



# REFORM OR

# REVOLUTION IN EASTERN EUROPE?



**A SOCIALIST ORGANISER PAMPHLET**

**80 PENCE**



**“The Soviet Union emerged from the October revolution as a workers’ state. State ownership of the means of production, a necessary prerequisite to socialist development, opened up the possibility of rapid growth of the productive forces. But the apparatus of the workers’ state underwent a complete degeneration at the same time: it was transformed from a weapon of the working class into a weapon of bureaucratic violence against the working class, and more and more a weapon for the sabotage of the country’s economy.**

**A fresh upsurge of the revolution in the USSR will undoubtedly begin under the banner of the struggle against *social inequality and political oppression*. Down with the privileges of the bureaucracy! Down with Stakhanovism! Down with the Soviet aristocracy and its ranks and orders! Greater equality of wages for all forms of labour!**

**The struggle for the freedom of the trade unions and the factory committees, for the right of assembly, and for freedom of the press, will unfold in the struggle for the regeneration and development of *Soviet democracy*.**

**The bureaucracy replaced the soviets as class organs with the fiction of universal electoral rights — the style of Hitler-Goebbels. It is necessary to return to the soviets not only their free democratic form but also their class content. As once the bourgeoisie and kulaks were not permitted to enter the soviets, so now *it is necessary to drive the bureaucracy and the new aristocracy out of the soviets*. In the soviets there is room only for representatives of the workers, rank-and-file collective farmers, peasants, and Red Army personnel.**

**Democratisation of the soviets is impossible without the *legalisation of soviet parties*. The workers and peasants themselves by their own free vote will indicate what parties they recognise as soviet parties.**

**A revision of *planned economy from top to bottom* in the interests of producers and consumers! Factory committees should be returned the right to control production. A democratically organised consumers’ cooperative should control the quality and price of products.**

**Reorganisation of the collective farms in accordance with the will and in the interests of those who work there!**

**The reactionary *international policy* of the bureaucracy should be replaced by the policy of proletarian internationalism”.**

**Leon Trotsky**



Hungary 1956

# Back the workers against the police states!

History has many examples of it: when the rulers of moribund repressive systems themselves decide that there must be change, and set about tinkering with their system, then it can blow up in their faces.

Gorbachev's attempts at reform from above may well unleash revolution from below.

The English Revolution of the 1640s broke out when the tyrant king Charles I called the first Parliament in 12 years. Parliament seized the initiative, and Charles lost his head.

The French Revolution of 1789-99 broke out in a somewhat similar fashion.

King Louis called the first French States General (a sort of parliament) in more than a century, and he too lost his head.

Or take Gorbachev's predecessor, the reforming dictator Nikita Khrushchev. Khrushchev and his associates took over after Stalin died in 1953. They carried through substantial changes. They more or less ended the mass terror of the Stalin era. They opened most of the prison camps and introduced a comparatively liberal atmosphere. Workers' living standards improved.

In the USSR Khrushchev was relatively successful. Even after Khrushchev was overthrown in 1964 and reaction set in under Brezhnev, Russia never went back to the horrors of Stalin.

## Contents

With the workers against the police states. Editorial. ....	1
Workers' unity East and West by Zbigniew Kowalewski .....	4
The USSR's economic crisis by Martin Thomas .....	6
The prison-house of nations by Clive Bradley .....	8
Everyday life in 'actually existing socialism' by Stan Crooke .....	12
The Hungarian Commune 1956 by Sean Matgamna .....	14
The Polish August by Alexis Carras .....	16
Socialism and democratic rights by Eric Heffer MP .....	20
From Gdansk to martial law by Alexis Carras .....	23
Our strike in Szczecin by Edmund Baluka .....	24
A self-limiting revolution? by Tom Rigby .....	27
A programme for revolution by Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski .....	29
Stalin's counter-revolution by Leon Trotsky .....	33
Stalin's post-war conquests: what the Trotskyists said. Document. ....	35
The USSR 1917-1948 .....	36
Is the USSR imperialist? by John O'Mahony .....	39

Socialist Organiser no. 369-70,  
1 September 1988.

Editor: John O'Mahony  
Typesetting Upstream Ltd (TU).  
01-358 1344

Published by Socialist Organiser,  
PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.  
01-639 7965

Printed by Press Link  
International (UK) Ltd (TU).  
Registered as a newspaper at the  
Post Office.

Signed articles do not necessarily  
reflect the view of Socialist  
Organiser.

In the USSR the bureaucracy kept a firm grip. But things went differently for them in Eastern Europe, which they had controlled for less than a decade when Stalin died. The end of the Stalinist terror there unleashed powerful forces of revolt against Russian overlordship.

Reform blew up in Khrushchev's face. It took tanks and Russian armies to beat down Hungary, and it was only by the skin of their teeth that the Khrushchevites under Wladislaw Gomulka held on in Poland.

## Gorbachev

Today the USSR and Eastern Europe are in greater ferment than at any time in over 30 years.

Gorbachev is using liberalisation as a tool to push through economic reform in the USSR against the entrenched opposition of a large part of the bureaucracy. He has set a hornet's nest buzzing.

In the USSR a majority of the people are not Great Russians and feel in varying degrees oppressed as nationalities. Already a spate of national movements has arisen to confront Gorbachev with demands for national liberties and rights.

Kazakhstan resents over-centralised control. The Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania question their forcible incorporation into the USSR. Armenia demands the transfer of the Nagorny Karabakh district from Azerbaijan.

The whole Eastern bloc is one seething mass of national antagonisms. In Eastern Europe there are bitter conflicts between the so-called socialist states. They treat their national minorities worse than any similar minorities are treated in the advanced capitalist countries. That is not new: some of history's worst atrocities of chauvinism and nationalism were committed by the Stalinist states against each others' peoples in Eastern Europe at the end of World War 2. Ten million Germans were driven out of Poland, and three million out of Czechoslovakia.

What is new now is that a wide range of conflicts is flaring up, both in the USSR and in Eastern Europe, and the rulers of the system are divided and unsure what to do about them.

Such ferment is an inevitable consequence of any degree of glasnost. You cannot have one without evoking the other. That is the dilemma Gorbachev faces.

Even when an East European regime is not committed to glasnost, the signals from the USSR make life very difficult for the regime.

## Strikes

The national question is the most immediately explosive issue, as it was also in 1956, under Khrushchev. But in 1956 the main force of opposition and combat against the system was the working class, using working-class weapons like the general strike. And now too the working class is begin to heave and stir.

The great model here is Poland's Solidarnosc. Movements for free trade unionism exist and have grown in

strength in almost all the Eastern bloc states. They are in the embryo stage the Polish free trade union activists were at before the mass strike of August 1980 made their movement a ten-million-strong giant.

The Polish free trade union movement had a long gestation. For years before 1980, committed militants like Lech Walesa and Anna Walentynowicz built up experience, gaining from every bit of toleration and riding out the repression. Similar processes are already underway in other countries.

Even small chinks of toleration can allow such movements to gestate. Toleration is a double-edged weapon for the rulers. It gives them more flexibility; but they gain only if what they tolerate is not strong enough to challenge them. They can miscalculate.

Solidarnosc broke through the barriers in 1980 when Poland's rulers raised food prices and allowed for some flexibility by way of wage rises for the combative workers of a few plants. They thought they could stifle and control the workers' movement by using their monopoly of communications. They could not.

The Kremlin has long had a standard method of dealing with strikes in the USSR: grant the workers' demands, victimise the strike leaders, and rely on a media black-out to stop news of the workers' gains spreading. But now the official press has started — tentatively and occasionally — to report strikes. The results could be explosive.

## Explosive

We can't know how things will go, of course; but there have been strikes in many parts of the Eastern bloc, and repression is, for now, not as fierce as it was. The general strike in Armenia in support of that republic's demand for the transfer of territory from Azerbaijan was organised by the local bureaucrats; nevertheless the model and example is a potent one, and the workers don't need state sponsorship to use it.

The lesson of history is that the mass strike is the natural elemental form of the revolt against totalitarian or semi-totalitarian state rule. That is what happened in East Germany in 1953, Poland and Hungary in 1956, and Poland in 1970, 1976 and 1980.

The economic reforms Gorbachev wants will mean speed-up, unemployment, and wage cuts for many workers. Workers will resist. The loosening-up which the bureaucrats need for their own more efficient rule will greatly increase the chances of the working-class resistance reaching explosive proportions.

The most likely first result of the ferment unleashed by Gorbachev's reform drive is a backlash against reform, or an attempt at a backlash. The ruling bureaucrats fear even Gorbachev's limited reforms — but they have no alternative except continued stagnation. And an attempt at a backlash might only accelerate the bureaucracy's loss of control.

Exactly 20 years ago Alexander

Dubcek attempted to do in Czechoslovakia something like Gorbachev is trying to do in the USSR. To overcome entrenched bureaucratic opposition to economic reform, Dubcek went for 'glasnost' — an openness unknown before. The USSR and other Warsaw Pact armies cut short the experiment.

But there is no force which will invade the USSR to stifle Gorbachev's reform. And the bureaucracy may not be able to keep control this time round as they did under Khrushchev, or to clamp the brakes on, as they did when they replaced Khrushchev by Brezhnev.

Even if the bureaucrats can hold in the USSR, they may trigger an uncontrollable explosion in one of more of the East European states.

## British workers

We can't know in detail what will happen. We do know that the British labour movement must prepare itself to be able to act the part of support and solidarity — and not that of scabs — for the workers' and national revolts in the Eastern bloc.

At the time of the Polish workers' mass strike movement in 1980, the TUC was due to pay a long-planned visit to the official police-state unions in Poland. Those government-controlled unions were threatening to have the workers shot down if they did not go back to work — as they had indeed been shot down in Gdansk in 1970. But the TUC could not be persuaded to call off the planned visit! In the end the Poles cancelled it.

Most of the left refused to call on the TUC to boycott the Polish police-state strikebreaking 'union'. After the military coup which outlawed Solidarnosc in December 1981, large sections of the same left refused to back Solidarnosc's call for a boycott of Polish goods.

Some lessons have been learned since then; but many in the labour movement have great faith in Gorbachev, who has had a wonderful press in the West.

## Socialist states?

The problem is that some of the best people on the left think of the Eastern bloc states as socialist, and are confused about where their loyalties lie. When the workers in those states come into conflict with the 'socialist' governments, the confusion is made worse because union-bashers in the West, like Reagan and Thatcher, hypocritically pretend to be the friends of free trade unionism in the East. The fact that the Catholic Church plays such a big role in the free trade union movement in Poland also alienates many Western socialists.

There are no good reasons for confusion, though. The facts about the Eastern bloc are now well enough known. Nationalised property there is state property, and the state is the property of a privileged elite.

This ruling elite tolerates little dissent, especially from the working class. Calling themselves socialist, they deprive the working class of all rights to free speech and free organisation. They persecute





**Hungary '56: workers destroy Stalin's statue.**

genuine trade unionists, and impose state 'unions' of the sort pioneered by fascism in the West — pseudo-unions to police and control the workers.

So long as they retain control, the state bureaucrats can experiment with different forms of economic organisation, including even controlled market relations in parts of the economy. What they have never yet tolerated is free working-class industrial and political activity.

### **More backward**

In many ways these societies are more backward than advanced capitalism, and workers there lack rights that we have long ago won by struggle in the advanced (and some of the underdeveloped) capitalist countries.

We advocate the replacement of the present system of nationalised economy under a state-monopoly bureaucracy with a socialised economy under the democratic control of the working class. What exists now is no form of socialism. Nationalisation combined with state tyranny is at least as far away from socialism as the system in the West, and in some ways — the systematic denial to the workers of the right to organise — it is worse.

Nationalisation is a means to an end — working-class liberation from the economic exploitation of those who control the means of production. That is not achieved when the nationalised economy and the monopolising state are in effect the property of a ruling elite whose upper layers lord it over society as the aristocrats and capitalists do elsewhere.

Every socialist and every class-conscious worker in Britain, every honest trade unionist, must side with the workers against the state and with the oppressed nationalities against their oppressors.

### **Solidarnosc**

The 21-point programme adopted by Solidarnosc in the days when it threatened the Polish state shows how hypocritical and dishonest is the sympathy of Thatcher and Reagan for such

a movement. But even when we disagree profoundly with a movement like Solidarnosc — as we do now, since its official policy is now for a return to some sort of free-market economy — we must still back it against the state, and support its right to exist, to live, and to make mistakes.

There can be no socialism without the working class. The idea that the totalitarian state of the privileged bureaucrats can be the custodian and champion of socialism against the working class is an absurdity. Nationalisation, to repeat, is a means to an end — workers' liberty. And when nationalised property is controlled by the bureaucratic state, it is bureaucratic property, not socialist property.

The common argument that the Catholic Church is 'behind' Solidarnosc is both untrue and beside the point. Take it seriously, and it would lead you, for example, to dismiss and condemn the entire Southern Irish labour movement. It is only partly true: the Catholic Church is powerful in Solidarnosc because Catholicism is a big element in Polish national identity and Polish revolt against Russian overlordship. But the Church in Poland plays a dual role: while churches provide havens for trade-union activists, and priests condemn the government from their pulpits, the Church hierarchy has often helped the state to control Solidarnosc.

### **Scargill and Walesa**

The easiest way to comprehend the Solidarnosc movement is to compare its leader Lech Walesa with the militant leader of Britain's miners, Arthur Scargill.

Scargill grew up in a system of private capitalist exploitation of his class. He fights that system and those who run it. What does he want to put in its place? Socialised property — socialised property conceived as the antithesis of exploitation by the private owners of the means of production.

Scargill sees what appears to be socialised property in the Eastern bloc states, and knows that his own capitalist enemies hate those states — because the bourgeoisie have been overthrown there, and replaced by state-monopoly

bureaucrats. So he looks to the Eastern bloc.

Walesa is Scargill's mirror-image. Born during the war unleashed by the Russian-German invasion of Poland in September 1939, he grew up in a system of exploitation of the workers by state bureaucrats and oppression of Poland by the USSR. To Walesa and others like him, the Western system seems less exploitative because it is not exploitation based on vice-like state control of society on top of monopoly control of the means of production. So Walesa looks to the West.

### **Mirrors**

Walesa and Scargill, leaders of the same sort of movement, stare at each other across a historical void. Together they sum up the immense tragedy of the working class in the last 40 years. Instead of independent working-class politics, each has the politics of the enemy of his immediate enemy. Each glorifies his enemy's enemy.

Instead of Scargill understanding that nationalised property under a police state cannot be socialism, Walesa understanding that you can have exploitation on a free-market basis without direct state intervention, and both joining to fight for socialised property and consistent democracy without capitalists or bureaucrats, each sides with the other's enemies. Even the fact that the Polish state which had suppressed Solidarnosc then supplied Thatcher with scab coal against the heroic miners' strike of 1984-5 has not taught Scargill any lasting lessons.

Independent working-class politics are indispensable: without them you are inevitably pulled in the wake of either the bureaucrats or the capitalists.

The explosions that are likely in the Eastern bloc in the period ahead will put the socialists and militants in the British labour movement to the test. Will we stand with the workers and subject peoples, or with the oppressing bureaucrats?

We publish this pamphlet to make the case for siding with the workers in the Eastern bloc.

**Workers of the world unite! For workers' liberty East and West!**

# For workers' unity East and West!

Seventy years ago in the Russian Empire there was the first workers' revolution. The working class gained power.

Fifty years ago in the Soviet Union the bureaucratic counter-revolution consolidated itself definitively. It is a system of totalitarian domination, a system of oppression and exploitation of the working class. It is a system of oppression by the Great Russian nation of the other nationalities. Today that system finds itself in deepening crisis.

I think we are entering into the third period of the epoch opened by the Russian Revolution. The Gorbachevian reforms express one fact; that the totalitarian bureaucracy finds it more and more difficult keeping its system going.

In Poland the crisis of the bureaucratic system has been unfolding for a long time. This crisis shows that the bureaucratic regime is unreformable. The Polish experience is very important for understanding what is going on in the Soviet Union.

This experience shows that only the working class can overthrow the bureaucratic regime — the working class in alliance with all other oppressed groups in society: the youth, the women — and not only the women of the working class — the oppressed groups and nationalities, the peasants, and the intellectuals.

Only the working class can liberate society from the bureaucratic oppression.

The Polish revolution of 1980-1 was defeated. But the revolution lit up their own social landscape for workers. Not only for Polish workers, but for workers in the rest of the Soviet bloc too. What did the Polish revolution show?

In the first place, the power of independent mass action by the working class. The Polish working class in 1980-1 gained its independence in relation to the bureaucratic regime. It won trade union freedom and organised itself in a very large trade union.

This Polish working class had been deeply atomised for several decades. And then in 1980, in just a few months, it managed to construct a trade union that was one of the most powerful trade unions in history.

In a few months this working class discovered working class democracy; and in a few months it built one of the most democratic trade unions in the history of the world workers' movement.

This working class created a large layer of natural worker leaders. It developed gigantic class struggles in the form of strikes and occupations of factories. The Solidarnosc trade union was capable of unleashing factory occupations by 10 million workers simultaneously.

The Polish working class learnt all that in a few months!

Zbigniew Kowalewski, an exiled leader of the left in Solidarnosc, argues for workers to link up across the East-West divide



**“Broad sections of the labour movement in the capitalist countries regard the Eastern bureaucracies as positive and progressive alternatives to capitalist countries. And these broad sections still consider today that workers' struggles against bureaucratic regimes is reactionary and anti-socialist. In the same way broad sections of workers in the Eastern bloc, in Poland and not only in Poland, think the national struggles, revolutionary struggles, and strikes in capitalist and dependent countries are engineered by the bureaucracy.”**

Not only that. When it won trade union freedom, when it organised itself independently, when it learnt to struggle — then it decided rapidly that it should become the master of its own destiny.

The question was posed: who should run Poland, the bureaucracy or the working class itself?

The workers moved quickly from the trade union struggle to a more advanced scale. They moved for workers' control, for social control over production, for social control over information, over radio, over TV, for political democracy in the state, and for political and ideological pluralism.

Starting off from a movement by the Solidarnosc trade union, workers' councils began to form. In this way the beginnings of a new form of power appeared. The dynamic of these developments was clear. The struggle for social control, for self-management, was objectively a struggle to win workers' power in society.

Solidarnosc started as a self-managed trade union. From a self-managed trade union it went on to fight for the project of a self-managed republic.

The Solidarnosc militants said we want a state in the image of our society — free trade unions, liberty and democracy. The labour movement began to work out an overall programme of political democracy in the state. From the struggle for workers' control Solidarnosc went to the struggle for real social control of social property.

During 18 months, all the creative capacity of the working class was shown. In this very brief period the working class transformed itself from an object to a subject.

Today, it is of fundamental importance that the Soviet working class should do the same things that the Polish working class did.

The Soviet bureaucracy has realised that it can no longer rule in the old way. Gorbachev is trying to find a new form of domination for the bureaucracy. He is conscious of the necessity of reforms to preserve a system of society in crisis. It is of fundamental importance that the Soviet working class should take advantage of this situation and enter onto the scene as an independent force.

It should demand in the first place very simple things. Decent wages; decent conditions of work; decent housing; freedom of expression and freedom to hold meetings. It should demand elementary civil and human rights. The Soviet working class should organise strikes in defence of decent wages and conditions. It should begin to form democratic unions starting off from strike committees. It is very important that it should begin to organise itself independently, without bureaucratic control, under the exclusive leadership of its own natural leaders democratically elected.

It is necessary as from now to begin to prepare our future solidarity with Soviet workers. In the same way it is very important to continue to develop solidarity





with the Polish workers, with the struggle of Solidarnosc, a struggle which has already continued for six years since the defeat of 1981.

We do not know when and in which country the next phase of workers' struggles will begin. The next wave may begin in the Soviet Union, in the conditions created by the current reforms, and it may spread from the Soviet Union to other countries of the Soviet bloc. On the other hand, it may start from the satellite countries and generate repercussions in the Soviet working class.

**In any case, it is of fundamental importance to prepare our solidarity with Soviet workers and trade union militants, and of course, with Solidarnosc. We must forge links between the struggles of workers in one country with those in others.**

Unfortunately this task is quite difficult to carry out. The international labour movement is deeply divided.

There is a traditional long-existing division in the labour movements of the more developed countries and in the labour movements of less developed and dependent countries. Stalinism, when it came to power in the Soviet Union, introduced new divisions. These divisions were visible in the labour movements of capitalist countries and dependent countries with the movement of the Polish working class and its defeat.

Broad sections of the labour movement in the capitalist countries regard the Eastern bureaucracies as positive and progressive alternatives to capitalist countries. And these broad sections still consider today that workers' struggles against bureaucratic regimes is reactionary and anti-socialist. In the same way broad sections of workers in the Eastern bloc, in Poland and not only in Poland, think the national struggles, revolutionary struggles, and strikes in capitalist and dependent countries are engineered by the bureaucracy.

There is a great distrust among the workers in Poland of struggles that are supported by propaganda from the Soviet Union or Jaruselski. In this respect there are terrible situations. For example the fighters in the Salvadorean revolution think Solidarnosc is the agency of the CIA. And in a similar and symmetrical way many workers in my country think the Sandinista revolution was simply an expansion of the Soviet bureaucracy.

So we have got very big tasks to confront in the creation of international links and internationalist consciousness between workers in East and West, and in the North and South to use a conventional expression. To create that feeling of solidarity, which in a sense is a natural feeling, to overcome these divisions.

**I think the divisions between workers here and workers in Eastern bloc countries are a particular problem in the British labour movement. The existing divisions benefit only those who oppose the working class, whether they be capitalists or bureaucrats, imperialists or chauvinists.**

# The USSR's economic crisis

By Martin Thomas

**The USSR is by far the world's biggest producer of steel and oil. Its energy consumption per head — another index of industrialisation — is higher than Britain's or West Germany's.**

It is able to rival the US in space technology. Even in services and consumer industries it can show some impressive figures. The USSR has more doctors than any other country in the world — one doctor for every 270 people, as against one for every 650 in Britain. It produces more shoes than the US, Britain, France and West Germany put together — enough for every person in the USSR to have 2½ new pairs each year.

