

# **Stalinism, the left, and beyond**

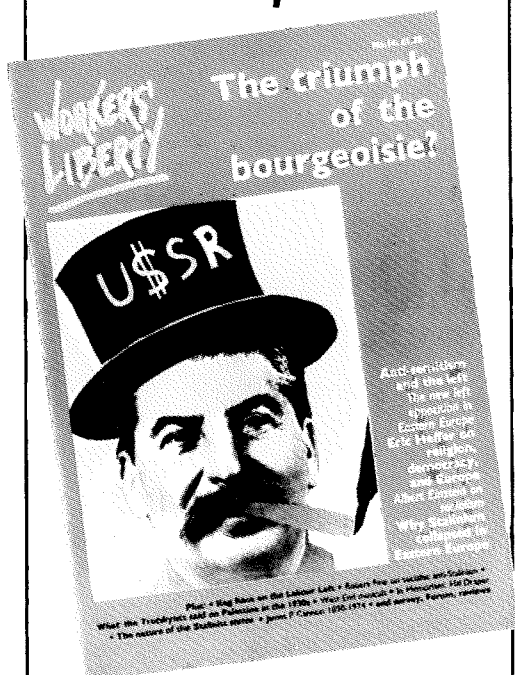


**A symposium**

- Neville Alexander  
**Neal Ascherson**  
Tony Benn  
**Greg Benton**  
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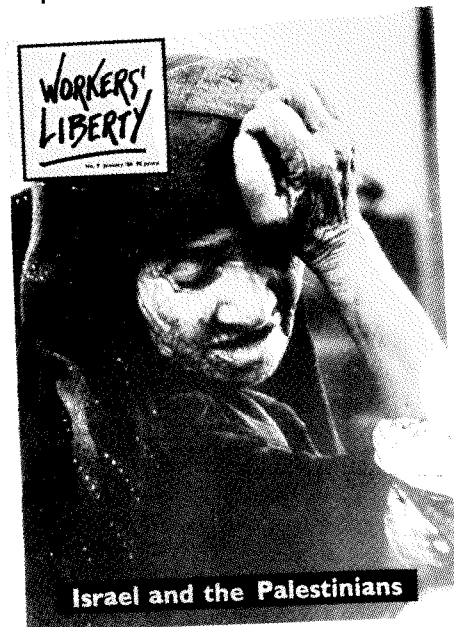


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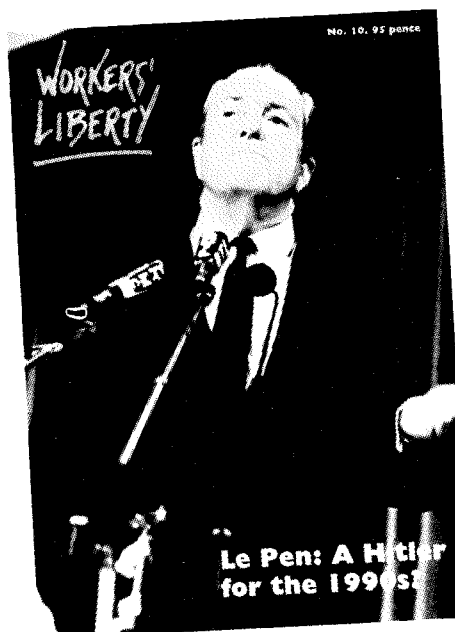
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The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of sex or race.

**Karl Marx**

No.16 1st March 1992

## A letter to readers

Back after an enforced break, *Workers' Liberty* gives over this issue almost entirely to a symposium on the collapse of the USSR and its implications for socialism. The symposium ranges over a vast spectrum of the left. For the socialist generation radicalised in the 1930s and 1940s, the Soviet Union has been the great issue of socialist politics for many decades; part of the symposium is a summing-up by a variety of veterans of that generation on this issue which has shaped so much of their lives.

Because of the symposium, most of our regular features have had to be cut to a minimum, or, as with the *Survey* feature, left out completely. We hope that the discussion launched with the symposium will be continued in the next issue.

Why the long gap between issues? The Labour Party's moves to ban *Socialist Organiser* in 1990 forced us to concentrate on fighting against the Kinnockites; as part of that fight we re-launched *SO*, expanding it to 16 pages and putting more resources into it. After they banned *SO* we responded by launching the *Alliance for Workers' Liberty*. We have also produced a number of pamphlets, including one opposing the Gulf war.

We are short of money, and there is great pressure on our resources. We need help. Subscribe; sell *Workers' Liberty*; send a contribution to our fighting fund.

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Burying Stalin in Mongolia

## In the beginning was the critique of capitalism

The Russian socialist revolution is dead? It died long ago! It died not in December 1991, when the USSR formally ceased to exist, nor in August 1991, when the failure of the attempted coup finally broke the back of what power the “Communist Party” had left. It died more than six decades earlier, when Stalin led the state bureaucracy he personified to the final defeat of the working class and the destruction of the working-class communists led by Trotsky.

It died in a bloody one-sided civil war in which the new bureaucratic ruling class, having defeated the workers, established itself as the “sole master of the surplus product”, that is, over the peoples of the USSR, eliminating all its bourgeois and petty-bourgeois rivals.

The state bureaucracy used its immense political power to insert itself into every pore of society and the economy. Collectively owning the state which owned the economy — and the people! — it presented itself as being in continuity with the revolution. It said that the property

owned by the bureaucracy’s state was the same as socialist collectively-owned property.

Where working-class rule and socialist aspirations had gone down to bloody destruction for decades, their murderers paraded around in the old clothes of the revolution, and defended themselves with counterfeits of its ideas, goals, phrases, slogans and symbols. The Stalinist counter-revolution proclaimed the continuity of the revolution. This was the ruling class that never dared to call itself by its own name! It worked within the emptied shells of the system it had overthrown. It seized control of the Communist International and, turning it inside out politically, used it for its own purposes, denouncing and stigmatising the real 1917 communists as Trotsky-fascists and counter-revolutionaries.

This was not only the Dictatorship of the Bureaucracy; it was also the Dictatorship of the Lie!

In this way, the Russian revolution of 1917, like a dead star whose fading light still reaches Earth long after it has ceased

to exist, still sent out, for the millions of would-be revolutionary workers who rallied in successive waves to “the banner of the October Revolution”, a bright light long after the source of that light had ceased to exist in the world. Now the light that went out 60 years ago is seen unmistakably to have gone, in the dramatic collapse of the Stalinist empire. For the misguided millions who still believed — or half-believed — in it, its going out is an immense tragedy.

For six decades, the effect on socialists of the existence of the USSR was malign, corrupting, confusing, and demoralising. The end result can now be seen in the debris of the once-imposing “communist” movement which marched in step with the rulers of the USSR. The collapse has brought bitter disorientation and disappointment to vast numbers of people. It is, they believe — and the bourgeois commentators are eager to insist on this conclusion — the end of socialism. The USSR was socialism; and thus socialism

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has collapsed.

The collapse of the USSR has had an effect on the world “communist” movement like that of pneumonia on a weakened organism.

In this magazine, to take a crass example, Ernesto Laclau, who is very influential both as a CP-aligned “talking head” and as a “trailblazing” academic, casually dismisses the Marxist notion of the class state. Yet he lives in Britain, where for a dozen years the Thatcherites, acting for the bourgeoisie, have used the state in almost a Jacobin fashion to shape and reshape society, to pin the working class down legally and — in the miners’ strike and other battles — to beat it down physically! In terms of the empirical evidence, it is simply ridiculous to question the existence of the “class state”! To question such an ABC idea of socialism is, in code, to question the *goal* of breaking the power of the bourgeois class state that certainly exists. Yet the politics of the official “communist” movement have long consisted of such crass right-wing sub-reformist intellectual trifling.

Those who stand in the tradition of Trotsky have long known the truth about the real nature of the “socialist” states, and we have tried to enlighten the labour movement about it. We are surprised by the suddenness and completeness of the collapse; our dearest wishes, hopes and expectations have been confounded by the condition to which decades of Stalinist rule have reduced the working class in the ex-Stalinist states. We had believed that the working class would fight attempts to restore capitalism, and would try to replace Stalinism with socialism. But we are neither surprised that “official” police-state socialism has finally collapsed, nor do we believe that real revolutionary socialists have anything to apologise for.

“Socialism” now cuts a greatly diminished figure in the world — but socialism from now on must be real, where for long it was a great sham and counterfeit.

Even if the whole Stalinist phenomenon is — preposterously! — seen as a failed experiment in socialism it could not kill socialism. For socialism is born and reborn out of the critique of capitalism. So it was 150 years ago. So it is now.

If Stalinism was any sort of socialist experiment, then it was of the type of Robert Owen’s or Etienne Cabet’s Utopian colonies, on a giant scale: an attempt to build a parallel society growing from backwardness in autarky or semi-autarky to overtake advanced capitalist society, and supersede it. Such things are impossible. Capitalism has an uncloseable lead. The answer to the failure of that sort of socialist experiment — if that is what you see Stalinism as — would be the same as the answer the Marxists gave 150 years ago to such “Utopian socialists”: capitalism will only be overthrown and superseded from within its own developed heartlands, by the proletariat. It cannot

ever be outflanked by the development of a superior parallel system on its fringes.

If real socialist relations of production depend upon a high level of productivity, culture, and civilisation, then by definition backward and underdeveloped economies cannot perform the miracle of defeating the more advanced countries by somehow, in advance of their own historic development, creating advanced socialist economic relations. It is absurd now as in the ’40s to believe that this could ever happen.

Not all the failures of the many early socialist attempts to go outside existing society, sometimes into the American wilderness, and there found utopian colonies refuted, confounded, weakened, or unsaid one word of the socialist critique of capitalism. The collapse of experiments like Robert Owen’s “New Lanark” and Etienne Cabet’s Icarian colony only shaped and deepened that socialist critique.

Other socialists learned from their ex-

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**“The ‘crisis of socialism’ provoked by the collapse of the USSR is a crisis of imaginary socialism, though it is also a crisis of the socialist movement as it exists.”**

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perience *what not to do*; how it could and could not be fought and superseded. From such experiences socialism as a comprehensive doctrine grew and developed towards a capacity to deal more effectively with existing society. Socialists turned into politicians.

So it would be now, had Stalinism been some sort of socialism, instead of socialism’s murderous negation.

But the working class itself is changing, disappearing! So say the ex-socialists.

In the time of the Utopians also capitalism changed; so did the proletariat. Trades like that of handloom weaving had provided backbone activists for the first labour revolts, such as the working-class seizure of the city of Lyons in 1831, and for the first mass labour movement, the Chartists of the later 1830s and 1840s. Such categories of workers disappeared and were replaced by others, factory-based. The second industrial revolution, 100 years ago, changed the occupational physiognomy of the working class yet again. There have been many changes since. We are in the midst of dramatic changes now, the “computer revolution”.

Capitalism, all through its history, has existed in a whirligig of change and then again change, a permanent revolution in technology. Yet through all the flurry of its existence, three things have been constant: exploitation of the working class to extract surplus-value, the basic cell of

capitalist society; the private ownership of the means of production (supplemented by ownership by a state itself privately “owned”); and the maintenance by the owners of a firm political control, by naked dictatorship or behind a limited bourgeois democracy.

Private ownership of the means of production, exploitation, and curtailed liberal-*bourgeois* “democracy” are still today the heart and soul of bourgeois society.

Capitalist exploitation and degradation have not disappeared — far from it! The last two decades have seen the creation of a new underclass of paupers in Britain, the US, and in many other countries. Is the computer revolution going to dissolve the great concentrations of capital and fragment the means of production, creating a mass of modern electronics-based equivalents of the artisan production units of 200 years ago? If not, then it will transform neither the ownership of the means of production in the hands of capitalist monopolies nor the fundamental proletarian condition of the mass of the population!

The people in the ex-Stalinist states now face the worst evils of the worst capitalism: chaos, starvation, and barbarism. For them the historic choice long ago posed by socialists is stark, unmitigated, and immediate: socialism or barbarism in the period ahead.

But did not Stalinism grow, inevitably, out of the “organisational methods” of the Bolsheviks? No it did not!

Marxian socialism is rooted in the idea that the age-old dream of equality is realisable, thanks to the potential for creating material abundance which capitalism has brought into existence for the first time in history. Class rule and class exploitation are rooted throughout history in the material conditions of human life in a world of relative scarcity: while such scarcity continues, classes and class rule are inescapable. For that reason, socialism, to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, was necessarily the child of advanced capitalist society.

Discussing what would happen if the class that wanted to build socialism should take power in an unripe society, Marx put it pungently: “all the old crap” would soon reappear. Socialism was not possible except by building on what capitalism had developed on a world scale.

That too was the view of Lenin and Trotsky. In 1917 they did not think that backward ex-Tsarist Russia could build socialism. They did think — and rightly — that the working class could take power there. Then, so they believed, a chain of revolutions would be detonated across advanced capitalist Europe. The ex-Tsarist empire would be a backward part of a European socialist federation.

Trotsky, who was the first Marxist to develop the idea that the working class might take power in backward Russia, also said plainly that only the international spread of the workers’ revolution

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could compensate for the fact that Russia was not ripe for socialism. Unless the revolution spread, the working-class seizure of power in the old Tsarist empire would be doomed. Socialism was necessarily International Socialism. Nobody thought of "socialism in one country".

Revolutionary movements of the workers did sweep Europe in 1918 and 1919, in Hungary, Germany, Italy, France. Even underdeveloped Ireland saw ephemeral soviets. The West European workers were defeated; the backward territory ruled by the Russian workers was isolated.

In those conditions defeat was inevitable in the medium term, and Lenin and Trotsky had said so plainly. Their project was impossible in the conditions in which defeat in the West had left them. The defeat they feared was the overthrow of the Bolshevik regime and the restoration of the old capitalists and landlords.

But the Bolshevik Party was a living force in history, not a band of watchtower speculators. They fought and held on, expecting the European revolution to rescue them. They fought and beat the Tsarists and capital's White Guards in civil war; they fought and beat the armies of 14 states which invaded their territory.

To do that they had to create a gigantic militarised state apparatus, incorporating large parts of the old working class into it. Two or three years after the October Revolution, Bolshevik rule was already the rule of that state machine, backed fluctuatingly by the bedraggled remnant of the working class and by the peasantry. Self-transformation, not the victory of capitalist counter-revolution, was the first result of the Bolsheviks' impossible situation. Writing in 1920, the acute liberal socialist Bertrand Russell pointed out that Russia was ruled by a bureaucracy, adding that this bureaucracy could simply decide to take to itself the privileges of a ruling class. And in fact that happened, though not without a profound conflict.

In 1921 the civil wars ended, but the country was ruined. The prospects for successful revolution in Europe not immediately encouraging. The Bolsheviks decided to allow a controlled development of capitalism — the "New Economic Policy". In these new condition, the ruling bureaucracy began to become soft and privileged. Yet in the Bolshevik theory of what they were doing, these were the people who had to "hold on" in a country in which the very working class which had made the revolution had been killed off, dissolved into the state machine, or dispersed into the countryside.

Purges of careerists did not make any difference. When Lenin died, those who had control of the party apparatus, now largely fused with the state, demonstratively opened the party to a gruesomely misnamed "Lenin levy" of careerists, to swamp the revolutionaries.

The genuine revolutionary communists, led by Leon Trotsky, and basing

themselves on the working class whose interests they championed, differentiated themselves in the early-1920s from the bureaucratized elite, who controlling the state. The latter now balanced between the working class and the newly revived bourgeoisie.

The Trotskyists were defeated and expelled. Stalin wound up slaughtering not only the opposition communists but his own degenerate and treacherous section of the Bolshevik Party. The Stalinist Congress in 1934 was known as "The Congress of Victors". So they were, but for them it was woe to the victors. Within

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three years most of them had been shot.

Fighting the degeneration of the ruling apparatus, Trotsky thought that the great danger lay in the threat of the overthrow of the regime by the forces of the reviving bourgeoisie. The opposite happened. The Stalinist bureaucracy overthrew and crushed the nascent bourgeoisie. After 1928 the Stalinist bureaucracy forcibly collectivised agriculture, using immense brutality and terror in which millions died. They created a tremendous state-owned complex of industry all across the USSR. They utterly subjugated the entire population of the area, by way of unbridled terror. The bourgeoisie was wiped out; so was the petty bourgeoisie. The state undertook to control and plan the entire economy, from giant industry to the pettiest retailing.

Not only was the savagely autocratic Stalin regime in glaring contrast with all pre-1917 notions of what the regime of socialism would be, including that of the Bolsheviks, it also flatly contradicted the notions of even the autocratic Bolshevism which had set itself the task of "holding on" until the European revolution changed its situation. In 1921 Lenin had defended the independence of the workers' trade unions from the Bolshevik state, and throughout the middle 1920s Trotsky fought for a limited extension of democracy.

No modern socialist blueprints had ever conceived of such an all-encompassing concentration of state ownership, even for

the most developed economies, as that now created by the Stalinist bureaucracy to serve its own goal. For the Stalinist bureaucracy all-embracing state ownership allowed it to use its monopoly of political power and control of the state to crush all its bourgeois and petty-bourgeois rivals, and so to siphon off for itself the maximum surplus product.

No Marxian socialist had ever conceived of such a concentration of state economic power because, even in a highly advanced country, it was inconceivable without an unacceptable level of state coercion.

Yet, even after the destruction of workers' power, and its replacement by Stalinism, the Stalinist state, and later its satellites in Eastern Europe and its replicas in Asia, bore an antagonistic and even revolutionary relationship to the advanced bourgeois West.

Behind the great barrier reefs of the state monopoly of trade, and an immense military machine, they tried — as if the socialist utopian colonies of the early 19th century were their model — to develop a distinct economic system, growing on its own base in competition with capitalism. Military and economic competition with the West, from an immensely more backward base, was always central to the Stalinist states' relationship to the advanced economies of the world. That was *as utopian as any utopian colony ever was*.

The appearance of viability for the competition was won by the building up of armies and weapon systems which cost the USSR qualitatively more, as a share of its national output, than their military machines cost the Western states. Only the iron grip of the Stalinist states could have inflicted on an atomised and pulverised population the sacrifices involved for so long. Just as the unwinnable Vietnam war destabilised the US not only politically but also economically, so the USSR's "Vietnam war" in Afghanistan after Christmas 1979 seems to have helped bring down Stalinism in the USSR.

At the core of the collapse was the collapse of the morale, confidence, perspective and will of the political centre in the USSR — the only people who had, in a lumbering, slow-moving, way, any power of initiative. Under the new bureaucratic Tsar, Gorbachev, and under the whip of competition with the capitalist West, they set about reforming their system; but as during previous reform efforts in the 1960s, they could not break the inertia of the great bureaucracy sprawling on society. So Gorbachev took a stick to the incumbents, with "glasnost", or "openness".

The monopoly of the ruling "party" began to dissolve. Limited criticism gave way to real, uncontrolled, criticism. Attempts at having controlled elections with more than one candidate gave way to real elections. Then the non-Russian nationalities, long oppressed, moved.

In the 1950s, Nikita Khrushchev had wisely told the bureaucracy that their

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main enemy in carrying through *their* reform would be "spontaneity" — people getting out of control. Thirty years later, the bureaucracy was less able to control "spontaneity".

Yeltsin, a demagogic, unprincipled, Mussolini in the making (if he is not pushed aside by someone worse) appealed against the "Communist Party" to the people, and soon confronted Gorbachev as an elected representative, with a legitimacy Gorbachev lacked. Like Louis XVI of France, the well-meaning Gorbachev fell victim to the chaos he had unleashed. The failed coup last August broke the power of the CP, which was thrown off like an encumbering garment by the state apparatus. The feebleness of the coup was its most surprising feature. Not since the Italian Fascist Grand Council, reeling from the blows of war, met in September 1943, deposed Mussolini, and declared the fascist movement dissolved, has there been such a collapse of something that seemed so powerful.

Perhaps a better historical analogy is that of the collapse of Germany in November 1918. The ex-USSR now is a state that has lost a prolonged war: not, except for smallish proxy wars, a shooting war, but a cold war of economic and technological competition, exhausting, draining, and, for the USSR, all-absorbing. It was a war the USSR could not win.

Forty years ago it could compete seriously with the West, on the basis of a brute concentration of men and tanks. It could not compete indefinitely because the bureaucratic economy was technologically backward. The diagnosis made by Trotsky in 1935 told the Stalinist system its real future:

*"The progressive role of the Soviet bureaucracy coincides with the period devoted to introducing into the Soviet Union the most important elements of capitalist technique.*

*It is possible to build gigantic factories according to a ready-made Western pattern by bureaucratic command — although, to be sure, at triple the normal cost. But the further you go, the more the economy runs into the problem of quality, which slips out of the hands of a bureaucracy like a shadow.*

*Under a nationalised economy, quality demands a democracy of producers and consumers, freedom of criticism and initiative — conditions incompatible with a totalitarian regime of fear, lies and flattery".*

Russian Stalinism became a model for "developmentalist" social formations in other backward countries. Yet the system never established an articulated, self-regenerating, self-regulating economic mechanism. The rule of the bureaucracy was incompatible with real planning by way of democracy and free information. The very idea of planning became discredited. Decisive layers of the intelligentsia and sections of the ruling "party" propounded the restoration of the market economy as the solution to the failure of Stalinism. Both dissidents like

Yeltsin, and the Gorbachev regime, propounded this solution, differing only on tempo and degree of recklessness.

There was no organised force struggling for rational working-class planning — using controlled market mechanisms where appropriate. Real socialism and real socialists had been extirpated, alongside real trade unions. Socialism? That was the system we had!

The crisis engulfed them before there was any chance for the workers to get their bearings. The post-August regimes are committed to the creation of capitalism. In an act of criminal irresponsibility as grotesque and dogmatically blind as anything the Stalinists ever did, the rulers of a system centralised for decades have washed their hands of responsibility for feeding the people. In a world where the nearest thing to an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie is organised networks of gangsters, and where markets are mainly local and rudimentary, they seek to impose capitalist market mechanisms by state ukase! By way of perhaps years of chaos, famine, wars between peoples, they will succeed, if they have the time.

