky commercial world of the private company. Having served Tees and Hartlepool for many years under the 1966 Act and having fulfilled the obligations of the Act, why is it that the authority now wishes to alter not only the way in which it does business, but the ownership of the assets?

I shall not refer at length to the private Bill that was published on 27 November, but I want to refer to the assets. According to the last balance sheets, the assets of the Tees and Hartlepoons authority stood at £52.508 million. The reason why proposals are now coming forward is the abolition of the dock labour scheme earlier this year. We were told by the Secretary of State for Employment that the abolition of the dock labour scheme would open a new door to the docks and that there would be more investment and more jobs. In practice, the only door that has opened has led to lay-offs and redundancies, and now the proposed privatisation of dock assets running into millions of pounds. The abolition of the dock labour scheme has cleared the way to privatisation which was on the Government's hidden agenda all along. Rather than jobs being created, jobs have been lost. In Hartlepool alone, 70 jobs have been lost and on the Tees, 130 jobs have gone in a few months. In all the docks that were formerly covered by the dock labour scheme, 3,800 jobs have been lost. That may fit in with the Government's scheme of things, but it does not fit in with the promises or forecasts made by Ministers at the Dispatch Box.

The fear on Teesside and at Hartlepool docks is that once privatised, the Tees and Hartlepoons authority will not stay in cargo handling for long, but will concentrate on property investments, where the pickings might be said to

be easier. Indeed, moves in the direction of property development were begun by the Tees and Hartlepoons port authority even before the abolition of the dock labour scheme when the proposed privatisation was but a gleam in its eye. Property deals took place involving the Tees offshore base where the former Smith's dock shipbuilding site has been transformed significantly, and there is to be a tripartite development venture in Hartlepool marina involving the Teesside development corporation and the Lovell partnership.

As I understand it, the new proposal is designed to provide a legislative framework for selling assets. It will also permit the authority to spread its wings, invest other than on Teesside and buy into other ports if that is its wish. It will be able to invest in Europe while remaining on Teesside. If that was the ambition of the Tees and Hartlepoons port authority, why did it not simply apply to the Government to extend its powers in accordance with the recommendations of the Rochdale report, to which I referred in my opening remarks? Why did the Government not come to the House with the appropriate orders to amend the powers of the Tees and Hartlepoons port authority so that it could do all those things within its existing framework? If that was not possible within the present legislative framework, why did the Government not agree to bring before the House a short amending Bill to give the port authority such powers?

Again, we are seeing the hidden hand of the Government, not to allow the port authority to spread its wings but, in accordance with the Government's ideology, to insist on the privatisation of its assets, forcing it into the considerable expense of putting a private Bill through the House of Commons. It will be a long and hard route.

When Mr. John Hackney, who was chief executive of the Tees and Hartlepoons port authority announced the proposed privatisation of the docks he said that it was the authority's wish to take advantage of the competitive environment in which it operates and of the pan-European transport industry in the run-up to 1992. I hope that I have demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary that the first aim might have been achieved through appropriate orders in the House or Government legislation. Perhaps he will clarify that when he responds.

What is one to make of the authority's second proposal, which is to take advantage of the pan-European transport industry? What on earth is a pan-European transport industry other than a fine phrase from the press agency? Mr. Hackney has said that the authority wishes to defend and build on the success that it has achieved since its creation in 1966. No one doubts that success, least of all myself. He also said that it must have full scope to develop its business, both in the United Kingdom and Europe, in providing port facilities and in other distribution activities. Again, I submit that all that might have been achieved through orders before the House or amending legislation. Mr. Hackney also stated:

"The authority is determined to ensure that this development will take place without any reduction in its commitment to maintain, develop and expand the ports of Tees and Hartlepool."  
I accept fully the assurances which Mr. Hackney wishes to give.

Mr. Hackney has also said that the authority is committed to a continuing Teesside base for the business and to ensuring that the area shares to the maximum the