So why is Mikhail Gorbachev talking so urgently about "years of stagnation" and the need for "reconstruction" (perestroika)?

The impressive figures for gross output translate into much less impressive figures for usable final products. Despite all that steel and oil, fewer Soviet workers than Western workers have cars, and their cars perform worse.

The USSR's economy is even worse at turning the basic industrial materials into more sophisticated goods, like modern machine tools and computers. Productivity is very low. On average, it takes two Soviet workers to produce what one US worker produces in industry, and four in agriculture.

Work in the average Soviet factory goes in cycles. Most of the time, everyone dawdles. Work is held up

because supplies haven't arrived, or because machinery has broken down.

Then comes the end of the month. The manager panics because the factory hasn't met its plan target. The target is reached by "storming" — working frantically, striving to turn out the goods any old how, without checking, with parts missing.

So a good proportion of those millions of shoes are useless rubbish. And the bureaucratic chaos spreads through society. Despite all those doctors, you have to pay bribes to get decent medical treatment.

In the 1930s, a sort of "storming" produced results. Millions of workers were hurled into digging coal, building power stations, and producing steel. It was chaotic, wasteful, terrible in its consequences for the workers, but it built an industrial base.

Even today, forced-march methods can produce results in the military and space sectors. A bureaucratic command goes out that these sectors are to have first call on scarce supplies and skilled person power. But as a general regime for a modern economy, which needs to be flexible in response to changing technology and people's demands for goods and services, "storming" is disastrous.

A market economy does, in its own way, have flexibility. Competition promotes new technology and new products. There is a huge price to pay for

the workers — inequality, insecurity, constant pressure — but the system does have its own dynamic.

An economy democratically planned by the workers would be flexible, too — indeed, more flexible, and at a smaller human cost. The USSR's economy, guided by the crude, blundering, lurching efforts of the ruling bureaucrats to develop their national economy in a competitive world, has no such flexibility.

The bureaucrats stumble, flounder and lash out in the dark. Every one of them browbeats their inferiors in the hierarchy and lies to their superiors. There is neither the harsh, anarchic discipline of the market, nor the discipline of conscious human control.

And worse. Not only is the Soviet economy bureaucratic; the bureaucrats are often *incompetent* bureaucrats. A large proportion of them are elderly men, with little education, who got their jobs by toadying.

The bureaucratic chaos and inertia feeds on itself, as one stop-gap measure after another is used to drag the lumbering monster of the economy forward. The ordinary factories cannot produce fridges that work; so the Defence Ministry starts producing fridges.

Housing is scarce; so each factory corners its own chunk of housing, which it controls and allocates to its workers. The factory may even run its own farms and vegetable gardens, to supply its workers with food.

Each factory and each ministry tries to secure its sources of supply by producing the supplies it needs itself, so there is wasteful duplication.

As Gorbachev himself says: "Try to get your flat repaired; you will have to find a moonlighter to do it for you, and he will have to steal the materials from a building site". About 50% of shoe repairs, 40% of car repairs, and 30% of household appliance repairs, are done by private operators. The black market is huge.

Gorbachev does not — and, as flesh and blood of the bureaucracy, cannot — propose workers' control as the answer. Instead, he wants to bring more market mechanisms into the official Soviet economy.

Gorbachev wants to shake up the managers and shake up the economy. He is moving in five main directions.

\*A drive for discipline, against corruption and alcoholism.

\*Giving the rules of profit and loss, supply and demand, more scope in the economy.

\*Exposing corrupt, stick-in-the-mud bureaucrats to the threat of public exposure and losing their jobs.

\*Stacking top jobs with his own supporters.

\*Withdrawing from Afghanistan, and negotiating arms cuts with the US, so as to lessen the terrible drain on the USSR

## The limits of Glasnost

To have access even to a limited range of views in the media is better than being bombarded by a mind-numbing uniform 'party line'; to be able to vote even between two officially-vetted candidates for works manager is better than having no vote at all.

To this extent Gorbachev's political reforms are a step forward.

They include:

\*Limiting the term of office for all officials to ten years, unless they get a 75% mandate for a further five years.

\*Secret ballots for all positions in the state and in the ruling party. The ruling party will, however, keep its monopoly over candidates.

\*Better legal procedures for people to bring complaints against officials. (At present the main method for doing this — a widely-used though ineffective one — is anonymous letters to higher authorities).

The media have become much less rigid, and there is much more liberty for writers and film-makers.

All this stops far short of letting workers organise themselves freely in independent trade unions or new political parties. All moves for workers' self-organisation and self-liberation — and in the USSR, as everywhere, the liberation

of the workers must be the task of the workers themselves — will be moves against the resistance of Gorbachev and the bureaucracy.

The rights of nationalities are central to democracy in the USSR, a multinational empire where the oppressed nationalities, Ukrainians, Armenians, Latvians, Estonians, and others, between them are the majority of the population.

The issue is already explosive. The Kremlin admits that it lost control in Nagorny Karabakh, an Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan which wants to be united with Armenia. Armenians have staged a general strike on the Karabakh issue, with support from the local Armenian bureaucracy. There are mass protests in Latvia against Russification.

Yet Gorbachev's faction in the bureaucracy is very much a Great Russian faction. Gorbachev has sacked local chiefs in several minority-nationalist areas — accusing them, probably rightly, of corruption — and replaced them by men more in tune with Moscow.

For the workers, Gorbachev's reforms are far from being a revolution. What's important about them is that they may shake up and destabilise the system enough for a real revolution to be made by the workers.





**Soviet food queue**

of military spending.

On paper, Gorbachev has gone a long way towards turning the USSR into a market economy.

Since January 1968, 60% of industrial enterprises have been "self-financing". Instead of paying over their profits to central government, then asking central government for a grant when they want to invest, they are supposed to keep their profits and decide for themselves what to do with them — when and how to invest.

Since January 1987, individual ministries and some large individual enterprises have been able to do business directly with the West, cutting through the Foreign Trade Ministry's previous monopoly of such business.

Since May 1987 a new law has greatly increased the scope for co-operative enterprises. Private enterprise is also being given more room. The USSR's first private hospital opened in May 1987.

In March 1987 the USSR had its first bankruptcy ever. Pro-Gorbachev economists talk about taking all industries except the most basic, large-scale ones out of the central plan; having banks operate commercially, lending money at interest to industrial enterprises; increasing wage differentials; 'shaking out' some 15 million workers from inefficient enterprises; and raising the prices of basic goods to gear the price system to supply and demand.

In March 1988 new rules were proposed for agriculture. Groups of workers, or individual workers, can strike commercial contracts with a collective farm to do particular jobs. Land and equipment can be leased out for up to 50 years. (A similar measure in China has virtually finished off collective farms and restored private peasant agriculture).

Limits on the present private plots —

which occupy about 3% of the arable land, but produce about 30% of Soviet food — have been lifted. Collective farms are allowed to do business directly with the West.

But the results of all this so far have been meagre. Not only have growth rates been unimpressive. It is doubtful how far the market has become any sort of real counterweight to bureaucratic command and bureaucratic inertia.

Economic measures similar to Gorbachev's have been tried before many times in the Eastern bloc. In agriculture they have sometimes worked. In industry they have been unsuccessful. They have been tried in Hungary and Yugoslavia for 20 or 30 years. They were tried in the USSR in the 1960s. Again and again they have been thwarted by bureaucratic inertia.

The enterprises which are supposed to be "self-financing", for example, say that 80% of their profits still go to their central ministries. The officials in the ministries, however much they agree with generalities about the need for change, do not want to let that money out of their hands.

Bureaucratic influence and string-pulling are still much more powerful than profit-and-loss calculations.

Maybe Gorbachev is determined enough to push further. But he hasn't done yet. In practice, what Gorbachev's economics means so far is increased pressure on workers to produce more, increased wage differentials, and increased insecurity.

Market economics is no more a cure-all in the East than it is in the West.

## Why the USSR stagnates

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.

The rough work of borrowing, imitating, transplanting and grafting, was accomplished on the bases laid down by the revolution. There was, thus far, no question of any new word in the sphere of technique, science or art.

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 farther you go, the more the economy runs into the problem of quality, which slips out of the hands of a bureaucracy like a shadow.

The Soviet products are as though branded with the grey label of indifference. 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.

Leon Trotsky,  
'The Revolution Betrayed'

# The prison-house of nations

Recent events have shown how powerful an issue nationalism is in the USSR. The demand for the region of Nagorny (mountainous) Karabakh, currently within the republic of Azerbaijan but with an Armenian majority, to be incorporated into the republic of Armenia, has led to enormous popular mobilisations. Demonstrations and strikes have shocked Gorbachev into making sympathetic noises. Meanwhile, counter demands from the Azerbaijanis have suggested another, equally profound nationalism.

In the Baltic states, Latvia and Estonia, demands for greater national autonomy have even won official backing from their Communist Parties. On the Black Sea coast and in Uzbekistan, Tartars have been demanding that the Crimea, from which they were deported by Stalin at the end of the Second World War, be made their independent homeland.

For certain, in the future, as big struggles unfold in the Eastern bloc, na-

By Clive Bradley

tionalism will be a strong dynamic. And not only in the USSR: throughout Eastern Europe, nationalism is an important factor.

The Tsarist empire, overthrown in the revolution of 1917, was popularly known as the 'prison house of nations'. Huge numbers of small nations were ruled over tyrannically by the 'great Russian' state. One of the most powerful weapons possessed by the marxist movement in Russia was its promise to set these nations free. Lenin and the Bolshevik Party championed the demand for the right of nations to self-determination. When they took power, they allowed the oppressed nations of the Tsarist empire the right to independence; the federation of Soviet Republics formed after the revolution was established on a voluntary basis.

Indeed, some marxists at the time even felt the Bolsheviks' adherence to this principle to be folly. Rosa Luxemburg, a Polish socialist who put forward many friendly criticisms of the Russian revolution, complained:

"While Lenin and his comrades clearly expected that, as champions of na-

tional freedom even to the extent of 'separation', they would turn Finland, the Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, the Baltic countries, the Caucasus etc., into so many faithful allies of the Russian revolution, we have witnessed the opposite spectacle. One after another, these 'nations' used the freshly granted freedom to ally themselves with German imperialism...".

In the end, Luxemburg was proved to be wrong, and the masses of these oppressed nations were, on the whole, won over to the revolution. But soon the revolutionary regime, isolated in backward Russia, began to degenerate, and a new dictatorship arose, that of Stalin. Once again the minorities in the USSR came to be oppressed. Russians dominated the state. The governments of smaller republics were put under complete control from Moscow.

Then came the Second World War, which saw the fiercest and most costly fighting on the Russian front. When the Russian armies drove the Nazis back, ultimately forcing a surrender, they found themselves in unchallenged control of Eastern Europe. Germany was divided, the East coming under Russian control, along with Poland, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Hungary.

## The Hungarian market disaster

"Intensification of our participation in the international division of labour... the profitability of production is to be increased..."

"A rapid increase in the production of those goods which can be economically manufactured and compete on the world market..."

"Instruments of economic regulation should be developed so that... differences in efficiency are more reliably reflected in profitability, and so that the accumulation and use of funds becomes more flexible at the level of the individual enterprise..."

These are extracts from the 1976 Five Year Plan for Hungary — the country that has been practising economic 'Gorbachevism' for 25 years. Has 'perestroika' Hungarian-style worked? The answer to that question is much discussed in the Kremlin.

"If one or two Soviet factories go bankrupt in the next months", commented the *Guardian* (5 May 1988), "if the spectre of unemployment begins to stalk the streets of Moscow, or if insider dealing on a Soviet stock exchange suddenly rears its head, it is not implausible that the responsible Soviet minister will pick up his telephone to seek advice in Budapest."

In fact Hungary's experience illustrates the dilemma faced by all the rulers of the East: the bureaucratic ultra-centralised system — but market management plus market mechanisms doesn't work much better.

"Scars to Hungary are most often etched by the glamorous Váci Street in

Budapest, Eastern Europe's most fashionable shopping centre. But by January this year, Hungary owed \$10.5 billion to Western banks — \$1,000 per head of the population.

Real wages fell 8 per cent between 1979 and 1986. A small percentage of Hungarians, many of them private-enterprise profiteers, own BMWs and Mercedes; but 25 per cent are on or below the poverty line.

Unemployment is still low by Western standards — somewhere between 10,000 and 40,000 — but new measures state that wage levels will be maintained only in those factories and offices where the workforce is cut by five to ten per cent. 100 or so enterprises are viewed by the government as "permanent and hopeless loss-makers".

How does Hungarian perestroika work? Sandor Demjan, chair of the Hungarian Credit Bank, told the *Financial Times* (11 September 1987): "We lend money to those companies which make money". Instead of getting interest-free central government grants for new investments, as in the past, Hungarian enterprises have to get loans at interest from a bank. The introduction of profit-oriented commercial banking, Hungary's 'Little Bang', has been followed up by opening banking in Hungary (like industry) to the partial involvement of foreign capital.

It used to be called Kadarism, after Janos Kadar, the leader who was imposed after the defeat of the revolution in 1956 but then turned to economic reform. Now they call it Grosznost, after the new prime minister, Karoly Grosz, who is



Thatcher and Kadar pushing the country further down the same path.

The gist is to combine central planning with the market, and maintain a good dose of economic dealings with the West.

The problem is that it brings the bad effects of market economics without doing away with the bad effects of bureaucratic management. Despite reams of proclamations about the need for profit to regulate the economy, bureaucratic string-pulling still counts for a great deal. Hungary's rulers can see no answer except to push further along the road of market economics.

There has been some political liberalisation — Hungary now has a semi-tolerated independent trade union — but only bit-by-bit. The *Financial Times* explained why.

"From experience, Mr Kadar knows that once the bottle labelled 'reforms' is fully uncorked... the population's pent-up grievances will pour out until nothing remains — least of all the party".

What Kadar knew Grosz has not forgotten. And Gorbachev will be keeping a watchful eye.





#### Demonstration in the Ukraine

This division of Europe into Eastern and Western 'spheres of influence' was the basis for the post war settlement between the dominant world powers — the USA and the USSR. It was strictly adhered to: Stalin's 'patch' did not include Greece, and so he helped strangle a revolution there.

One country, Yugoslavia, also originally part of the Russian bloc, broke free of it. The nationalist movement under the leadership of Tito was much more independent than the various regimes imposed on other East European countries, and was not prepared to accept complete subordination to Moscow. Albania also charted a separate course.

Elsewhere, although these countries were never incorporated into the USSR proper, they were very heavily under its control. Power was held by 'Communist' parties who depended not upon popular support but upon Russian backing. If their allies were under threat from popular revolt, the Russians had tanks ready to move in.

The revolution in Hungary in 1956 was in large part nationalist in inspiration. One of the main demands of the Hungarian people was for independence from the USSR, which meant, in particular, the withdrawal of Hungary from the Russian-dominated, Warsaw Pact.

The response in Moscow — supposedly experiencing a 'thaw' of the Gorbachev type in the wake of Krushchev's 'revelations' about the Stalin period, made earlier in the year — was to send in the tanks. No greater proof of Hungary's lack of national independence could have been possible.

Peter Fryer, a journalist for the British Communist Party sent to cover events in Hungary and eventually expell-

## Yugoslavia: national tensions increase

Yugoslavia has been a pioneer of 'market socialism' since the 1950s. Today it has rocketing inflation, 30% unemployment in some areas and a huge foreign debt.

Attempts by Yugoslavia's rulers to solve the country's economic problems are bringing national divisions again to the fore.

Yugoslavia is made up of six Republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, and two autonomous provinces. It has 22 different nationalities. Above the republics which have considerable powers of regional government is a Federal Government.

Until Tito's death in 1980, the Federal Government was able to mediate and conciliate regional differences fairly effectively. The relative economic prosperity enjoyed by Yugoslavia for much of this period was a key factor in this. But by the late 1970s divisions began to emerge again as wage levels started falling and prices rose.

The richest republic Slovenia, has wage levels six times those of Kosovo, the poorest. Kosovo also has a large ethnic Albanian population.

In Spring of 1981 protests in Kosovo against the high cost of living rapidly grew over into nationalist rioting, with the Albanian population demanding that Kosovo be given the status of a seventh republic. At present it is one of the two

'autonomous provinces'.

The government dealt with the uprising by sealing off the capital and declaring a state of emergency. But discontent still bubbles.

The Federal government sees one of the ways out of the economic impasse as creating a more integrated national market and doing away with internal trade barriers. The Republic's have the power to levy their own taxes — and many tax goods mainly imported from other provinces at higher levels than 'home' produced goods. Regional differences in wealth mean that workers in poorer republics lose out — price levels often are dictated by those in Slovenia, which means that poorly paid workers in places like Kosovo and Macedonia are badly hit.

But regional governments are opposed to more integration. The smaller republics' bureaucrats do not want to be dictated to by the larger republics.

An opinion poll conducted in 1985 in a Belgrade newspaper showed that 62% of Yugoslavians thought relations between the nationalities were "satisfactory" — down from 83% in 1964.

The bureaucrats are worried about the resurgence of nationalist discontent. There are 400,000 political trials a year in Yugoslavia, mainly arising from nationalist agitation in Kosovo, Bosnia and Croatia. 70% of those are for 'verbal crimes.'

As Yugoslavia's rulers attempt to strengthen the central government, national divisions are likely to become more and more acute. Hostility between the two biggest ethnic groups, the Serbs and the Croats is heightening. Only a working class political programme coupled with real democracy for national minorities can avoid these differences exploding into communal conflict.

ed for telling the truth about them, commented at the time:

"Even if White Terror had been raging, it must be said, said openly and with emphasis, that from the standpoint of socialist principle the Soviet Union would still not have been justified in intervening...It was a clear and flagrant breach of... (the principle) that no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations". ('Hungarian Tragedy', p.68)

But the Hungarian revolution also had positive lessons. The social force that led the revolution was the working class: strikes and the formation of

workers' councils characterised the movement. And elsewhere it has also been the working class, and working class forms of activity, that have dominated popular movements in Eastern Europe.

There had been an earlier revolt in East Germany in 1953. One of the sparks for the Hungarian events of 1956 was protest taking place in Poland. Czechoslovakia saw a brief 'Prague Spring' in 1968 before Russian tanks were sent in. And of course Poland saw further 'unrest', culminating in the huge strike wave that gave birth to Solidar-

nosc in 1980.

The Polish workers tried to learn from the experience of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Solidarnosc adopted a strategy that became known as the 'self limiting revolution'. By holding back on their demands they felt they could prevent a Russian intervention.

In the end the 'self limiting revolution' limited itself to defeat. There was a coup led by General Jaruzelski, rather than an invasion. But there was and is no doubt that behind Jaruzelski stood Brezhnev, and later his successors.

So the independence of Poland, the sentiment for which was as strong as it had been in Hungary, needed to be raised as a demand of the struggle. The demand in itself would not, of course, have prevented Russian intervention or the Polish army's coup. But the movement needed to understand clearly that this was a central objective. And it needed to try to inspire the peoples of other Eastern European countries to follow its example.

National oppression and the struggle against it continue to be powerful elements in the powder keg of the Eastern bloc. Within the USSR itself, recent disturbances in Armenia and elsewhere only represent the tip of the iceberg. In the Ukraine, a nation of 60 million people, the largest oppressed nation in the world, there has for a long time been a nationalist movement, which Gorbachev may now find increasingly impossible to repress.

Other East European countries also have their own internal national divisions and problems. Yugoslavia, made up of many different nationalities, has recently seen growing social and political strife, and at the heart of this has been national discontent; there has been conflict between Serbs and Albanians.

In Transylvania, Rumania, the large Hungarian minority faces severe persecution. Many have fled over the border into Hungary, and their families who have stayed behind have faced further oppression.

Socialists should support the right of nations to self-determination. The countries of Eastern Europe have the right to be free of Russian influence, to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact or whatever else they choose. The various nations that form the USSR also have the right to independence if they want it. We should not worry that the nationalist movements in these countries might not be socialist: there is no chance of the oppressed peoples living in the Eastern bloc being won to socialism if they identify it with Russian oppression and totalitarianism. Of course within these countries the task of socialists is to win the often powerful workers' movements away from nationalist leaderships; but our support for their national rights should not depend upon the influence of genuine democratic socialism.

In the near future this is likely to be a major issue for socialists. Both in the USSR and in Eastern Europe, nationalism looks set to tear the empire of Stalin's successors apart. Socialists must be sure to be on the right side in those battles to come.

## Contradictions of Gorbachev's policies

By Zbigniew Kowalewski

Gorbachev's policy on nationalities is difficult to assess.

There are two extreme situations. First, the cases of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In the Brezhnev period, strong cliques formed in these two republics, two corrupt cliques which made many concessions to intellectuals: important developments in cultural life, in the study of history. It had a strong nationalist character, sometimes reactionary. The elimination of these cliques by Gorbachev suggests an offensive against these nationalities. Their slogan is to revive 'Soviet patriotism'. This caused revolt in Kazakhstan, a mass action linked to nationality — a strong anti-Russian expression.

The nationalities policy of Brezhnev's period was characterised by Great Russian chauvinism e.g. Kirgizia. The Gorbachev reforms have been followed by liberalisation. An establishment writer has written against Russification of language especially the question of the alphabet (The Arabic alphabet was better than the Cyrillic).

Also there has been more open discussion on ethnic origin of Kirgiz people. Two concessions have been made. In the Ukraine also there are new possibilities to discuss national issues more freely.

So there's a contradiction: Liberalisation for some nationalities, an offensive in others.

Where is the economic reform going? Marxists don't know much about the economic functioning in the USSR. There are lots of problems in sorting out how the bureaucracy functions and how it runs the country. Generally we assume there is bureaucratic centralism. Obviously there is, but how it works is hard to say. The problem of analysis goes back to the question of the purges in the 1930s. The traditional Trotskyist analysis of the purges is not adequate. I follow the ideas of a French historian of Hungarian origin who's studied it carefully. He thinks one of the functions of the Great Terror was an attempt by the bureaucracy to centralise the bureaucracy. This was represented by the Stalin faction. But

he argues that the attempt failed. The Stalin faction was trying to confront centrifugal tendencies in the bureaucratic running of the economy and within the bureaucracy itself. So it poses the question of the existence, in the '30s, of strong pressure groups linked to branches of industry, regions etc. And he describes how they resisted centralisation.