What is more and more probable is that authoritarian regimes based on the old armed forces, now being divided up between the successor states of the ex-USSR, will impose an iron grip to control the transition. China — where the murderous Stalinists still rule, using market

economics — will be their model here.

The "crisis of socialism" provoked by the collapse of the USSR is a crisis of imaginary socialism, though it is also a crisis of the socialist movement as it exists. In the longer term, the collapse of imaginary socialism must be good for real socialism.

Stalinism was not socialism; Lenin and Trotsky were not responsible for Stalin; socialism is not dead; the proletariat under capitalism changes: it cannot disappear. Socialism now has a chance to regrow and redevelop that it has not had since the defeat of the October revolution 64 or 65 years ago. The politics of Trotsky, the real tradition of Marxist socialism, for long marginalised and half-suppressed, are painfully vindicated. Trotskyism combined commitment to socialism as the self-liberation of the proletariat, and as necessarily a product of advanced capitalism, with the belief that, nevertheless, it was possible and necessary for socialists to struggle for what could be won in conditions such as those of Russia in 1917. Trotsky and his comrades stood against Stalinism, in the name of socialism and of Bolshevism.

From that current, from that seed-bed, a new socialism will grow in the new conditions where, though many things are changed, the basic things are still what they were in the socialist beginning: the critique of capitalism, and the fight to help the proletariat, on which capitalism rests, liberate itself!

## 1989

**March:** Semi-free elections in USSR.

**May:** Hungary tears down border fences with Austria. Thousands start to flee from East Germany to the West via Hungary.

**May-June:** Revolutionary upheaval in China, finally crushed by the government.

**June:** In Polish elections, Solidarnosc wins all the seats open to contest (bar one), and forms a government.

**July:** Mass miners' strikes in USSR.

**September-October:** CP regime crumbles in Hungary.

**9 November:** East Germany opens borders to West. Old regime falls in Bulgaria.

**27 November:** General strike for democracy in Czechoslovakia.

**10 December:** Non-CP government takes over in Czechoslovakia. Vaclav Havel elected president (29th).

**21 December:** Dictator Ceausescu shouted down at rally in Bucharest.

**22 December:** Ceausescu flees Bucharest.

## 1990

**January:** Gorbachev sends troops into Azerbaijan: massacre in Baku.

**March:** "Democratic Forum" wins majority in Hungary. Lithuania declares independence.

**May:** "National Salvation Front" (ex-CPers) wins presidential election in Romania.

**June:** Socialist Party (ex-CP) wins majority in Bulgarian elections. Civic Forum wins majority in Czechoslovakia.

**3 October:** Germany reunified.

**29 November:** General strike in Bulgaria forces out Socialist Party (ex-CP) government; coalition government takes over.

**December:** Lech Walesa elected president of Poland.

## 1991

**March-May:** New wave of miners' strikes in USSR.

**April:** CP wins majority in free elections in Albania.

**9 April:** Georgia declares independence.

**4 June:** Albania's CP government resigns after 3 week general strike.

**25 June:** Slovenia and Croatia declare independence.

**19-21 August:** Attempted coup in USSR by some of Gorbachev's deputies. After its defeat, the old regime collapses. CP banned, republics declare independence.

**21 December:** Soviet Union formally dissolved.

**25 December:** Gorbachev resigns.



## Stalinism, the left, and beyond

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way...”

Dickens's picture of the atmosphere on the eve of the French Revolution sums up the atmosphere on the left now after the collapse of Stalinism in Europe neatly, perhaps too neatly.

The left is liberated. The left is bewildered. The left is vindicated. The left is historically refuted. Socialism is dead. Socialism is reborn. Which left? Which socialism?

The views of the editors of

Workers' Liberty will be found in the Editorial in this issue, and in the paper *Socialist Organiser*, our weekly sister publication.

We give over most of the space in this issue to a symposium on the fall of European Stalinism and the consequences for the socialist left. Our contributors cover a very wide spectrum, ranging from, say, Neal Ascherson on the right, to people like, say, Michel Warshawsky on the left, whose revolutionary socialism is pretty much identical to our own.

The texts in this magazine are transcripts of interviews conducted by Mark Osborn in the three weeks up to 14 February.

## Crisis was shaped in the mid-'20s

By Neville Alexander

Neville Alexander is a South African socialist and former Robben Island prisoner. Associated with the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action, he is the author (under the pen-name No Sizwe) of the book *One Azania, one nation*.

We see the roots of the current crisis in the ex-USSR in the mid- to late-20s. The turning point was the victory of Stalinism and the victory of what was called 'Socialism in One Country'.

There were great economic and, particularly, political implications of this turn. The Russian working class and the Bolshevik Party were destroyed.

Secondly, we would trace the failure back not only to the suppression of the freedom of the Soviet working class, but to the lack of production of consumer goods. The technological revolution was not extended to that sector of production.

These two factors, taken together, explain why the Soviet Union fell behind. Therefore, the crisis we see now was inevitable.

We have been accused of being agnostic on the question of the nature of Soviet society. Frankly, we do not know. We know Stalinism is not capitalism. But in a sense the question: is this a deformed workers' state? is anachronistic.

Even though it may be evasive, we have generally tended to accept the formulation that these are transitional societies. Of course, this means they can fall back towards capitalism but also have the potential, depending on the international situation, of moving into a socialist stage.

The point here is that nothing is irrevocable in history. If we describe these societies as transitional we are implicitly saying they are post-capitalist. I accept the logic. But this does not mean they can not revert to capitalism. A lot depends on international developments.

I think we have seen that. The reversion to capitalism has become possible.

Nevertheless, for us, there is no question about the centrality of the Russian Revolution. We believe the October Revolution continues to be the most important event in world history.

In building a new international socialist movement, there is no doubt that we have to go back to the period of 1917-1924 to see where our starting points should be.

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## Crisis shaped in the mid-'20s

From page 7

Our view is that in the advanced capitalist countries the so-called actually existing socialist societies *have* discredited socialism. In the minds of most workers — in fact, most people — those societies were equated with what socialism was supposed to be. This was a real setback.

In countries like South Africa, socialism continues to be not just relevant but popular. But we have no doubt at all that because of the hegemony of the black nationalists, the socialist movement continues to be a minority current.

But it is there, and it is important. Socialism is an important pole of attraction in the mass movement.

So you have the two sides: the position in the advanced capitalist countries and the situation in the ex-colonial world.

Although our organisation has not got a finished position — it is an ongoing

“In a way we have to get back to the First International where workers’ organisations the world over got together on the basis of their experience, on a bare empirical reality of the experience of capitalist exploitation, begin to put together a cohesive strategy against the world capitalist system.”

debate — I can give you an analogy for the way forward. In a way we have to get back to the First International where workers’ organisations the world over got together on the basis of their experience, on a bare empirical reality of the experience of capitalist exploitation, begin to put together a cohesive strategy against the world capitalist system.

This is where we have to start. What implements we have to use to do that, whether we join, for example, this or that socialist international are in part tactical issues.

We need a non-sectarian approach to international socialist currents. We feel people are wandering around with a schema for the solution of the world’s problems.

We have to start from the point where each national socialist formation has got peculiar problems — even though there are obviously general principles arising from the capitalist mode of production which are common to all.

# Marx was wrong about class

By Neal Ascherson

Neal Ascherson is a journalist, and author of *The Polish August: the self-limiting revolution*, an account of the rise of Solidarnosc.

I do not think we will ever see Stalinism again.

As to what is currently happening — there is, in a way, a crisis of frustrated development. People are being mobilised in order to modernise. Behind this is a sense of backwardness and political dissolution. There is a powerful will to overcome and catch up.

Catching up is not always seen as joining and merging. The form in which Russians, when and if they talk about politics, still think that the ideal Russia would not be like a western society. If you say: what will it be like? Will it be capitalist or a new form of socialism? I can never seem to get a satisfactory answer.

All I ever seem to find is an affirmation that there are huge material and human resources that are unused; that Russia has become a backward nation sinking into the Third World and what is required is a leap forward.

I can see many reasons why this situation occurred. But the Bolshevik Revolution is over. The French Revolution is over. You can argue whether it ended in 1793 or 1815, then popping up again in 1830 and 1848. But it ended. There was a time when you could say: 1789 is over. Now we can say the Bolshevik Revolution and the experiment has ended.

Lenin thought that his revolution would last for ever. He was wrong — as was Marx about the development of class. Marx’s main predictions about class development are more of an analysis than a prophecy. Things, for reasons he could not have foreseen, have turned out differently.

Revolutions are always about the same things. They are about unjust



Neal Ascherson

distribution of property, about political tyranny. They are about a mass impatience with the way of governments. This will happen again. And when it does, there will be resemblances to the Bolshevik Revolution. Some of its principles are principles which will always be here, like the dream of absolute equality.

A lot of the conceptions are just too good to die. People will always strive for these things.

I am an old liberal progressist. As people become more intelligent and better educated, they do change. One thing is wonderfully clear: in the last ten years, people in Western Europe have become much more cowardly, especially soldiers. That is very good news! This comes out of the Gulf War and the Falklands War. People are much less gung-ho about risking their necks, or even killing others, except where it can be done mechanically, at the press of a button, covering thousands with sand.

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This trend is irreversible. It is a good sign. The human race advances two steps forward, one step back towards greater equality.

The great danger now in Eastern Europe is that these societies will fall back into a previous historical arrangement. You will get greatly developed Western Europe and beggarly Eastern Europe, whose role is to provide raw materials, cheap labour, and fruit and veg.

Will this happen? My feeling is that it probably will not. Firstly because the development of modern, multinational capitalism is able to move outside nation states and relocate itself. The heartlands of Western Europe are pricing themselves out of manufacture to such an extent that the East has a chance.

And, strangely, the posthumous victory of some Communist attitudes, in Eastern Europe will help. Insofar as people believed in Communism in Eastern Europe before the Second World War, it was as a means of development. The appeal was of an autarkic system where industrialisation was forced in order to catch up with the west. There would never be a situation in which a vast rural population would be dependent on a few industries.

I think that Trotsky and Lenin's ideas of socialism are over. However, the kind of analysis Marx made is as good now as it ever was. That way of looking at society is still the right way. You can remove the dialectic as an extremely antique way of

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“The great danger now in Eastern Europe is that these societies will fall back into a previous historical arrangement. You will get greatly developed Western Europe and beggarly Eastern Europe whose role is to provide raw materials, cheap labour and fruit and veg.”

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saying things; remove the prophetic element in Marx which is plainly wrong.

But Marx's general analysis will plainly survive. What will always survive is the important part of Marx — that he was a revolutionary. He wanted the oppressed of the world to rise up and strike a blow.

We need a vision of society in which people will be more equal; where people combine in order to be stronger and improve their standards of living and make new institutions to preserve justice. This is all to do with socialism at a very basic level. This will continue as long as the human race exists.

## The West deliberately bankrupted the USSR

By Tony Benn

Tony Benn is Labour MP for Chesterfield.

The collapse of the old Soviet regime is bringing anarchy to Russia. That anarchy is being used by the West to create an opening for the exploitation of the Soviet working class.

There is a potential market in the USSR, although not yet. And there is a cheap labour force.

A type of mafia is developing in some of the republics. Rouble millionaires are emerging from speculators.

The probability is that we will see military-type capitalism in the USSR. Then the question arises: how much socialist resistance will there be? After all, the old regime — no matter what you say about it — was built around public values and public services. People will see these services go.

Now there was nothing perfect about the old system. It was repressive and centralised, but it did improve working class living standards a lot.

I think that the underlying reasons for the crisis are a little more complex than are sometimes made out. The Russians spent between 30 and 70% of GDP on defence.

I think that the western strategy to destroy the Soviet regime was to bankrupt them.

This level of expenditure, no doubt, justified in their eyes by the threat of attack, forced them towards bankruptcy.

Now we see the problems of control of the army, navy and nuclear weapons. An angry, disenchanted, forcibly demobilised army can lead to gangsterism. These guys are trained to kill.

The question is: what will come out of the wreckage? The best guide at the moment is to look at Poland. I know *Socialist Organiser* supported Solidarnosc — an organisation I always had some doubts about — but Solidarnosc threw up Walesa and a right-wing government.

It does not follow that the old Communists, who have been dissolved in Poland and the Soviet Union, were all tainted with Stalinism. Lower down the Party there were some decent people who did not like what was happening. These people may well reappear as democratic socialists.

Resistance to the changes could come quite quickly, a type of counter-counter-revolution. I hope there is resistance — or the fate of the people will be appalling.

The association of socialism with Stalinism? I do not think that British workers assumed that socialism meant totalitarianism. The right would like to tell us that socialism is dead. That is not true. The most popular issue in Britain is defence of the socialist health service.

We should not allow ourselves to be demoralised.

At least the changes in the USSR mean that no-one can say: you are working for

the KGB. That helps us.

Objectively, this is a great period for socialism although, subjectively, it is difficult.

I think democracy scares people at the top. All systems hate democracy. In the Labour Party it is the same. When we raised the issue of democracy, a large part of the PLP split off and formed the SDP.

I think we should approach the whole socialist question through democracy. We need to spread power and encourage people to use it.

My Commonwealth of Britain Bill is being extended to include legislation for workers' rights, industrial democracy and broadcasting.

What should we say about the Russian Revolution and soviets? I have always

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“I think people are suspicious of the Trotskyite vanguard party idea. They say: if you were at the top, you would be like the current leaders. In fact, it is true that power corrupts everyone. I have always been ready to go for the slower process of the dissolution of capitalism by democracy.”

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opposed the Trotskyite view that said that in Britain we had a situation comparable to that in Russia. I am not saying it *could not happen*, just that it was *not happening*.

I was always afraid that a vanguard party, in certain circumstances, could seize power. Since it had no democratic authority it could be easily toppled. It would have no base of support.

I think people are suspicious of the Trotskyite vanguard party idea. They say: if you were at the top, you would be like the current leaders. In fact, it is true that power corrupts everyone.

I have always been ready to go for the slower process of the dissolution of capitalism by democracy.

I have also never been strongly for great state corporations. There was a parallel between the nationalisations in Russia and the social democratic programmes in the west. They were both centralised and secretive. Ian McGregor was a product of nationalisation just as the rulers in Russia were a product of their revolution. The Russians were not the only people who tried to do it all from the top.

## Not so pessimistic about China

By Greg Benton

**Greg Benton** is a lecturer at Leeds University, editor of *Wild Lilies, Poisonous Weeds: dissident voices from People's China* and of the *Memoirs* of veteran Chinese Trotskyist Wang Fanxi. He has been associated with the journal *International Viewpoint*.

There were some progressive elements in the Soviet economy despite its Stalinist political system. While I'm happy to see the destruction of Stalinism as a system of political rule, I do regret that capitalism and market forces are determining the way in which the Soviet Union is developing. Now in the Soviet Union you have the prospect of a marriage of the worst features of Stalinism and capitalism, in other words a political dictatorship and an economic rat-race. The main beneficiaries of the reversion to the market economy in the Soviet Union are the mafiosi who controlled the state until 1989.

China isn't Russia, and the Chinese revolution happened in a different way from the Russian Revolution. The CCP started off in 1921 as a party committed to democracy and science. Its main leader Chen Tu-hsiu was the founder of the May 4th movement in 1919 that campaigned for democracy and science. The people who joined him in the early party were formed by that experience and the CCP have always retained elements of a commitment to democracy, feminism and internationalism, for example, the Yen'an opposition of 1942, the cultural revolutionary opposition of 1967-8, the movement at Democracy Wall in 1979, and the Peking Commune of 1989. In all these instances distinguished and respected veteran communists have sided with people out to sweep away the political tyranny. Marxism in that sense is not discredited in China as it is in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Some of the doyens of democratic dissent in China are long-standing communists. This is an important difference between Russia and China. In 1989 when millions of people were demonstrating on the streets in Peking it was rather hard to find a large number of people committed to the restoration of capitalism. I don't think the agenda of China's dissidents in 1989 bore more than a superficial resemblance to that of the now-victorious opposition in the Soviet Union. The main target in China in 1989 was corruption in the party, which is why Gorbachev was such an important symbol for them in a way that Bush and Reagan could never be. Gorbachev seemed to represent to youngsters in the square the possibility of reform within the system. His presence in 1989 in Peking was one of the main factors in the spreading and deepening of the movement. Obviously in the course of the movement new layers of young people

came to the fore. People like Wuer Kaixi and Chai Ling, now famous in the West, together with their high-level supporters behind the scenes, would like to change China in a capitalist direction. The Americans put a lot of work into creating a mood, and cohort of people to embody that mood, in favour of free enterprise.

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**“China is now a post-capitalist society with some elements of socialism, distorted by a hideous political system. There are elements of socialism in the economy and the cities in particular”.**

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But the credibility of these latter-day heroes of the Square has been destroyed since 1989. If the movement revives the older layer of left wing dissidents will reassert themselves in China. Economic reform was carried out in China several years before it was even seriously mooted in the Soviet Union. Chinese workers have a long experience of the effects of economic reform on their pockets. This is one reason why some of the panaceas proposed in the Soviet Union don't find the same adherence in China, where people are disenchanted by the attempts to sweep away their securities. These securities, particularly in the cities, are one of the main reasons why the system remained stable for so long in China. The Chinese revolution did not create a paradise, but it did create a place where workers could feel safe and at least relatively equal, and where their basic needs were looked after. So I'm not so pessimistic about the future of democratic dissent and politics in China as I am about Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

China is now a post-capitalist society with some elements of socialism, distorted by a hideous political system that bears no resemblance to socialism. There are elements of socialism in the Chinese economy and in the cities in particular.

Are the ruling elements of the CCP a ruling caste rather than a class? I'm no longer really concerned with that debate. The ease with which the CP was squeezed from power in the Soviet Union would seem to suggest it was a thin veneer on society rather than a new class. It's not something I've given much thought to, and I can no longer see so clearly the practical implications anyway of one definition or the other.

Democracy and democratic revolutions

took over 800 years to mature and even now they're flawed in many ways. Not until 1919 did we have full suffrage in this country and even now there are all sorts of problems with it. Socialism is a very new idea, and one can't expect miracles so soon. I think that if you look at China now and the social forces, a level of enlightenment exists that didn't exist in 1949. In 1949 the working class, the factory proletariat in China, numbered something like three million people. Now Hong Kong alone has three million workers. The factory proletariat is educated, literate and politically aware, far more so than it ever was in the past. China now has an educated sector from high schools and universities far greater than in the past. These are the people who have time to think. These are the people who spearheaded the movement of 1989. There is an element of elitism in this group, but in the course of the revolution of 1989 students began to realise that it was important to admit workers into the square, to encourage workers to organise themselves. This was a tremendous achievement of the movement of 1989, a realisation by large numbers of students that alone they can do little and that they do need support from wider sections of society. The lesson wasn't entirely learnt but I'm still quite optimistic. The ground exists for discontent and a body of theory and ideas exist in China that can envisage non-capitalist reform of the system. The experience now in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is strengthening some Chinese in their determination not to go that way and not to allow that sort of instability and crisis, which would be far greater in a country with China's level of economy and production than in the richer countries in Eastern Europe.

**Don't try to save the term**

**“socialism”**

**By Cornelius Castoriadis**

**Cornelius Castoriadis** was one of those, alongside C L R James and Raya Dunayevskaya, who argued in the Trotskyist movement in the 1940s for a shift to seeing the USSR as “state capitalist”. Later he launched the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group; today he no longer calls himself a socialist. He has written under the names “Chaulieu” and “Cardan”. He lives in France, and has also written extensively on questions of psychology.

# STALINISM

## The Bolsheviks used a surplus of repression



By Robin Blackburn

Robin Blackburn is the editor of *New Left Review*. He was formerly for many years associated with *The Week* and the International Marxist Group.

I think that a whole current on the left identified — from the very beginnings of Stalinism — that the denial of workers' democracy would create appalling problems.

The problems became greater in the most recent period because the Stalinist model of command economy fell far behind contemporary capitalism. Its economic failure gave the Soviet Union no room for successful political experiment or genuine democratisation.

I would point out that the term 'Stalinism' would apply to the Soviet-type models. There is another type — the Chinese variety. While this second type has been quite repressive politically, it has been economically more dynamic.

The Stalinist systems did not develop a type of economic organisation superior to capitalism. I think we have seen an at-

**The downfall of the Stalinist tyranny in Eastern Europe and the USSR happened in a curious way, with the self-destruction of the ruling class. The Communist bureaucracy attempted reforms under Gorbachev but could never succeed, because the system was irreformable.**

**What will happen now is another matter. The situation is quite chaotic, even in Eastern Europe, and much more so in Russia itself.**

**The heartening aspect of the downfall of the Stalinists was that in East Germany and Poland the people struggled against the Communist tyranny. The disheartening aspect was that as soon as the Stalinist regimes collapsed the people went home and stopped their activity.**

**There have been lots of illusions. People believed that as soon as they got rid**

tempt to control the market and the accumulation process through the power of the State and of social mobilisations. When that power of social mobilisation was at its height — immediately after the October revolution in Russia, or straight after the Second World War in the Soviet Union and parts of Eastern Europe — it was possible for a time to achieve things that were not possible for capitalism — at least in backward states.

So there were social gains in those states and some of the post-revolutionary states such as Vietnam, Cuba and China.

But the existence of these important social gains did not mean there was a transcendence of capitalism, and especially of the models of advanced capitalism.

While it is clear that the bureaucracy itself provided the main social character of the state, the ruling bureaucracies have always tried to co-opt, organise and even buy off the direct producers. This has taken place by offering them special access to consumer goods or special trade union-organised holidays. But obviously, the capacity of the bureaucracy in the USSR to offer material improvements to the mass of direct producers has become sharply reduced in the last twenty or thirty years.

Were those states in some sense working class states? I think it true, but awkward and unwelcome as a fundamental sociological insight. But I think it has to be understood far more literally than is normally the case.

These societies were certainly not workers' democracies; they were not the type of workers' states we hope to see in the socialism we are looking to. But I think that it is the case that the ruling institutions, centrally the Communist parties, were normally made up of 50% industrial workers or collective farmers. If these Parties had not had these people, they could not have ruled.

So there was a sort of sociological reality to the idea of working class states. Then, to the extent that the support of people on the shopfloor and in the farms waned, these so-called ruling parties actually ceased to rule.

