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 lauched 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 standards, 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 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 class was a special class of managers and administrators, which quickly became a purely administrative layer which had no masses behind it".

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.

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; 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.

> "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".

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 — when they were able to — gave them enormous strength.

Hillel Ticktin

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 than 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.

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 hide 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 spadefuls, 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 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 fascistic Argentina, and all their terrorist gangs.

> "The SWP and others have alienated Jews from the left".

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 Israel-Syria (Iraq, Iran) conflicts.

Alfred Packter

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 beneficient "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 Mahagonny" 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 unlived 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".

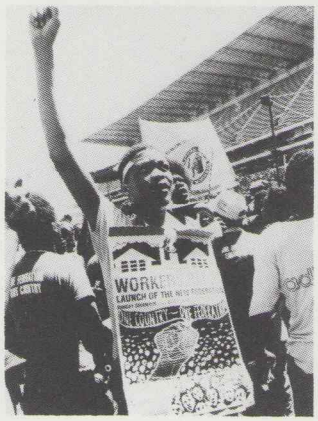
If you know anything about art, you'll enjoy this book; if you don't, it might make you want to.

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 "economistic" 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".

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.