The bureaucratic centre was forced to make compromises. They accepted the existence of centrifugal tendencies and held them in check by repression etc. Obviously that's not all there was to the Great Terror, but an important aspect.

The problem today: terror demobilised, so how does the bureaucracy control these centrifugal tendencies within itself?

The traditional Stalinist system worked up to a point in controlling them. So after the Stalin period, the question was how to do the same thing by different means?

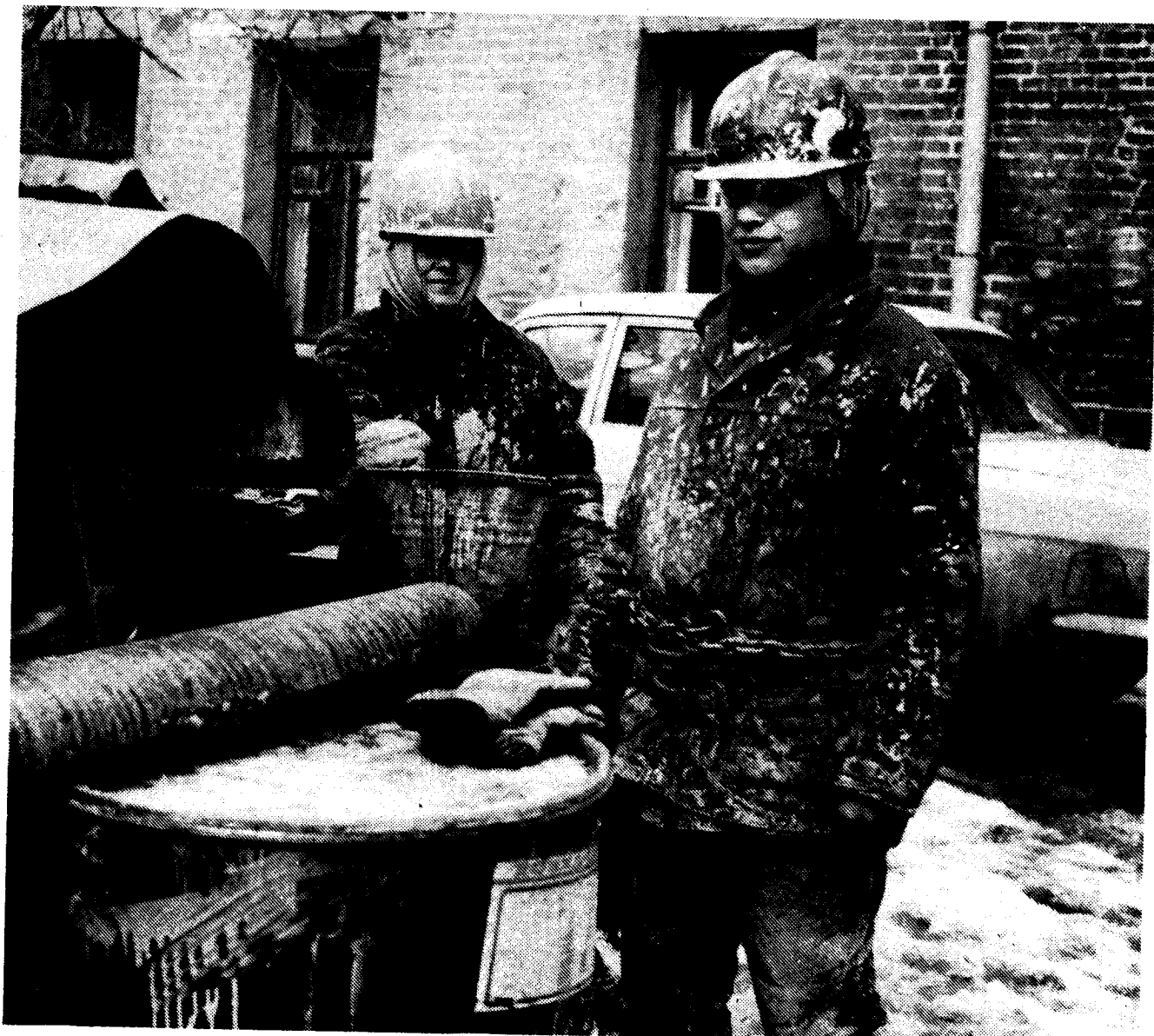
My only way of looking at it is through parallel with Poland. So all these attempts at market reforms are responses to this problem of centrifugal forces in the running of the economy, all based on a false consciousness amongst groups like Gorbachev's

They think the old bureaucratic centralism doesn't work and they're right. They think the solution is the introduction of market mechanisms — but they're wrong. The introduction of market mechanisms can only lead to a reinforcement of the centrifugal tendencies. All it would mean is a freer rivalry between different economic groups for a share of central investment funds. The most powerful groups will have greater access.

So what you get is a sharpening of tendencies to overaccumulation. More overdevelopment of heavy industry, worse starving of consumer industry and worsening of the imbalance between them. We may see periods of great economic growth, but it will have the effect of deepening the economic crisis.

So if the reforms work in terms of breaking resistance of groups they will produce a greater crisis in 10 years time.





## Worker in a 'workers' state'

"By the side of each machine is a list of petty regulations governing your working day; the foreman is always breathing down your neck; the boss is a distant, unapproachable tyrant; the trade union official is a miserable creep who always sides with the boss; the speed of your machine is driven even faster because of the system of piece work".

No, not an account of working in some sweatshop in the Midlands, but the experience of a Hungarian worker, working in the Red Star tractor factory in Budapest, in a supposedly 'socialist' country.

For writing his book, Miklos Haraszti was given a suspended sentence of 8 months in jail.

Workers were expected to operate two machines simultaneously, each working at different tempos, on different jobs. Norms were set for how much a worker should produce a day — norms which could only be reached by running the machines far faster than safe. This was not just physically dangerous but put immense strain mentally on the workers.

"As soon as I start the accelerated pace brings on an extreme state of nerves. My eyes are transfixed by the hail of sparks; my whole body shakes towards the lever; sometimes I can't bear the tension any longer and pull too soon. The machine trembles and shrieks. The excessive stress on the material produces ominous knockings and vibrations...the milling disc hits against harder material and breaks, making an infernal din. The broken teeth shoot past my head like bullets."

But it's Catch 22 for the workers. The harder they work to achieve the norm, the higher the norm is set. Anyone who criticises the piece-work system is accused of 'vulgar egalitarianism'.

The piece work system is supposed to be a 'perfect form of socialist remuneration'. But as Haraszti points out "only workers are allowed to enjoy this chemically pure form of socialist wage-labour; their superiors have to be content with more backward forms!"

So this is supposed to be socialism? The account shows that workers are far worse off than any British worker in a



relatively well-unionised factory.

Many workers gain their only job-satisfaction by making 'homers' — items for their own use made in their spare time out of junk. "By making homers we win back power over the machine...skill is subordinated to a sense of beauty."

This expresses in essence the socialist ideal that work should cease to be a daily grind and become a means by which people can express their drive to create. Haraszti's book gives us a vivid picture of drudgery in the Stalinist states and a pointer toward socialism.



**QUESTION:** How do we know that Adam and Eve lived in the Soviet Union?

**ANSWER:** Because they did not have any clothes to wear, had only an apple to eat, but thought they were living in paradise.

This Cold-War-style joke is not that wide of the mark, save that it is sections of the workers' movement outside of, rather than within, the Soviet Union who look upon the country as a workers' paradise. And apples, and fresh fruit in general, are not always the easiest things to acquire in the Soviet Union.

In the countries of 'real existing socialism' everyday life for workers is a round of tedious and badly paid work, long queues for consumer goods, poor social services, and low-quality accommodation. And Gorbachev's economic reforms will make things even worse.

According to Konstantin Simis, a Russian lawyer expelled from the Soviet Union in 1977, the average monthly salary for manual and office workers at the start of the 1980s was 164 roubles, before taxes. But the minimum salary required for a family of three to live even modestly, he calculated, was 250 roubles.

The low wages paid to workers contrast starkly with the incomes of the bureaucrats who oppress them. A Marshal of the Soviet Union receives 28 times the income of a worker on the minimum wage. Pay differentials between workers and senior executives in some enterprises can be tenfold or even the fiftyfold of the income of the former. When the hidden (and not so hidden) 'perks' for the bureaucrats are taken into consideration, the differentials in income are even greater. The higher echelons of the bureaucracy have their own chauffeur and domestic staff, priority tickets for entertainment and

## Everyday life in 'actually existing socialism'

By Stan Crooke

travel, special waiting rooms in stations, special private showings of films, and reserved dining rooms in restaurants.

Each Politbureau member has their own personal villa on the Black Sea in the Crimea or in the Caucasus, surrounded by huge parks, and staffed by cooks, chauffeurs, gardeners, hairdressers, doctors and gamekeepers.

Working conditions for the bulk of the Soviet workforce are even worse than those of workers in many Western capitalist societies. Punishments in the official Labour Code for labour indiscipline include fines, demotion, sacking, and deportation to a labour camp. Strikes are forbidden (in a 'workers state' workers cannot strike against themselves, runs the argument). Nor do workers in the Soviet Union have any trade unions to turn to in order to defend them in the workplace.

In fact, though, the Labour Code is not strictly enforced by factory managers, for fear that they appear as inefficient managers to their bureaucratic superiors. It is common therefore for many workers to arrive late, leave early, slip off to do the family shopping, stay off 'sick', or turn up with a hangover. A form of rotten corporatism prevails, whereby managers turn a blind eye to workers' absenteeism, whilst workers turn a blind eye to management fiddling the figures

to make it appear as if plan targets have been met.

Women workers have not received the equality so often promised or even declared to have been realised by the ruling bureaucracy. A survey in one Soviet town showed that 66% of women were in comparatively unskilled jobs but only 19% of men. Only 16% of factory directors and chief engineers are women. Where women have become a majority in a particular section of the workforce, then the status, and pay, of that profession has declined.

Women also face a tremendous burden of housework. The notorious shortage of consumer goods in the Soviet Union means long hours of queuing when they are in stock in the shops. Women spend an average of six hours a week shopping. In families of the industrial working class the husband is calculated to have an average of 34 hours free time a week, the wife 20 hours a week.

Soviet-produced consumer goods are renowned for being of low quality, if not completely worthless. Anecdotes about matches that don't strike and pairs of two left shoes are legion. The worst quality goods are those produced at the close of each month, when factories are under pressure to meet their monthly production target and therefore produce straightforward junk in order to achieve the target at least nominally.

In 1987 alone 6,000 millions roubles worth of goods were rejected by the State Quality Control Board as being

sub-standard. (Not that this prevented them from being included in the national production and output figures, as if they had actually ended up in the shops.)

The low quality of Soviet production adds to the futility and frustration of work in the Soviet Union. A stress-free working rhythm is impossible due to the shortage or complete absence of spare parts, which may not work in any case even when they are available. And why work harder to pick up an extra bonus when there is virtually nothing in the shops worth buying with the extra money earned?

The Soviet bureaucracy, and its admirers abroad, make great play of the Soviet Union's cheap housing and social services. Workers unfortunate enough to have to live in such housing or who attempt to use such social services do not share in such enthusiasm.

Rents are certainly cheap. But the accommodation for which it pays is of poor quality and overcrowded. It has certainly improved since the 1960s when, in Leningrad, for example, 57% of working class families lived in a single room, and 21% in two rooms. Even today, however, 40% of unskilled workers' families have to share washing and cooking facilities in their accommodation. For young workers the alternative is a factory hostel, attached to the workplace and run by a commandant.

The much vaunted Soviet health service lags behind even the underfunded NHS in this country. Surgeons performing complicated operations receive less than most factory workers and only slightly more than the average national wage. Nursing sisters receive even less. The health service lacks sufficient resources to meet people's needs, and the technical quality of Soviet medical equipment and drugs stands no comparison with those used in the West.

Infant mortality in the Soviet Union remains at the level of Portugal or the Caribbean. Life expectancy is actually falling. Men live an average of 65 years, as against 73 years in the USA. The comparable figures for women are 67 and 77 respectively. Largely because of inadequate equipment, heart attacks kill twice as many people in the Soviet Union as in the developed capitalist countries.

The frustration of life in the Soviet Union finds expression in the notorious levels of alcoholism. In one Moscow factory a foreman reported that although he supposedly had 320 workers, he knew that everyday 40 of them would be drunk on the job and another 30 would not bother to turn up, often because of hangovers. Some factories have special brigades, whose sole task is to prevent drunken workers injuring themselves in machinery.

Soviet alcohol consumption has tripled since 1955. 20 deaths per 100,000 in the Soviet Union are due to alcohol, as against two deaths per 100,000 in the rest of the world on average. 66% of divorces and 70% of crimes are attributed to alcohol. Recent studies reveal that women and adolescents are turning to alcohol in increasing numbers.

Gorbachev's reforms have involved a

certain limited liberalisation of intellectual life. But the material problems faced by working class families in their everyday life remain unchanged. As a recent report in the French trotskyst paper 'Rouge' on contemporary life in Moscow pointed out:

"The shopping basket (of the average family) can be filled at the price of interminable queues, and its contents will be of a mediocre quality. Meat is rare or costs too much (10 roubles a kilo, for a monthly salary of about 150 roubles). It is not always possible to find cheese. Sugar has disappeared from the Ukraine in order to serve in the production of adulterated alcohol. As for oranges (from Cuba or Egypt) you have to walk around a long time to be able to buy a kilo".

In fact, Gorbachev's economic reforms will make the problems faced by working class families in their struggle for existence even worse. Plans to increase prices by scrapping or reducing government subsidies, introduce charges

for many social services which are currently free, increase wage-differentials, and tie wage levels more closely to actual output, mean that workers will have to work harder even just to stand still in their already lowly position in Soviet society.

A survey of the opinions of over 6,000 skilled workers in 500 Moscow factories revealed that over half of them were of the view that Gorbachev's economic reforms had brought little tangible result — apart from harder work. In one factory 62% of those surveyed expressed this opinion. Equally widespread is the — quite accurate — fear that Gorbachev's economic reforms will lead to falling living standards. As one correspondent to the magazine 'Kommunist' pointed out:

"The increase in retail prices will provoke dissatisfaction in the population and undermine the faith of the people in the projects of the Party and in perestroika".

## Well, he died

The following is a translation of an actual survey conducted in Budapest by two reporters of Radio Budapest as part of its May 6 comedy show, 'May Cabaret'.

While the other segments of the show were prepared satirical pieces, this taped segment was spontaneous and unrehearsed; and, as such, it provides a rather candid picture of the state of "ideological preparedness" among average Hungarians:

Radio Budapest sent two of its reporters first to Marx Square to ask passers-by who Karl Marx was.

Answer: Oh, don't ask me such things.

RB: Not even a few words?

A: I'd rather not, all right?

RB: Why not?

A: The truth is, I have not time to study such things.

RB: But surely you must have heard something about him in school?

A: I was absent a lot.

Another voice: He was a Soviet philosopher; Engels was his friend. Well, what else can I say? He died at an old age.

A female voice: Of course, a politician. And he was, you know, he translated Lenin's works into Hungarian.

An older female voice: It was mandatory to study him, so that we would know.

RB: Then how about a few words?

The same woman: Come on now, don't make me take an exam of my eighth grade studies. That's where we had to know it. He was German, he was a politician, and I believe he was executed.

RB: Whom was Marx Square named after?

A very old female voice: Well, wasn't he that great German philosopher? No? Marx, Engels, Lenin? No?

(The radio reporters then went to Engels Square):

RB: Do you know whom Engels Square was named after?

Passer-by: After Engels.

RB: And who was Engels?

A: He was an Englishman and he screwed around with communism.



RB: Do you know whom Engels Square was named after?

An older female voice: I don't know, I'm not from Budapest. I don't know.

A male voice: Well, let's see. Engels, a revolutionary?

RB: And do you remember his other (first) name?

A: Engels, Engels...Marx Engels. Marx, wasn't it?

Another voice: One of his names was Marx, the other Engels?

Another voice: That's it.

RB: Where did Engels live?

A female voice: Well, where did he live, you ask. Well, he lived in Leningrad, that's to say, Moscow.

RB: Could you tell me whom Marx Square was named after?

The same voice: Karl Marx.

RB: Where did he live?

The same voice: Well, he died.

RB: But where did he live?

The same voice: Well, partly, so far as I know, in the Soviet Union. That's where he studied for a while, and then I think he also spent some time in Hungary. I wouldn't know exactly.

RB: Do you know whom Marx Square was named after?

Several voices: No, we come from Szeged. We are from Szeged. We are from Szeged, so we don't know.

RB: Do you know whom Engels Square was named after?

Male voice: No.

RB: And Marx Square?

The same voice: I don't know that either.

From 'Voice of Solidarnosc', no.6, June 1985.



# The Hungarian Commune of 1956

Ten years ago this autumn Stalinism showed that it was still very much alive, that it had not been buried either with Stalin or at the 20th Congress — and that those who said it had were wishful fools or liars. The Hungarian workers rose for socialist democracy, an end to the grinding economic regime of parasitic Stalinism, and in favour of national liberation from the oppression of the Russian bureaucracy...and they were mercilessly crushed by the might of the Soviet Union. It was shown decisively that 'de-Stalinisation' was a change of gears, an adjustment of tension and tempo — but in no sense a basic change. The monster was still sucking blood and had sharp and deadly teeth to defend its suckers.

Ten years is too short a time for a detailed re-telling of the story here to be necessary; but we will best honour the proletarian martyrs of 1956 by briefly examining the lessons of their struggle.

We have seen the contributions of capitalism's ad-men on this anniversary: pious breast-beating, mixed with assurances that Hungary is far better off today! They were willing and eager to scream about the rape of Hungary, as they still do, reaping the anti-socialist propaganda harvest of their lives — but the capitalists themselves, behind their hypocrisy, were just as concerned as the Stalinists that on no account should a democratic workers' state, freed from the stifling and disfiguring scab of Stalinism, be allowed to emerge. A Titoite Yugoslavia is one thing: self assertion by the armed masses a different and deadly thing. No less than the bureaucracy did they fear the Hungarian mass movement, and for the same reason.

One day before the fighting began Dulles, then US Secretary of State, openly defended the legality of Soviet troops in Eastern Europe. During the bloodbath the New York Times reported the US Government as openly opposed to the revolt, and embarrassed by it. They had let the Russians know in the most diplomatic language that they would 'defend' Berlin and Austria — but as for Hungary...Dulles had already given the line on that. The Hungarian masses were 'left to their fate'; to the capitalists they were only useful as propaganda — and for this purpose the only good revolution was a crushed revolution.

We know the story of Hungary. The centuries-long struggle against both Austria and Russia for national emancipation; a Bolshevik Government, the first Hungarian Commune, in 1919, put

The article we reprint here — a summing-up of the lessons of the Hungarian workers' uprising of 1956 — was first published in the Irish Marxist magazine *An Solas*, December 1966. It was the first writing on the workers' struggles in the Eastern bloc by the Trotskyist tendency from which Socialist Organiser traces its political lineage.

down in blood by the White counter-revolution; the Horthy years with the Hapsburg admiral at the head of the reaction; the war in alliance with Germany and the aftermath of defeat, with Hungary as the battleground; the Russian occupation which had no use for the class differentiation of the days of Lenin and Trotsky: next, Hungary part of the Soviet sphere of influence as recognised by the Great Power Conferences, real power in the hands of the Russian army, and the CP with ample time to demonstrate the possibility of a 'peaceful revolution' — provided you have first broken the back of the state, or someone has; the years of Rakosi's terror vented first against the honest communists who found reality under the extended fiat of Stalin nearer to Horthy's barbarism than to any kind of socialism, who resisted or resented the conception of the satellite states as milch-cows for the Russian economy; and then the attempt to ease the tension of the police terror that for years had ruled from Siberia to central Germany — an attempt which finally got out of hand for the bureaucracy and led to the Hungarian explosion.