Looking back at the Russian Revolution, I believe it was largely doomed when it proved unable to link up with social-revolutionary currents in the advanced countries. If it had done this, its isolation would have been broken and the new conditions would have allowed a different development.

The Bolsheviks themselves compounded many of the problems. They us-

ed a surplus of repression. Finding they were more isolated than they hoped, they then had recourse to, for example, the falsification of the results of Soviet elections. They also banned other, pro-Soviet parties — or harassed, at the very least, these parties.

These were the roots of Stalinism.

In 1921, we saw the repression of Kronstadt and of Makhno's partisans — both by purely military means.

Although Kronstadt and Makhno were real threats they should have been handled politically, not militarily.

Looking forward — history itself, through social struggles, has brought about what claims to be a bourgeois-democratic revolution in the former Communist countries.

It was nipped in the bud in China, partly, as I said, because the Chinese model has proved itself very dynamic due to the scrapping of the command economy model not ten years ago, but twenty years ago.

China was able to adapt itself to the world market. The other states failed to make that adaptation. They condemned themselves, as Trotsky said they would in the debates in the 1930s, to stagnation. The conditions were created for a bourgeois revolution in Eastern Europe and then the Soviet Union.

There will be attempts to take the new, hard-won democratic liberties away. Suppression will be attempted in new ways.

I think now, in a world more than ever dominated by capitalism, where there is grotesque inequality, above all between the First and Third Worlds, where we see the possibility of ecological catastrophe and increased militarism and chauvinism, the ideals of socialism are more valid than ever. I think this will include attempts to rehabilitate notions of public intervention.

But I think that residual faith in statism, whether of the Fabian or Stalinist variety, has to be firmly rejected.

Socialism must take a much greater interest in ideas of workers' social management. We need an understanding that the sort of socialism we would like to see can not be orientated according to the dictates of a command economy.

Socialism means public agency and intervention but it can not mean a single plan imposed on the whole of the globe.

The phrase we have been using in *New Left Review* to encapsulate these ideas, is that the goal should be, in the first instance, a socialised market.

## Solidarnosc was not a genuine trade union

By Tony Chater

Tony Chater is the editor of the *Morning Star*, the daily paper associated with the Communist Party of Britain.

I think that the old model of socialism has collapsed. This was probably inevitable.

Now we see a form of Third World capitalism developing.

The old systems became ossified. In order to reform them the reformers — like Gorbachev — needed the full support of the Party and the trade unions. He needed to work out a practical reform programme which could also have the support of the people as a whole, so the people could be mobilised.

But the Party and the unions were so integrated into the centralised, bureaucratic structures that they had passed the point of no return. The moment they passed from generalisations about reform to action and decisions, the Party split into different sets of élites. In the sense that it was part of the system, it was difficult to use it to change the system.

The process of ossification began in the mid-'20s. A whole series of measures began to be taken. That meant the gradual restriction of democracy.

The situation had developed for revolution in Russia. Lenin led that revolution. The imperialist powers intervened and there was terrible destruction. Lenin then initiated the New Economic Policy which in a sense was a controlled form of capitalist development within a workers' state and in a situation where the commanding heights of the economy were nationalised. Lenin wanted to develop the productive forces to a level where socialism could begin.

That process began to be arrested in the mid-'20s. I do not think you can blame Lenin for Stalin. Stalin was just an individual, it is not possible to explain what is happening by the actions of individuals.

I do not agree that the Communist Party in Britain took its policies from the Soviet Union.

From 1950 onwards, the Communist

Party started to develop a strategy for socialism in Britain based on British conditions and traditions, "The British Road to Socialism". We were opposed to the treatment of dissidents in the Soviet Union and to the intervention in both Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan.

Our programme was based on the utter inseparability of socialism and democracy. Democracy is not an added extra — it is the body and soul of socialism.

I would not call Hungary 1956 an invasion: the Soviet Union was already there.

The problem was that from 1948 onwards, attempts were made to impose a Soviet model on the countries of Eastern Europe. This was the root of the trouble. It led to difficulties, in Hungary from around 1953 leading to 1956.

I do not believe that Solidarnosc was a genuine trade union. I think it was a political movement in which the Catholic Church — particularly the reactionary elements — were heavily involved. We can see the fruits of this development at the present time. There is a right-wing government in Poland and the development of capitalism.

Is socialism possible in one country? Yes, but in practice these developments will probably take place on a much wider scale.

## Don't try to save the term "socialism"

From page 11

of Communist rule there would be a rich, abundant consumer society. They wanted their image of what the West was like. Of course, the situation did not allow this — especially not in Russia itself.

I do not see that the change will inevitably be to capitalism. In some countries that is quite probable; in Russia, I am not sure.

Why did the old system collapse? It was crazy from the point of view of instrumentality. Almost half the resources in the old USSR were devoted to military expenditure. Russian economists say that this spending is still 30 per cent of GDP. If we assume that 20% of GDP is for non-productive consumption of the bureaucracy, and at least 20% for investment, that leaves little for people to live on.

Then, there was always the passive resistance of the people. And there were two great external shocks to the system in the 1980s: the Polish revolt and the Afghan resistance.

It was not mechanically certain that they would not go on. But we have the conjunction of unpredictable — not ac-

cidental, but contingent — factors in history: a small group of people under Gorbachev undertook to change part of the system, they pulled the thread, and everything began to unravel.

The system was a bureaucratic totalitarian capitalism which came about because of the totalitarian Bolshevik party. The organisation of the Bolshevik party — so-called "democratic centralism" — was the rule of a small bureau. The Bolsheviks took power in a military putsch. October was not a revolution. The idea that it was a revolution is a lie.

The Bolsheviks dissolved the Constituent Assembly where they had only 25% of the delegates. They imposed their own control on the Soviets, which became more and more a mask. They suppressed the Kronstadt revolt.

The bureaucratic dictatorship already existed in Lenin's time.

The greatest blow against the workers' movement, against socialism, and against freedom in general, was not accomplished by capitalism or by the Nazis. It was done by Communism. If you go to Eastern Europe and talk about socialism, you will probably be lynched. The people there will not hear a single word about socialism from now on. This also goes in Western Europe. That is the result of Communism.

The revelations coming out now about the Stalinist systems — though for me they were not new facts — enable people to say: socialism was *that!*

Totalitarianism! Any other regime is preferable!

The prospects now are not very rosy. These feelings will hang over for a long time. People need time to digest the fact that capitalism is not a democratic regime, it is not economically fair, and it produces ecological catastrophes. People need time to discover that they can *do*

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"Workers are only 20% of the population. We cannot have 20% of the population running the whole of society — unless it is done by totalitarianism".

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*something* about capitalism. People need time to discover that doing something about it does not necessarily mean ending up with a Bolshevik party on their backs.

I do not use the word "socialism" any more. I am not trying to save the term "socialism". What I aim at is an autonomous society where the collectivity is autonomous and makes its own laws and where individuals are autonomous. This means that individuals are free within the limits of

## A socialist society will need the market

By Ken Coates

Ken Coates is a British Labour member of the European Parliament. He was formerly associated with *The Week* and the Institute for Workers' Control.

I would separate the countries of Eastern Europe from those in the ex-USSR. The logic of developments is quite different. Eastern Europe was an occupied territory. The Soviet Union had been formed through a process begun by their own revolution.

In Russia and the other republics of the old USSR the collapse of the economy has resulted from the impasse reached by Gorbachev's attempt to restrain the military-industrial sector of the economy. Gorbachev largely failed to do this. He tried to achieve disarmament because he knew that the proportion of the Soviet national product eaten up by the military sector was unsustainable. It was denuding the consumption sector of the economy and undermining the previously more effective

laws that they make themselves. People are educated to be free and responsible.

I would not call this socialism because the term is irretrievably prostituted by the history of the last 70 years, both the history of Communism and that of the so-called social democracies in the West.

We have seen Mitterrand in France. In Britain you have had the Labour Party in government. Then you had the Tories. You may have Labour again. This is some sort of national football game, of no general interest for humanity.

People must create new organs of power in order to take over. These organs must be collectively run, with direct democracy. Federated across countries, these organs would form national instruments of power.

I talk of *people* rather than *workers*. Workers are only 20% of the working population in the US. The working class will also be reduced to this proportion in the other industrial countries. We cannot have 20% of the population running the whole of society — unless it is done by totalitarianism.

The Polish general strike of August 1980 was run through factory strike committees. That was possible because Poland was a *backward* country. Poland still has 40% industrial workers, and so, by definition, it is a *backward* society.

I think that every member of the population, except for a small layer of three or seven per cent at the top, has an interest in change.

welfare sector. There was a crisis.

After six years of glasnost in which many areas were opened to debate it is still impossible to find out the proportion of GNP devoted to military expenditure.

There has been some debate about the term "military industrial complex". I do not want to quibble about words. But they could not sustain the effort of trying to match the US.

The military expenditure was *insane*. Some figures quoted suggest 50% or 70% of GNP was spent. I think more accurate figures say 20-25% of Soviet GNP went on arms spending. Compare this with the West. Massive Western military machines have been built at a cost of 5% of GNP.

I think Gorbachev's manoeuvres between left and right can best be explained by his attempt to find purchase on the military-industrial complex and rein it in.

Gorbachev's policies were always ambivalent, but I will not join those who knock his domestic record. I feel he was up against overwhelming forces.

Gorbachev did not make the crisis — he inherited it from the architects of the autocratic USSR. Did he attempt to reform in the interests of the rulers? Well, that question falls several ways. The nomenklatura felt very threatened by Gorbachev. They now appear as liberals, or entrepreneurs, and *also* as defenders of social provision.

A peak was reached during the coup attempt of 1991. The economy entered a period of open collapse and the break-up of the USSR is a direct result of this impasse.

The military-industrial complex is being disassembled by the process of republican secession.

Who would I blame for the current mess? Well, blame is not very useful. But, of course, some responsibility must lie in the early period of the Russian revolution. But here we also find different roots, which did not develop because they were cut back.

Then the question should be asked: why did these roots not develop? The reason was the succession of Stalin, Stalin's adjustment to international competition and the threat of war.

Planning which is not democratic is liable to produce results of this type. Undemocratic planning also takes place in capitalism. Planning by major corporations often mess up social choices about the environment. It is not possible to organise complex modern societies without planning. Socialist parties which try to ignore this are leaving their reason for existing behind.

But also, I have worked in the na-

tionalised mines. I know that this type of bureaucratic management does not meet the needs of our people.

The point is that a *socialist* society in the modern world will need large elements of production for the market. It is not worth the sweat to try to sort out large parts of the economy which will be better nourished if they are informally organised.

Who wants to organise all plumbers into a central syndicate? It is not part of the socialist project to eliminate the market in a wide range of small production and services.

But, having said this, the ex-Soviet Union cannot avoid wholesale collapse and possible colonisation if they try to reanimate their industries by putting them all on the market. Firstly, in the

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**“Undemocratic planning also takes place in capitalism. Planning by major corporations often messes up social choices on the environment. It is not possible to organise without planning. Socialists who ignore this are leaving their reason for existence behind”.**

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international marketplace, most would go bust.

Secondly, even the military sector — the most advanced sphere — could not be privatised to the advantage of anyone in Russia.

The only rational way for the Russian economy to develop is through a very large sector of public enterprise, which should be democratised. We should not see that process of democratisation dogmatically. Democratic control should come from two directions: worker involvement and social management.

Worker involvement will not suffice. The workers are in too defensive a frame of mind — they actually are on the verge of starvation. No-one has time to see the social objectives. So the classic model of workers rising up to defend their social gains has little relevance.

If you have a functioning economy and full employment, workers can involve themselves creatively in management. In the mess of Russia it is not so easy.

The main issue now is to maintain the public sector.

Who exactly will do this I am not sure. The present government of Russia is likely to preside over an increasing mess while stimulating xenophobia.

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## Lenin overestimated the possibilities in Western Europe

By Vladimir Derer

Vladimir Derer is secretary of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, and has been active in the East European Solidarity Campaign. The son of a pre-war Czech socialist MP, he has lived in Britain for 50 years.

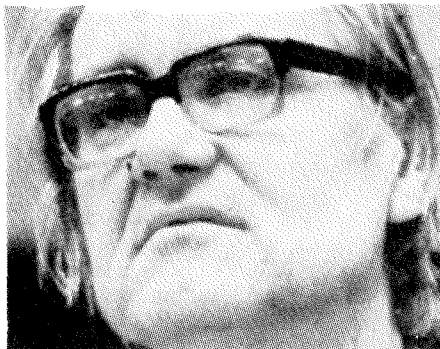
The much-mentioned left prognosis that Eastern Europe is turning into capitalism has not been really substantiated. Capitalism can not exist without a bourgeois ruling class, and it is doubtful whether the racketeers who are doing well at the moment will be able to turn into a ruling class.

Unless the ex Soviet Union is going to be turned into a part of the Third World, the personnel of the bureaucratic apparatus — as distinct from the personnel of the party — may have to fall back on *administering* the economy. The reforms introduced by Yeltsin are not going to work.

I accept that there is a basic difference between the countries of Eastern Europe and the ex-USSR. The transition to capitalism is quite possible in countries like Czechoslovakia and Hungary. But even there, Western capitalists are not really moving in. The bourgeoisie also have problems. The investments necessary to make the major industries much more productive are just not present. Buying industry in Eastern Europe is not generally a commercial proposition for the Western capitalists, because it implies considerable investment.

The only place where the full introduction of capitalism is likely is East Germany. That is entirely because the West Germans will finance the change.

If capitalism is not introduced, the other possibility is that the managers of state concerns may have to reconsider their current capitalist orientation.



We should not overestimate the extent to which the ex Communist Party members are doing well as new employers and entrepreneurs. In Czechoslovakia, there is a distribution of ownership via coupons rather than to a narrow section of society. This means wider ownership, but will not lead to investment, which is what the modernisation of industry requires.

The reason for the collapse was that the Soviet Union was acting as a substitute imperialist power, trying to keep up with America. They could not do that on their narrow material base. The consumers were starved.

The ideological disintegration of Stalinism did not happen by systematic propaganda from another class, undermining the ruling class, as in the 18th century in France. The collapse happened because the rulers realised that they had to reform the economy, but they did not have the means to accomplish reform. People simply ceased to believe in a system which had discredited itself.

We should make a distinction between the Communist bureaucracy and the bureaucracy as a class. The Communist Party became the major brake on the development of the means of production. That is why it was so easy to close it down.

The personnel of the Communist Party were grouped by their compliance with the dominant ideology. In many respects they were inferior people, yet they were in control. The burgeoning middle classes and professional strata saw these people as incompetent. This was most clear in Eastern Europe, where the regimes were imposed from the top. People *complied* with the regimes, but did not *believe* in them.

The havoc which Stalinism brought with it is not yet over. Socialism has been discredited practically everywhere. On the other hand, there is still a lot to learn from the Russian experience.

Before the 1914-18 war there was a certain amount of justification for Lenin's strategy that the Russian revolution would trigger off a chain of revolutions. My own assessment is that Lenin did not quite appreciate the differences between Russia and Germany. He grossly overestimated the possibility of building Communist Parties in Europe. The simple mechanical transplant of the Russian party model attempted in the first years of the Comintern was obviously not possible.

Whether they would have embarked on the Russian revolution if they had known this is an open question. In retrospect, they made an error.

Lenin, in *What Is To Be Done?* and *Left-Wing Communism*, did not realise the difference between the Bolshevik party and the Social-Democratic parties of Europe. In 1914 he initially believed that the issue of *Vorwärts* which came out in support of the war was a fake. When Lenin wrote *What Is To Be Done?* he believed that he was reproducing on Russian soil the model of German Social Democracy. He quoted Kautsky as an authority.

The specificity of the Russian situation gave Lenin the opportunity to build a party capable of winning power. His assumption was that revolutionary parties in Europe could be created out of Social Democracy, simply on the Russian model.

It is true that the working class can only develop its own ideology outside the immediate class struggle, but in Western Europe the only way in which an organisation which seeks to do this can be built is by the closest contact with the labour movement. In Russia there was no *separate* labour movement. Trade unions hardly existed.

This different situation in Russia is repeated to some extent in the case of oppressed nationalities, where the socialist party can fully identify itself with the struggle of an oppressed nation and can win the leadership. In the case of Russia, the Bolsheviks won the leadership by becoming the voice of the oppressed.

In Britain, the socialists have been unable to do that. They have kept themselves outside of the mainstream of the labour movement. That is true of the early Communist Party, and it began with the Social Democratic Federation. A sectarian existence apart from the labour movement does not get socialism very far.

### A socialist society will need the market

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The Western left needs to support any socialist forces which emerge in these states. And we must do so in a non-sectarian spirit.

It is absurd just to look for people with corresponding views.

Thinking people need to take stock of the new situation. We need to do this, and the left in the ex-USSR is doing it under even greater pressure.

The socialist opposition will include vast numbers of former Communist Party members who were never part of the apparatus. These people were certainly not critical enough but nevertheless represented a tremendous social effort.

These people range from those who staffed the unions to those who ran the local chess club. This was the forum where voluntary social organisation happened in Russia.

Yes, it is true that to get a better job you joined the party. But it is also true that the party maintained a great rhetoric of socialism. People could express themselves and do socially valuable work at the base. Then there were the socialist oppositionists.

We must do whatever we can for these people. They need fax machines, money and resources. It would be premature to just look around and only help the ones and twos we can find that exactly agree with us.

## The real left has no need of apology

By Terry Eagleton

Terry Eagleton is a professor of literature at Oxford University and author of many books on literature and ideology. Formerly associated with *Socialist Press*, he is a member of the Advisory Editorial Board of *Socialist Organiser*.

Socialists in the West can not be disillusioned about events in the East unless they had illusions in the first place.

It has not been since the 1930s that Western Marxists — aside from the Communist Parties — have in any great numbers allied themselves with the Stalinist cause. Almost all of the major interesting Marxist developments in the West, from Trotsky to the Frankfurt School, have been resolutely anti-Stalinist.

The Western liberals woke up to the issue only around the time of Tiananmen Square. But we have pushed against Stalinism for well over half a century. The most abrasive and analytical critique of Stalinism has come from within Marxism, not from outside it. We have far outstripped the feeble moralism which, sometimes, was all the liberals could summon.

Far from being apologetic, we should point out that we have developed not only the most historically grounded criticism, but also the most politically combative analysis of Stalinism. The kind of reforms on defence of individual liberties which Western liberalism engaged in, however important, have for us just not been good enough.

Although no Western socialist can take heart from the reversion to capitalism in the East, at least we can say that just at the point where many cynical, often erstwhile radicals in the West were denouncing the whole concept of revolution as irretrievably outmoded and idealist, then events broke out with a bang in Eastern Europe, in the place where they least expected it.

Whatever came after, those events can be read as being all the things that a jaded Western post-modernism has rejected. There we had a collective popular subject, an insurrection against the state and to some extent a change of rulers.

Those in the West who have been so cavalier about the "old-fashionedness" of the concept of revolution, it is *they* who should be doing the apologising. We can say this without detriment to the concerns we have about where those revolutions will lead. But we can see as fact the possibility of this type of radical change.

We should forcefully remind people that Marx's political writings are democratic to the core, to the point where democracy is



**"The most abrasive and analytical critique of Stalinism has come from within Marxism, not from outside it."**

not an optional extra for socialists. Socialist structures must genuinely enable mass participation at every level.

Democracy is at the very heart of socialism. Or, alternatively, socialism, in the end, is political rather than economic. The economic is a necessary condition, of

course, but it is not a sufficient condition.

In fact, it is capitalism rather than socialism which is obsessed with the economic. Some socialists have perhaps also made this mistake.

Socialism is obviously about a change of power. But, in the end, we can only identify a genuine change of power, rather than a new group of rulers taking over, if the very meaning of power has also changed. That is the whole point of Lenin's *State and Revolution*. It is not just a matter of a new set of people, but a change in the very concept of power. This is the ultimate marker for a post-Stalinist socialism.

The concept of revolution has been so misused it may be difficult, strategically, to use it. It has been diluted and bastardised. On the other hand, if we were debating with a serious, decent liberal we could say we agreed with their basic values. If we said: could your values be achieved without a massive global transformation?, and they answered "no", they would be in flat contradiction with themselves.

We should stress that massive change is a realistic perspective. Anyone who thinks that a few more bags of grain and a bit more parliamentary democracy will answer all our needs is flatly wrong.

It is hard to say yet how much damage the death of Stalinism has done to socialism.

Socialism has a claim to be the greatest and largest reform movement in history. It has therefore inevitably encountered a lot of setbacks. But I am very confident that the socialist idea — despite what is currently happening in Eastern Europe — is as viable as ever and will survive.

One of the more invisible crimes of Stalinism was to discredit the idea of socialism in the eyes of the Western working classes. At least this is no longer on the agenda. At least we can now clear away the monstrous mystifications of socialism which have so alienated people to whom it would have been beneficial.

## This system was regressive

By Mike Farrell

Michael Farrell is a leader of the Irish Trotskyist group *People's Democracy*. He lives in Dublin and is the author of *The Orange State* and other books on Irish politics.

In the 1960s, the Soviet Union appeared to us to be keeping up with the West.

The most striking thing for me is the complete falsity of the claims which were made for Soviet society. In fact, in many ways, the system was regressive against the West.

Clearly, it did not go beyond capitalism. It was a backward economy in the Soviet Union. The whole enterprise seems to have been misconceived — heavy industrialisation on top of an agricultural system which could not bear its weight.

Statistics were falsified

I still believe that some social advances were made in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe. Certain aspects of the system had something to be said for them — for instance, a fairly good social welfare system, fairly good for that type of society, bearing in mind their backwardness.

The period after October and before Stalin was a workers' society. But those who firmly maintained that these were workers' states of some type should see that after Stalin these were not workers' states in any sense.

Obviously, for those who did maintain some faith in the Eastern European societies, even though they may also have

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## The 1917 revolution should never have taken place

By Al Glotzer

Al Glotzer is a socialist living in New York who for many years was one of Max Shachtman's closest comrades and co-thinkers.

The crisis in the Soviet Union was created by the economic failures of the successive regimes. It came to the point where there were no consumer goods, no food, no housing. This was practically a Third World country, economically speaking.

Of course, they had plenty of arms...