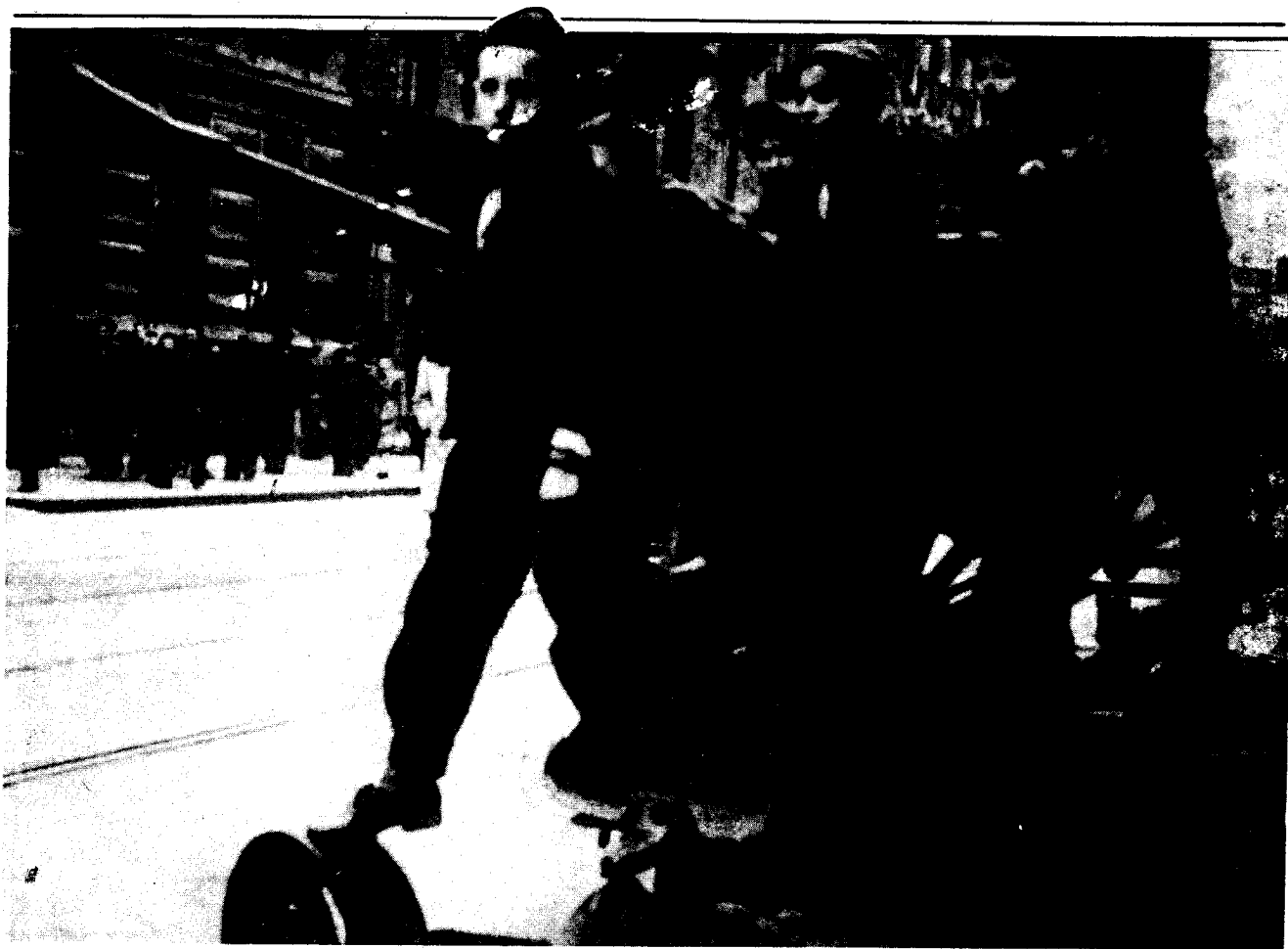
When Stalin's crimes — a portion of them — were denounced by his accomplices and successors, the bureaucracy shook to its foundations. In Hungary critical voices emerged, at first among the intellectuals and students. Laslo Rajk was now rehabilitated. Leader of the war-time underground CP who later resisted the Stalinist corruption, he was hanged in 1949 after confessing to fantastic crimes at one of the show trials which took place throughout Eastern Europe at that time, clearly modelled on the Moscow trials of the thirties. Over a quarter of a million workers and students marched behind his disinterred bones, in a resurgence of popular feeling comparable to the giant funeral of O'Donovan Rossa in 1915. Soon the workers were out in the streets, arguing, discussing, while the erstwhile tyrants hesitated to resort to repression that might exacerbate the situation. When the stiff-necked Gero clique did finally make up their minds it was too late.

A programme of democratic demands was drawn up: withdrawal of Russian troops; an end to compulsory production norms; workers' control — industrial and political; a ceiling on the

salaries of managers and technicians, as Bolshevik Russia had known. When the AVO (the hated political police) opened fire on students who demanded that this programme be broadcast over the radio it sparked off a series of pitched battles. After a week of bitter fighting against tanks and machine guns, the workers controlled Budapest: the Russian army was withdrawn. Workers' councils organised the means of life. Popular confidence swelled and grew, and took the form of cleansing the streets of Budapest of the symbols of Stalinism. Hammers and sickles which had come to represent tyranny were torn down; the proliferate statuary of the State crashed to the ground. The elation and solidarity of proletarian freedom was everywhere. A new government emerged, composed of members of the CP who had been in disfavour at various times, led by Nagy and Maletter.

As later events, including developments in Hungary itself have shown, liberalisation was possible without loss to the bureaucracy; and the Polish October 1956, which had acted as a spur to the Hungarians, showed that a bending to pressure, controlled by a section of the bureaucracy, was also acceptable. But the crime of the Hungarians was that they had asserted their freedom arms in hand. This was the danger, the fuse to the powder keg. Real power wasn't in the hands of the Nagy government, but was held by the workers and students. The Russians had retired, but they were far from satisfied.

Nagy announced the withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. And the opportune moment arrived for the Russians to return, when the English-French-Israeli invasion of Suez set the example in the slaughter of the people of Port Said. A new onslaught against the Budapest workers was now made so much easier. A new army crossed the border, unaffected by the spirit of Budapest, set up a 'provisional' Government under Janos Kadar, hitherto a supporter of Nagy. Now the 'Red' army had the most modern tanks, and they retook Budapest after heavy fighting with great casualties for the rebels — the most determined of whom were concentrated in the workers' areas such as Csepel and Dunapentele. Thus the armed resistance was broken; but for weeks after the workers held out in the slow grinding battle of a general strike.



**Children defy a Soviet tank, Hungary 1956**

The irony of the situation emerged when workers mounted a bust of Lenin on their barricade to taunt the advancing Russians! But this was the natural place for even a statue of Lenin in the Budapest of 1956. It was as if some force of historic truth acted through the confused people who put it there, to ensure that 'Lenin' was seen in his rightful place — with the proletarian insurgents...

The Stalinists still say it was a fascist counter-revolution; and still they find believers, who are surely credulous to believe in a fascist general strike! Of course there were fascists. Some had found good jobs terrorising workers as members of the AVO — these the workers dealt with mercilessly, as they dealt with other known Stalinist terrorists. The struggle was conducted by the proletariat with proletarian weapons: the general strike; the councils of workers deputies; and armed struggle — albeit with pitifully poor arms against tanks. The Stalinist lies were exposed when the Daily Worker's Budapest correspondent, Peter Fryer, defended the Hungarian workers from the shameless hired hacks of their murderers.

The workers burnt only the symbols of 'communism' — its real meaning rose, phoenix-like, in their programme: not to restore capitalism or the landlords, but to retain nationalised property cleansed of the bureaucracy and privilege which were the social basis of the terror. There was some feeling for

restoring the land to the smallholders who had been forcibly collectivised in the barbarous Stalinist manner. But the big landlords, including the Catholic Church, who owned half of all Hungary until Nagy's agrarian reform after the war, would have needed a better army than that which the workers had defeated either to regain possession or restore their rule.

It must be admitted that the situation was fluid and many possibilities existed: only a struggle between different tendencies would have decided the outcome. Between the withdrawal of the first Russian army and the final suppression a Government essentially centrist balanced on top of the workers' councils. Its perspective was one of consolidation of limited gains rather than of extending the revolution to spread the fire to the heart of the bureaucratic power — Russia.

The great vacuum was the absence of any pre-ordered party which could raise the magnificent spontaneous action of the masses to a higher level of effectiveness, such as was imparted in 1917 by the Bolshevik Party. Hungary shattered a lot of illusions: in Stalinism for its sincere adherents and fellow-travellers; and in an easy non-revolutionary self-reform by the bureaucracy for some 'revolutionary marxists' who had given way to wishful thinking. The debilitating negative proof of defeat showed that those who had striven to maintain the conception of the Lenin-type Bolshevik

party after the degeneration of the Comintern were correct, and no less correct in regard to the anti-bureaucratic revolution in the East as to the anti-capitalist revolution in the West.

The 10th Anniversary finds the Stalinist world split down the middle, its 'monolithic' unity rent by the narrow national interests of the Chinese and Soviet bureaucracies. East European and Russian standards have risen, the terror has been relaxed — but still the congenital crisis of Stalinism continues, still this regime of oppression of the working class and betrayal of socialism must disguise itself with 'socialist' camouflage; it remains unsettled and the rulers need gimmicks and 'experiments' — every gimmick and every sort of experiment to ward off the one solution — the initiative of the masses of the workers.

After Berlin in 1953, Hungary was the first great lightning flash of the coming revolution of the workers in the Stalinist states. The Hungarian workers were isolated and they were crushed, and the re-inforcements for this came from the heart of Russia. But tomorrow, when the rumblings in Russia itself explode in the mass movement of the workers to reclaim the power to control their own lives — where will the bureaucrats get re-inforcements from then? When the Russian workers move decisively no power on earth will accomplish what Krushchev's tanks did in Budapest in November 1956.

# The birth of Solidarnosc

On August 14, 17,000 workers at the Lenin shipyards came out on strike. In Gdansk, the Baltic port, the lifeline of Poland's sea link with the West, the workers who in 1970 had toppled prime minister Gomulka from power were once again on the move.

Within 48 hours another 30,000 workers in surrounding factories had also struck in support. Elmor, Klimo, Opakomet, Techmet, many other factories, too numerous to mention, were at a standstill.

\* "Reinstate Anna", a woman crane driver at the Lenin shipyards a trade union representative who had just been sacked by managers for her activities, which stretch back to the unofficial strike committees of the early and mid 1970s.

\* "Get rid of the national trade union bosses."

\* "Free trade unions democratically elected by the workers locally and nationally".

\* "A monument to honour the 200 strikers shot down in 1970 by the militia".

\* "Wage rises of 2,000 zlotys a month".

\* "The price of meat to be pegged at its pre-July 1 price".

\* "The radio and television to broadcast the workers' demands".

These were the slogans of the Lenin shipyard workers.

In August 1980 the workers of Poland rediscovered their own history. The tremendous, inspiring strike wave which led to the creation of Solidarnosc involved the Polish workers going back to their own past and adopting again methods of struggle that they had pioneered — the mass strike and the sit-in strike.

Alexis Carras tells the story of the August strike wave, which developed as a response to government attacks on working class living standards and ended with the authorities forced to negotiate with the MKS (Inter-Factory Strike Committee — a kind of workers' parliament).

Friday morning, 15th August. Public transport at a standstill. 8,000 workers at the 'Paris Commune' shipyards in Gdynia, just outside Gdansk, come out. Representatives of the individual strike committees which were automatically thrown up by the strikes, hurry to the Lenin shipyard.

Friday night the negotiations with the management break down. 110 delegates elected by 17,000 workers refuse the management's compromise offer of 1,200 zlotys.

Saturday morning the negotiations start again. Outside the hall thousands of workers are shouting "2,000! 2,000!"

and "Walesa, Walesa" — the name of the acknowledged strike leader, just reinstated by management along with Anna Walentynowicz. He had been sacked in 1976 after the strike events and again in January of 1980 for his involvement in KOR (Committee for the Defence of the Workers).

11 o'clock Saturday morning: agreement is reached. Wage rises of 1,500 and written guarantees that no worker will be persecuted for involvement in the strike.

Walesa emerges from the hall. Thousands of workers don't want any compromise. All the demands must be met. Nevertheless, he is given a hero's welcome, tossed in the air by his mates, shouting "long may he live to be a hundred".

It looks as though the strike movement in the Lenin shipyards is over. So sure are the management and the government that Wojciechowski, head of the state news agency PAP, calls an interview with foreign correspondents to assure them that the crisis is past and that work will resume as normal on Monday.

He is to be bitterly disappointed.

It is still touch and go in Gdansk as to whether to resume work. The mood is one of frustration. It's no longer simply a matter of a few thousand zlotys more, or the price of meat. Any gain the government gives now with one hand, it will take back in the autumn, through inflation and other price rises. The deeper grievances awoken by the strike come to the fore.

As one of the strikers says, "35 years is enough". 35 years of bureaucratic rule, of queues, of undemocratic "unions", of lies and repression!

A tiny spark is needed and the government's hopes of once again containing the anger of the workers would come crashing down.

That spark was the worker delegates' meeting by now at the Lenin shipyards.

## The mass strike

The classic form of the workers' uprisings in Eastern Europe has been the mass strike. The relationship between the different aspects of struggle is similar to what Rosa Luxemburg observed in the mass strike movements in Poland and Russia in 1905.

"The movement on the whole does not proceed from the economic to the political struggle, nor even the reverse. Every great political mass action, after it has attained its political highest point, breaks up into a mass of economic strikes. And that applies not only to each of the great mass strikes, but also to the revolution as a whole.

With the spreading, clarifying and evolution of the political struggle, the economic struggle not only does not recede, but extends, organises and becomes involved in equal measure. Between the two there is the most complete reciprocal action.

Every new onset and every fresh victory of the political struggle is transformed into a powerful impetus for the economic struggle, extending at the same time its external possibilities and intensifying the inner urge of the workers to better their position, and their desire to struggle.

mains behind from which a thousand stalks of economic struggle shoot forth.

And conversely. The workers' condition of ceaseless economic struggle with the capitalists keeps their fighting energy alive in every political interval; it forms, so to speak, the permanent fresh reservoir of the strength of the proletarian classes, from which the political fight ever renews its strength, and at the same time leads the indefatigable economic sappers of the proletariat at all times, now here and now there, to isolated sharp conflicts, out of which political conflicts on a large scale unexpectedly explode.

In a word: the economic struggle is the transmitter from one political centre to another; the political struggle is the periodic fertilisation of the soil for the economic struggle.

Cause and effect here continually change places; and thus the economic and the political factor in the period of the mass strike, now widely removed, completely separated or even mutually exclusive, as the theoretical plan would have them, merely form the two interlacing sides of the proletarian class struggle in Russia. And their unity is precisely the result of the strike.





Workers' defence guards, Gdansk 1980.

They plead with the Lenin workers. "If you go back now," says a bus driver, "no one else will get anything". With the Lenin yard returning to work the back of the strike wave would be broken. Smaller factories and other scattered groups of workers would be easily isolated and smashed.

The Lenin workers agree. Walesa agrees — "We have no right to turn our backs on the others. The strike must continue until the victory of all".

Saturday night, Sunday morning. The MKS is set up — an inter-factory strike committee, representing strikers from all the plants which have struck. By Monday it is in effect controlling the strike movement in 18 shipyards and factories in Gdansk, Gdynia and Sopot. An alternative power, workers' power is coming into being in this sprawling Baltic conurbation. The central strike committee is made up of two delegates from each factory and place of work, accountable to the individual factory committees and mass meetings. Its power stretches to plants over 100 miles from the recognised centre of the strike movement — the Lenin shipyards.

A panic-stricken bureaucracy urges Gierek to cut short his summer trip in the Crimea, where he was conferring with that other friend of the working class, Leonid Brezhnev, top bureaucrat in the USSR.

Gierek, forever reminding the Polish workers of his own humble origins as a coal miner, first in Belgium and later in the Silesian coal fields of Southern Poland, had dealt with a similarly grave situation in January 1971. It was he who took over the reins of power after Gomulka's fall. Then in an unprecedented (for a Stalinist leader)

series of meetings with striking workers in the Baltic ports, he managed to get them to go back to work. By talking tough he asked for a mandate, for the government to prove itself, and he got it:

"So I am talking to you the way I spoke to my miner friends in Silesia. I say to you: help us! Help me! You cannot doubt by goodwill...As to your demands we will do our utmost. The party will be renovated; we will get rid of the incompetents...Accept it, help us, and on our side, we will do everything we can to ameliorate this tragic situation. That is your duty."

The workers, then, accepted their 'duty'. Surely they would do so again. Yet Gierek, that Monday night on the television, despite all his gravity and promises, was like an anachronism. In the few weeks that he was in the Soviet Union, Poland not only continued to regard him cynically, but had totally slipped away from him.

His attempt to divide the growing opposition movement between the 'just' wage demands and their frustration with the bureaucracy on the one hand, from the allegedly sinister, 'anti-socialist' designs of the dissidents around KOR, was a fiasco.

Nor did he offer anything concrete.

The meat price rises would still remain. There was absolutely no question of free trade unions and certainly no end to censorship.

There were certain limits that 'socialist' Poland could not go beyond, without provoking the 'disquiet of its friends'. Once again no real concessions, only promises and dark threats of Soviet invasion.

As for the MKS, the government acted as though it did not exist. Negotia-

tions at individual plant level was as far as it would go.

The workers' response hardened. By Tuesday strikes multiply with a dizzying speed. By now over 200 plants were on strike. In Szczecin near the East German border, 30,000 workers in 20 factories had themselves created an inter-plant strike committee and issued a series of 37 demands.

Steelworkers in Nowa Huta near the southern city of Cracow had come out and strike committees were being formed in the Silesian coalfields. This last event is particularly worrying to Gierek himself. Silesia is his traditional political base and the miners there are the highest paid workers in the country. During the earlier strike movements they had played no role.

Every day the strikes increased. By Wednesday in Gdansk alone, 260 factories grouping 120,000 workers were on strike. The MKS was growing daily stronger. 500 delegates were by now represented in it, the majority in their late teens or early twenties.

All of them had torn up their official union cards, just to underline their hatred of state unions.

As an added rebuff to Gierek and the bureaucracy the workers were categorically refusing to negotiate on a plant by plant basis, correctly viewing this as an attempt by the party and the government to split their forces.

Tadeusz Pyka, the deputy prime minister, and his official entourage of trouble-shooters, which included Jablonski, the President of the Polish Republic, and Stanislaw Kania, Central Committee secretary in charge of the army and security forces, were hardly making any progress with the Gdansk

strikers.

In the negotiations with sections of the MKS, which bothered to go and meet them, they would offer concessions and perks.

The workers would accept but when Pyka asked them about a return to work the following morning, the answer was always the same — "that issue would have to be discussed by the rank and file".

The government's rage could barely be contained.

In Szczecin, the second largest port, over 40 factories and all five of the shipyards were on strike. Transport in the city was at a standstill. Prime minister Babiuch and his delegation were in Gdansk, making no progress in their mission to break the strike.

Meanwhile strikes were breaking out in other smaller cities. In Koscierzyna, Lembork and Ustaka. In the city of Elbag on the Baltic, eight factories formed their own MKS.

A comical incident at Gdansk shows how the bureaucracy's authority is crumbling. As part of the regime's psychological pressure to force the strikers back to work, it dropped thousands of leaflets over the shipyards, warning the strikers of the untold damage they were inflicting on the Polish economy.

The workers who printed the leaflets have now come out on strike.

The discipline of the Gdansk workers is exemplary. There are 24 hour pickets on the gates of the Lenin shipyards, by now covered with flowers sent from every corner of Poland.

Workers everywhere know about their action, despite the government's attempts to isolate Gdansk from Poland and the world on the night of the 15th when it cut all communications with the Baltic ports. The pickets search everyone entering the yard. Bottles of vodka are gently confiscated and their contents thoroughly emptied. They cannot afford any unnecessary excuse to allow the authorities to intervene.

Nearby a cross erected in honour of fellow workers, the victims of the government's bloody intervention in December 1970.

Inside the shipyard the workers are holding continuous meetings and discussions. Working class democracy in action, a million miles removed from the dull yesmanship of previous official trade union meetings and assemblies.

Yet in Warsaw, Jan Szydlak, head of the state unions is still furiously maintaining that "the authorities have no intention of transferring power to anyone else — nor of sharing it with anyone."

Meanwhile the television and the radio are keeping up a constant barrage of propaganda against the Baltic port workers. Pictures of idle sea ports, of the 63 stranded ships waiting to unload petrol and fruit for the Polish consumers. Tons of goods waiting for export, losses of millions of dollars a day, losses the Polish economy, on the verge of collapse, cannot afford.

Yet these pious wailings on the ills of Poland do not cut much ice with the rest

of Poland. After all, who are the ones responsible for the impasse, the workers or the bosses? As for the rotting fruit, it was touch and go whether you could get to the top of the queue to buy some anyway.

The continual spread of strikes and the threat of strike action is the best gauge of the effectiveness of the government's propaganda.

Its arrest of the dissidents involved in the Self-Defence Committee (KOR/KSS), especially the editors of the illegal paper 'Robotnik' (Worker), whose sales in recent weeks have climbed to tens of thousands, hardens the situation even further.

The arrest on Wednesday night, August 20, of 14 KOR members, including Jacek Kuron, is followed the next night with the arrest of a further 20 KOR activists in Warsaw.

At the same time the government's lack of progress in the negotiations at Gdansk leads to the sacking of Tadeusz Pyka, head of the negotiating team and vice-prime minister and his replacement by Jagielski.

By Monday August 25, the Inter-Factory Strike Committee grouped over 400 factories, representing hundreds of thousands of workers in Gdansk, Gdynia and Sopot.

With the strike spreading to other towns, as well as breaking out again in regions which had been hit in the previous weeks, the government is forc-

ed to make concessions.

Most of them are totally cosmetic. They involve a large-scale reshuffle within the ranks of the Party leadership. After the sacking of Tadeusz Pyka, the Vice-Prime Minister, the Prime Minister Babiuch, Szydlack, the head of the state trade unions, Tadeusz Wraszczyk, head of the planning commission, and Jerzy Lukaszewicz the chief of propaganda policy, are sacrificed to the anger of the working class too.

In the meantime, Josef Pinkowski, the new Prime Minister, has been instructed to begin negotiations directly with the Inter-Factory Strike Committee.

When Jagielski (who took over as deputy prime minister and chief government negotiator from Tadeusz Pyka) met the inter-factory strike committee in Gdansk for the first time on the night of August 23, he was full of the bluster and bureaucratic haughtiness acquired through years of ruling over the working class, accountable to no-one.

To the individual demands of the strikers' representatives contained in their 21 points, he would answer with insulting dishonesty.

Abolition of censorship? But 'we' need censorship for the security of the state. It is a key element in the ensemble of 'our' social institutions. And of course there is always the problem of pornography.

Release of political prisoners?

## The workers' demands

1. Free trade unions — independent of the Party and the managers, in accordance with convention 87 of the ILO, ratified by Poland.
2. Guarantee of the right to strike and the safety of strikers and all those who help them.
3. The right of free expression, publication and printing as guaranteed in the Constitution. The cessation of all repression against independent publications and access to the media for representatives of all Churches.
4. Re-establishment of all rights for those dismissed after the strikes of 1970 and 1976 and the rights of students excluded from higher education because of their political views. Freedom for all political prisoners, in particular E. Zadrozynski, J.M Kozlowski and an end to all repression on grounds of beliefs.
5. The mass media to inform the country about the creation of strike committees and united strike committees and to publish their demands.
6. Concrete actions to be taken for the ending of the crisis. For example, publishing of all information to do with Poland's socio-economic situation. The opportunity must be allowed to all social strata and groups to participate in discussions on a programme of reforms.
7. Payment of strikers for the holiday period.
8. 2,000 zlotys a month increase on the basic wage for every worker, to compensate for the increased cost of meat.
9. A sliding scale of wages.
10. The domestic market to be fully

supplied with foodstuffs and exports of the surplus to be limited.

11. The introduction of a card rationing system for meat until the market is stabilised.

12. The suppression of 'commercial' prices and the sale of goods for foreign currency in the domestic market.

13. The appointment of managers solely on the basis of ability and not of Party membership. Eradication of the privileges of the police, the secret police and the Party apparatus by giving them family allocations equal to those of the workers' families and by the elimination of the system of special shops for the bureaucracy.

14. The right to retire after 35 years of work, at 50 years of age for women and at 55 for men.

15. Elimination of any difference between the two systems of retirement and pensions by levelling-up.

16. Improvement of working conditions, medical services and the other services that workers need.

17. The creation of creche facilities and nurseries in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of working mothers.

18. The extension of the maternity leave period to three years, with pay.

19. The shortening of the waiting period to be allotted a house.

20. Increase from 40 to 100 zlotys in the allowance for moving house.

21. Compensation for those factories working continuously with no free Saturdays by lengthening the annual holiday period or by the allocation of special public holidays.

Jagielski would gasp in disbelief. Had he heard the strikers correctly? Everyone knew there were no political prisoners in socialist Poland.

Working class families allowances in line with those received by the police?

What ingratitude on the part of these workers who could not understand the difficult domestic life of policemen, due to their irregular workshifts!

(And what about us night shift workers? asked one of the strikers. Jagielski shut up at that point).

As one of the workers put it, "He hasn't understood anything. He thinks we're a load of asses, that he can easily fool us. He forgets that we have the experiences of 1956, 1970, and 1976...all that's nothing to him. But they'll end up by understanding us all right!"

The major demand on which the workers were intransigent was independent trade unions. The bureaucracy balked at this.

Democratisation of the existing 'trade union'? Greater worker participation in the existing factory committees, alongside the managers and other assorted hacks? Yes! But free trade unions were out of the question.

They would without any doubt undermine one of the bureaucracy's key instruments for controlling the workers and making sure that any demands and complaints, after their initial airing, would be quietly buried in a file, in the office of some careerist who probably had never seen the shop floor in his life.

The negotiations were suspended for several days and finally resumed on Tuesday August 26, but only after the government lifted the telephone blockade on Gdansk.

There was a remarkable change in the government's attitude towards the strikers. The silly ultimatums that Walesa, Anna Walentynowicz and Gwiazda should be excluded from the negotiating team were forgotten. Regional party boss Tadeusz Fizbach was now full of goodwill towards the strikers, "whose actions are not really directed against the people's state", and whose frustrations were perfectly understandable given "the planning mistakes, the overcentralisation and the imperfections in socialist democracy".

However, by that very evening the negotiations were off again. Jagielski was prepared to go only as far as recognising the right to strike, but not free trade unions. It probably had occurred to Jagielski that this was not much of a concession, since whether or not the government recognised the right to strike, hundreds of thousands of workers up and down the country over the last two months were in practice affirming and defending that most basic class right, and had shaken the government and the party from top to bottom.

Jagielski hurried back to Warsaw to confer with his cronies at a summoned Politburo meeting.

Negotiations only started again two days later, on August 28. If the authorities' aim was to isolate the Baltic workers, in particular those in Gdansk, to slowly whittle away their nerve and



**Strikers in Szczecin, 1971**

force them to return to work short of gaining their major demand — free trade unions — this tactic was manifestly beginning to fail.

The Gdansk and Szczecin workers remained solid.

On that same evening the talks were suspended again, with the government completely unwilling to concede free trade unions. The attitudes of sections of the bureaucracy, previously willing to go along with the 'soft line' negotiators, began to harden.

Jankowski, the new head of the state controlled 'trade unions', who replaced Szydłak, and Wojciechowski, head of Interpress, again began to hurl accusations of extremism, and mouthing their peculiar variant of 'Marxist' and working class phraseology, violently insisted on the need to defend the 'unity of the trade union movement'.

But the bureaucracy was quickly shaken out of its inertia and its playing for time by events in other parts of the country.

On August 29 the giant steelworks of Huta Warszawa went on strike. In Wroclaw over 30 factories created their own Inter-Factory Committee, and reports were that the strike was spreading.

Bydgoszcz, 150 km south-west of Gdansk, was paralysed by strikes. In the Cegielski factory at Poznan, one of the largest in the city, a 48 hour strike in solidarity with the Gdansk and Szczecin workers, and a call on the government to meet their 21 demands.

The previous disdain of the Gdansk workers at the docile attitude of the Silesians now began to be dispelled. The Gdansk workers used to say what can you expect of the Silesians, stuck down there at the bottom of their mines, whereas the Baltic workers, living at the edge of the sea, were always open to new horizons. This sense of regional superiority now became increasingly ir-

relevant.

Faced with the spread of the strike wave, the government rushed to sign an agreement with the MKS. By Saturday morning, August 30, a pact was made. Over the public address system in the Lenin shipyard, which had been used throughout the negotiations to keep the rank and file workers in touch, with live transmissions of the talks, the agreement was announced.

Jubilation in the strike committee, which numbered hundreds of delegates. Outside in the shipyard, on the streets, in front of the Lenin works, the response was more unsure.

Many questioned the sincerity of the government's promises. Others were worried by the first reports of the terms of the agreement. Was it really true that the agreement said that the trade unions recognised the 'leading role of the Communist Party'? and as for the free trade unions, were they to cover only Gdansk? What about the rest of the country? What about the imprisoned KOR members?

Above all, there was the feeling that the great carnival of working class freedom of the last few weeks was not about to end. The return to work, the return to the normal daily grind of the factory routine.

During the strike, the area in and around the Lenin yard had been transformed into an island of freedom. Delegations from all over the country, and many parts of the world even, had come to Gdansk. Actors and singers would come and perform in the open, everyday something new, and above all the fear that had marked the life of workers for so many decades was no longer there.

It was these uncertainties which forced Walesa to cancel the talks and the signing of the agreement on Saturday

Turn to page 22



# Socialism and democratic rights

There is not, nor can there ever be, absolute freedom. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that there are certain basic human rights which ought not to be violated.

Yet these rights are being trampled upon in many parts of the world under different economic and social regimes. Socialists and communists are imprisoned in countries like Argentina, Chile, Iran and South Africa, while non-communists are killed or gaoled in other communist countries.

When it comes to civil and human rights, therefore, it is important that socialists should not be seen to have double standards. The British left have always been the champions of free speech, free association, free trade unions, free elections, free parliaments, in countries like Chile, Argentina, Brazil and South Africa, as well as at home. We must stand up equally for human rights in the so-called socialist countries.

## Disgust

If oppression takes place in the name of socialism, then socialism is besmirched, and those who would otherwise be in favour of a socialist society turn away in disgust. This has already happened on a vast scale, and the oppression in the Soviet Union and other 'socialist' countries has done untold harm to the cause of socialism.

Democracy and freedom have always been the instruments of genuine socialism, not its enemies. Once anti-



Eric Heffer MP

By Eric Heffer MP

democratic methods are used, then socialism goes out of the window. Shortly before her death at the hands of the German right in 1919, Rosa Luxemburg warned the Bolsheviks:

"Freedom for the supporters of the Government only, for the members of one party only — no matter how big its membership may be — is no freedom at all. Freedom is always for the man who thinks differently. This contention does not spring from a fanatical line of abstract justice, but from the fact that everything which is enlightening, healthy and purifying in political freedom derives from its independent character, and from the fact that freedom loses all its virtue when it becomes a privilege".

Luxemburg argued that the dictatorship of the proletariat "would be an extension of democracy".

"This dictatorship consists in a particular application of democracy, not in its abolition; it implies energetic action against the acquired rights and general economic relations of bourgeois society, and without this intervention a socialist transformation of society is impossible".

This type of bureaucratic society has nothing in common with socialism, the essence of which is freedom and democracy. Socialism means the flowering of the human spirit, not its curtailment or destruction. The very idea of putting a writer, poet or scientist in prison or in a mental institution for their beliefs fills genuine socialists with horror.

## Prisons

It is this that turns Soviet dissidents into 'counter-revolutionaries' once they gain their freedom and reach the west. They were not always reactionaries. But they have been in labour camps, prisons, or mental hospitals merely for expressing their views, or sometimes just for demanding the implementation of the law. The west, with its apparent freedom of speech and politics, seems to them like paradise.

Roy Medvedev, a Soviet dissident who has remained a marxist and a socialist writes:

"Socialist democracy is simultaneously a goal and a means. Democracy is essential as a value in itself. To be able to express one's thoughts and convictions freely without fear of persecution or repression is a vital aspect of a free socialist way of life. Without freedom to receive and impart information, without freedom of movement and residence, without freedom of creativity in science and the arts, and without many other democratic freedoms, a true socialist



Polish militia attacks workers

society is impossible. Democracy all government activity open to scrutiny — is also necessary as a means of ridding our society of bureaucracy and corruption. It offers firm protection against a relapse into anarchy and lawlessness".

Socialism and democracy are therefore, synonymous. It is important to stress this because today in Britain the Conservative Party is trying to persuade that left-wing socialists want a European-style state. These same socialists who make such a song-and-dance about Soviet repression are quite happy to remain silent about what goes on in countries like Chile and South Africa.

## Double

But the fact that many Tories apply double standards on the question of human rights is no reason for us to follow their example. Oppression, and when it is carried in the name of socialism, then it is absolutely vital that socialists should not only protest and attack it, but also come from the roof-tops that such oppo-



has nothing in common with genuine socialist concepts. Unless we identify ourselves totally with those fighting for freedom and democracy in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe our protests against oppression in Chile, Iran, South Africa, etc., are a sham.

### Trade union

One crucial test for the left is the attitude it takes to those in the Soviet Union who are now trying to create genuine trade unions. At the beginning of 1978 the Free Trade Union Association of the Soviet Working People was founded. The members of the Association have suffered police harassment, imprisonment and detention in psychiatric hospitals for their attempt to give Soviet workers an independent voice.

The reality is that trade unions in the Soviet Union are controlled by the state. Consider, for example, the fact that Aleksander Shelepin, who visited Britain as the leader of the Soviet trade unions, was previously head of the KGB, the secret police. Imagine if the former boss

of MI5 or MI6 were to become General Secretary of the British TUC!

Socialists have consistently opposed the control of trade unions by the state. They opposed Hitler's absorption of the German unions into the Labour Front, and the transformation of the unions in Mussolini's Italy and Franco's Spain into subordinate parts of the Corporate State. Under Stalin the Soviet trade unions also lost their independence, becoming 'transmission belts' for the bureaucratic party and state machine.

### Millions

Therefore although trade unions exist in the Soviet Union, with many millions of members, these documents show that they are no longer instruments of workers in their struggle to defend and improve living standards and working conditions. It is perfectly understandable that some independent-minded Soviet workers believe that they must organise genuine trade unions. They should receive the same degree of support from British trade unionists as do trade unionists in Chile, Bolivia, and the

black trade unionists of South Africa.

The British labour movement must take a clear stand in support of Soviet trade unionists. If we do not, we will be guilty of the charge of having double standards.

Dr Colin Morris said at a service at Westminster Abbey to commemorate Human Rights Day 1977:

"We would do well to take account of some words of Gerald Winstanley, leader of the Diggers, a seventeenth century protest movement of the English peasantry against the worldliness of the church and the tyranny of the rich. His followers paid a heavy price for their resistance to the state and from bitter experience he wrote, 'There are but few who act for freedom, and the actors are oppressed by the talkers and the verbal professors of freedom'".

Perhaps there has been too much talk about freedom and the time has come to act. An essential part of that action must be to support those in *all* parts of the world who need our help.

From the Introduction to 'Workers Against the Gulag', by Victor Haynes

# The Church in Poland

Many socialists in Britain are hesitant about supporting Solidarnosc because of the visible strong influence within it of the Catholic Church. But why is it that the Church has that influence?

Let's start with Father Jozef Tichner, who preached at Solidarity's first national congress. His book, "The Ethics of Solidarity" clearly supports workers taking strike action: "Senseless work is the most extreme form of the exploitation of man by man. It is a direct insult to the human dignity of the worker. When work becomes senseless, the strike is the only kind of behaviour which makes sense".

Tichner is not opposed to socialism. He merely distinguishes between 'Closed Socialism' (Stalinism) and 'Open Socialism'. 'Closed Socialism', "allows of only one possible form of exploitation — that which is the result of private ownership of the means of production. When, therefore, after the abolition of private property, the workers come to the conclusion that they are being exploited, closed socialism concludes that they have fallen victim to an illusion".

Or take Father Jerzy Popieluzko, the priest murdered by the Polish security forces in October 1984. After martial law of 1981, when many steelworkers in Warsaw were being arrested and jailed, beaten and attacked, Popieluzko declared "The duty of a priest is to be with the people when they need him most, when they are wronged, degraded and maltreated".

He sat with the steelworkers in court, he worked tirelessly to raise money, food, clothing for the jailed workers' families. And, yes, he preached against the authorities as well. For that he was killed, his finger-nails ripped off, his body black and blue, his tongue ripped out.

Again, in May 1977 in Krakow a leading KOR (Workers' Defence Committee) sympathiser, Stanislaw Pyjas, a student, was killed. His funeral was attended by 2,000 students. Violence was feared. Who supported the students and appealed to the workers of Krakow to act to ensure they didn't get hurt? Cardinal Wojtyla.

When 14 people began a hunger-strike against the arrest of KOR members in 1977, where did they find sanctuary? In St. Martin's Church in Warsaw.

The church is one of the precious few places where Poles can escape the tyranny of the state. Before the rise of Solidarnosc, it was the only major institution in Poland autonomous from the state. The Catholicism of a Polish worker fighting for his or her class, or of a priest closely linked with such workers, is different from the Catholicism of the Vatican.

Here is a scene: 31st August 1985, the 5th anniversary of the founding of Solidarnosc. Workers, farmers, old, young are attending church for a 'birthday mass'. Posters, produced by the underground, are displayed. One shows a large fist crushing a prison. Another, a defiant 5-year old to represent Solidarnosc.

Hymns are sung, but hymns with words like "Oh my country, how long have you been suffering! How deep your wounds are today!". An observer is reduced to helpless tears by the passion in their voices". As the 'birthday mass' ends a powerful voice comes through the loudspeakers "Let us swear to make



Solidarnosc live".

Thousands of fists shoot into the air, and thousands of voices shout as one "We sear it". And outside a group of Silesian miners — no doubt remembering their comrades killed in December 1981 — lay a wreath over the grave of Jerzy Popieluzko. Where else under martial law can workers gather like this, feel their unity like this, express their opposition like this?

Now to understand all this does not mean you have to support it. It doesn't mean we can forget the church has its own interests, its own goals, its own ideas — often bitterly opposed to what we stand for as socialists. It doesn't mean we stop proposing and fighting for secular, rational, human, workers' solidarity. But it does mean we can never support the bureaucrats on the grounds that their 'Marxist-Leninist' mumbo-jumbo is somehow better than the workers' Catholicism.

Indeed, the most important thing to be said against the Polish Catholic Church is that its hierarchy has been one of the most important props of the Polish state!

It constantly preached 'moderation' and 'compromise' to Solidarnosc from August 1980 to December 1981.

Take for example the Bydgoszcz crisis of March 1981. According to Timothy Garton-Ash in his book 'The Polish Revolution', the "workers would never again approach the extraordinary degree of mass mobilisation, popular resolution and preparation which they achieved on 30 March" as they prepared to launch a general strike. At the eleventh hour Lech Walesa called it off. Walesa said: "The Pope wrote to us and the Primate pleading with us for reason and reflection".

And Jaruzelski was happy to broadcast Archbishop Glemp's message the day after martial law, which said: "The authorities consider that the exceptional nature of martial law is dictated by a higher necessity. It is the choice of a lesser rather than a greater evil. Assuming the correctness of such reasoning the man in the street will subordinate himself to the new situation".

To refuse our support for Solidarnosc is to strengthen the church. Can't you hear the bishops? "Look at these western socialists. They watch you beaten bloody with truncheons and thrown in jails for defending your rights. And what do they do? They do nothing. Come to us...".

From page 19

afternoon, until the government had given an answer to the ultimatum over the release of the political prisoners. For a moment it looked as though the tenuous agreement had broken down yet again. Jagielski could not believe it. Only an hour before he had undergone the humiliating experience of trying to get Walesa and the strike committee representatives to sign as soon as possible, whereas they insisted on reading every single demand and agreed formulation out loud, one by one, in front of reporters and delegates. The hapless minister could only repeat again and again, "OK, I accept, I'll sign".

Now again more delays, even possible breakdown. Jagielski was sent packing to get immediate assurance from the government about the release of the KOR members. His arrogance and self-assurance had been totally knocked out of him.

Jagielski arrived on Sunday, the next day. After the Plenum of the Central Committee of the PUWP signed the text of the agreement and after a few more delays to ensure the release of the political prisoners (they were to be freed starting the next day), at 4.35 on Sunday afternoon Jagielski and Walesa entered the large hall in the Lenin yard.

Sitting there in complete silence were over 1000 delegates from different factories in the region.

Walesa took the microphone. "Dear friends, throughout this strike we have thought of the interests of our country and it is of that that we shall be thinking when we start work tomorrow — September 1, a date whose significance you all know.

"Have we obtained everything? No, but we have obtained a lot under the circumstances. The rest we can obtain because now we have our trade unions. We've fought to get them, not only for us but for all the country. Let's make sure we maintain their independence. The strike is over."

For other Polish workers the fight was just beginning. Silesia, the industrial heartland, whose workers are the highest paid in the country was continuing the strike it had called out of solidarity with the Baltic workers.

They tore to shreds the government's last hopes that the disease of free trade unionism would remain firmly enclosed within the Baltic coastal area. The Silesian workers were now demanding their own free unions.

An MKS had been established in the Silesian coalfields as well. Centred in Jastrzebie, it grouped 26 mines and 208,000 miners, as well as 27 other factories representing 100,000 workers.

No pretence at delay, or even hard-line rhetoric, now. The government rushed to negotiate with the MKS directly and apart from granting the same demands as at Gdansk it agreed to negotiate other demands such as abolition of the 4 x 6 hour shift system, lowering of the retirement age to 50 years, a working week of five days and the abolition of the official trade unions.



Women shipyard workers in Gdansk

## From Gdansk to martial law

**In August, with the spread of the strike and occupation wave, and the formation of Inter-Factory Strike Committees, the bureaucracy was brought to the negotiating table. Talks were conducted, assurances given, promises made and written down on paper.**

Vice-Premier Jagielski and Walesa signed the Gdansk Agreement, guaranteeing for the first time in the history of a Stalinist-ruled state the right to existence for an independent trade union movement, as well as a whole list of other social demands from wage rises to maternity leave.

It was a short truce. By early October, there was a general strike of over six million workers to push for access to the media, wage rises, and other demands. Gierek may have been replaced, and the ex-security chief Kania brought in, to placate the different factions of the rul-

By Alexis Carras

ing party, the PUWP, but yet the Party insisted on its 'leading role within society'.

When the Solidarnosc statutes failed to include such recognition, it was enough for a Warsaw court to rule the union's rule book 'unsuitable'. It was another test of strength, and another victory for the workers.

The 'registration crisis' also showed that different sections of the bureaucracy were now wildly colliding with each other and tripping each other up.

The following month there was another major fight — the 'Narozniak Affair', when two members of Solidarnosc, Piotr Sapelo and Jan Narozniak, were imprisoned for obtaining and publishing documents from the Prosecutor General's office on how police should deal with dissidents and opposi-

tionists. Again, there were strikes in factories and steelworks, and demonstrations, and the bureaucracy was compelled to do another humiliating volte-face and free the two.

The bureaucrats returned on the offensive in early January, blocking one of the Gdansk agreements — the five day working week. Millions of workers took their Saturdays off anyway. A compromise was eventually hammered out with the Solidarnosc leadership, in effect with Walesa, that one Saturday every month would be worked.

Walesa, the 'star' of the August movement, was surrounded by Catholic priests and other moderate advisors. And radical resentment at these compromises grew in Solidarnosc.

By early February, the poorer peasantry were organising in their own 'Rural Solidarnosc' and demanding recognition from the government. The backward, impoverished peasant smallholder, long the victim of urban ridicule, government



# Our strike in Szczecin

In this article Edmund Baluka, a Polish Trotskyist and shipyard worker, describes the strike which he led in Szczecin in 1971.

What I shall talk about is the four days in January 1971, described by numerous journalists and politicians as exceptionally different from the grey, ordinary days which make up the 'survival-life' of our enslaved people. December 1970 marked a turning-point — a 'wrong' turn, a turn which meant that 'we lost contact with the working class'. The factions struggling for power within the Party laid the blame on their predecessors, only to take the same path and commit the same mistakes once the situation had been brought under control.

The price rises of 1 December 1970 which averaged twenty per cent, were the result of the contribution paid by People's Poland, within the framework of Comecon, to further Soviet world expansion. They were at once a necessity and a provocation on the part of the Moczar and Gierek factions struggling for the post of First Secretary of the PUPW Central Committee.

On 14 December, the workers of the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk became the first to down tools and take to the streets. The buildings of the PUPW Regional Committee, the trade unions and the local oligarchies were soon in flames, and the same day, the neighbouring towns of Gdynia, Elblag and Slupsk were also in revolt. Thanks to road-blocks and the silence of the press, radio and television, it took three days for the revolt to break out in Szczecin. According to later estimates, over 3,000 people — many of them children, women and old people — were massacred in the towns of the Baltic Coast. On 19 December, Edward Gierek took over power from Gomulka: but the whole of Poland came out in favour of an Italian-style general strike. The new ruling faction came together at the Eighth Plenum of the Central Committee in order to appoint new Central Committee secretaries and set the jammed productive machine in motion again. However, the new First Secretary of the Szczecin Regional Committee made a mistake: he interrupted the Eighth Plenum and obliged Gierek, Jaroszewicz, Szlachcic and Jaruzelski to go to the Adolf Warski shipyard in Szczecin. It was the noisy press, radio and television campaign promoting the 'good intentions' in the field of production which sparked off the mobilisations against the new PUPW ruling group: the Gierek faction.