For many years, I have held that Russia was not a workers' state. I have held this view since the split in the American Trotskyist movement in 1940.

We had a long debate with Trotsky about whether this was a degenerated workers' state or not. We said no.

The Old Man made defence of the

Soviet Union the chief position of the Fourth International. We did not accept that position — we regarded the society as a new class society, and the bureaucracy as a new class. This was not a capitalist society.

Now, after 70 years, the revolution has collapsed. My own opinion is that it should have never taken place in such a backward country. I think Lenin and Trotsky were wrong. Not only that, but they established a one-party state and produced Stalin.

In fact, in 1903, Trotsky predicted that Lenin's type of organisation would first produce a dictatorship of the party, then the dictatorship of the central committee, then, finally, a single dictator. This course was clearly followed.

In 1917, I believe that the correct policy would have been to set up a democratic state and allow a normal development of the economy. All socialist parties would

had have the right to be active. The country was not ready for socialist reorganisation.

The revolution did not succeed in any respect. It remained a backward country. We deluded ourselves, thinking this was socialism.

In fact, anyway, this was no revolution. It was a putsch of the Party. It was the Party's insurrection and the Party's plan. It had no support of the masses. Do you think a couple of hundred thousand supporters in a vast, backward country of over a hundred million is the support of the masses?

Industry was isolated in just a handful of cities. They could not provide for the people. And a socialist who can not raise the level of existence of the people is a failure.

This is why I am a social democrat. Without democracy we are lost. And the Communist movement never had any democracy. It did not believe in it. It attacked the conception. That was a big mistake.

democracy inside the Party, repeating what he wrote in *Revolution Betrayed*. He said it was not a principle that no other

I do not believe Trotsky's answer then to the question of where he stood on democracy was forthright.

He did not assert that he was a democrat. He said that he had been for

### This system was regressive

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been critical of them, the total collapse in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union is shattering.

I am not *that* disturbed, although I am shocked at the level of corruption, brutality and repression taking place in those societies. I think it was worse than any of us imagined.

But if they were not genuinely socialist societies in any sense, their collapse does not discredit socialism. It may only discredit what some people *saw* as socialism.

As to the attacks on the Russian Revolution: the revolution was a tremendous progressive development in human history.

It would be foolish and unhistorical not to relook at the actions of the post-revolutionary government. We should not avoid the possibility that some of its actions helped the degeneration of the revolution and led to Stalinism.

This is *not* to throw Leninism out root and branch. *Mistakes* should not lead us to assume that the whole *project* was wrong.

The areas which should be looked at include the experience of the Cheka and questions associated with democracy — how we ensure bureaucracy does not grow and how we leave space for democratic discussion without threatening a revolutionary society.

We should look at these issues — partly because of the experience of Eastern

Europe. I have heard many wild and peculiar views expressed by people who have had no experience of debate. Political opposition would have allowed these people to thrash their views out.

We now face a period of pretty grim reaction, particularly in Eastern Europe. I have been quite frightened by some of the attitudes of Eastern Europeans. Yet their feelings are also understandable. They have been so disillusioned by Soviet society, that they have reacted violently against it and glorify the West. I am sure that will pass.

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**“In Western societies, there is a deep economic crisis with mass unemployment. People are looking for solutions. The left will regain support to the extent it is able to put forward both resistance and to appear to offer the prospect of building an alternative.”**

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These societies are heading for severe crisis as they try to introduce the market. The problems in these societies are insoluble by market solutions.

But it will take quite some time to rebuild socialist movements in these states

and for the left to regain lost confidence in the West.

In Western societies, there is a deep economic crisis with mass unemployment. People are looking for solutions. The left will regain support to the extent it is able to put forward both resistance and to appear to offer the prospect of building an alternative.

In Ireland, in some ways, the left is in bad shape. But I do not think that the crisis in Eastern Europe will have that much impact — other than on the Communist Party and the Workers' Party.

The Workers' Party was ultra-Stalinist. They are now facing particular problems. First, the collapse in the East and the discrediting of Stalinism has led them to want to disassociate themselves from regimes — like North Korea and Ceausescu's Romania — which they used to be identified with.

Secondly, they achieved considerable electoral success in the last election, winning seven seats in the Daíl. They won these because of the virtual collapse of the Labour Party. Those who have been elected are very opportunist and they want to ditch most of the Party's ideological baggage. They want less control on them from extra-parliamentary bodies.

In addition, these people fear that the Labour Party is reviving and that their seats are becoming vulnerable. They want to move towards the social democratic centre to join or form a working alliance with the Labour Party. This is the background.

The collapse of Stalinism has demoralised and discredited the ruling group in the Party, who were diehard Stalinists.



# STALINISM

organisations should exist, but in Russia the situation was such that they had to ban all other parties.

In fact, though Social Revolutionaries and the Social Democrats in Russia supported the revolution right through the Civil War, Lenin still insisted in wiping them out.

When the Party took power, they made the other parties illegal. They would not give them a press, meeting places. They ran the type of regime you had in Italy. Mussolini and Hitler learned from the Bolshevik Party.

No, the alternative to the revolution was a democratic state. Do not forget that the Soviets were not part of the Provisional Government, which was established by the revolution, in February, and in which the Bolsheviks did not participate.

The Soviets were a type of workers' organisation. They had a certain legitimacy. They were part of the dual power. But they were not a substitute for democracy, for the right to speak, to write freely, to have your own press and meetings.

It was only for a short period of time after October, before the state had settled, that there were still limited rights.

Lenin's hatred of the Mensheviks was extreme. And the Mensheviks were revolutionaries every bit as much as the Bolsheviks. They were not against the violent overthrow of the Tsarist government. They helped the overthrow of the Tsar in February 1917.

And Martov's party supported the Soviet regime. Martov was a friend of Lenin. He had to leave the country after the Bolsheviks took power. It was through Lenin's intervention that he was allowed to leave. If he had not done so, he would have been dead like Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev.

What does social democracy mean? It means a constant defence of democracy and the rights and living standards of the workers against the exploiters. Right here, in the US, being a social democrat means allying yourself with the labour movement.

Democracy, of course, extends to industry. Workers must have rights in the workplace and over the policies of industry. We must fight to keep the gains we have made despite the deep depression in the US. They want to make the workers pay for the crisis.

As a first step, workers must share in management. I do not think they should be subordinated to the decisions of individual managers.

But democracy is important. The American SWP now supports the Cuban dictator!

The idealistic elements of socialist theory do not square with supporting people like Castro. You have the same thing in the USSR. The inhuman aspects of communism are the most striking feature about it: the purges, the murders, the killing of the Party leaders.

## Revolutionary socialism is dead

By Fred Halliday

Fred Halliday is a professor at the London School of Economics. Author of many books, he also edited *Russia, China and the West 1953-66*, a collection of Isaac Deutscher's writings.

What is happening in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is that the attempt to create an alternative path to that of capitalism has foundered — after 70 years in the Soviet Union, less in Eastern Europe.

These countries have been forced not only to return to the path of capitalist development, but to return to the semi-peripheral conditions which all of them except Czechoslovakia found themselves in prior to the establishment of Communist regimes.

It is very clear in terms of their financial conditions. They are now probably lower down the ladder than Latin American countries.

There are numerous problems attached to the project of transition. But there is no strong agency capable of resisting the transition — neither the old bureaucracies nor the working classes.

Part of the problem is that, say, in the Soviet Union a lot of political energy is going in a different direction, into ethnic and national conflicts.

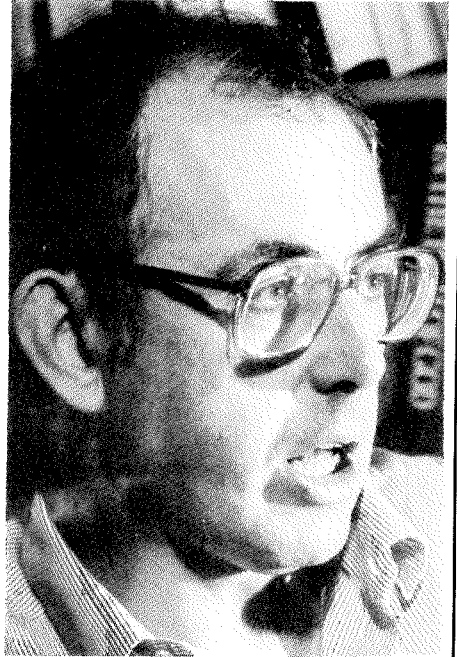
What are the possibilities for authoritarian regimes in these states? They may be pushed in that direction. On the other hand, I think that the world historical conjuncture which these states find themselves in is a different one to the one that existed between the wars.

It is too early to say that these democratic regimes will be stable and be able to solve social and economic problems. But it is ahistorical to say they will revert to the previous authoritarian type.

Russia is a different matter. It is not clear what will happen there.

In general, the crisis took place because these states were unable to compete successfully with the West — not even in military terms, not even in economic terms. They fell behind not only in terms of consumer goods, but also in broader industrial, agricultural and technological indicators. Of course, above all, politically they were not seen to be competing. They did not establish an alternative to bourgeois democracy, a more advanced socialist democracy, let alone do so in conditions of relative material wealth.

The regimes did not fall because of



Fred Halliday

mass revolt from below, except to some extent in Poland, and that was contained. They did not collapse.

They did not fail in world historical terms. Their economic and social achievements over 30, 40, 70 years were quite substantial. In some respects they were more advanced than the West, for instance, in some countries, provision of social welfare.

But, overall, they failed to compete with capitalism. The populations were becoming more disaffected, but also the leadership was itself disaffected. The leaders, including Gorbachev and others in Eastern Europe, gave up.

Where you have Third World regimes, who perhaps have material problems as great, but have a different ideological background — Cuba, China, Vietnam and Korea — their leaders have not given up. They have more of an indigenous basis, although they are not democratic.

The popular basis, for instance in Cuba, has been squandered by the regime. The key point, however, is that the leadership has not given up.

Why did things move so quickly? For the same reasons that the European empires crumbled so quickly in a different political context: the cracking of a hegemonic will.

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## By Boris Kagarlitsky

**Boris Kagarlitsky** is a leader of Russia's new Party of Labour. He was jailed under the Brezhnev regime for his work on an opposition journal. He is a member of the Moscow City Council.

There is a lot of speculation about the nature of the crisis in the ex-USSR; "the crisis of communism", "the final crisis". Some kind of speculation is useful. But because of all the abstract ideological debate, some have forgotten the very elementary, technical meaning of the current crisis. This situation was produced by the collapse of the management system in the Soviet Union in the late '70s and early '80s.

The reasons are easily described. The crisis was produced by the inability of the system to adjust to the tasks of technological change, and by the growing complexity of the economy. The economy became less and less subject to management from one centre.

This is why the crisis happened recently rather than 20 or 30 years ago. So, this is a crisis of centralist management. In this sense you can say that Stalinism has completely exhausted its potential but for quite technical reasons.

Stalinism had a certain historical *logic*, and rationality. It lost this rationality because the world changed. And, in part, the world changed because of the very success of Stalinism in moderating the system.

Now we face the official position of the Russian government, which says that Stalinism was wrong from the very beginning, mixing socialism and communism with Stalinism.

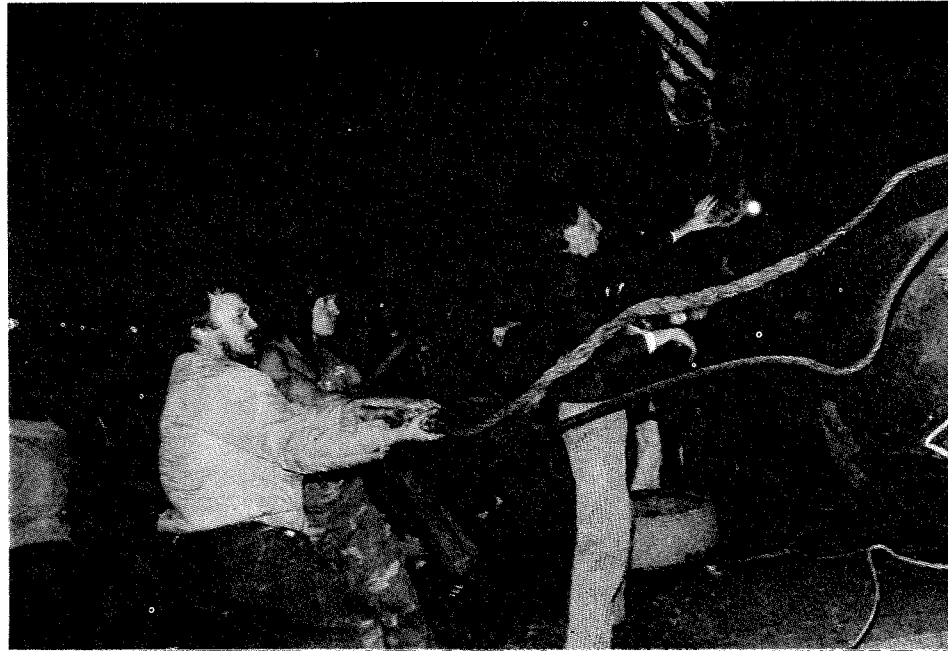
We can ask why the crisis happened in 1991 rather than 1931 or 1941, when the technical situation at least seemed to be worse. The system survived all these pressures, and wars and then collapsed. It is because of the crisis of centralism. In this sense centralised managed systems, including some types of capitalist management, are part of the very same crisis.

Stalinism was an attempt to compensate for the under-development of Russia. Developing faster means developing in a different way. It was a non-capitalist but also a non-socialist development.

Stalinism is a separate phenomenon. We have defined it as "statocracy". This is a system produced by the collapse of the capitalist mode of production in a backward country. Elements of state capitalism, socialism and the Asiatic mode of production were put together by the state bureaucracy which de facto acts as a caretaker for the absent ruling class.

As history proved, this mode of development was extremely unstable. It lasted something less than 70 years. In historic terms this was a very unstable phenomenon.

The traditional Trotskyist explanations



Moscow demonstrators pull down the statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky

## Socialism has not failed

of a degenerated workers' state could fit into the picture of the 1920s and early 1930s, but not the late 1930s. Trotsky's explanations were correct in, say, 1929 or 1931, but not in 1937, and particularly not after his death.

This degenerated workers' state produced something which was no longer any form of workers' state. This type of statocracy, or totalitarian system was the product of the degeneration of the workers' state; it still kept certain characteristics of the workers' state. It was a heritage it possessed even to the last moments of its existence.

The degenerated workers' state theory says that the working class still remains

working class itself. The bureaucracy shaped this social development to fit its own demands, interests and vision.

One aspect which is often ignored is how the development of the working class was part of the strategy of the state system. In this way the working class completely lost — for years and years — the ability to develop its own interests. This was one reason for the stability of the system.

Now the new market forces, introduced by the very same bureaucracy, are reshaping the working class. They are producing a much more class conscious and militant working class than the working class was even as recently as five years ago.

Were Lenin and Trotsky right in 1917? Apparently Mao Zedong was asked whether he considered the French Revolution a success — he answered that it was too early to tell!

It is too soon to judge the Russian Revolution. The irony of the situation is that the outcome of the struggle in Russia today will show whether Lenin was right or wrong. In many respects the historic outcome depends on us.

If capitalist restoration finally brings the country back to the camp of underdeveloped countries — the only possible outcome of capitalist restoration — we will have lost 70 years of development.

We will be worse off than a country like Brazil, for instance. So if restoration succeeds we could say that the revolution was a catastrophe because of the final result.

But if the country rejects that road of development and takes a non-Stalinist,

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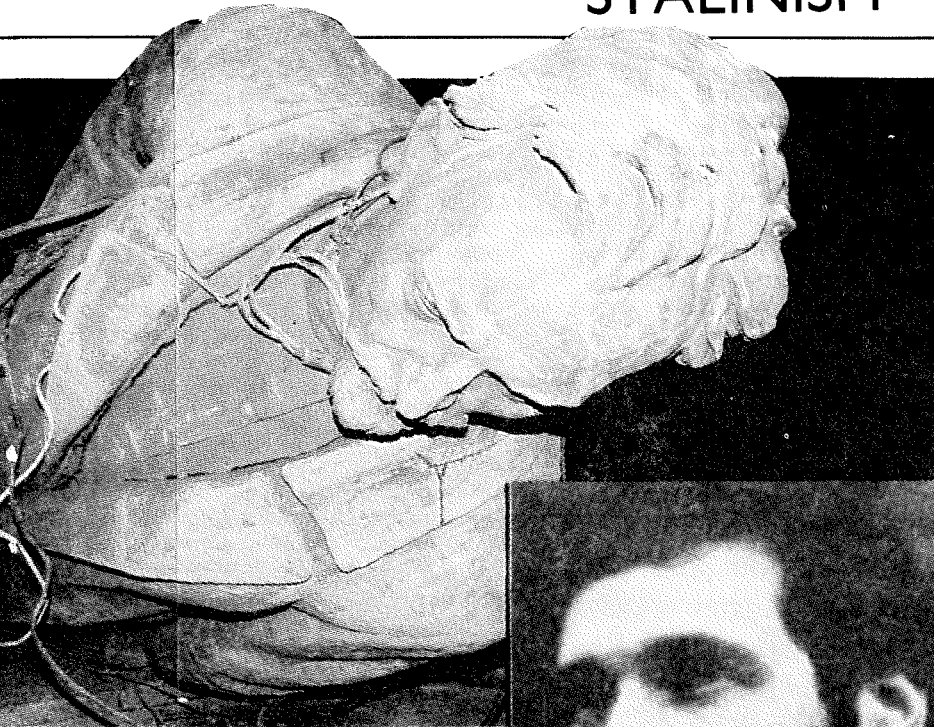
**"Stalinism emerged out of Lenin and Trotsky's society like the child killing the father — the negation of the Revolution".**

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the major force determining the development of the country, but in a deformed way. The bureaucracy was trying to exploit the workers and use the development for its own interests, but was not the main force determining the development. Working-class interests remained the main driving force of development.

This was a transitional phenomenon. Finally, the bureaucracy became a self-sustaining mechanism which very much determined the social development of the

# STALINISM



ed

non-capitalist path, we can say then that, despite the tragic characteristics of the Russian Revolution, it nevertheless was not made for nothing.

Historically, Stalinism greatly damaged the socialist project. It prevented the Western left from becoming a hegemonic force inside the working class. With a different development in Russia, there could have been a better chance for socialism in the West.

On the other hand, if we follow the real dialectic of history and look at the issue we see that the revolutionary changes of the past produce lots of "damage".

For instance, the Jacobins in the French Revolution damaged the cause of bourgeois democracy in Europe. This was the most extreme realisation of bourgeois democracy in the Europe of the time. They damaged ideas like republicanism. But now we can see that Jacobinism was a necessary historical experience. It was probably a necessary historic error, which could not be avoided in the 18th century.

This informs my attitude about Bolshevism. Bolshevism, for socialists, was the same as Jacobinism for bourgeois republicanism and the cause of the bourgeois revolution. In this sense we can not completely separate Bolshevism from Stalinism.

Lots of people in Russia now say that it would probably have been better for socialism if the Whites had won the Civil War. Then Bolshevism would have been a tragic legend; the idea would not have been compromised.

Of course, people in 1918 could not think like this. They did not know about Stalinism. Stalinism emerged out of Lenin and Trotsky's society. But, politically,



**Boris Kagarlitsky**

Stalinism is another creature. Stalinism was rather like the child killing the father.

Stalinism is very much the negation of the Revolution. But the reaction was produced from the inside of the Revolution, not the outside. The people who produced the Stalinist Thermidor were Bolsheviks themselves. They killed the very best of Bolshevism — but they were also produced by Bolshevism.

Right now, in Russia, people face the danger of starvation. There are some conclusions to draw. Firstly, it shows how inefficient private property can be. If anything at all now works in Russia it does so in the state sector. And it works, more or less, when it is not damaged by partial privatisation.

Without a strong, democratically controlled state sector there is no perspective for development for the countries of Eastern Europe. There is a good case for nationalisation in the rest of the world as well.

The issue for the left is: what form should this nationalisation take? We are for self-management and nationalisation with industrial democracy. We need control not only from the producers but also from the consumers, through democratically elected local government and national assemblies.

But even in its bureaucratic form there have been successes for nationalisation. For instance, originally the British nationalisation of the coal industry was a success. People in Britain sometimes forget what the situation was like before nationalisation.

If we follow the development of British industry, we see that the Labour nationalisations after 1945 were bureaucratic — they should not be treated as good examples of socialist policy — but that they also played an important role in developing the country.

There is a tendency in parts of the Western left not just to negate the Bolshevik experience but also to negate the social democratic record. The trend now is to try to forget about all that was of any class importance in the history of social democracy. There *are* substantial parts of that experience we can learn from, and build on, critically.

The Labour Party made some attempts to challenge the capitalist control of certain centres of the economy. These attempts basically failed. Now the lesson the Labour right tries to draw out is not to seek ways and means for new attempts, but to cease to challenge capital in any way. Saying that part of Thatcher's appeal was that "1945 socialism" had failed, and British nationalisations were inefficient, is to miss the point: this was 40 years later! It is the same as saying no economic progress was made in Russia during 70 years because the system collapsed in 1991!

Obviously, I am not saying this is an ideal socialist programme, only that the 1945 Labour Party programme had a real reformist core. This was not very radical, but it was rational and quite necessary for society. We should not now say simply: this was wrong.

The Conservative government of the 1950s accepted these nationalisations. The irony is that the more recent counter-offensive of the right was made possible because the nationalisation of 1945 worked. Capitalist society was modernised and made more productive. Only after this work was completed was the Conservative counter-offensive possible. The big bourgeoisie pushed social democracy aside; it was no longer needed.

So, in terms of capitalist development, the social democratic experience was a success.

How do we address the question of the state? We say we need neither more nor less state: what we need is a *different* state. In Russia, today's state structures must be dismantled, and probably in Britain.

Incidentally, I am amazed at how authoritarian the British system is. Your government abolished the GLC. Yeltsin has tried to get rid of the Moscow City Council but has not yet succeeded. The problem of *how* to dismantle the state structures is a difficult question to solve. But it *has* to be solved.