On 22 January 1971, the day after this campaign began, about 6,000 workers from the Adolf Warski shipyard decided to leave work and burn down the radio and television stations that were broadcasting false reports about the (good) intentions of raising production. I was head of the Szczecin strike committee in January 1971; I saw women, children and workers slaughtered in the streets. I very soon realized that there was no point in dealing with the local authorities since they did not have the power to grant our demands. That is why I called on the shipyard workers not to leave their workplace, but to deepen the occupation

and insist that Gierek and Jaroszewicz come and explain whether they intended governing the country like Gomulka.

The workers agreed to my proposal: they occupied the radio station which was located in the management buildings; they shut the entrance-gates, and then threw a security ring around the shipyard. Within a few hours, however, the yard was completely encircled by the militia and security police (about 6,000 men in all) — equipped with tanks, landing-stages and dozens of helicopters flying in formation. The authorities cut off the electricity and water, and for three days refused to allow our relatives to give us food.

At the same time, the strike spread to all the industrial plants in Szczecin, as well as to the railways, the postal services, commerce and urban transport.

Workshop delegates then elected a 40-person strike committee empowered to take decisions and represent the workers' demands through delegates permanently in contact with the committee. The strike committee was divided into five commissions with the following functions:

- 1) Protection of plant and defence of the workers against militia and security police provocations.
- 2) Relations with other enterprises.
- 3) Propaganda activity, drawing on a radio transmitter and a printing-press able to produce leaflets and posters for the inhabitants of Szczecin.
- 4) Provision of food for the workers.
- 5) Preparations for combat. This commission was charged with finding bottles for Molotov cocktails, and with creating anti-tank barricades in the case of a militia attack — an eventuality that was considered by the PUPW Central Committee in Warsaw.

After three days of occupation we were still cut off by the repressive forces, starved, threatened with an attack by the militia with whom we had already had a few skirmishes. Then we saw that behind the ring of militiamen and security agents there was an enormous crowd of some 100,000 people which was growing all the time: these were the inhabitants of Szczecin who threw us food and cigarettes over the iron gates. At that moment it became clear that our leaflets and posters had mobilised the populace of Szczecin to actively support the shipyard workers.

Gierek too was informed of this active and general solidarity with the Szczecin workers. And so, at six o'clock on the evening of 24 January 1971, he stood in front of the closed shipyard gate and pronounced those historic words: 'I am Edward Gierek. I am First Secretary of the PUPW. Please would you open the gate for me.' We opened up, because the letter that had been sent to Gierek asked him to come to the shipyard.

The First Secretary was accompanied by Prime Minister Jaroszewicz, the Minister of Defence, General Jaruzelski, the Minister of the Interior, Franciszek Szlachcic, and a few more dignitaries of

the new ruling faction. The discussion between Gierek and the strike committee, which went on for nine hours, was relayed live throughout the shipyard by means of loudspeakers. The 'speeches' of Gierek and Jaroszewicz, and well as the interventions of delegates from the 36 shipyard sections, were thus also heard by the inhabitants of Szczecin standing just behind the militia cordon.

I should stress an important point: Gierek did not want this nine-hour discussion to be heard outside the shipyard, but the strike committee absolutely refused to give way.

Out of the twelve points we had drawn up, Gierek accepted eleven, including the demand for democratic elections in the Party, the trade unions and the youth organisations. However, the call for a reduction in prices was not satisfied. Gierek shed real tears when he went on the promise that the twelfth demand would be met in the near future. The shipyard workers gave him their trust, although not without stating that they would rise up against the party if it were to commit fresh mistakes.

One of our points called for the strike committee to remain in place as a 'workers' commission', whose task would be to ensure that satisfaction was given to all the demands of the shipyard and other workers in Szczecin. Gierek went back on his promises in less than a year: the most active worker militants encountered a thousand difficulties, including sackings and unjust court sentences; and few comrades who had shown exceptional ardour during the struggle were even found dead in obscure circumstances.

These sacrifices were not wasted. The revolt of the coastal towns was the main factor in the change of government and Party leaderships; and Gierek's trip to the Szczecin shipyard made the Polish working class aware of the fact that determined and united opposition to the bureaucracy can force it to give ground.

The June 1976 events have shown that it is possible, even in a system of totalitarian power, to organise a general strike within twenty-four hours and compel the regime to go back on its decisions. The opposition now fighting in our country has effectively blocked the authority's decision to lower the Poles' standard of living; and it is also active in demanding greater democratic freedoms. The solidarity of Polish intellectuals and students with the workers marks another defeat for the PUPW renegades.

Thirty thousand Romanian miners have forced their dictator, Ceausescu, to set out on the same pilgrimage as the one Edward Gierek had to make under the pressure of the working class of the Polish coast. I do not think that these miners were inspired by the example of the Polish shipyard workers. They made their own discovery that there is no use discussing with 'small fry' — that the fish starts to rot from the head down! And to cut off the head is to halt the process of decomposition eating away at the societies of the Soviet bloc.

There is no need for me to add, I trust, that the same kind of gangrene is in the process of destroying the capitalist societies. The only difference between the two is their names, in their outward appearances and in their modes of exploiting the labour force. The sharks of the Kremlin, Peking, Washington and Latin America, the racists of South Africa and all the Idi Amins of this world have no other aim than to exploit the labour force out of love of authority.

neglect and local party apparatchniks, was beginning to actively enter organised political life.

Victory was not outright, despite the support of the city workers. The government backed down in face of a general strike threat, but recognised Rural Solidarnosc *de facto*, not in law.

Similarly, the students, long dormant after the trauma of 1968, isolated, used by different factions of the bureaucracy, and finally crushed, were once again regrouping politically. Strikes in Lodz University quickly spread throughout the country, the central demands being the dropping of Russian as a compulsory subject along with the dead and sterile courses in the bureaucracy's version of 'Marxism-Leninism'.

Faced with a crisis out of its control, the Party elevated General Jaruzelski to head the government. The head of the armed forces assumed the leading role in the civilian administration, while Mieczyslaw Rakowski, prime spirit of the liberal wing in the bureaucracy (though even this 'reformer' considered the PUWP's domination non-negotiable!) took the vice-premiership.

This was no more than a prelude to further attacks. Within a month, Adam Michnik and Jacek Kuron, major figures in KOR (Social Defence Committee), were detained and placed under close surveillance, with their right of movement and travel within the country seriously curtailed.

In early April many Solidarnosc militants were severely beaten and hospitalised in Bydgoszcz.

This was the incident which sparked off the first major split in Solidarnosc's ranks. Leading militants resigned from the union's governing bodies over the mild stand of the Walesa wing, which satisfied itself with promises of a future investigation into those responsible for the terror, and the acceptance by Walesa (in what appeared to many a thoroughly autocratic manner) of a three-month moratorium on strikes.

Solidarnosc's conflict with the Stalinists seemed to follow an almost cyclical pattern — successive flash-points, whether on economic or broader social struggles, followed by weeks of relative calm, the calm then giving way to a new sharp conflict.

Big cracks had also appeared in the ruling party itself. The PUWP, a party of three million members, began to experience the revolt of its own rank and file.

Apart from the hundreds of thousands who had already left the Party, roughly one in three of the Party's membership had also joined Solidarnosc. Feeling misled, cheated, and angry at the leadership's unaccountable, undemocratic, and traditionally repressive role, the rank and file began to organise outside the accepted and strictly controlled 'vertical' channels of authority, into the so-called 'horizontal movement'.

(But already many PUWP members had been won over to the Solidarnosc movement. In Szczecin and Silesia, for example, PUWP workers were prominent in the MKS structures, and drove

much harder bargains with the bureaucracy than did Gdansk).

Party cells made contact directly with each other rather than going through the central leadership. The founding meeting of the 'horizontal movement', in the city of Torun, grouped the most radical elements in the PUWP with the aim of sweeping away the old leadership in the coming 9th Extraordinary Party Congress. They also aimed to defeat the reactionary factions in the PUWP grouped in hard-line Stalinist circles like the Katowice Forum (whose Open Letter to the Party questioned the competence of a leadership which in their view was 'pandering' to the democratisation movement).

If anything would tip the balance



Jaruzelski

towards a Russian invasion, it was the PUWP, as a bureaucratic machine, losing its grip on the situation and its ability to accommodate reforms then claw them back later.

Speculation was rife as to whether the Soviet Union would allow the 9th Extraordinary Congress to take place at all. The Czechoslovak invasion had taken place just before the Party there was due to have its Congress.

The horizontalists demanded free elections throughout the entire Party — punishment of all the guilty, elections with no limit on number of candidates, voting to be secret. They were out to smash the central apparatus.

Other PUWP members, for example in Lodz, demanded "that only those who had the courage to oppose totalitarianism, who can be incorporated in Solidarnosc", should prepare the new Congress.

These were tremors which must have shaken the Kremlin to the core. Brezhnev was reported to have said that "one day the PUWP will be able to defend the cause

of socialism". On the eve of the Congress, the Russian leadership attacked the PUWP leadership with a list of its deviations, everything from conscious "accommodation to counter-revolution" to "mercantilism".

But the Congress was held, and the balance in the PUWP leadership remained roughly the same.

It was, however, a totally exceptional congress in the annals of ruling Stalinist parties, with serious democracy and substantial weeding-out of the leading committees.

General Jaruzelski, a popular army leader and head of the government, gained dominance at the congress, receiving the highest vote for the Politburo bureau (higher than the then general secretary Stanislaw Kania).

The elevation of Jaruzelski signified that the Party was focusing its hopes on this man — uncompromised by recent events, willing to declare he would "never use the troops against the working class", a real 'national communist'. He would soon hold in his hands not only governmental and army power, but also the general secretaryship of the PUWP (a unique collection of posts in the Stalinist world).

Outside the walls of the congress, the hunger marches were beginning throughout the country.

Tens of thousands marched in Lodz on July 30. Economic catastrophe was crashing down on the nation, as queues lengthened, people tried to exist below subsistence level, and even the most basic of consumer goods disappeared from the shops. Poland's foreign debt was soaring even further.

Hopes of repayments on the debt faded away, while Western governments and financiers nervously gathered together to reschedule the debt and entice Poland into the monetary discipline of the IMF.

One year on, and the working class saw itself daily cheated, despite its strength, sacrifices, and determination. The Party, still clinging tenaciously to its control of the economy, was relegating the masses to starvation and a bitter winter ahead. Scenes of terrible destitution appeared, scarcely paralleled in any advanced industrial country outside of wartime.

The workers pushed for greater workers' control of industry, to meet this economic collapse and paralysis.

And the Party's reaction? The closing down of a Solidarnosc newspaper in the Katowice steelworks, which was spearheading the workers' management movement in the factory, for supposed 'anti-Sovietism'.

In September, in Gdansk, 912 delegates from all over the country, representing 9,500,000 Solidarnosc militants, met for the first part of the movement's congress. They issued the momentous 'Appeal to All Workers of Eastern Europe' — one of the finest expressions of working class internationalism to emerge from the glacial spaces of European Stalinism.

The Appeal was denounced on the grounds that it was an "anti-socialist Bacchanalia" and



Hungary '56: workers destroy Stalin's statue.

# Campaign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc

The Campaign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc (CSWEB) was launched at the highly successful Solidarity Conference held on November 7 1987 sponsored by 30 Labour MPs and many trade union branches and Labour Parties.

CSWEB is a broadly based campaign which aims to build solidarity in the British labour movement for workers struggling against bureaucratic repression in the Eastern Bloc.

CSWEB stands for the liberty of workers in the Eastern Bloc as well as in the West. Anything less is hypocrisy.

We are asking your organisation for its support. We hold regular campaign meetings and fringe meetings at labour movement conferences.

Together with the Eastern Europe Solidarity Campaign we produce the bulletin Socialist Alternative in Eastern Europe. We want labour movement organisations and individuals to sell Socialist Alternative. Phone us on 01-639 7967 for details.

Special offer: 1 years subscription to SAEF for £1.50.

Affiliate and send delegates to our meetings.

Affiliation rates:

- Labour Parties and trade union branches
- Labour wards, Women's Sections, Black Sections and student Labour Clubs
- Labour Party Young Socialist Branches

£10

£5

£1

Further details from:

Campaign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc, 54A Peckham Rye, London SE15.

the Soviet Baltic Fleet ominously ploughed the foggy seas off the Baltic coast, Albin Siwak, boss of the Polish state 'unions', euphemistically called for the 'de-legalisation of Solidarnosc'.

The second part of the congress followed later in the month — as the workers' control issue became central, and Walesa's leadership was challenged by Marian Jurczyk of Szczecin and Jan Rulewski of Bydgoszcz.

Jurczyk and Rulewski attacked Walesa's gradual acclimatisation to hobnobbing with the Stalinists and his divorce from the rank and file, and openly called for withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. They declared that Solidarnosc should not moderate its aims and struggles through "overestimation of the Soviet threat".

The decomposition of the old regime was symbolised by the invitation of Zbigniew Pudziak, representative of the 40,000 strong independent police union, to address the congress. The police would no longer do the regime's dirty work, announced Dudziak, to the delegates' thunderous applause.

Despite the overtures to the regime by the moderates, who announced the disbanding of the KOR and proposed a compromise over workers' control, the regime was now, it is evident in hindsight, gearing itself up for a decisive showdown.

The revolt of the long-dead Parliament against government attempts to renege on the workers' control compromise, the rebellion of the police, and behind-the-scenes Russian pressure, led the Party to sack Kania and elect General Jaruzelski as party leader.

The haughty general declared a "crusade against totalitarianism". He meant, of course, Solidarnosc's ten million membership.

The PUWP Central Committee pushed for the purging of the party. Jaruzelski deployed small military units throughout the country, especially the rural areas, to lean on the local bureaucracies, to get things moving, and to "keep the government informed". Meanwhile, a soft-sell was offered to the union moderates — a 'National Front of Salvation'.

Walesa accepted the proposal for tripartite Church/State/Union talks — thus going against one of the basic reasons behind the creation of an independent union movement which would not take responsibility for the regime's actions on the regime's terms. Meanwhile the government tried to break the wildcat strike movement gripping the country. They tried to get Walesa to mediate, while Jaruzelski pressed for a ban on strikes, special powers, and tight trade union laws aimed to drown spontaneous militancy in a welter of time-consuming arbitration and petty procedures.

The regime tried, and pulled off, the first attempt since August 1980 to physically confront the workers, when it attacked a firefighters' training school in Warsaw earlier this month. Having gained the upper hand temporarily, with hunger stalking the country the regime prepared for a final assault.

# A self-limiting revolution?

By Tom Rigby

**From August 1980 until the declaration of martial law in December 1981 there were two powers in Poland: the workers' movement and the Stalinist bureaucracy.**

The two powers faced each other in a situation of unstable equilibrium. Most of the basic preconditions for a revolution were present. The regime was no longer able to continue ruling in the old way, and the masses were no longer prepared to be ruled in the old way.

At different times, the initiative switched from one side to the other.

But, in the end, what proved decisive was the fact that Solidarnosc never fully faced up to the possibilities and the opportunities that presented themselves.

As a result, over time, the bureaucracy was able to line up behind General Jaruzelski. The military was the part of the State apparatus which maintained the most cohesion; taking advantage of Solidarnosc's failure to provide a clear political answer to the massive social crisis which developed from the summer of 1981 — the strike wave and hunger marches — Jaruzelski stepped forward as the 'saviour' of the nation.

Jacek Kuron, the leading theorist of the 'self limiting revolution' which ultimately prevented Solidarnosc facing up to this danger, could nonetheless see this threat quite clearly. In August 1981 he argued: "Part of society could turn to the idea of a strong government as a ray of hope. We can already see the idea grow around the figurehead of Jaruzelski..."

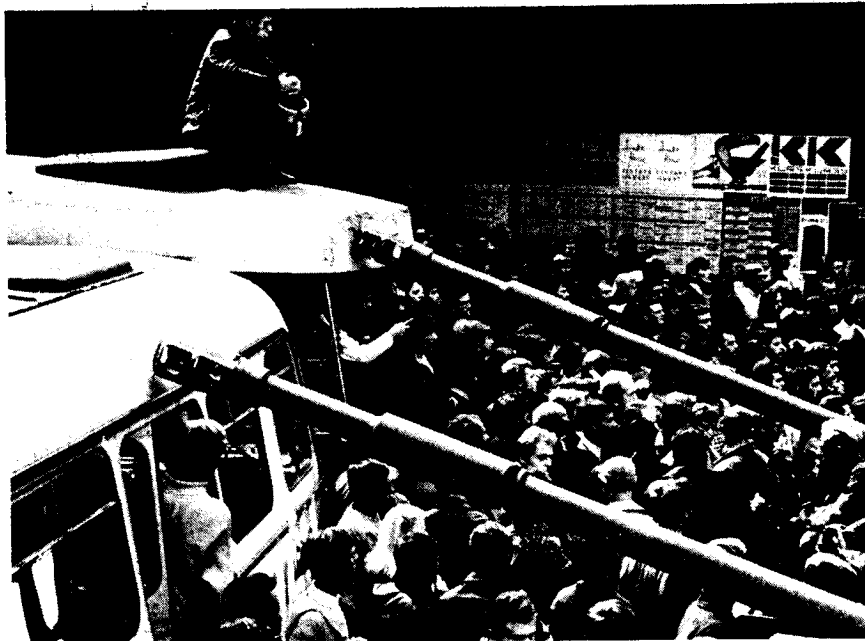
The basic idea behind 'self limiting revolution' was simple. Poland is part of the Russian Empire, so any attempt to break from this "geo-political reality" through the overthrow of the bureaucrats can only lead to disaster. That was the lesson of Hungary '56 and Czechoslovakia '68. Russian tanks would put an end to any radical movement which went too far, too soon.

The reason this theory could exercise such a grip on Solidarnosc was that it addressed squarely the central problem of revolution in Eastern Europe. Tragically, it provided the wrong answer.

Though this theory was most clearly put forward by Kuron, one of the heroic pioneers of the Polish labour movement, it ultimately represented the viewpoint of the middle strata of Stalinist society — the technicians and the intelligentsia.

Drawing on a variety of sources, including Eurocommunism, the 'self limiting revolution' implied the need for an 'Historic Compromise' between the workers and the regime. But the social basis for such a compromise did not exist.

The crisis of Polish society was too



Russian tanks: the limit to revolution?

deep, and the prospects for a 'social-democratic' reformist solution on Western lines were virtually non-existent.

Unlike the capitalist rulers in the West, the Stalinist bureaucracy has never been willing to co-exist indefinitely with a genuine workers' movement. Politics and economics are too closely fused. The bureaucracy's stability depends upon the *atomisation* of the working class.

Poland is a relatively open society by Eastern European standards. But 'civil society' — the institutions outside the state itself that help to hold society together — are still very weak. And this basic feature makes bureaucratic power relatively fragile and exposed. That is why repression and force are so important in holding these systems together.

The bureaucrats cannot share power, and they cannot even make the kinds of concessions to the workers that the capitalists can in the advanced capitalist countries of the West.

Zbigniew Kowalewski, a leader of the left wing of Solidarnosc, pointed to another set of problems associated with 'self limiting revolution'. Discussing the ideas of the 'Network' — market orientated supporters of workers' self-management — he argued:

"The strategy of 'self limiting revolution' conditioned the Network's project. Consciously or not, it conformed to a political vision according to which it was certainly possible to overthrow bureaucratic power at the grass roots — in the workplaces and in the municipalities — but not at central level".

The bureaucracy's monopoly of economic power rests on two linked factors: on one side, the total suppression,

by political means, of democratic institutions of self-organisation and representation of the workers and the citizens, and the lack of any control by such institutions over the central authority; and, on the other side, the large-scale administrative suppression of the other factor of control, market mechanisms. The law of value cannot be suppressed in a post-capitalist economy. It has to wither away, in parallel with other market categories, including the buying and selling of labour-power. The re-establishment, to a certain extent, of the operation of the law of value as an element of control over the plan, is one of the indispensable objectives of reform of economic management in the revolution against the bureaucratic regime. But if you consider that, for political reasons, the development of democratic institutions of the working class cannot go beyond a certain threshold (the 'geopolitical factor' [the threat of USSR intervention] determining the relation of forces in the last analysis), then you automatically seek to limit the power of the bureaucracy by the maximum development of the market. If workers' councils cannot exercise real control over the bureaucratic regime, then let the market do it instead: such was the Network's logic. The question was posed in the following manner: if we can only take power in the workplaces, the workers' councils must be able to base themselves on a maximum of enterprise autonomy in relation to the organs of power held by the central bureaucracy.

Many self-management activists disagreed with this position and argued that there could be no workers' power in the workplaces without resolving the question of power at the level of the



state”.

One of the consequences of this position was that the Solidarnosc leadership lacked any clear answers to the deep social and economic crisis that gripped Polish society. If the workers could only take *bits* of power, whether they liked it or not they still had to take *a lot* of the responsibility for the failure of the system as a whole. This explains the hostility of part of the Solidarnosc leadership to many of the wildcat economic strikes of the late summer and autumn of 1981.

But once Solidarnosc failed to give a clear focus to workers' protests, many moved towards the right. As Karol Modzelewski argued: "The union is not as strong as it was. It is weaker and every activist knows it". With the declaration of martial law Solidarnosc paid for this weakness.

If the 'self limiting revolution' was an illusion what was the alternative?

Kuron was right to look at the "Geopolitical reality" of Poland's status as a subject nation in the Russian Empire. But instead of seeing this relationship as setting the *limits* to radical change it should be seen as the decisive obstacle to be overcome for the workers' revolution to take place.