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The left had three kinds of illusions in these systems. The maximum illusion was that these societies were, if not paradise, greatly superior in overall terms to the West; and that they were more democratic. That was never the case and the majority of the left gave up at some point after the Second World War, although they were certainly wrong to hold these views before the war.

The second illusion was that, although the system was clearly less successful economically, and more repressive politically than the bourgeois West, nevertheless it had the *potential* to develop. In other words, if the leaders changed their policies the societies could realise the possibility of an alternative society. This illusion reached its zenith particularly during the Krushchev period. It rested on the belief not only that the system would produce a leadership capable of reforming — which of course in the end it did — but also that the system *could* be reformed, “socialism with a human face”.

Even with a liberal leadership they could not out-perform the West. But it rested on a key illusion: it assumed that the Communist Party could still retain a monopoly of power. But if coercion is ended, against the background of the capitalist world, free elections will be demanded.

Had Dubcek remained in power he would have run up against exactly this problem.

“Socialism with a human face” — keep the communist revolution but make it nicer — was never going to work. When Gorbachev came along it was not just that he was too late, which of course is the nice

view, the cop-out view.

The third illusion was that, we know they are less successful than the West, but they will be there for a long period. In my case, I underestimated their fragility.

I thought we would be living with a Cold War for the foreseeable future. That was a mistake. Much of the efforts of the left in the early '80s went into minimising the might of the USSR and overestimating the might of the West. Having said this, I

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“The world that capitalism is creating is more unequal and polarised than the world that was created in the early part of this century: north and south, within our society.”

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did not expect these regimes to crumble as they did.

My feelings about the Bolshevik revolution is that, quite bluntly, it could never have succeeded. The model of political and economic development it postulated was unable to compete with capitalism.

It is another way of saying that the greatest mistake of socialism of this century is to underestimate what capitalism can achieve. We should look at “actually existing capitalism”. Capitalism

has introduced universal suffrage in all the advanced countries. That is enough to be a benchmark.

Capitalism has greatly developed the productive capacity of society and has provided an improved, and for many people reasonable, standard of living for two-thirds of the population of the major capitalist states. This is something that no-one expected.

It is this with which the Bolshevik revolution is competing.

We are now at a period of immense historical transition. It is easy to overestimate the importance of the present. But the present in this case *is important*.

The project of revolutionary socialism has foundered. There is no point in thinking it can be revived. Secondly, the whole idea of history moving along certain rails towards revolutionary transformation, from one mode of production to another, has got to be clearly rejected.

Thirdly, one of the major motors of international conflict in the 20th century — war between capitalist states — is also over, for the first time since the 1890s.

Having said this, the world that capitalism is creating is more unequal and polarised than the world that was created in the early part of this century: north and south, within our society.

The experiences of France '68, Chile '70-'73, Portugal, Iran and Poland are not the embryos of future experience. They have been the breeding ground of illusions. May '68 was followed by June '68, and the electoral triumph of the French bourgeoisie. The Iranian revolution was captured by proto-fascist clergy. The Portuguese revolution was actually engineered by right-wing generals who then reaped the benefits of it later on.

There have been successful struggles and of course these will continue. But to see this as part of some broader, historical, unified trend is just revolutionary mysticism.

The fact is that capitalism is generating contradictions. But the idea that there is something that is moving forwards is wrong. What is left now is the possibility of realising the potential of the bourgeois revolutions. Indeed, this means moving forward to more radical forms of democracy, more equitable international distribution and the banishing of war between states. These are classical goals of the revolutionary movement, without the mysticism and determinism of the communist tradition.

The epoch opened by 1789, the belief in the inevitable process of historical change and in revolutions as the gateways — as this epoch has come to an end.

There is much from that tradition which is still valid. But it will not be recuperated by overstating the socialist potential in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, or by myths about how things could have been done differently in the '60s, or the importance of '68.

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## No blueprint now

By Jim Kemmy

Jim Kemmy is an independent socialist from Limerick in the Irish Parliament.

Stalinism was definitely a repressive system. But now I see a danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

A lot of idealism went into setting up the Soviet Union. This idealism is all forgotten about now.

Every country needs a strong labour movement whether a Labour government is in power or not. The difficulty now is that there is a stampede in Russia in which socialism and the labour movement could be trampled on.

The trade union movement in the Soviet Union has been eclipsed. Nothing has replaced the Communist Party. The sad thing was that Gorbachev was not able to democratically reform the CP.

The Russian Revolution was developing

for years before 1917. Tsarism was the most backward, vicious, repressive regime where there were great concentrations of wealth. It was inevitable that there would be a reaction.

Russia leapt from Tsarism to Communism almost overnight. Looking back on it, that was unfortunate.

Marx and Engels had not envisaged socialism being founded in a society like Russia. They thought it would come out of a society like Britain. They thought it would come about in a society where democracy had prevailed for a while. I think, with hindsight, it would have been better to have had a democratic stage first and a socialist stage later on.

I think the other fact to remember is that the Russian Revolution emerged into the world and was attacked by foreign armies. They made the situation worse.

Do not forget that, with all its flaws, the Soviet Union did break the back of fascism in World War II. Survival was at stake. Stalin was brutal, but a great war general. He tried to harness the different religions and nationalities behind the war effort. They lost over 20 million people in Russia.

Without forgetting the lack of political liberty in Russia, do remember the achievements that were made in areas like space technology.

It was not that we did not want to look at the problems of the system, but in Britain and Ireland, where there were plenty of anti-socialist critics, there was no point in us adding our voices to the chorus. Obviously there were flagrant abuses which it was hard to defend. It was pointless to add your small voice to the shouts of the Tory Party, the bosses or, in Ireland, the Church.

I think the left should have been more independent.

I think it is important to have a balanced attitude towards the Revolution.

The West European left is demoralised and to some extent it has lost its ability to think. It has lost its analytical attitude to society.

Marxism still remains useful as a critique of capitalism. But Marx lived over 100 years ago — and the world has changed a lot since then.

There is no blueprint now and we must all look again at society. There is a need to update socialism and to make it more relevant.

Socialism in one country is no good anymore. The employers are organised internationally in the European Community. We have organised very weakly, very nationally.

The weakness and fragmentation of the left is very pronounced; it must be overcome. We must combat the injustices of capitalism and propose, in place of capitalism, an efficient, democratic socialism.



Jim Kemmy

## Bureaucracy was implicit in the Marxist conception

By Ernesto Laclau

Ernesto Laclau is a writer of Argentinian origin now living in Britain, a contributor to *Marxism Today* before it folded, and author notably of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (with Chantal Mouffe).

We have to differentiate between Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. In the case of Eastern Europe the Communist regimes were largely the result of the Red Army occupation after World War 2. There were no indigenous roots for this development.

At the moment when the Soviet power began to weaken itself, it was obvious opposition movements would emerge.

In the Soviet Union the process was more complicated. But what is clear from the general pattern of the transition was that one of the main achievements of the Soviet Union was to postpone for over 70 years the disintegration of the Tsarist empire. It had largely inherited a state apparatus and bureaucracy and established a firm dictatorship over many nationalities.

Even if the process in the former Soviet Union was different to Eastern Europe this is not *entirely* so: there were many oppressed nationalities integrated by force.

I think the meaning of the process is the end of bureaucratic socialism. What has failed is a conception of socialism in which bureaucratic centralisation and control of economic life exclusively by the state were the basis of the social and economic system.

In fact this conception was always implicit in the Marxian concept of society. The problem was how a limited historical agent could assume a universal historical

task — the social management of the productive process.

The historical answer, in the case of the Soviet Union, was that this task was assumed by a corrupt bureaucracy. Therefore, what has failed in the Soviet Union is something much wider than a particular political regime. The whole conception of socialism founded on centralised bureaucratic control of the productive process has failed.

There are two main brands in the socialist tradition: communism and social democracy. These strands share a basic confidence in bureaucratic centralised planning. This idea is at the core of Marxism.

The Marxist conception is linked to the withering-away of the state. The state as a bureaucratic mechanism would become redundant. The proletariat had the role of the universal class which would represent pure human essence.

A historical subject would emerge which would represent the universality of the species. Without this emergence there would be no withering away of the state.

In fact, what has happened, far from the emergence of a homogenous, unique social agent which could represent the universality of the species, what we have is a plurality and fragmentation of many social actors.

I see a proliferation of many historical actors who have the right to have some say in decisions affecting the productive process.

What about France 1968? Iran in 1979 or Poland in 1980? These were not class

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## They lost the economic battle

By Livio Maitan

Livio Maitan is an Italian Trotskyist, a long-time comrade of Ernest Mandel in the leadership of the Fourth International (United Secretariat), and author of *Party, Army and Masses in China* and other books.

The question of how to evaluate the crisis in the ex-USSR and eastern Europe cannot be separated from an assessment of the class character of these states, which in turn involves an historical balance sheet of the Russian Revolution and its aftermath.

I continue to defend the Trotskyist view that the Russian Revolution was the world's first successful conquest of state power by the working class; the actions of the Bolsheviks and their allies in seizing state power remain historically justified. But the degeneration of the revolution was to some extent inevitable once the European revolutionary wave of 1917-23 was defeated. That is to say it was inevitable that isolated revolution in a backward country should suffer

bureaucratic deformations. It was not inevitable that a bureaucratic caste would usurp power. That was a consequence of the political defeat of the struggle of the Left Opposition in the 1920s, itself conditioned by the profound weakness of the Bolshevik old guard in relation to the danger of bureaucratisation, as well as the well-known atomisation of the Russian workers' vanguard, a consequence of the civil war and its aftermath.

Without the extension of the revolution, a workers' state in most countries would have been quickly overthrown. But it survived in the Soviet Union thanks to the immense reserves of natural resources and labour power. This enabled the bureaucratized economy to carry out the tasks of basic industrialisation in a relatively autarkic way, albeit using terrorist-police methods. Despite the relatively long-term survival of the bureaucratically degenerated workers' state, Trotsky's prognosis — either successful political revolution and the extension of the revolution, or alternatively

### Bureaucracy was implicit in the Marxist conception

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movements in the least.

1968 represented the *end* of class politics. In France, forms of protest did not depend on the position of actors within the productive process. We saw new student mobilisations.

Today we see a proliferation of new identities which cannot be seen as unifying around a class base.

Looking back at the Russian Revolution, with the advantage of hindsight, we can see that the real democratic revolution was the revolution of February. Retrospectively, the suppression of the Constituent Assembly by the Bolsheviks was a profound mistake.

The October revolution was partly a democratic revolution with a non-democratic outcome. Would a democratic outcome have been possible given the conditions and relation of forces? That is difficult to say.

In Britain now we should struggle for democratic socialism. This means increasing the constituencies which have a say in collective decisions.

Even if bureaucratic Stalinism has failed in its classical form we should also note that regulation by pure market mechanisms has also failed. It is not a matter of returning to the "virtues" of the market. We need a type of mixed economy in which social control of the productive process and private property are combined.

This is a formula which can mean many things. For instance, for a radical democracy should mean that many groups at local level would have a say in the regulation of economic life. And economic life is not the only aspect; there is a plurality of subjects and social agents which have to have more control in a much more democratic society.

Concepts such as "class state" and "capitalist state" must be re-examined. Certainly, the British state is not a class state if "class state" relates to a particular group. The British state is simply the result of the relation of forces between different groups in society.

Our task is to allow progressive forces to control more and more of the state's mechanisms.

If we do not attempt this the struggle is lost before we have begun. Marxists have had the contradictory approach of, on the one hand, relying on increasing state intervention to advance social aims and on the other hand asserting that the state was the instrument of the dominant classes.

Whether the British state is going to become a class state, or become something else, is not decided in advance. This is decided in struggle.

## Stalinist communism was never socialism

By Ronnie Macdonald

Ronnie Macdonald is a leader of the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee, which represents workers on the North Sea oil rigs.

I have mixed feelings about the transformation taking place in Eastern Europe and the ex-USSR. Clearly, I am pleased that the totalitarian governments were defeated. They were overturned with quite remarkable ease. It shows what happens when the people refuse to admire the king's new clothes.

But delight must be tempered with some caution. We are seeing the resurgence of very reactionary forces. Religious and nationalistic groups are organising and they present a real danger.

A second factor in the collapse was the existence of an over-centralised, bureaucratic state. Planning was not carried out democratically. In the end the system ground down to a standstill.

Thirdly, we saw incredible spending on arms. The Soviet Union's resources were wasted on the building of a massive military machine.

This arms spending attenuated the growth of material wealth in the society as

a whole.

The US is now suffering from the same symptoms of wasteful spending on armaments. But they are caught up in a bind. Massive cuts in military spending will have a catastrophic effect on the West.

The Western recession is caused by essential contradictions of capitalism. The unviability of both the East and West emanate, in the final analysis, from the same reasons: the inability of the economies to deliver.

I have never involved myself in the "did Lenin lead to Stalin" discussion. I have always taken it as read that the Russian Revolution was a necessary and a good thing. No-one should question the legitimacy of the first years when Lenin led the government. It was only in the mid-1920s, under Stalin, that things went badly, drastically wrong. Stalin's forced collectivisation and the beginnings of totalitarianism signalled the real break with the ideals of the October revolution.

The OILC symbol is taken from the Solidarnosc logo. There are remarkable similarities between the rise of the union in the Polish shipyards and our own

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capitalist restoration — remained valid.

The roots of the present crisis of the eastern bloc are that the bureaucratic command economy lost the economic battle with world capitalism. The system reached the limits of its capacity to expand, without a successful workers' revolution which could have renovated the economy and opened the possibility of an extension of the revolution to more advanced industrial states.

Gorbachev's reforms represented an attempt, ultimately utopian, to maintain the bureaucratic system by modifying it.

Marketisation of the bureaucratic economy combined with a limited democratisation proved inherently unworkable.

Attempted reform from above created the space for mass rebellion from below, especially in eastern Europe. The revolt of the workers was completely justified and deserved our full support. But its ultimate social outcome is not yet determined. Given the complete discrediting of socialism in these countries by decades of Stalinism, the relationship of forces up till now is very unfavourable. In all the eastern European states, there are now governments aiming at rebuilding capitalism. Restorationist tendencies are prevailing on the ideological and political field also in the ex-USSR. Nowhere has the working class conquered political independence, not even to the extent of for-

unionising activity, although I should stress that we are a bit nervous of some of the other connotations.

We chose the symbol because, during the month in which the Committee took off, Thatcher was in Poland, talking about the need for freedom and free trade unions! We said: well, Maggie, we are for that too!

I have heard it said that if you were not a Communist at 19, you had no humanity; if you were still a Communist at 30 you had no sense. Many — I was not amongst them — did take this road and considered the Communist Party only to reject it because they could not envisage living in a society where trade unions and trade unionists had to utterly subordinate themselves to the state.

I never equated Stalinist communism with any type of socialism. Communism was never socialism. Hopefully, now it has gone we can begin to set the record straight.

From now on we must present the socialist case in democratic terms. We can win people by the strength and quality of our argument. I am confident we will win these arguments.

In the OILC we are putting together an effective fighting machine which can work for offshore oil workers. For the foreseeable future we will see a stand-off between the working class and capitalism.

We need to ensure that the socialist forces are strong in their opposition to capital.

ming mass independent trade unions.

If the outcome is the final restoration of capitalism, in eastern Europe and in the ex-USSR as well as in China and Cuba, it will constitute ultimately an historic defeat for the world working class, the victory of counter-revolution. The very existence of the Soviet Union and other non-capitalist states was a formidable factor in the world relationship of forces, despite the crimes of bureaucratic rule. The restoration of capitalism would free the hands of international imperialism; the Gulf war was a first sign of the potential consequences. Obviously, the task for revolutionary socialists today is to maximise their efforts to aid the construction of independent workers' organisations

## “We must continue to defend the project of a socialised economy”.

and socialist forces. Socialists, revolutionary people in these countries must simultaneously fight all attempts at marketisation and privatisation, but also any attempt to reimpose or recycle bureaucratic rule.

As to the question of the future of socialism, two basic things have to be said. First, we are in a very difficult international situation with world capitalism on the offensive against the working class. Because of the wide association of Stalinism with socialism, many doubts about the viability of socialism are being expressed, not only in intellectual circles but in the workers' movement in many countries. Second, of course, Stalinism was not socialism; the democratic and emancipatory content of socialism has to be re-stressed in this situation.

The political profile and tasks for revolutionary marxists is a long discussion which cannot be fully elaborated here. But I would stress that we must continue to defend the project of a socialised economy as against illusions in the capitalist market, while making it very clear that socialisation and workers' control do not equal bureaucratic nationalisation on either the Stalinist or social democratic model. And that while socialists defend all democratic rights, including those achieved under bourgeois democracy, our conception of socialist democracy is something qualitatively different. Workers' self-management is simultaneously an economic and democratic concept.

Finally, socialism today has to highlight the emancipatory potential of struggles against all oppressions — women's oppression, racism, the oppression of lesbians and gay men, national oppression — and really integrate these issues into our perspectives and action.

Socialism or barbarism remains the choice facing humanity. The challenge for revolutionary marxists is to turn the collapse of Stalinism to our advantage, rather than allowing it to be used as a weapon against us.

## The USSR used to work

By Ralph Miliband

Ralph Miliband is a lecturer at the London School of Economics. Author of *The State in Capitalist Society*, *Parliamentary Socialism* and other books, he has been associated with the Socialist Movement.

I think the way to look at the current crisis is to see Perestroika as a great failure and Glasnost as a great success.

Perestroika has failed because it was begun without a clear view of what had to be done, not knowing how to go about reform. Cross-currents contradicted each other and meant that some did not want to give up the command system altogether; others did. Gorbachev, as he says himself, was a victim of the incoherence.

Gorbachev could not go straight back to capitalism. But he did not have a clear alternative.

I think Eastern Europe is rather different. The major currents were the discredited Stalinist old guard and the pro-capitalist liberals. The system was so much less entrenched there than it was in the USSR that once the Russians said they would not help the old guard, the systems broke down. There was not a basis for the old guard to hold on. Ceausescu tried and failed.

These were not legitimate regimes. They were mostly propped up by the Soviet Union.

What underlay much of the crisis in the Eastern European states was economic failure. This is remarkable because up until the 1960s, some very anti-Communist politicians and economists thought that these states would overtake the West. Indeed, they were not doing that badly. In terms of economic growth, modernisation, industrialisation, the drop in infant mortality, the 1950s and 1960s were not bad decades. They compared favourably, at least, with the equivalent countries in the Third World.

There are a number of explanations. The overriding one is that a system which is so bureaucratically imposed from above and so totally unwilling to accept dissent will not get people's cooperation. This is particularly true in Eastern Europe.

There was an impetus in the 1950s and '60s which worked up to a point. Beyond that, the system showed itself incapable.

I make a distinction from the USSR. These factors hold for the Soviet Union, but from the '40s through to the '60s, there seems to have been a good deal of legitimisation, a sense that life was getting better. Their immense reserves were called upon for extensive modernisation. But, after the 1960s, they were required to go in for more intensive modernisation.

They were not equipped to develop, for example, information technology. Innovation was not possible. It should be remembered that the Brezhnev era, usual-

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## A revolution from above

By Alec Nove

Alec Nove is an emeritus professor at Glasgow University. He is the author of *The Soviet Economic System* and of *The Economics of Feasible Socialism*, in which he advocates a species of "market socialism".

I am quite pessimistic about the situation in the Soviet Union. Whatever plans and programmes are taken up, the political

system, as it now stands, is incapable of implementing them.

For example, when it is said that some sort of authoritarian regime is extremely probable, it is because a power vacuum exists. There has to be *some* type of authority.

The old Marxist-Leninist doctrines have been thoroughly discredited. The alternative is nationalism: this has already con-

tributed to the break up of the Soviet Union. The difficulty is that the nationalist ideologies are inclined to be conservative. But the nationalists are split on the question of the market. Some are in favour of Chicago and Thatcher. Others have a Russian-style neo-Slavophile conservatism. Some are neo-fascists, and pro-Pinochet.

Then there is the question of the

### The USSR used to work

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ly thought of exclusively as a period of stagnation and corruption, did also see some development.

There was something resembling a consumer revolution in the Brezhnev era. It was an awful regime but, at the same time, the Soviet working class was not doing too badly.

In relation to what is happening now it is worth remembering that in the '70s the system *was* functioning. The distribution was awful, but it *was* functioning. There was bread in the shops. With Perestroika, one system came to an end with nothing to replace it.

One factor that should be added is that they desperately attempted to keep up in the arms race and just could not manage it.

In the end, the system could not call upon people in a way which was efficient. The joke of the workers was: they pretend to pay us and we pretend to work. People could see the corruption and the waste.

People have characterised the Soviet Union in very different ways. I never thought these regimes were capitalist. I do not think that "degenerated workers' states" is very apt, either.

Bureaucratic collectivism comes closest of all. This is a very specific system, not totally unknown in history, but fairly well on its own.

A few years ago, I wrote that this system was 'despotic collectivism' and, who knows, it could become a 'democratic collectivism'. That was an illusion.

The bureaucracy, or class, or ruling strata was in any case very divided and uncertain. They wanted to preserve privileges and resented people like Yeltsin who attacked them. Gorbachev became an agent of dissolution; once the system was touched it became brittle and broke.

There is something in the strict Trotskyist notion of a bureaucracy deciding to revert to private property and operate its own thermidor, as Trotsky described it in *Revolution Betrayed*. It is true after all that a lot of Party people saw their chance in privatisation to become the new capitalists.

One fact which is significant and deeply depressing is that those who wanted to replace the old regime not by

capitalism but by some sort of socialist democracy — these people are not going to make it.

I am certain that there are millions of people in the Soviet Union and East Germany who want socialist democracy.

In the ex-GDR, there was a genuine socialist culture. A lot of people hoped that the alternative to the old regime would be socialist democracy. They are now paying the price for this in the current witch-hunt taking place in East Germany. I was in Czechoslovakia in 1990 and people there were being persecuted for being Communists.

I am now impressed that both the right and the social democratic left believe that socialism is over. I have even heard

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**“There is something in the strict Trotskyist notion of a bureaucracy deciding to revert to private property and operate its own thermidor, as Trotsky described it in *Revolution Betrayed*. It is true after all that a lot of Party people saw their chance in privatisation to become the new capitalists.”**

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social democrats say that social democracy has achieved all that is possible. It has reached the end of the road.