When Kuron co-wrote, with Karol Modzelewski, the historic "Open letter to the Party" in 1964, he understood this point quite clearly:

**"WE ARE TOLD:** 'We live in the centre of European conflicts. The world is divided into camps, and both sides have atomic weapons. All revolutionary movements in this situation are crimes against the nation and against humanity. The Polish "raison d'etat", following from the international situation and our geographical situation, demands our silence and obedience. Otherwise, we are menaced with atomic annihilation or, at best, with intervention by the tanks of a friendly power, as happened in Hungary. Under such conditions, to analyse social structures, to discuss surplus value, to work out political programmes — these are occupations which are either irrational or simply harmful. In order to build socialism one must first of all *exist*'.

1) This thinking is based on the assumption that revolution is the result of a criminal conspiracy against internal or world peace. It is the traditional argument of all anti-revolutionary ideologies and well known in the history of the workers' movement. It is typical police thinking. In reality, revolutions are the result of economic and social crisis.

From the social point of view, revolution is always an act of force which pits the strength of a social movement against that of the ruling power. But revolution is the act of an enormous majority of society directed against the rule of a minority that is in political crisis and whose apparatus of coercion has been weakened. That is why revolution does not necessarily have to be carried out by force of arms. The possibility of avoiding civil war depends on such factors as the level of consciousness and organisation of the revolutionary movement which limit the degree of chaos and the possibilities of armed counteraction.

The real crime against the internal peace of the country is committed by the ruling bureaucracy, which first tries to disorganise the masses, deprive them of political consciousness and then uses armed force to try to break their revolutionary movement. We remember Poznan and Budapest.

2) The argument of Soviet tanks. It is said that an eventual revolution in Poland would inevitably lead to Soviet armed intervention, the result of which, from the military point of view, is not open to doubt. Those who advance this view assume that everything takes place in 'one country in isolation' which, by way of exception, is torn by class struggles while in neighbouring countries there are no classes but only regular armies with a given number of planes and tanks. For them, the revolution neither crosses national boundaries nor has an effect beyond them.

This typical 'political realism' completely contradicts historical experience. Revolutionary crises have always been



Jacek Kuron

on an international nature. 1956 was no exception, but the bureaucracy then had at its disposal economic and social reserves which enabled it to handle the crisis by a reform manoeuvre. This made it possible to put a brake on the development of the revolution in Poland, to prevent a revolutionary situation from arising in Czechoslovakia, the GDR and the USSR and, thereby, permitted the Hungarian revolution to be isolated and crushed. The present phase of the crisis is marked by a lack of the necessary reserves for such a manoeuvre. This is true not only in Poland but also in Czechoslovakia, the GDR and Hungary and even of the USSR itself. It is difficult to foresee in which of these countries the revolution will begin; it is certain, however, that it will not end where it begins. The crisis in these countries cannot be mitigated, even temporarily, by reforms and concessions because there is nothing more to concede or to reform within the framework of the system. Under these conditions, the revolutionary movement must spread to the whole camp, while the possibilities of armed intervention on the part of the Soviet bureaucracy (if it is still in power) will not be measured by the number of its tanks and planes but by the degree of

tension of class conflicts within the USSR”.

If Kuron and the other KOR activists had held to this analysis, and organised on the basis of it, Polish history might have been different.

The KOR activists did the vital preparatory work for the construction of a mass workers' movement. But in the end Kuron and the KOR failed the Polish workers **ideologically**.

Part of this failure was the Solidarnosc leadership's attitude to Polish nationalism. Though many on the left criticise Solidarnosc for being too nationalist, in an important sense they were **not nationalist enough**.

The Solidarnosc leadership should have prepared from the very beginning for the inevitable conflict that was to come. They should have clearly stated their commitment to fight for Polish independence. This could have given clear focus to the deep-seated national aspirations of the Polish people. The Solidarnosc leadership vacated the field of nationalist sentiment to the anti-semitic, anti-gypsy and crudely anti-Russian Right. Their timidity on this question also let the *Polish* bureaucracy off the hook: the dictators of the future were able to hold the threat of Russian invasion like a pistol to Solidarnosc's head, as if they had a common worry. A militantly 'nationalist' stand by Solidarnosc would more clearly have exposed the bureaucracy's real interests. While Solidarnosc was working for a 'national accord', the bureaucracy was preparing to strike.

The Polish workers could have beaten back and defeated a Russian invasion. If rank and file soldiers had been drawn into Solidarnosc; if the movement could offer a clear vision of an alternative society; and if it could convince the majority that it had a chance of winning, victory might have been possible.

The Russian Stalinists *could not* guarantee that they could defeat Solidarnosc. Poland has a much bigger population than Hungary or Czechoslovakia, and the Polish workers have immense social power. There is no certainty that Russian tanks could quell an armed Polish people, and unlike 1956 or 1968 the Russian Stalinists were bogged down in a costly, protracted war in Afghanistan. A beacon of workers' democracy in Poland could have inspired revolts by the workers and oppressed nationalities of the other countries of Eastern Europe and within the Soviet Union itself.

This is speculation. But the tragedy of Poland is that Solidarnosc went down to defeat in circumstances that were far from the best. In December 1981, the heroic militants of Solidarnosc fought for their lives in the factories and mines against the army and the riot police. But they fought from a position of weakness, after they had lost the initiative. Lech Walesa was right when he declared in December 1981: "Confrontation is inevitable and confrontation will take place. Let us abandon all illusions. They (the regime) have been thumping their noses at us".

It is a tragedy that Solidarnosc did not grasp this truth much earlier.



Hungary '56

# A programme for revolution

Thus far we have considered the revolution as the gravedigger of the old order. It also creates a new society. Is the working class, which must be the main and leading force of the revolution, capable of developing a real, viable programme?

The class interest of the workers demands the abolition of the bureaucratic ownership of the means of production and of exploitation. This does not mean that the worker is to receive, in the form of a working wage, the full equivalent of the product of his labour. The level of development of the productive forces in a modern society necessitates a division of labour in which there are unproductive sectors, supported by the material product created by the worker. Therefore, under conditions of a workers' democracy, it will also be necessary to set aside from the total product a part earmarked for accumulation, for the maintenance and development of health services, education, science, culture, social benefits and those expenditures for administration and for the apparatus of political power which the working class will recognise as indispensable. The essence of exploitation is not that the working wage represents only a part of the value of the newly created product but that the surplus product is taken away from the worker by force and that the process of capital accumulation is alien to his interests, while the unproductive sectors serve to maintain and strengthen the rule of a bureaucracy (or bourgeoisie) over production and over society, and thus in the first place, over the labour and social

This programme originally appeared in 'An Open Letter to the Party', written by Polish socialist dissidents Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski. The authors were sentenced to three years in jail for publishing the document in 1964. Kuron himself has now developed a political perspective different from this — the theory of 'self-limiting revolution' — but the document remains as one of the boldest revolutionary programmes produced from within the Eastern bloc.

life of the working class.

To abolish exploitation means, therefore to create a system in which the organised working class will be master of its own labour and the resulting product; in which it will set the goals of social production, decide on the sharing and use of the national income, hence define the size and purpose of investments, the size and disbursement of expenditures for social benefits, health services, education, science and culture, the amount for the power apparatus and its current tasks. In brief, a system in which the working class will exercise economic, social and political power in the state.

How should the working class and its state be organised in order that it might rule over its own labour and its product?

## Workers' democracy

1) If there is no workers' democracy in the factory, there can be none in the state on any long-term basis. For it is only in the factory that the worker is a worker, that he fulfils his fundamental social function. If he were to remain a slave in his place of work, then any

freedom outside the place of work would soon become "Sunday freedom," fictitious freedom.

The working class cannot rule over its own labour and its product without controlling the conditions and goals of its toil in the factory. To that end, it must organise itself in the plants into Workers' Councils in order to run the factories. The manager must be made into a functionary subordinate to the Council, controlled, hired or dismissed by the Council.

However, these days, all key decisions relating to the management of an enterprise are made centrally. Under these conditions, the Workers' Council would, in practice, be deprived of power. The manager is closely bound up with the offices which make the decisions — the central apparatus of economic management. In this situation, the Workers' Council would inevitably be reduced to an adjunct to the management, as is the case with the present-day Conferences of Workers' Self-Government.

To manage enterprises through its Workers' Councils, the working class

must make the enterprises independent, creating the preliminary conditions for workers' democracy and, at the same time, adapting management relationships to the new class goal of production (as we have already shown, the system of centralised management is an organisational tool of production for the sake of production, whereas production for the sake of consumption requires a decentralised system). Thus, while taking the first step toward realising its programme, the working class achieves that which is most far-reaching and progressive in the programme of technocracy: the independence of enterprises. But the working class and the technocracy each imbue this concept with a fundamentally different social content. To the technocracy, independence of an enterprise means that management has full powers in the factory. For the working class, it means self-government for the working force. That is why the working class must go beyond plant management by the Councils. Workers' self-rule, limited to the level of the enterprise, would inevitably become fictitious and a cover for the power of management in the factory and for the rule of a new technocratic bureaucracy; exploitation would be maintained and the former state of chaos would return in a new form.

Basic decisions relating to the sharing and use of the national income naturally have a general social character; that is, they are made on an economy-wide scale and therefore, they can only be made centrally. If these central decisions were to remain outside the influence of the working class, it would not rule over the product that it has created and over its own labour.

## Proletarian power

2) That is why in addition to factory councils, the working class will have to organise itself into a nationwide system of Councils of Workers' Delegates, headed by a Central Council of Delegates. Through the system of councils, the working class will determine the national economic plan and maintain permanent control over its execution. As a result, the Councils at all levels will become organs of economic, political, legislative and executive power. They will be truly elective offices, since the electors, organised according to the natural principle of production, will be able at any time to recall their representatives and appoint new ones in their place. In this way, the representatives of working forces in the factories will become the backbone of proletarian state power.

## Multi-party democracy

3) If, however, the workers' representatives in the Central Council of Delegates were to have only one draft plan for the division of the national income laid before them by the government or by the leadership of the sole political party, their role would be limited to a mechanical act of voting. As

we noted earlier, a monopolistic ruling party cannot be a workers' party; it inevitably becomes the party of the dictatorship over the working class, an organisation of a bureaucracy designed to keep the workers and the whole of society disorganised and in line.

For the council system to become the expression of the organised will, organised opinion and organised activity of the masses, *the working class must organise itself along multi-party lines*. In practice, a workers' multi-party system means the right of every political group which has its base in the working class to publish its own paper, to propagate its own programme through mass media, to organise cadres of activists and agitators, i.e., to form a party. A workers' multi-party system requires freedom of speech, press and association, *the abolition of preventive censorship*, full freedom of scholarly research, of literary and artistic creativity. Without the freedom to elaborate, publish, express various ideological trends, without full freedom for the creative intelligentsia, there is no workers' democracy.

In the workers' multi-party system, various parties will propose plans for the division of the national income to the Central Council of Delegates creating conditions for discerning alternatives and for freedom of choice for the Central representatives of the working class and for factory workers electing and recalling their delegates.

We speak of a workers' multi-party system, although it would serve no purpose or even be possible, to limit membership in the parties to workers only. The working class character of the multi-party system would follow from the nature of the state power, organised as a system of councils. This means that parties seeking to influence the centre of political power would be obliged to win influence among the workers.

By the same token, we are against the parliamentary system. The experience of both 20-year periods shows that it carried no guarantee against dictatorship and, even in its most perfect form, it is not a form of people's power. In the parliamentary system, parties compete for votes. Once the votes have been cast, election programmes can be tossed into the wastebasket. The deputies in parliament feel close only to the leadership of the party which nominated them. The electorate, artificially arranged in purely formal districts is atomised and the right to recall a deputy is fictitious. The citizen's participation in political life is reduced to reading statements by political leaders, listening to them on radio or watching them on television, while once every four or five years, he goes to the ballot box to decide which party's representatives are to rule him. Everything happens with his mandate, but without his participation. In addition, parliament is a purely legislative body, which permits executive power to emerge as the only real authority, dominated by men of economic power. Thus, in the parliamentary system, the working class and the whole of society, on the strength of their own vote, are

deprived of influence on the centre of power.

As against this formal, periodic voting, we propose the regular participation of the working class through its Councils, parties and trade unions, in economic and political decision-making at all levels. In capitalist society, above parliament, stands the bourgeoisie, disposing of the surplus product; in the bureaucratic system, above the fiction of parliament, the central political bureaucracy rules indivisibly. In a system of workers' democracy, if it takes a parliamentary form, the working class will stand above it, organised into councils and having at its disposal the material basis of society's existence — the product of its labour.

## Trade union independence

4) The working class cannot decide directly, but only through its political representation at the central level, how to divide the product it has created. But as its interests are not entirely uniform, contradictions between the decisions of workers' representatives and the aspirations of particular sections of the working class are unavoidable. The very fact of separating the function of management from the function of production carries with it the possibility of alienation of the elected power, at the level of both the enterprise and the state. If the workers were deprived of the possibility of self-defence in the face of the decisions of the representative system, apart from the right to vote (i.e. apart from that very system), then it would turn against those whom it is supposed to represent. If the working class was deprived of the possibilities of self-defence in its own state, workers' democracy would be fraudulent. This defense should be assured by *trade unions completely independent of the state and with the right to organise economic and political strikes*. The various parties, competing for influence in the trade unions, would struggle for the preservation of their working class character.

## Universal education

5) To prevent the institutions of workers' democracy from being reduced to a facade, behind which the old disorder would make a comeback, their democratic forms must be the living expression of the activity of the working masses. Administrators, experts and politicians have the necessary time and knowledge to bother with public affairs while the worker is obliged to stand next to his machine. To take an active part in public life, the worker, too, must be provided with the necessary time and knowledge. This requires a certain number of hours to be set aside weekly from the required paid working time to insure *the universal education of the workers*. During those hours, workers grouped into production complexes will discuss draft economic plans submitted by different parties for the country, fac-

tory or region which are too difficult for popular presentation only if an attempt is made to conceal their class content. The representatives of political parties participating in these hours of workers' education will bring both their programmes and the working class closer to each other.

## A workers' militia

6) In a workers' democracy it will be impossible to preserve the political police or the regular army in any form. The anti-democratic character of the political police is obvious to everyone; on the other hand, the ruling classes have had more success in spreading myths about the regular army.

The regular army tears hundreds of thousands of young people away from their environment. They are isolated in barracks, brainwashed of independent thinking through brutal methods, and taught, instead, a mechanical performance of every order issued by their professional commanders, locked in a rigid hierarchy. This organisation of armed force is separated from society in order that it may, more easily, be directed against society. The regular army, like the political police, is by its very nature a tool of anti-democratic dictatorship. As long as it is maintained, a clique of Generals may always prove stronger than all the parties and councils.

It is said that the regular army is necessary to defend the state. This is true in the case of an anti-democratic dictatorship, where, other than by terror, it is impossible to force the large mass of people to defend a state that does not belong to them. On the other hand, if the masses were allowed to carry arms outside the military organisation, it would create a mortal danger for the system. Consequently, a regular army, for such a system, is the only possible form of defense force.

It is said that the regular army is necessary to defend the state. This is true in the case of an anti-democratic dictatorship, where, other than by terror, it is impossible to force the large mass of people to defend a state that does not belong to them. On the other hand, if the masses were allowed to carry arms outside the military organisation it would create a mortal danger for the system. Consequently, a regular army, for such a system, is the only possible form of defense force.

We have already seen, during the revolutionary wars in Vietnam, Algeria and Cuba, that the armed workers and peasants — if they know what they are fighting for and if they identify their interests with those of the revolution — are not worse soldiers than those in the regular army. This is especially true for small countries threatened by the counter-revolutionary intervention of a foreign power. It has no chance with a regular army; it can defend itself successfully by a people's war. Regular armies are necessary to aggressors who undertake colonial wars and wars of intervention; they are necessary to the anti-democratic dictatorships in order to

keep the masses obedient. This is evident especially in Latin American countries where the army has exclusively the internal function of the police. It can also be observed elsewhere — in Poland, too — as we saw during the events in Pozan. Whether or not the army and the workers actually clash, the regular army always remains an instrument of tyranny over the working class and society, just as a club always remains a means of beating, whether or not its owner actually puts it to that use. In a system of workers' democracy, the regular army does not insure defense against the counter-revolution; on the contrary, it may become the source and the tool of the counter-revolutionary camp. It must therefore be abolished.

To make democracy indestructible, the working class should be armed. This applies, first of all, to the workers in larger industries who should be organised into a workers' militia under the aegis of the Workers' Councils. The military

## “The working class will have to organise itself into a nationwide system of Councils of Workers' Delegates”

experts who will train the workers' militia will be employed by the Workers' Councils and remain subordinated to them. In this way, the basic military repressive force in the state will be directly tied to the working class which will always be ready to defend its own state and its own revolution.

For technical reasons, it is unavoidable to maintain permanent military units within specialised divisions such as the navy, airforce, rocketry etc. The soldiers for those divisions should be recruited among the workers of heavy industry, and during their military service they should remain in touch with their factory teams and retain all their workers' rights.

## Agriculture

7. Agricultural production plays an essential part in the economy and the peasantry too important a role in society for the workers' programme to bypass the affairs of the countryside. The future of agriculture lies, without doubt, with large, specialised industrialised and nationalised enterprises. The technical base for such an organisation of agricultural production can only be created by the industrialisation of agriculture. This requires enormous investments, whose realisation is a problem for the distant future. Under present technical-economic conditions, all

attempts at collectivisation mean depriving the peasant of the land he owns which can be achieved only against his will through the methods of police dictatorship. The result would be a fall in production and a police dictatorship victimising the working class itself. Such collectivisation can be reconciled only with a bureaucratic system; it spells death for workers' democracy.

The free, unlimited interplay of market forces, under conditions of individual ownership of land, and given the present structure of agriculture, leads to capitalist-type farming. It deprives owners of small and scattered holdings of the possibility of concentrating their means of investment, necessary for their development, and consequently shifts the major part of the means of investment in the countryside to the richest farms. It means the rationalisation of the rural economy through a deep crisis, bankrupting the poorest holdings; and it means unemployment and high prices for necessities for the industrial working class. This is acceptable to the technocracy which is naturally sympathetic to capitalist farming, but unacceptable to a workers' democracy.

For the working class, the goal of production is the development of the consumption of the broad mass of people who today live at subsistence level. As we have already seen, the bureaucracy pushes the consumption of the majority of villages even below that level, deprives the peasant economy of its surpluses and agriculture of any prospects of development, because it seeks to minimize the real expenditure on labour and regards social consumption as a necessary evil.

The interests of the working class lie in overthrowing these relationships between the peasant economy and the state; it demands a rapid development of agricultural production — the basis for increased consumption — through the development of the mass of small and medium individual holdings. This makes the working class the spokesman for the majority of peasants and creates the basis for a real alliance between them. To realise their common interests it is necessary, first of all, to overcome the "price scissors" which deprives small and medium peasant holdings of their material base for development, and to tax progressively the richest farms. Second, that part of the product of the peasant's labours intercepted by the state in the form of taxes or in any other way must be — after subtracting sums corresponding to the peasants' contribution to administrative expenditures — returned to the countryside in the form of social and cultural investments and as state economic and technical aid to assist small and dwarf holdings.

To achieve this, the peasantry needs to organise itself on an economic basis and elect its own political representatives. It must set up its own production organisations and find new perspectives for the almost 60% of the peasantry which vegetates on small holdings and has labour surpluses; it is admissible to allow investments in industry to be



blown up out of all proportion. This requires the proper use of labour surpluses in intensive additional production, such as livestock breeding, vegetable and fruit cultivation and such industries as meat packing and fruit canning. This is very difficult, and in the case of processing plants, impossible to achieve with the scattered forces of small holdings. The precondition of success is the creation of associations of small and medium holdings, having at their disposal a labour surplus. These associations, based on the land they possess, on cooperation and on state aid in the form of low-interest credits, participation in small investments, transport guarantees, etc., will then set up small processing plants and, also in common, organise their supplies and marketing. This is the cheapest way to increase the production of deficit-bearing agricultural produce and to invigorate the underdeveloped food industry. It is also the only way of intensifying the work of dwarf and small holdings and simultaneously employing on the spot, the existing labour surplus.

Peasant holdings must be provided with conditions favouring specialisation of production, without which there can be no rational husbandry. At the same time, in their contacts with state purchasing enterprises, peasant producers must be organised to defend themselves against artificial lowering of prices. For the isolated peasant producer who enters into a "voluntary" accord with the state is helpless when faced with the state's monopoly of the market. Accordingly, apart from creating production organisations, the rural population must form its own universal *supply and marketing organisation* for the peasant holdings. The richest farms, which are relatively few in number but play an important role given their size and economic strength, will then have no chance to transform themselves into capitalist enterprises; they will be short of cheap labour and cheap land that would otherwise be provided by the failure of weak holdings. The richest farms, however, will have the chance to increase their production on the basis of their own means of investment provided they are able to solve the manual labour shortage through the use of machines.

Inasmuch as industry plays the decisive role in the economy, the direction of industrial production will determine the general direction of the national economy. And the working class, which will have control of its own product will thereby create a general framework for the functions of the other sectors, including agriculture. But within these most general limits, determined by the level, structure and development of industrial production, the peasants must also control the product of their labour. The plans for development, for investments, for economic aid should not be imposed by the state on the peasant population. Otherwise, a specific apparatus of control would come into being and would, finally, also obtain control over the working class. *That is why political self-government by the peasants is a must for*

the good of workers' democracy. It is made possible because the interests of the workers and peasants converge.

Economic organisations of peasant producers are not enough to give peasants control over that part of their product taken over by the state and which is to be restored to the countryside in the form of direct state investments and state aid to peasant holdings. This can be assured only by the *political representation of peasant producers on a national scale*, elected on the basis of economic organisations and peasant political parties.