They are saying that the best that can be hoped for is "capitalism with a human face" because the only alternative is totalitarianism.

Our problem is a double one. On the one hand, saying there is a radical alternative. At the same time, not falling back into mere slogans and formulae without thinking through our project. This will be very difficult. It will take some years.

I also think that we should avoid unrealistic ultra-leftism. The Leninist or Bolshevik model has gone.

The model says that it is quite inconceivable that anything resembling a socialist society can be achieved or even

begun within the current constitutional framework. The bourgeois state can not simply be inherited, it must be smashed.

This view of the state may be true. It is an imponderable. But I am certain that given the existence of capitalist democracy, it is possible to work within the system, engaging in electoralism and parliamentarianism.

Although there is such a thing as parliamentary cretinism, the danger is of falling into an anti-parliamentary cretinism.

It is now possible to conceive of a socialist government coming to office, even to power, and then facing a war of attrition from the capitalists.

The working class remains a basis of support for anything resembling socialist transformation. But we need to examine the sectional, race and gender divisions in the working class. The question becomes: how do we put together a "historic bloc" which could constitute a political majority as well as its current sociological majority?

We should underline that our socialism involves predominant public ownership. If people talk of the "mixed economy" I have no problems; the problem is that today's mixed economy has the wrong mix, with far too great a private sector.

We need to rehabilitate the notion of public ownership.

Finally, the left is not only recoiling from public ownership, but is also anti-statist to a degree which is wrong. It is essential that a socialist enterprise has a strong state.

I am not a statist. We must make our state democratic. I do not want to see a new tyrannical state replace the old one. But we must have a directing executive which is controlled and restrained but also has room to work.

Lenin's *State and Revolution* talked about the dictatorship of the proletariat as the people under arms in democracy. The state, if not destroyed, has become an administrative organ. I think Lenin approached anarchism here. Frankly, this is not realistic, as indeed the Bolsheviks soon discovered.

We would inherit a bourgeois state which would have to be democratised to become socialist. We would change its personnel. We would review the relationship between the legislature and executive. Although Marx wanted to merge these two elements, I do not believe this is possible.



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economy. It is in a terrible mess. There is a good case for freeing prices in the sense that if people are going to earn and spend money, prices must have some type of rationality behind them. The alternative is universal rationing.

But reform has been left so late. Shortages are severe; inequalities have grown enormous; it is sufficient for anyone to find a means of acquiring hard currency to buy up everything they want. There are lots of businessmen playing the extremely corrupt markets which do exist. They can quickly become millionaires. The pensioners and the poor are in a terrible position with the price increases.

But where is the money with which the government can pay the pensions and relief which is needed? Revenues are not being effectively collected. The new tax system is not yet in place.

A VAT of 28% has been introduced. They have never had VAT; it is difficult enough to operate it here.

There is now a great chance of disorder, followed by an authoritarian crackdown.

What are the roots of the crisis? There are different ways of looking at this question. The system inherited from Stalin could be called totalitarianism. The Communist Party full-time functionaries ran the country. Under Gorbachev this system was weakened, although not abolished. But nothing replaced their rule.

This is as true of the politics as it is of the economics. The only alternative was some sort of market. The Chicago marketeers who believe that all that has to be done is to adopt the principles of their textbooks and everything will turn out right are wrong and naive. But the point is that there is a logic to a market economy and, alas, it is very difficult to do without.

Some steps needed to be taken towards the market. But there were many problems — lack of experience, institutions, market culture and legal framework. A lot of genuine opposition came from ordinary people bothered about large price rises.

This was a revolution from above where Gorbachev sought support from below. A lot of the initiatives were from above. Many of the political struggles which took place were between different groups in the nomenklatura.

Perhaps this was inevitable. People would be brought out onto the streets to demonstrate, but alternative political structures did not emerge. To this day, in Russia, there are a lot of new parties but not a single one could be described as a serious political force.

Add to this that they made grave economic errors — including the destruction of the currency. Budget revenues fell because of the fall in the price of oil, and because of their campaign against vodka (which provided a lot of revenue). Expenditure increased. Military spending remained very high. They made desirable decisions to increase expenditure on appallingly underfunded medical services and build more houses. They covered the

gap by printing money.

On top of this you had the various nationalities pulling in different directions and thus you had an increase in economic confusion.

Supplies no longer arrived. Production was halted without supplies.

Thus we saw a cumulative effect. People no longer trust money. Managers go in for barter to get materials, citizens barter in order to get anything for themselves.

What is the substitute for what in the West is the profit motive? It is the plans laid down from above. To keep the whole thing together, save it from breaking up into a series of competing interest groups, there was a system of “administrative competition”. Not economic, but administrative competition. We had various administrative units competing for resources not because of need, but based on the amount of influence they could

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wield in the bureaucratic system.

Under Brezhnev, especially the ageing Brezhnev, the system started going rotten.

Now what was the relationship between Stalin and the Russian Revolution? Was Stalin the executor of Lenin’s plans, or the executioner of Lenin’s comrades? He can be seen as both!

Clearly there is a lot in Stalin which would have outraged Lenin. And yet he built on something which Lenin began to make — the one-party state.

Lenin began by seizing power in a peasant country and changing it from above, disregarding the wishes of three quarters of the population who were peasants. This had an oppressive logic of its own.

Thirty-three years ago I wrote a piece called “Was Stalin really necessary?” The argument was that, given the Bolshevik Revolution had occurred, isolated in a hostile world, the emergence of a tough leader was to some extent predestined.

I could now quote Roy Medvedev saying there was a historical logic in the triumph of the cult of personality, but once established a lot depended on the personality. Therefore it did not in the least follow that such and such a number of peasants must die, or thousands must be shot.

I have seen archive figures which sug-

gest 375,000 people were shot in 1937.

I wrote the *Economics of a Feasible Socialism* ten years ago. One of its objects was to say that the Marxist as well as the Soviet view of socialism has no future. These views could only discredit socialism. If it has a future it must look different. Not only must it be democratic, but the notion of eliminating market forces after a transition period is simply wrong.

Marx’s vision of socialism was utopian romanticism. We have to start by saying what is wrong with capitalism, and pure individualism. What is important about socialism is that it is *social*.

When Erhard introduced the market into Germany in 1948 he called it the “sozialmarktwirtschaft” — a “social market economy” which emphasised both democracy and the social. The market is central in some spheres and quite the wrong thing in others — health, education, or London Transport. This view must be cleansed of its association with Marxism-Leninism.

What is the relationship between the state and democracy and the market? Well, first, take London Transport. Mrs Thatcher abolished local democracy in London. If we followed the example of the Paris region, then we could have a democratically elected local government spending money without being ordered not to by our extraordinary Thatcherite fanatics. Public transport in Paris is subsidised. There are good reasons for this subsidy.

But we must have democratic voting to decide how local or national taxes are spent.

The problems of the Marxist view are obvious. For instance, are the railways run for the benefit of the railwaymen, or the passengers? What is workers’ control? A group of workers can exploit other workers. There are many examples of this. For example, South African white workers are quite viciously against training blacks because black workers would then be able to compete with them for jobs.

I am in favour of workers’ self-management in the context of a competitive economy. But, certainly, a group of workers who run an enterprise which happens to be a monopoly could very well exploit their position. If the industry is a “natural monopoly” which, for instance, London Transport ought to be, we need an authority *not* elected by the transport workers to ensure they *do not* exploit others.

How deep have the blows against socialism, caused by Stalinism, gone? The wounds are particularly deep in those countries which have been run by Stalinists. Stalin was able to quote Marx. Look at Poland: communism was not only terrible, it was also imposed by an external power.

Things are better in Western Europe. Mitterrand can still call his party the Socialist Party without damage.

## STALINISM

# Socialism is the most profound form of democracy

By Michel Pablo

Michel Raptis (Pablo) is a Greek socialist. He was the foremost leader of the mainstream Fourth International from the 1940s to the early 1960s, especially in the period when it developed the thesis that the East European, Chinese and other systems were "deformed workers' states". He ceased to be a "workers' statist" 20 years ago.

I think we have seen the fall of Stalinism, not the fall of socialism or Marxism. The collapse was inevitable. The only astonishing thing was the way the collapse happened.

I think we have entered a new historic period. We must rethink many issues. We must reject Stalinism and reclaim the basic ideas of Marx and Lenin and Trotsky.

I think we have before us a long

period where these states move from Stalinism — bureaucratic statism — towards a kind of bourgeois state again.

We have a long historical period ahead.

We must remember that the state of capitalism is not so stable.

We have now America, Mexico and Canada as an enmeshing trade bloc; Europe where we do not know even how many states there will be; and the Japanese empire. Japan in the next few years will become the major economic power in the world.

These three major blocs will have antagonistic relationships — as in the past. Of course, we do not know what will happen. I am now a very old man — perhaps I will not find out!

But, anyway, capitalism is not stable.

Now more than ever, this prehistoric barbaric world needs a radical social transformation. The subject of this change will not only be the workers but also many other strata.

I think, as I have said, that the crisis in Eastern Europe was inevitable.

I will explain why. It has only been during the last thirty years that humanity has possessed the ability to establish the Utopia. It has only been during this period that it has become possible to give everyone the same level of life and to shorten considerably the necessary time of social work and to permit everyone to develop themselves. This fact is new. It is only during this latest period that we have possessed the material and cultural level necessary for the socialist Utopia.

For many years, I said that the states

## Leninism and the party

By John Palmer

John Palmer is European editor of the *Guardian*. He is active in the Socialist Movement, and was for many years until 1975 a leading member of the International Socialism group (forerunner of the SWP).

The passing of Stalinism now opens tremendous opportunities for us.

I am a state capitalist. I do not take the *New Left Review* — stalinoid — view that these were deformed but progressive modes of production whose defeat is a defeat for the working class.

This is not to say that what takes their place presents less of an obstacle. We are seeing the growth of nationalism and anti-semitism. These are filling the ideological vacuum, and among the most dispossessed too. We have witnessed not only the death of Stalinism but also the chronic decline of social democracy.

I take a more orthodox position on the Bolshevik revolution than I take towards Bolshevism today. That is to say, whatever the relevance or irrelevance of Bolshevik forms of organisation (something, in fact, I increasingly question), to jog backwards in history and to delegitimise the Bolshevik revolution is grotesque.

I agree with the position in Sam Farber's book *Before Stalinism*. Farber is an ex-Isler and came originally from the Shachtmanite YPSL. His book is important because it gets away from the crude alternatives that either Leninism led to Stalinism or there was no continuity at all between the two.

The truth is that many of the Bolshevik practices prefigured and facilitated — although did not make inevitable — the Stalinist degeneration.

Farber talks about the internal debate in the Party over industrialisation, the unions, and about factional rights inside the Party. He gives importance to the battles for democracy by people like the Workers' Opposition, the loss of which weakened the resistance in the immune system of the Bolshevik revolution to Stalinism.

This is not to say Leninism led to Stalinism. But I do not accept the view that the two were antithetical. Real life was much messier.

Something better than Stalinism was possible, and that was best fought for inside the Bolshevik movement.

On the question of the party in today's Britain, it is possible to both overstate the case and the opposition to the case.

The nature of the 'party' covers a multitude of possibilities. The Bolshevik Party of *What Is To Be Done?* is utterly different to that of *The State and Revolution*.

When Trotsky wrote as a Menshevik — something I would not have been; I would have been a Bolshevik — that the Bolsheviks had a low cultural level and suffered from Jacobinism, he was right.

It would be un-Marxist to pretend that the economic transformation of the industrial world has not produced enormous cultural changes, including changes in the culture of the working class itself. These changes affect the

balance between pluralism and democratic centralism. For example, a workers' revolution must be pluralist from the start. Pluralism does not necessarily exclude non-proletarian parties. And this is in fundamental contradiction with historical Leninism.

We need pluralism because the working class will not homogenise this side of the final transformation. Different experiences will come together.

I also feel that the heterogeneity of the working class is not only a weakness, it is also a source of strength.

Is the case for a party that the working class is still dominated by bourgeois ideas? This argument is suspiciously one-dimensional. The working class is impregnated by all kinds of ideas coming from social forces outside its own formations. These are not necessarily bourgeois ideas. Look at Islamic fundamentalist ideas inside the Arab working class. That is not a bourgeois phenomenon — it is petty-bourgeois, even pre-bourgeois.

My own view is that there are transitional cultures for the working class short of socialism. For example, I think that during class struggle and in the new social movements, there are prefigurative social forms. The sort of prefigurative work around the GLC in London, highly questionable and certainly contradictory, nonetheless contained elements which will have to be developed by any serious left.

The programme will have to be a programme for an extended transition in and against the existing state.

in these countries were "bureaucratic states" with nothing to do with socialism. These "bureaucratic states" were in the hands of the new strata — I do not know if you can call it a class or a new social category — the state bureaucracy.

These states collapsed. Particularly after 1960 there was crisis. Before that time there was the possibility of economic expansion. After that time, the pressure of capitalism overwhelmed them.

Of course, it was necessary in these societies to have a political and economic reform. Trotsky also said that it was inevitable that the bureaucracy would try to

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**"We must go back to Marx and clearly say that socialism comes out of the developed countries".**

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do it.

But the bureaucracy have acted in the worst way. They lost control completely. They showed they were very little and incapable men.

What you had in Russia was not capitalism. What we are seeing now is how difficult it will be in these countries to create capitalism and a capitalist mentality. They will need a long, long period to do this. Theoretically, this means that what we had was a little different to capitalism.

In Russia, the bureaucracy represented a new stratum of people.

About Lenin and Trotsky. What they said in their time, globally speaking, was quite right. We must not forget that they began the revolution in Russia not to build socialism in Russia, but to help to expand, immediately, the revolution in Germany.

Of course, Lenin and Trotsky can be criticised for this or that point, but we must not completely reject them because we must understand the conditions of the time in which they were working.

Stalinism really was the worst thing for socialism. Of course, I have some sympathy for some of the old Communists. The old Communists here in Greece fought for years and years. Now they face big troubles because they do not understand what is happening.

But, truly, the worst thing for socialism was Stalinism.

In particular, we must assert that socialism is bound up with democracy. Socialism is the most profound form of democracy.

Looking forward, I think that we must remember that we are Europeans — that our view is slightly deformed. The big majority of humanity is in the Third World. There, the problems are now terrible. On the other hand, we must go back to Marx and clearly say that socialism comes out of the developed countries. We must help the Third World from Europe.

## The October Revolution did not produce Stalinism!

By Jozef Pinior

Jozef Pinior is a leading figure in the Socialist Political Centre in Wroclaw, Poland. He was a prominent local leader of Solidarnosc in its underground years.

I believe that a main factor in the situation here is the fact of capitalism. There is very strong pressure from Western capitalists.

There is a lack of any real socialist alternative. In Poland there is a very deep demoralisation inside the working class and in more general society.

People feel defenceless against capitalisation. What is really on the agenda in Eastern Europe is the creation of some type of authoritarianism in order to introduce capitalism. There is a conflict or contradiction between the process of capitalisation and introduction of market reforms and, on the other hand, democratic freedoms, even parliamentary democracy.

In Poland, I think it will be very difficult to introduce further capitalisation through parliament. Authoritarianism is on the agenda. The form of authoritarianism could well be new — a mixture of military institutions and classical authoritarianism.

Is fascism possible? Well, when we talk of fascism we look for mass organisations. There are no such organisations in Eastern Europe right now. What does exist are the authoritarian state types like Walesa or Yeltsin in Russia.

The danger is that we will see a revolt movement — strikes and riots — without a politically clear alternative. In this process a strong right wing, fascist-style movement could well emerge.

The comrades here believe that Stalinism is dead in Eastern Europe. When we talk about Stalinism I think we must remember to differentiate between bureaucracies and political parties. For instance, in Poland, former Stalinist bureaucrats have been able to change themselves to a market-type bureaucracy. They vote for right-wing political parties, not for the former Stalinist Social Democratic Party. The Social Democratic Party is not useful for them.

In this situation it is possible for some ex-Stalinists, for instance from the Stalinist trade unions, to move to the left. The Social Democratic Party has a lot of contradictions, but there are left currents within it.

The Polish state is in a transition period. We have a government completely dependent on imperialism and the

International Monetary Fund.

On the other hand, we still have a very strong working class. The working class is still a very important class inside society. The capitalists must look to crush the working class. The state is still in transition towards capitalism, still under pressures from various classes.

My view is that the 1917 October Revolution was a real working-class revolution. After 1917 there was a type of workers' state. Stalinism was a movement against this state and against the working class. There is no relation between the October Revolution and Stalinism. Stalinism was a kind of counter-revolution.

From Stalinism to Gorbachev there was a period full of contradictions. There was a struggle between the working class, the bureaucracy and imperialism. The bureaucracy wanted to become a ruling class. But this was not possible for them. In fact, they were too weak. The bureaucracy was between the working class and the world capitalist ruling class.

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**"We still have a very strong working class. The working class is still a very important class inside society. The capitalists must look to crush the working class. The state is still in transition towards capitalism, still under pressures from various classes."**

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This project was to introduce market programmes against the working class. There were no political forces to defend a socialist programme.

The working class had disintegrated after years of living under the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy had not got a serious alternative programme.

The situation now is not easy. There is a crisis of socialism on a world scale. But we still have to face the contradictions inside capitalism. Capitalism cannot resolve the

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## October did not produce Stalinism!

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problems it creates. We need to develop the socialist, anti-capitalist programme. After Stalinism we must stress that there is no socialism without democracy. This ought to be clear to everyone now.

Now, in Eastern Europe, this is particularly important. Because here socialism is not on the agenda. What is necessary is for working class defence of existing democratic rights; working class defence of the poor of society against capitalisation. Today it is a question of defending jobs and workers' control against capitalisation.

Democracy and parliament must be defended against Walesa's presidential power and authoritarianism. In the future workers' commissions and factory committees will go beyond the best of the current institutions. These new institutions will be based on struggle from below.

## “The proletariat will not become a saint”

By Maxime Rodinson

Maxime Rodinson is the author of *Israel and the Arabs*, *Islam and capitalism*, and many other works on the Middle East. He was a member of the French Communist Party from 1937 to 1958. A retired professor at the Sorbonne, he lives in Paris.

There are general and deep reasons for the collapse of the old regime in the Soviet Union, and particular, conjunctural causes.

An economy directed by a single centre cannot manage to satisfy the needs of a big country. And the suppression of private property in the means of production does not resolve all the problems of domination and exploitation.

I think Lenin had an intuition of that. I have a quotation from him, from 1915 I think, in an article of the rights of nations, where he says that even if the proletariat has taken power, it will not

become a saint. There will still be the desire to live on the backs of others, to exploit, after the revolution.

Lenin was far-seeing. He did not come back to this idea, except perhaps in the last few months before his death, but he saw the issues clearly.

Those are the deeper factors. There are also more conjunctural factors: the way Stalin ran the Soviet Union, and the incompetence of his successors.

As for the place of the Soviet Union in history, that is a difficult question. I no longer believe in social evolution in a single straight line; I am more inclined to believe in the repetition of a certain number of phenomena. There have always been systems with managed economies. Obviously the Soviet Union was a very particular sort of system, conditioned by the history of Russia and the world situation in the 20th century.

From another point of view you can say

## Terrible times ahead

By Paul Sweezy

Paul Sweezy is a Marxist economist living in New York, author of *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, *Monopoly Capital* (with Paul Baran), *On the Transition to Socialism* (a debate with Charles Bettelheim), and other books. He has long been associated with the *Monthly Review*, which was launched in 1949 as a journal independent of the Communist Party but sympathetic to the Soviet Union.

I think there is a totally chaotic transition taking place from one social order to another. There is no really reliable historical precedent.

I think there will be many crises and some terrible times before the situation is resolved.

Although there may be new eruptions, which could be called Stalinist, I do not think that the old pattern of the Communist Parties with their particular institutions are going to be recreated. Dictatorships are not beyond the bounds of possibility, in fact they are quite likely.

Why did the crisis in these states take place? Because the whole capitalist world, led by the US, was absolutely determined not to let the USSR succeed. They had more resources, more staying power. Looking back we can see this was probably inevitable. I do not think anything good could have developed under the particular historical circumstances.

The original leaders of the Bolshevik revolution were sincere socialists and had every intention of realising the goals for which they had been fighting. But the conditions were extremely difficult. They had to devote all their resources — I think they had no choice — to catching up and defending themselves militarily. So the chances that the outcome would be a closed, militarised society were high.

We should have expected it; looking back I'm not sure that those on the left did. Some (including me) had high hopes of relaxation and democratisation after World War 2, when the regime was quite popular. Then the US turned the heat on. They said, we will not let the USSR do this. I think they did this because they were scared to death that the USSR would succeed and the whole Western imperialist system would be undermined.

I do not think these systems were capitalist. They were class societies, and exploitative societies, too. This is not contrary to Marxist theory — neither capitalism nor socialism has any historical inevitability.

Parts of the bureaucracy are obviously working class. Most of the people in the Soviet Union got salaries and work from the state. In this sense they were also part of the bureaucracy.

On the other hand, it was a big, relatively educated and, by world stan-

dards, not at all an unskilled working class. It still is. It is the *only* class in the ex-Soviet Union now that has a definite identity, that you can pin down, say what it is.

There is no capitalist class. The old Communist ruling class has no party or nomenklatura with which to organise and discipline itself. These things have gone.

In the meanwhile, a new society cannot be started without a class which has some coherence and idea of what it wants. And the working class in the ex-Soviet Union was so fragmented and weak organisationally that it has had no time to organise itself and develop an ideology.

In the West, it took a century or more for the working class to do that. How do you expect it to happen overnight in the Soviet Union? We will have a period of ten, twenty years, maybe a couple of generations, where the problem of class structures has no real form. Most Marxists have not yet recognised this as a problem. They will have to.

What will happen to the states like Cuba or China? To put them right into the Stalinist bag is probably wrong. I think there may be a lot of surprises...

Stalinism has done a tremendous amount of damage to socialism. Traditions and habits have been ingrained on a lot of the left. On the other hand, circumstances are quite novel, and how people react and how important that background is, I am not sure.

that the collapse of the USSR is the defeat of a certain sort of utopia which has been pursued for a very long time — the desire to have a state which responds exactly to the will of citizens and of the people leading it.

The Chinese system will probably go the same way, maybe after a long delay. Maybe there the major role of the peasant communes will dampen the shock for a time; maybe a new Chinese peasant state will be created. There have been Chinese egalitarian utopias for a very long time, long before communism, back to the second century of the Christian era, for example.

The question of the ruling class in the Soviet Union is complicated. Above all, there was a special class of managers and administrators, recruited originally from workers and even partially from peasants, but which very quickly became a purely administrative ruling layer which had no masses behind it. And it knew that. They were always frightened. The people in the Kremlin looked on themselves in practice

“The ruling class was a special class of managers and administrators, which quickly became a purely administrative layer which had no masses behind it”.

as a group who had been put in power by extraordinary circumstances but were now on a little island in the middle of an ocean of peasant barbarism. When the Germans invaded in 1941, the people in the Kremlin were very frightened — I have eye-witness accounts of this — saying that if the Germans gave chocolate to the peasants they were finished. They were very glad to hear of the first German atrocities, seeing them as evidence that they would be saved.

The ruling classes in Eastern Europe had the support of the leadership in the Soviet Union. That was their great strength, and their weakness. They were forced nevertheless to take account of the masses in their different countries. A very clear example in Poland. The communist government had to take account of the peasant masses — leaving them some land, and partly private agriculture — and of the church.

When I went to Warsaw during the Khrushchev era, there were posters all over the city for a big exhibition on the role of the Jesuits in the history of Poland. I was giving a lecture on Mohammed, and all the priests were opposed to it because it was bad for religion.

Certainly many guidelines from past socialist struggle remain broadly valid. But a lot of work, reflection, and thought is needed to determine what to do within those guidelines. Beyond that, I don't know.

## The Communist Party is no more

By Nina Temple

Nina Temple is secretary of the 'Democratic Left', the fraction of the former Communist Party of Great Britain associated with the now defunct journal *Marxism Today*.

The roots of the current crisis in the USSR go back to the Russian Revolution and, before that, to the nature of the previous autocratic, centralised society in Russia.

I think the timing of the current crisis comes from a number of reasons. Firstly, they failed to provide goods for their people. A bureaucratic system was unable to deliver. The bureaucracy ruled out initiative. As the West became high-tech and post-Fordist and so on, Eastern Europe was unable to keep up.

The West also hampered the USSR with, for instance, its boycott on Western technology.

I think that with the growth of modern media, the myth that the Soviet Union was the finest place on earth became harder to sustain. The people in the USSR stopped believing that unemployment was the sole fact about the West.

Wave upon wave of people tried to reform the Soviet-style system. It's a bit like the reformers in the western Communist Parties. People joined for their ideals. More and more pressure built up for reform. The Communist Party had a debate which went on for the last 15 years.

Quite understandably, in the 1920s, we began with solidarity with the fledgling workers' state. For many years, people refused to accept there were any problems whatsoever.

The Communist Party white-washed the Stalin trials in the 1930s, and the invasion of Hungary in 1956. Even in the late '60s, despite CP condemnation of what it called 'intervention' in Czechoslovakia, there was still a view that these states were in some way socialist.

It is really only in the 1970s and 1980s that the Party began to have a more critical view. And the criticism remained atheoretical. There was much more criticism, people were saying there should be multi-party systems. But we did not cross the barrier to say: without democracy there is no socialism.

In 1977, there was a big debate around the 'British Road to Socialism' and the hardline, pro-Soviet wing of the Party left when we said that British socialism would involve various democratic rights.

But the Party itself did not bluntly say: these systems are profoundly authoritarian and corrupt until the work began on the *Manifesto for New Times*, in 1988.



As 1989 unfolded, and we discussed the *Manifesto*, what had seemed to many Party members as an extreme rebuttal of these societies, became more acceptable. People saw that we had been carrying out a quasi-diplomatic relationship with authoritarian regimes.

How do we deal with these issues today? The Communist Party is no more. The differences over the estimates of what socialism is, and what those states in Eastern Europe and the USSR were, are deep at the heart of the future of our own organisation in Britain. Those who see the revolutions of 1989 as a defeat for socialism are not in the majority in the Democratic Left. We believe that the events of 1989 and August '91 were the points of challenge of those systems.

It is highly improbable that these societies can move straight to socialism. The people in the Soviet Union have a much more immediate concern: feeding themselves. Left-wing people should try to stop an inter-ethnic catastrophe rather than moving to a socialist society.

What do we believe about the Russian Revolution? It ended in disaster. Some of our members think it was a mistake from the outset. The majority believe that from the beginning it contained the elements which led to Stalin. One element was the vanguard party.

We do not believe anymore in vanguard parties carrying out revolutions. We need a socialism which is accountable to the people. This means democratic change. There are no shortcuts to achieving socialism.

The Bolsheviks attempted such a shortcut by seizing power in Russia in 1917.

We do not see change coming about exclusively through Parliament. We see Parliament as a mirror of society. People who want to change society should campaign outside Parliament to establish a consensus.

We have rejected Leninism and democratic centralism. Our organisation is based on a very flexible post-Fordist view of working together.

# STALINISM

## The USSR never had a mode of production

By Hillel Ticktin

Hillel Ticktin is a lecturer at Glasgow University and editor of *Critique*, a socialist journal on Soviet and East European affairs. The situation in the USSR is chaotic.

I do not think that there is any chance that they will achieve their apparent goal of going towards the market. The most likely result of the attempt will be various pseudo-forms of the market. This will not really be the market — it will be a form of limited supply and demand but not based on the law of value.

We will see the extension of the black market and the development of the finance capital which they already have.

Even if they privatise as much as they are trying to, I can not see them achieving genuine capitalism. As a result we will witness a continual collapse, worsening disintegration.

I think authoritarian-type regimes are likely in parts of the ex-USSR. In Russia this is very probable.

Stalinism was disintegrating before 1985. I have argued this for years.

The process of disintegration would have gone on even without Gorbachev. Without intending to, he accelerated the process. He reduced the role of the centre;

**“These systems abolished the market and allowed the secret police to run unchecked. They fall into a peculiar period in history — neither socialist nor capitalist”.**

but the centre was absolutely crucial in maintaining the whole system. Once he started to remove the centre and lift, to a degree, the repressive apparatus, the system began to disintegrate faster.

When they attempted to move more quickly towards the market, the system began to collapse.

What then followed was the coup which wanted to restore the centre. If they had succeeded, they would have held back the collapse for a time.

The essential basis of the Soviet crisis lies in the fact that there was never a mode of production. The interesting question is why it lasted at all. I think the reason the system lasted is what Trotsky once called the “command over labour” which the system held in the 1920s and '30s. Their ability to dispose of labour, to use surplus labour from the villages, from the home, to exploit Eastern Europe and China —



Hillel Ticktin

when they were able to — gave them enormous strength.

Once this labour stopped, in the 1970s, and once the labour became *specific*, that is to say, when the workers became educated and skilled, the inefficiencies of the system could no longer be covered up. At this point the system began to disintegrate.

The point this raises is why did the system have such a considerable degree of waste? The answer here is that the system was undemocratic and a non-market system. Given this, input from below was essential. And there was no input from below, even less than in capitalism. The workforce was totally alienated.

There was never any form of planning — what did exist was a form of bargaining between the enterprises, between the enterprises and the ministries and so on.

This was a system of a kind. The centrepiece was bargaining, held together by a bureaucratic apparatus at the centre. The centre never played a planning role. It was never able to give a direction. No Five Year Plan was ever fulfilled.

This system held back the world from going forward to socialism for more than 60 years.

This was not a parallel mode of production to capitalism — because it is not a mode of production. It never had a future.

What is crucial though is that there was no fundamental law to the system; there was no integrating mechanism. There were competing laws which tended to negate each other.

Did this system really achieve anything? It is quite clearly inferior to capitalism.

If we compare this system to even the most backward capitalist country, we find

the nature of its production is inferior. Its products are inferior. Any capitalist entity, no matter where it is situated, is able to produce a product which has a degree of reliability and can respond to the wishes of the owner.

The USSR failed on all these counts. The market here will not be able to play any part in the system. The entire production stock has to be wiped out. This is happening in East Germany.

If we compare this system to, for instance, Latin America, we find it is curiously inferior.

If we then say, perhaps it raised the standard of living, we have to set against this the enormous number of people who were killed. This was unprecedented — certainly far more than died under Hitler.

The left has to take this into account. To call the Soviet system post-capitalist is to damn post-capitalism.

These systems abolished the market and allowed the secret police to run unchecked. They fall into a peculiar period in history — neither socialist nor capitalist.

Going back to the Russian Revolution: it was a socialist revolution.

Lenin was not fully aware that when they spoke of ‘breaking the chain at the weakest link’, they had not actually done so. A better analogy would be to say that a beam had been removed from a house. The house continued to stand. If you break a link in the chain, the chain is destroyed.

At the time, they expected a German revolution. We are left with the legacy.

It is completely wrong to blame Lenin and Trotsky. We should blame the bourgeoisie. After all, the change in power did not involve many deaths. The civil war would not have taken place except for the intervention of outside powers.

Finally, the system collapsed because the social relations collapsed.

Not only Stalinism has gone but the Cold War has gone too. It’s the end of an epoch.

Capitalism was being maintained by Stalinism. It will no longer be possible to discipline people ideologically or on the shop floor through using the fear of Stalinism.

It is difficult to see how capitalism can now hold the line — either ideologically or economically. It is now hard to see how there can be a boom. We seem set for slow growth punctuated by long periods of recession. In these circumstances people will more and more turn against the market.

The demands from workers in the ex-Soviet Union avoid words like socialism and Marxism but are demanding self-management of factories, greater levels of democracy inside factories and society.

The parliamentary form quite clearly is not working for them. Although they still support him, it is clear that Yeltsin has betrayed them. They will turn against him.

# The ex-USSR was not better than capitalism

By Michel Warshawsky

Michel Warshawsky is a leader of the Revolutionary Communist League (Matzpen), the main Trotskyist group in Israel.

The developments in Eastern Europe and the USSR can be summarised in one way: the disintegration of the regimes built and led by the Stalinist bureaucracies. Why in this way? The structural crisis of these societies came to a critical point much later than we expected.

The alternative social class, the organised working class, found it impossible to lead a conscious process of replacing the crumbling regime with a better alternative.

Objective conditions provoked a collapse of the system. The crisis did not occur because of the conscious action of the workers.

This system was structurally unable to transform itself from an "extensive development" to an "intensive development". It could not pass from a stage of developing basic infrastructures to consumption production. There was no control either by the producers or the consumers.

It was possible to build roads and factories but not to go beyond that and answer the basic needs of the population.

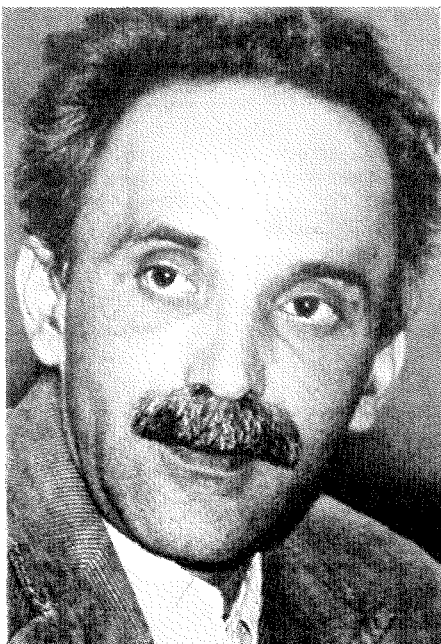
I never believed that these societies were better than advanced Western capitalism. But I think we underestimated the scope of the crisis and the social waste in these societies. I think we understood the *trend*, the contradictions, but underestimated the disintegration: they were in an economic dead end.

These societies were not capitalist. They were different.

Up to a certain stage in their development, if there is a social subject, the rulers could be replaced in a cheap way. But the working class did not do this and we saw degeneration. And I think degeneration was not only on the level analysed by the Trotskyist movement — on the political level. But political degeneration provoked social and economic degeneration.

These societies differed from capitalism because basic economic choices were not the result of the market. It was not profit which regulated the system. There was huge, colossal waste. There were some benefits which the workers got which they do not get even in advanced capitalist countries — the most important being full employment.

It is true that in some capitalist economies, for a limited period of time, there can be a kind of social contract which would give full employment. But this is contradictory to the very rules of the economic game — although it can exist as a type of parenthesis.



Michel Warshawsky

Some capitalist regimes — bonapartist, perhaps — may, for a while, grant high levels of employment, taking from the bourgeoisie in return for some social peace. But the point about the Soviet Union was that this full employment *did not* contradict economic principles.

A long time before the current crisis I had a problem when talking about definitions of these states. Definitions are only useful when they help to explain features, nature and characteristics.

I was never very happy with the idea of a workers' state being degenerated or deformed, because it created the impression, though it was never the intention, of the workers having some control over the regimes. To someone not part of a certain tradition it means: the state of the workers.

This was in direct contradiction to the second assumption of the theory of deformed and degenerated workers' states, which was that we had a state where the working class was totally — politically and economically — dispossessed of power.

What in my opinion is important, and in this sense the classical Trotskyist analysis was operational, was the idea that the basic economies were not governed by the same rules as capitalism. It has another dynamic of development. This was important in order to understand the internal relation of classes and the external relations. In this sense, what lies behind the concept of a workers' state is correct and in fact confirmed by development.

Perhaps the degenerated and deformed workers' state theory made sense in the '30s and '40s, but by the 1950s it did not help us explain or understand.

On the other hand, any type of definition like state capitalism was *wrong*.

What would I say to a bureaucratic collectivist? I don't care! What is important is where we failed. This was two-fold: an

underestimation of the scope of the crisis, a failure to understand that the longer the agony of Stalinism lasted, the less chance there would be of a workers' solution to Stalinism. Part of the degeneration was a total depoliticisation and demoralisation among the workers.

Did Lenin lead to Stalin? And Ben Gurion led to Shamir!

In Israel we have a very small left. Even the masses who voted to support the Communist Party did so because it was the national party of the Palestinians; they did not care about the Russian Revolution.

In Israel, the only political force dealing with Lenin was the Stalinists — either the Communist Party, or partly parallel to that, in the 1950s, the Left Zionists. For them, Lenin and Stalin were part of the same grouping. Any type of independent Marxist thought was always very marginal.

So we have not had a debate, as you have had in Europe between Stalinists and a Marxist alternative. So the crisis does not have the same sort of impact on currents with a different understanding of the Russian Revolution and of basic Marxist concepts, as it may have had in Europe.

When some of these people, who are re-evaluating the history, say that Stalinism began with the revolution, we say: prove it! We do not have to accept those ideas, we can point to the *war* between the Bolshevik Party and Stalinism. The Stalinists killed millions of communists. They have to show that this war was not a secondary phenomenon and that the *continuity* is more important. This debate is real, but marginal, because the big majority have collapsed under demoralisation.

It is too easy to say that the crisis in the USSR has lifted a great weight from around our necks. In the long run perhaps. But immediately — I mean for the next decade — we should not underestimate the effect of the crumbling of the Soviet Union on the balance of forces internationally and the workers' movement in particular.

This is for two reasons. First, on the objective relationship. I have said that I do not believe that the Soviet Union was more progressive than American imperialism: it was less efficient, maybe, but not more progressive. But it is easier to live with two mafia chiefs in your neighbourhood than with one mafia. Now we have one mafia chief and for poor people like us life in the world has become more difficult.

Second, it is not important whether or not it is historically true or just to equate the crisis of Stalinism with the crisis of Marxism. The fact is that for hundreds of thousands of people, it is one and the same crisis.

For instance, the left wing of the Palestinian national movement identifies socialism with Stalinism. When there is a crisis, for them it is a crisis of the very concept. So in this sense it is not possible to say, Stalinism was a block, now the road is open to the final victory.

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# STALINISM

## No better than capitalism From page 31

In fact the way has been opened to many of the people for cynicism and opportunism. Not all the results are immediately positive.

The revolutionary wing of the workers' movement has been very late to integrate the concept of democracy in its programme. This is due to the influence of Stalinism. From the mid-'70s there has been an attempt — after the Portuguese and Sandinista revolutions — to think

again.

But up to the mid-'70s we used to present 1917 as our model, saying there are no problems except that Stalin came, destroyed everything. We will close the Stalinist parenthesis and go back to Soviet democracy.

There are too many problems. For instance, I believe the way the Sandinistas tried to deal with the problems — without entering the debate of whether their choices were good or bad — was thinking anew. They understood that to keep power at any price is not necessarily the best alternative. They accepted elections knowing they may lose. It is not a choice a

revolutionary Marxist, say in the '50s, would necessarily have made. It was not the way we were educated.

We should accept the centrality of democratic rights. We should give priority to these rights even after the seizing of power. Not just on the level of principle, but also on the level of institutions. For example, on how to deal with the question of general elections. We always say: soviets, soviets...It is important but not enough today.

How should we combine these things? I think we need a long period of discussion among the many thousands of revolutionaries in the world.

# The working class is central

By Ellen Meiksins Wood

Ellen Meiksins Wood is a member of the editorial committee of *New Left Review* and author of *The Retreat from Class: a new 'true socialism'*.

The first thing that strikes me about the current crisis in the ex-USSR, despite all the dramatic changes, is the extent to which the old Union structures are being reproduced at the level of the Republics, at least in the sense that a section of the old apparatus is positioning itself to get a slice of the action in the new set-up. It's not just a matter of national feelings asserting themselves. I heard one commentator recently describe the situation as a battle over property, and I think this is close to the truth. Some of the republican leaders are simply trying to keep their hold on the levers of appropriation.

Whether we are seeing a restoration of capitalism is another matter. We may end up seeing something more like the worst of both worlds, with a section of the old apparatus holding on to privilege, together with market disciplines — the commodification of labour-power, unemployment, the compulsions of profit-maximisation — though probably without much success.

Authoritarian regimes are certainly not unlikely. In fact, such a regime may be a condition for restoring capitalism. But, in any case, I still find it hard to believe that any attempt to restore capitalist exploitation will not meet resistance from workers. We should not underestimate the obstacles and resistances built into the system. In the old regime, the workers were certainly oppressed and exploited by the state, but the relation between exploited workers and the exploiting state apparatus was different from that between capital and labour. In capitalism, the relation between exploiting capital and exploited labour, and the imperatives of competition and profit-maximization, are integral parts of the production process, right inside the enterprise itself. They operate, for instance, through the often conflictual relation between management and workers. In the old Soviet regime, the exploiting state and its coercive disciplines stood outside the enterprise, and there



were no systemic disciplines, like those of the capitalist market, operating directly on the production process within the enterprise. In fact, workers and managers tended to have substantial common interests. So there was a certain distance between the enterprise and the state apparatus, and when the old coercive structures disintegrated, they left behind a kind of vacuum, which it won't be so easy for private capital to fill.

Let me illustrate what I mean. I read recently that the Polish government has decided for the moment to put the brakes on privatisation. They now think they must turn their attention to industrial policy and to improving state industries. And the first thing they feel they must do is reform the legal framework in such a way as to make managers behave like owners. No one in the old system behaved like an owner, they say — by which they mean that no one in the state enterprises was compelled to respond to the 'economic' disciplines of competition, and so on.

There is an even more interesting example I read about a little while ago. In the former USSR, managers of enterprises, in the absence of directives from a central authority, are often finding themselves directing operations according to the demands of their workers. This violates all the canons of a market system! But once the central apparatus has been weakened, and in the absence of private capital, what other pressures are there for

managers to respond to? More particularly, in the absence of real market disciplines, whose ultimate weapon is the power to sack workers, what disciplinary powers do these managers have? In this limited but not insignificant sense, the old regime, or its disintegration, has left enterprises in the hands of the workers, at least to the extent that interposing capital between the workers and their control of enterprises may not be as easy as many people think.

I am not sure there is much of value to be derived from the continuing debate about the class nature of the Communist states. It is clear to me, though, that 'state capitalism' is not an accurate or useful description. The current situation should make it very clear just how far from reality that description was, as all the eager marketeers are discovering. For one thing, capitalism is rooted in the particular imperatives of competition, profit-maximization and the exploitation of workers through the medium of these imperatives. I cannot think of any useful definition of capitalism that doesn't include this systemic logic. The Soviet-type state certainly exploited the workers, and there was a kind of accumulation-driven process, but the essential imperatives of capitalism were not at work. When the central state disintegrated, it left behind a different kind of working class than you would find in a capitalist system, and also a different ideological residue, including the egalitarian impulses which have so irritated market-reformers.

Has Stalinism gone for good? I do not believe it could be restored in anything like its original form — though this does not preclude authoritarian regimes of other types. In fact, I'd be less surprised to see a restoration of Tsarism than Stalinism! Or, come to think of it, maybe we will now really see a kind of state-capitalism.

Was Stalinism the continuation of the Russian Revolution? The first thing that needs to be said is that Stalinism was a reversal of the truly democratic impulses of the Revolution, represented by soviets, and so on. And I certainly do not think that the extremes of Stalinism were inevitable. At the same time, it also needs to be said that it could never have been



anything but problematic to introduce socialism in a country with relatively undeveloped productive forces and to use a socialist party as an instrument of development. Rapid industrialization was always going to be taken out of the hands of the workers, and that meant that there would necessarily be a problematic relationship between the Party that claimed to represent the workers and the workers themselves. But what this means is that it is absurd to regard the failures of the USSR as proof that socialism as such, and especially a democratic socialism, is impossible.

It will take some time to repair the damage to socialism caused by Stalinism. But from now on things can only get better. We've been relieved of that albatross, and now we will have to focus our attention on capitalism, without cold war diversion. The problems of capitalism still exist, in spades, and I think that democratic socialism is still the only alternative.

I am certainly in favour of reappropriating the language of democracy. We must not give up democracy to the other side. But we also should not limit our idea of democracy to its conventional meaning under capitalism. I am afraid that this is what is happening to a section of the left. For example, in Britain, you have some people who are preoccupied

with constitutional and electoral reform. Obviously I am not against reforms that would democratise the British state. But the form this movement has taken looks to me like pure escapism. It's like becoming obsessed with a stain in the carpet while the house is burning down around you.

The idea of democracy ought to be our strongest challenge to capitalism, not a way of accommodating ourselves to it. We ought to be making it clear that a really democratic state and civil society are simply not possible under capitalism. Of course, it would be an advance to get rid of the monarchy and the House of Lords. But that would not get us much closer to removing the real obstacle to democracy, which is capitalism itself. For me, the idea of a free association of direct producers, the essence of socialism, would also be the basis of democracy. I know this is a very unfashionable idea, but I'm still firmly committed to it — both because it seems to me the only really democratic organization of society and also because it is the only alternative to an economy whose driving mechanism is either state coercion or the imperatives of profit-maximization, with all its irrationalities and inequities. In fact, maybe the principal lesson we ought to be learning from the collapse of Communism is that, while capitalism has proved itself capable of functioning without

democracy, socialism cannot. Socialism is, by definition, a democratic organization of society at every level from the workplace to the state.

Why do I insist on the importance of class politics? Of course, there are no guarantees that the working class will bring about socialism. My point is simply that if socialism is to happen, it must happen in this way, by the actions of the working class itself.

If we conceive of socialism as, in its very foundation, an organisation of material life based on freely associated direct producers, then that understanding of the socialist project conditions everything else, including, for instance, our conception of constitutional reform.

Some of the current ideas about political reform in Britain have the intention, I think, of detaching parties of the left from the labour movement, instead of reshaping the existing labour movement. This seems to me a huge mistake. I have to question whether, in looking for alternative political agencies, people are still interested in looking for alternatives to capitalism. I can't help thinking that by detaching themselves from the working class, they are also dissociating themselves from the project of replacing capitalism with socialism, and, indeed, from a really thoroughgoing democracy.

## FORUM

# Zionism, anti-semitism, and the left

I am a life-long Marxist socialist Zionist (former activist of the Israeli Left and later vice-chair of Mapam UK and also active in the London labour and peace movements).

So I welcome the open letter of comrade Sean Matgamna to Tony Cliff of the SWP (*Workers' Liberty*, Issue 14). This letter presents a superb analysis and critique of the anti-Zionist and somewhat anti-semitic politics of the former Israeli Left socialist Zionist Ygael Gluckstein (now Tony Cliff) and his present SWP supporters. These politics are the exact opposite of the classical critiques of Kautsky and Lenin (in their polemics against Rosa Luxemburg) on national conflicts and the rights of small nations to self-determination.

In particular, this letter shows up as a sham their support for the plans of the so-called socialist factions of the PLO (of Habash and Hawatmeh) for a Secular Democratic State and later an Arab socialist state in the whole of Palestine and proves that this plan is indeed "nothing else than an ultimatum to the Jews of Israel — after some military defeat by Syria and/or Iraq — to

surrender their rights of self-defence and nationhood, to dissolve their nation and settle for the rights of a precarious religious minority in a fanatical Muslim state".

In fact, I agree that the SWP are also comprehensively hostile to all the inhabitants of many other 'bad nations' (apart from Israel) such as the Kurds, the Eritreans, the South African Boers and the Ulster Protestants

**"The SWP and others have alienated Jews from the left".**

who are opposing "the onwards march of progress" while at the same time they are "critically supportive" — irrespective of their class structures — of such anti-imperialist 'good nations' as Syria, Iraq, Iran, Yemen and Libya and even General Galtieri's fascist Argentina, and all their terrorist gangs.

After the recent demise of those supporters of 'Libyan

socialism', the WRP and the Tankists and Bert Ramelson faction of the CPGB, the SWP members and supporters are now the main exponents of a particularly vicious brand of anti-Zionism/anti-semitism within many CLP branches, local trade union branches and university and polytechnic student unions. Unfortunately, this virus — hostility to Israel and sympathy for the 'socialist' military dictators of Syria, Iraq and Yemen — has long since spread to and has many supporters amongst the *Marxism Today* readers, the CLPD, Labour Coordinating Committee (*Tribune* readers) and in many trade unions.

The comrades of the Militant and the Spartacists formally oppose this anti-Zionism, albeit with a somewhat premature two-socialist states solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but I am not sure they are actually fighting this virus as actively as *Socialist Organiser* and *Workers' Liberty*. As long ago as early June 1967, just before the outbreak of the 'Six Day War', not only the SWP but *Tribune*, the British Peace Committee and the CPGB also threw Jean Jaurès

and Lenin at Mapam UK, calling on them to be 'revolutionary defeatist' in the coming war for Israel's survival.

The main supporters of Israel in the Labour Party are now right-wingers.

The SWP, the WRP and the Labour left have not only alienated Jewish students from socialism; their anti-Zionism has also driven hundreds of life-long politically active Jewish socialists from support for the Labour Party centre and left and even from support for the Labour Party right.

In their way, they have contributed to the rise of the SDP and even to increase in Tory Party support in several constituencies of London, Manchester and Leeds. The Labour Party can still win back this support but only with a clear programme of struggle against the revival of anti-semitism and fascism in West and East Europe and Russia, support for the right of all Jews to emigrate from Russia and Hungary etc. to Israel and honest socialist solutions to both the Israeli-Palestinian and the Israeli-Syria (Iraq, Iran) conflicts.

Alfred Packter

# REVIEWS



An analysis of maleness that doesn't mention capitalism

## Do it yourself liberation for men

Amy Gilbert reviews "Iron John: a book about men", by Robert Bly, Element Press

It's corny, it's full of wild assertions, and people poke fun at it. So why has Robert Bly's book *Iron John* been on the bestseller lists in the US for more than a year? Why have men flocked to it? What male needs does it answer?

The book uses the story of "Iron John", a mythical "hairy man" from the woods who helps a young boy to fortune, to examine what is wrong with the way men are raised today. This story, Bly claims, outlines what all boys need — older, male mentors who can help them into manhood by advice and assistance at testing times.

In primitive societies, the male elders of tribes performed this role. At a certain time, a boy was removed from his mother's sphere and inducted into manhood by initiation rites, which differed from tribe to tribe, but which generally involved ritual wounds or trials.

According to Bly, modern American society offers no such rites of passage, and boys grow up confused about their roles. Fathers are often absent (20-30% of American boys grow up in fatherless homes), or are so punitive and distant that they're worthless. American society, Bly claims, conspires to keep men boys. Wall Street raiders, corporate leaders and politicians may

have power and position, but they're stuck in childish competitiveness; Bly scorns them as role models. And for too many boys, the crack dealer on the corner is the only powerful male they encounter.

Bly asserts that this hunger for the (absent) father accounts for much male suffering. Bly wants to point out a positive route to masculinity, one that takes account of what men have missed out on, (a sense of having reached adult manhood), and helps them make up for it.

But the signposting is blurry. Barring a few swipes at bureaucracy and at those who trash the environment for profit, he has no real critique of society (which, obviously borrowing from feminism, he calls the patriarchy). Capitalism is never mentioned; it's as if modern American society suddenly emerged, fully formed, from the tribal era.

Though Bly defines a problem, he offers no solutions. Followers of Bly have set up "Wild Man" weekends, where men go to talk of their miseries, to confront their anger at their fathers, and where, guided by other men, they undergo an initiation ceremony that marks their new (positive) emergence as men. This may be fine for the men who go, but what about the rest?

Bly offers them only this vague and waffly do-it-yourself manual, written in the high-flown language of myth, poetry and fairy tale. The kernel of Bly's argument is simple: life is hard, men need to face trials and to confront their darker sides so as to emerge as fully rounded men. But need this message be restricted to men? Don't women need to do the same thing?

Bly's book has given a voice to a "men's movement", and though some of the activities of

his followers seem absurd, any movement that makes men question their roles and seek to recover their banished feelings must be positive.

But can individual solutions work? On an individual level, yes, they probably can. But ultimately, the answer to the pain of Bly's followers lies in reorganising society altogether, not in the band aid cures of group therapy, wild man weekends and the like. Although Bly's men undoubtedly suffer, they are still more powerful and privileged within society than women are. The society that keeps them boys nonetheless ensures they have women to look after them.

## Re-running the USSR debate

Martin Thomas reviews "Fallacies of State Capitalism", by Ernest Mandel and Chris Harman (Socialist Outlook, £3.95)

The debate collected in this book is a disappointingly pale re-run of the exchange between the same authors on the class nature of the USSR in 1969-70.

Neither author has derived anything from the dramatic events since 1989 to correct or to strengthen their previous arguments. Instead they repeat the arguments, but more wearily and with less verve.

Ernest Mandel's thesis is that the USSR was a "degenerated workers' state" (and indeed, as far as I can understand Mandel's position, that the ex-USSR republics still are such). The great

bulk of his argument, however, is negative: the USSR was not capitalist.

A single paragraph has the gist of that negative argument.

*"In the USSR the key essential investments are not distributed via the law of value [which law "operates under capitalism as the tendency to create an average rate of profit"]. They are decided by the bureaucracy, mostly at state level. It is a planned economy (that implies no value judgement: an economy can be planned in an irrational, even senseless manner) — planned as far as direct allocation of resources is concerned. For seventy years, 'loss'-making enterprises requiring large subsidies have received a preferential allocation of productive resources. These have been systematically diverted from 'more profitable' enterprises and sectors. Such phenomena are unthinkable under capitalism and the law of value"*.

The argument here is not so much whether the USSR was state-capitalist, as whether any economy anywhere can ever be "state-capitalist". For Mandel, "capitalism can only exist in the form of 'many capitals'".

If Mandel is right, and profit-equalising competition is what defines capitalism, then certainly the USSR was not capitalist. But was it a workers' state? The logic of Mandel's argument, as distinct from the labels he uses, implies that it was a non-capitalist bureaucratic exploiting system.

*"The socio-political struggle... in the USSR over the last sixty years... has been three-way... on every occasion the bureaucracy struck simultaneously at both the bourgeoisie and the working class... It did not simply 'over-exploit the working class', it also expropriated the bourgeoisie. Historically, it has played an autonomous role."*

In the 1969-70 debate, Mandel found the progressive (and thus "workers'") content to the bureaucratic system in its place in the sweep of world revolution — "the Yugoslav, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Cuban revolutions were... part and parcel of the world revolutionary process started in October 1917 — be it under unforeseen and specific forms" — and the beneficent "inner logic of a planned economy".

Those arguments are faded out considerably in the new debate. Mandel suggests that the USSR was planned "in an irrational, even senseless manner". He has to turn to the supposed welfare benefits of the Stalinist regimes

for evidence of their progressiveness: they had full employment, and workers in the USSR had a bigger share of the national income than in Brazil.

Why is Brazil the standard of comparison? I guess because it has the most unequal income distribution of any major capitalist country! Mandel's argument shows the "degenerated workers' state" thesis in the last extremes of clutching at straws.

Believing, myself, that the USSR was state-capitalist — in contrast to others in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty who believe it was bureaucratic collectivist — I would have been pleased if Chris Harman had convincingly demolished Mandel's arguments. But I was disappointed.

In the 1969-70 debate, Harman accepted Mandel's assertion that capitalism is defined by the *relations between capitals* — "yes, capitalism is, as Mandel argues, competition on the basis of commodity production" — though, inconclusively and in



passing, he also referred to a better definition ("the relation between wage labour and capital determines the entire character of the mode of production").

Both in 1969-70 and in the new debate, Harman goes on to argue that military competition between the USSR and the West had comparable effects to classical capitalist market competition — it was "competition between producing units... advanced to the point where each is compelled to continually rationalise and rearrange its internal productive processes so as to relate them to the productive process of the others". All that 20 years' thought and experience has added to Harman's exposition is greater weariness, more baffling use of "dialectics" (where the USSR appeared to be the opposite of competitive capitalism, it was dialectically the same), and greater schematism in arguing (or asserting) that only state-capitalist theory can enable socialists to look to the working class in Eastern Europe and the USSR.

## Art and dollars

**Belinda Weaver reviews "Nothing if not critical: selected essays on art and artists", by Robert Hughes, Collins Harvill, £7.99**

Reading art criticism these days is often a humbling experience. You know what each word means individually; it's only what they add up to that's incomprehensible.

Robert Hughes's new book is just the opposite — funny, readable, accessible, but also well and thoroughly researched.

The book is largely a collection of reviews of art shows and artists, but there are book reviews and longer pieces, such as the introductory essay, "The decline of the City of Mahagony" which examines the eclipse of New York as a world centre of art. In the 1980s, Hughes asserts:

*...the scale of cultural feeding became gross, and its aliment coarse; bulimia, that neurotic cycle of gorge and puke, the driven consumption and regurgitation of images and reputations, became our main cultural metaphor... The inflation of the market, the victory of promotion over connoisseurship, the manufacture of art-related glamour, the poverty of art training, the embattled state of museums — these will not vanish... now that 1990 is here.*

With art prices so over-inflated, Hughes predicts that the number of travelling exhibitions must dwindle; prohibitive insurance costs will ensure that. For the same reason, galleries and collectors will become reluctant to lend valuable works, leaving gallery visitors fewer chances to see an artist's life's work whole. And galleries' limited funds already cannot compete with the fortunes of billionaires, so the existing decline in gallery purchases of important works must continue.

The cost of pictures has already distorted how people see art. Visitors to galleries cannot "see" Van Goghs or the Mona Lisa as earlier generations could: their vision is distorted by dollar signs, by the cash value placed on "masterpieces".

Hughes discounts much modern American art, especially the "always-something-new" art so much hyped by art dealers in the 1980s, which is already losing its value.

Though people looking back on this period will find artists to respect, Hughes claims:

*...the good ones will seem like raisins bedded, very far apart, in the swollen duff of mediocrity that constitutes most late twentieth-century art. Whether the bad museum art of our own day... is better or worse than its late nineteenth-century equivalents, the stuff that Cezanne and Van Gogh had to slog their way past, is no longer an open question; because of the overpopulation of the art world, there is far more of it, and thanks to the lack of discrimination on the market-museum axis it is, if anything, somewhat worse.*

Hughes punctures a number of inflated reputations, most enjoyably the artist Julian Schnabel and the French "philosopher" Jean Baudrillard.

On Schnabel's memoirs, Hughes writes:

*The unexamined life, says Socrates, is not worth living. The memoirs of Julian Schnabel, such as they are, remind one that the converse is also true. The un-lived life is not worth examining.*

Hughes compares Schnabel to Stallone's Rambo (they have in common "a lurching display of oily pectorals"), and claims that Schnabel's growth (he never learned to draw) was smothered by his "impregnable self-esteem".

His skewering of Baudrillard's nonsensical ravings about America is wonderful. Baudrillard, the self-styled "aeronautic missionary of the silent majorities" [?], watches the New York Marathon on television, and witters on at length about 17,000 runners in "an end of the world show", "all seeking death", "bringing the message of a catastrophe for the human race... a form of demonstrative suicide, suicide as advertising". At the end of this tirade, Hughes remarks laconically: "One gathers that this is not a *sportif* philosopher".

If you know anything about art, you'll enjoy this book; if you don't, it might make you want to.

## A different voice

**Alan Gilbert reviews "Contested Domains", by Robin Cohen (Zed)**

"The 1980s have proved to be an infertile decade for the development of critical, let alone Marxist, social theory. Everywhere, and not least in the nominally socialist states of Eastern Europe, 'the market' is triumphant..."

"[Yet] all over the world (I have discussed in some detail in this book the situation in over 15



The force for change

countries) labouring people have galvanised some level of opposition to the control of the employers and the state... working people have found a voice (often a hesitant and uncertain one) that speaks to humankind in a different pitch and tone of that of their employers... It is to capturing this voice, this intimation of an alternative future, that this book is dedicated".

Robin Cohen's book is mostly a collection of articles previously published in a range of journals, each of them here supplied with an "endbox". It is in large part a polemic against the point of view which sees the wage-working class proper in the Third World as a relatively privileged group, with less radical potential than the larger and poorer "lumpenproletariat".

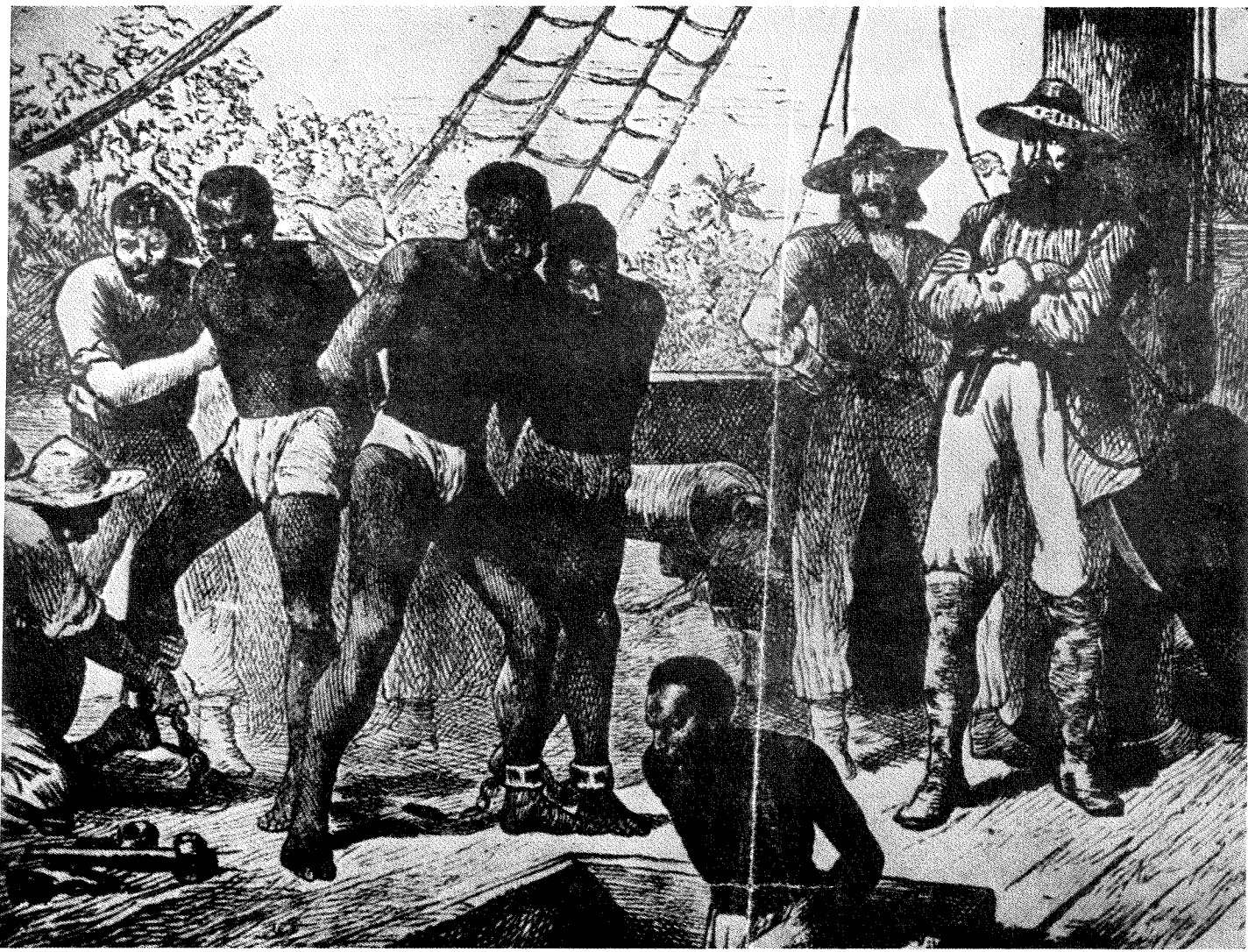
One chapter takes issue directly with Franz Fanon's claim that the "urban spearhead" of the revolution would be the "horde of starving men, uprooted from their tribe and from their clan... this people of the shanty towns".

The "lumpenproletariat", Cohen argues, is not a coherent group. It turns less easily to political activity than to despair, religion or internecine squabbling. When it is politically active, it is as likely to be mobilised by the right wing as by socialist or democratic forces.

New evidence that Cohen was right is the vicious spiral unleashed in South Africa's black townships when the ANC encouraged lumpenproletarian violence in the name of overthrowing apartheid by making it "ungovernable".

South Africa also gives clear proof of the other side of Cohen's argument: that the wage-working class in the Third World is capable of going well beyond "economic" struggles. "On the contrary, there appears to be a wide acceptance [among the urban poor] of workers and their principal class organs, the trade unions, as articulators of a wider set of grievances and ideologies than those that can simply by reduced to a wage demand".

## REVIEWS



Slavery was the "pedestal" of emerging European capitalism for more than 300 years after Columbus's voyage of 1492

# Capitalism and slavery

Colin Foster reviews  
"The overthrow of  
colonial slavery  
1776-1848", by Robin  
Blackburn (Verso, £14.95)

Blackburn argues against a mechanical Marxist or economic-determinist theory which would explain the abolition of the slave trade, and eventually of slavery, by wage-labour being more profitable than slave-labour.

Slave-labour, he points out, was still highly profitable in the West Indies when it was abolished there; and the freed slaves became not wage-workers but independent peasants.

Slavery, he argues, was overthrown by a combination of three movements: the revolt of the slaves themselves (especially in Haiti); the growth of democratic politics in Western Europe (especially in the French Revolution); and the fact that the slave plantations, though still profitable, were becoming

economically less important, allowing middle-class democratic politics to move against them without grave results for overall profits.

His account of the anti-slavery movement in early 19th century Britain is a powerful corrective to any notion that British workers are uninterested in anything beyond bread-and-butter concerns. Though led by middle-class radicals, anti-slavery was a mass movement in the working class.

"The anti-slavery emblem — a kneeling African in chains bearing the motto 'Am I Not a Man and a Brother?' — became a familiar sight on cups, plates, brooches and pendants". Pamphlets, some written by ex-slaves, circulated in thousands of copies; in 1833, some 5,000 petitions, with one and a half million signatures, were collected to demand the abolition of slavery.

Blackburn's description of the great slave revolt in Haiti is, however, dull and blurred compared to C.L.R. James's classic

*The Black Jacobins*. Too many pages of the book are given over to intricate analysis of the rhetoric of upper-class British anti-slavers such as the creepy William Wilberforce.

And, though the book is mostly straightforward narrative without much "theorising", it is annoyingly peppered with neo-Marxist jargon.

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