## Internationalism

8. We do not consider the anti-bureaucratic revolution to be a purely Polish affair. The economic and social contradictions we have analysed appear in mature form in all the industrialised bureaucratic countries: in Czechoslovakia, the GDR, Hungary and the USSR. Nor do we view the revolution as the exclusive affair of the working class in bureaucratic dictatorships. The bureaucratic system, passed off as socialism by official propaganda in both East and West, compromises socialism in the eyes of the masses of developed capitalist countries. The international bureaucracy and its leading force — the Soviet bureaucracy — fear all authentic revolutionary movements in any part of the world. Seeking internal and international stabilisation of its own system, based on the division of the world into spheres of influence with capitalism, the bureaucracy suppresses revolutionary movements at home and uses its influence over foreign official Communist parties to impede the development of revolutionary movements in Latin America, Asia and Africa. The anti-bureaucratic revolution is, therefore the concern of the international workers' movement and of the movement for colonial revolution.

Like every revolution, the anti-bureaucratic revolution threatens the established world order and, in turn is threatened by the forces guarding that order. The international bureaucracy will try to crush the first country or countries of the victorious revolution in proportion to the internal forces it will still have at the moment of crisis. Western imperialism will try to take advantage of our revolution to supplant the dictatorship of the bureaucracy with the dictatorship of the capitalist monopolies, which is no way better.

The working class must carry out all these changes in the area of political, social and economic relations in order to realise its own class interest, which is the command over its own labour and its product. Is this programme realistic?

With the initial step toward its realization — making the enterprise independent — the working class would create the conditions for adapting production to needs, eliminating all waste of the economic surplus and the proper use of the intensive factors of economic growth. The same would be carried out

by the technocracy, the difference being that the production goal of the working class is consumption by many, not the luxury consumption of privileged strata. That is why workers' control of production would assure the most radical resolution of the contradiction between an expanded productive potential and the low level of social consumption which impedes economic growth today.

The workers separate class interest coincides with the economic interests of the mass of low-paid white collar employees and of the small and medium holders in the countryside. In their combined numbers, they are the overwhelming majority of the rural and urban population. Since the slavery of the working class is the essential source of the slavery of other classes and strata, by emancipating itself, the working class also liberates the whole of society;

To liberate itself, it must abolish the political police; by doing this it frees the whole of society from fear and dictatorship;

It must abolish the regular army and liberate the soldier in the barracks from nightmarish oppression;

It must introduce a multi-party system providing political freedom to the whole of society;

It must abolish preventive censorship, introduce full freedoms of the press, of scholarly and cultural creativity, of formulating and propagating various trends of social thinking. It will thereby liberate the writer, artist, scholar and journalist; it will create, on the widest possible scale, conditions for the free fulfilment of the intelligentsia of its proper social function;

It must subject the administrative apparatus to the permanent control and supervision of democratic organisations, changing existing relationships within that apparatus. Today's common civil servant will become a man free of humiliating dependence on a bureaucratic hierarchy;

It must assure the peasant control over his product, as well as economic, social and political self-government. It will thereby change the peasant from the eternal, helpless object of all power into an active citizen sharing in making decisions which shape his life and work.

Because the worker occupies the lowest position in the productive process, the working class more than any other social group, needs democracy: every incursion on democracy is first a blow against the worker. That is why workers' democracy will have the widest social base and will create the fullest conditions for the free development of the whole of society.

Because the workers' class interest most closely corresponds to the requirements for economic development and to the interests of society, the working class programme is a realistic one.

Will that programme be realised? That depends on the degree of ideological and organisational preparation of the working class in a revolutionary crisis and therefore also depends on the present activities of those who identify with workers' democracy.

# Stalin's counter-revolution

How did Stalin and the Russian bureaucracy come to power? This extract from 'The Revolution Betrayed' by Leon Trotsky looks at the background.

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.

The rough work of borrowing, imitating, transplanting and grafting, was accomplished on the bases laid down by the revolution. There was, thus far, no question of any new word in the sphere of technique, science or art. 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 farther you go, the more the economy runs into the problem of quality, which slips out of the hands of a bureaucracy like a shadow. The Soviet products are as though branded with the grey label of indifference. 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.

Behind the question of quality stands a more complicated and grandiose problem which may be comprised in the concept of *independent, technical and cultural creation*. The ancient philosopher said that strife is the father of all things. No new values can be created where a free conflict of ideas is impossible. To be sure, a revolutionary dictatorship means by its very essence strict limitations of freedom. But for that very reason epochs of revolution have never been directly favourable to cultural creation: they have only cleared the arena for it. The dictatorship of the proletariat opens a wider scope to human genius the more it ceases to be a dictatorship. The socialist culture will flourish only in proportion to the dying away of the state. In that simple and unshakable historic law is contained the death sentence of the present political regime in the Soviet Union. Soviet democracy is not the demand of an abstract policy, still less an abstract moral. It has become a life and death need of the country.

It is sufficiently well known that every revolution up to this time has been followed by a reaction, or even a counter-revolution. This, to be sure, has never thrown the nation all the way back to its starting point, but it has always taken from the people the lion's share of their conquests. The victims of the first reactionary wave have been, as a general rule, those pioneers, initiators, and instigators who stood at the head of the masses in the period of the revolutionary offensive. In their stead people of the second line, in league with the former enemies of the revolution, have been advanced to the front. Beneath this dramatic duel of "coryphees" on the open political scene, shifts have taken place in the relations between classes, and no, less important, profound changes in the psychology of the recently revolutionary masses.

Answering the bewildered questions of many comrades as to what has become of the activity of the Bolshevik party and the working class — where is its revolutionary



initiative, its spirit of self-sacrifice and plebeian pride — why, in place of all this, has appeared so much vileness, cowardice, pusillanimity and careerism — Rakovsky referred to the life story of the French revolution of the eighteenth century, and offered the example of Babeuf, who on emerging from the Abbaye prison likewise wondered what had become of the heroic people of the Parisian suburbs. A revolution is a mighty devourer of human energy, both individual and collective. The nerves give way. Consciousness is shaken and characters are worn out. Events unfold too swiftly for the flow of fresh forces to replace the loss. Hunger, unemployment, the death of the revolutionary cadres, the removal of the masses from administration, all this led to such a physical and moral impoverishment of the Parisian suburbs that they required three decades before they were ready for a new insurrection.

The axiom-like assertions of the Soviet literature, to the effect that the laws of bourgeois revolutions are "inapplicable" to a proletarian revolution, have no scientific content whatever. The proletarian character of the October revolution was determined by the world situation and by a special cor-

relation of internal forces. But the classes themselves were formed in the barbarous circumstances of tsarism and backward capitalism and were anything but made to order for the demands of a socialist revolution. The exact opposite is true. It is for the very reason that a proletariat still backward in many respects achieved in the space of a few months the unprecedented leap from a semifeudal monarchy to a socialist dictatorship, that the reaction in its ranks was inevitable. This reaction has developed in a series of consecutive waves. External conditions and events have vied with each other in nourishing it. Intervention followed intervention. The revolution got no direct help from the west. Instead of the expected prosperity of the country an ominous destitution reigned for long. Moreover, the outstanding representatives of the working class either died in the civil war, or rose a few steps higher and broke away from the masses. And thus after an unexampled tension of forces, hopes and disillusion, there came a long period of weariness, decline and sheer disappointment in the results of the revolution. The ebb of the "plebeian pride" made room for a flood of pusillanimity and careerism. The new com-

manding caste rose to its place upon its wave

The demobilisation of the Red Army of five million played no small role in the formation of the bureaucracy. The victorious commanders assumed leading posts in the local Soviets, in economy, in education, and they persistently introduced everywhere that regime which had ensured success in the civil war. Thus on all sides the masses were pushed away gradually from actual participation in the leadership of the country.

The reaction within the proletariat caused an extraordinary flush of hope and confidence in the petty bourgeois strata of town and country, aroused as they were to new life by the NEP, and growing bolder and bolder. The young bureaucracy, which had arisen at first as an agent of the proletariat, began now to feel itself a court of arbitration between the classes. Its independence increased from month to month.

The international situation was pushing with mighty forces in the same direction. The Soviet bureaucracy became more self-confident, the heavier the blows dealt to the world working class. Between these two facts there was not only a chronological, but a causal connection, and one which worked in two directions. The leaders of the bureaucracy promoted the proletariat's defeats; the defeats promoted the rise of the bureaucracy. The crushing of the Bulgarian insurrection and the inglorious retreat of the German workers' party in 1923, the collapse of the Estonian attempt at insurrection in 1924, the treacherous liquidation of the General Strike in England and the unworthy conduct of the Polish workers' party at the installation of Pliudski in 1926, the terrible massacre of the Chinese revolution in 1927, and, finally, the still more ominous recent defeats in Germany and Austria — these are the historic catastrophes which killed the faith of the Soviet masses in world revolution and permitted the bureaucracy to rise higher and higher as the sole light of salvation.

As to the causes of the defeat of the world proletariat during the last thirteen years, the author must refer to his other works, where he tried to expose the ruinous part played by the leadership in the Kremlin, isolated from the masses and profoundly conservative as it is, in the revolutionary movement of all countries.

Here we are concerned primarily with the irrefutable and instructive fact that the continual defeats of the revolution in Europe and Asia, while weakening the international position of the Soviet Union, have vastly strengthened the Soviet bureaucracy. Two dates are especially significant in this historic series. In the second half of 1923, the attention of the Soviet workers was passionately fixed upon Germany, where the proletariat, it seemed, had stretched out its hand to power. The panicky retreat of the German Communist Party was the heaviest possible disappointment to the working masses of the Soviet Union. The Soviet bureaucracy straightway opened a campaign against the theory of "permanent revolution", and dealt the Left Opposition its first cruel blow. During the years 1926 and 1927 the population of the Soviet Union experienced a new tide of hope. All eyes were now directed to the East where the drama of the Chinese revolution was unfolding. The left Opposition had recovered from the previous blows and was recruiting a phalanx of new adherents. At the end of 1927 the Chinese revolution was massacred by the hangman, Chiang-Kai-Shek, into whose hands the Communist International had literally betrayed the Chinese workers and peasants. A cold wave of disappointment swept over the masses of the Soviet Union. After an unbridled baiting in the press and at meetings, the bureaucracy finally, in 1928, ventured upon

mass arrests among the Left Opposition.

To be sure, tens of thousands of revolutionary fighters gathered around the banner of Bolshevik-Leninists. The advanced workers were indubitably sympathetic to the Opposition, but that sympathy remained passive. The masses lacked faith that the situation could be seriously changed by a new struggle. Meantime the bureaucracy asserted: "For the sake of an international revolution, the Opposition proposes to drag us into a revolutionary war. Enough of shake-ups! We have earned the right to rest. We will build the socialist society at home. Rely upon us, your leaders!" This gospel of repose firmly consolidated the *apparatchiki* and the military and state officials and indubitably found an echo among the weary workers, and still more the peasant masses. Can it be, they asked themselves, that the Opposition is actually ready to sacrifice the interests of the Soviet Union for the idea of "permanent revolution"? In reality, the struggle had been about the life interests of the Soviet state. The false policy of the International in Germany resulted ten years later in the victory of Hitler — that is, in a threatening war danger from the West. And the no less false policy in China reinforced Japanese imperialism and brought very much nearer the danger in the East. But periods of reaction are characterised above all by a lack of courageous thinking.

The Opposition was isolated. The bureaucracy struck while the iron was hot, exploiting the bewilderment and passivity of the workers, setting the more backward strata against the advanced and relying more and more boldly upon the kulak and the petty bourgeois ally in general. In the course of a few years, the bureaucracy thus shattered the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat.

It would be naive to imagine that Stalin, previously unknown to the masses, suddenly issued from the wings fully armed with a complete strategical plan. No indeed. Before he felt out his own course, the bureaucracy felt out Stalin himself. He brought it all the necessary guarantees: the prestige of an old Bolshevik, a strong character, narrow vision, and close bonds with the political machine as the sole source of his influence. The success which fell upon him was a surprise at first to Stalin himself. It was the friendly welcome of the

new ruling group, trying to free itself from the old principles and from the control of the masses, and having need of a reliable arbiter in its inner affairs. A secondary figure before the masses and in the events of the revolution, Stalin revealed himself as the indubitable leader of the Thermidorian bureaucracy, as first in its midst.

The new ruling caste soon revealed its own ideas, feelings and more important, its interests. The overwhelming majority of the older generation of the present bureaucracy had stood on the other side of the barricades during the October revolution. (Take for example, the Soviet ambassadors only: Troyanovsky, Maisky, Potemkin Suritz, Khinchuk, etc.) Or at best they had stood aside from the struggle. Those of the present bureaucrats who were in the Bolshevik camp in the October days played in the majority of cases no considerable role. As for the young bureaucrats, they have been chosen and educated by the elders, frequently from among their own offspring. These people could not have achieved the October revolution, but they were perfectly suited to exploit it.

Personal incidents in the interval between these two historic chapters were not, of course, without influence. Thus the sickness and death of Lenin undoubtedly hastened the denouement. Had he lived longer, the pressure of the bureaucratic power would have developed, at least during the first years, more slowly. But as early as 1926 Krupskaya said, in a circle of Left Oppositionists: "If Ilych were alive, he would probably already be in prison". The fears and alarming prophecies of Lenin himself were then still fresh in her memory, and she cherished no illusions as to his personal omnipotence against opposing historic winds and currents.

The bureaucracy conquered something more than the Left Opposition. It conquered the Bolshevik party. It defeated the programme of Lenin, who had seen the chief danger in the conversion of the organs of the state "from servants of society to lords over society". It defeated all these enemies, the Opposition, the party and Lenin, not with ideas and arguments, but with its own social weight. The leaden rump of the bureaucracy outweighed the head of the revolution. That is the secret of the Soviet's Thermidor.

# 1917

## How the workers made a revolution



A Socialist Organiser special 60 pence

## A Socialist Organiser special

Available for 60 pence and 20 pence P&P from SO PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA.



## Stalin's post-war conquests: what the Trotskyists said

Leon Trotsky was the main leader of the revolutionary workers' uprising in Petrograd in October 1917, and the organiser of the Red Army. From 1923 until he was murdered by a Stalinist agent in 1940, he was also the most vigorous and courageous opponent of the new bureaucracy in the USSR from a working-class socialist point of view.

After Trotsky's death, his comrades continued his struggle against that bureaucracy, and tried to continue his work of analysing and assessing the development of the USSR. At the end of World War 2, the Kremlin vastly expanded its area of rule, seizing and pillaging Eastern Europe. Facts became available about the vast system of labour camps in the USSR, where up to ten million people were slaves.

The Trotskyists tried to update their understanding, and summarised their conclusions in Theses at an international congress in 1948. As the Trotskyist movement splintered and became disoriented in the difficult years after 1948, many of those conclusions were garbled or forgotten. But they are still relevant today. We reprint excerpts from the Theses.

It is equally difficult either to express in a single formula the tendency of the Soviet Union's evolution during these thirty years or to apply to it abstract norms like 'progress' or 'regression'. The monstrous growth of the state, the most totalitarian police dictatorship in history; the pitiless crushing of the proletariat; the choking off of all intellectual freedom; the renewal of national oppression; the new rise of the orthodox Church; the restoration of the slavery of woman, 'equal' to man only in order to sweat in the mines or the yards; the introduction of compulsory labour on a gigantic scale — all this certainly constitutes an enormous regression from the Soviet democracy of the first years of the revolution.

But the uprooting of all semi-feudal vestiges, the complete elimination of economic domination by world imperialism, the extraordinary upswing of industry, the transformation of millions of backward illiterate peasants into industrial proletarians who have thus become conscious of modern wants, the rapid development of old towns and the accelerated appearance of new ones, the penetration of electricity and the tractor into the countryside — all this undoubtedly constitutes progress in relation to the semi-barbarous Russia inherited by the revolution from Czarism. This *contradictory process* requires careful avoidance of schematic judgements, in order to analyse precisely present day Soviet society and to determine its internal tendencies of development...

History has not yet pronounced its final verdict on the USSR. Its economy, its state, its culture are undergoing constant change, which is far from having reached a definite conclusion. The composition of its social strata is subject to continuous and rapid variation. The proletariat which emerged from the Czarist regime with the stirring memories of the October Revolution and entered upon the road of industrialisation twenty years ago with enthusiasm, has given way to a working class newly drawn from the peasantry, whose immense creative energies are crippled by the Stalinist dictatorship. The peasantry of today, transformed by the tractor, the *kolkhoz* (collective farm) and the terror of deportations, only resembles superficially the old Russian peasantry. The workers' bureaucracy composed of upstart revolutionaries, has changed into a more or less closed caste, desirous of reviving the customs and nationalist traditions of the former ruling classes.

In spite of its complexity two striking features emerge from this picture. The sum total of the production relations inherited from the October Revolution has proved to possess an infinitely higher capacity of resistance than the Marxists had foreseen. The decisive historic



# The USSR 1917-48

**October 1917:** Revolution.

**November 1917:** Beginnings of civil war.

**Late 1917-early 1918:** British, French and other foreign forces begin intervention to help counter-revolutionaries.

**March 1918:** Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Bolsheviks cede vast areas to Germany in return for peace.

**Summer 1918:** Civil war stepped up. The 'peasant socialist' SR party openly supports counter-revolution; the Mensheviks (an avowedly Marxist party who consider the revolution premature) dither. Both are banned.

**November 1918:** Revolution in Germany. Mensheviks take firm line of critical support for Soviet government and are re-legalised.

**1919:** Most intense period of the civil war. But there are revolutionary uprisings in Europe. April: Soviet Republic in Bavaria (southern Germany). March-August: Soviet Republic in Hungary. Workers put pressure on Western governments to abandon anti-Bolshevik intervention. By the end of the year the Red Army is in a strong position.

**March 1920:** Poland invades Soviet Union.

**Late 1920:** Poles defeated and civil war ends.

**September 1920:** Mass factory occupations in Italy.

**Early 1921:** Collapse of industry: overall it is producing less than one-fifth of its 1913 output. From spring, famine: millions starve to death. Under the emergency regime of 'war communism', where the only method of economic allocation was military commands, the Soviets have withered. With the removal of the immediate threat from the counter-revolutionaries and imperialists, the workers and peasants are less patient. February: mass economic strikes in Petrograd. March: rebellion by sailors at the naval base of Kronstadt, near Petrograd.

**February 1921:** Georgia, previously under a Menshevik government which has made treaties with the Soviet government of Russia, is forcibly annexed. Trotsky protests at the time, though later he writes a pamphlet justifying the annexation against bourgeois criticism. The Mensheviks are banned again in early 1921.

**March 1921:** Bolshevik Party congress brings in New Economic Policy (controlled reintroduction of free market); bans factions inside the party. A debate on trade unions ends in victory for Lenin, who argues for trade-union independence from this 'workers' state with bureaucratic deformations'.

Uprising by German CP in March 1921 ends in fiasco.

**June-July 1921:** At the 3rd Congress of the Communist International, the Bolshevik leaders sound a retreat, calling for an orientation to 'the conquest of the masses' rather than immediately 'the conquest of power'.

**March 1922:** Stalin becomes general secretary.

**May 1922:** Lenin suffers a stroke. He is out of action almost all the time from



Churchill and Stalin dividing up the world at Yalta

now until his death in January 1924.

**Late 1922-early 1923:** 'Lenin's Last Struggle'. Lenin tries to form a bloc with Trotsky to struggle against Stalin and the growing bureaucratism. Trotsky, however, is not decisive enough. The party and state machine falls into the hands of the 'troika' of Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Stalin.

**October 1923:** First Trotskyist opposition manifesto, the 'Platform of the 46'. December: Trotsky's 'The New Course'. Trotskyists argue for more democracy and more industrialisation.

**October 1923:** German CP muffs revolutionary opportunity and is heavily defeated.

**February-May 1924:** 'Lenin levy'. Core of Bolshevik Party swamped in a mass of 240,000 new recruits, many of them careerists. The party has long had unchallengeable control of the Soviets; now the machine has unchallengeable control of the party.

**Summer 1924:** 5th Congress of Comintern, under Zinoviev's leadership, promotes a blustering ultra-left course. Trotsky polemicalises against this. Western CPs 'Bolshevised': given more efficient organisation, but also bureaucratic regimes and bans on factions.

**Autumn 1924:** Trotsky publishes 'Lessons of October'.

**December 1924:** Stalin comes out for 'Socialism in One Country', previously considered an absurdity by all Bolsheviks.

**1925:** Growing tension between Zinoviev and Kamenev, on one side, and Stalin, on the other. Stalin shifts towards an alliance with the right wing led by Bukharin, who advocate a long-term policy based on the richer peasants. The split between Zinoviev and Kamenev and Stalin comes out into the open in December 1925.

**Early 1926:** Joint Opposition (Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev) formed. Intense political battle from summer 1926 to end of 1927, over democracy, industrialisation and planning, and international issues. Comintern is shifting towards a policy of seeking powerful bureaucratic and bourgeois friends, rather than relying on workers' struggles.

**December 1927:** Defeat of the Op-

position. Trotsky and Zinoviev expelled from the party. Zinovievites immediately capitulate. Trotskyists sent into exile in remote parts of the USSR.

**Early 1928:** First signs of Stalin turning against Bukharin and the right wing. Pyatakov and a few other Trotskyists capitulate.

**January 1929:** Trotsky deported from USSR.

**July 1929:** Preobrazhensky, Radek and some other Trotskyists capitulate, on the grounds that Stalin is carrying out the essentials of the Opposition's policy of industrialisation and planning.

**Late 1929-February 1930:** Stalin's wavering policy lurches into a full-scale collectivisation drive. By February 1930 over 50% of peasants are in collective farms. Then there is another lurch backwards; but after that Stalin's change of course becomes stable.

By 1936 90% of peasants are in collective farms. Together with this goes a vast mobilisation of resources for forced-march industrialisation. Results:

- Number of livestock drops by about two-thirds, as panicked peasants slaughter their beasts.
- Consumption per head of meat, lard and butter fall by over 50% between 1928 and 1932. There is severe famine in 1933.
- Real wages fall by over 50% between 1928 and 1935.

- Social inequality and bureaucratic privilege increase.
- Industrial labour force doubles between 1927-8 and 1936.

- Between 1927-8 and 1937, output of electricity increases by a factor of 7; of steel by a factor of 3½; of coal by a factor of 3½. Output of industrial consumer goods, for example wool cloth, remains steady, however.

- All independent trade union activity crushed. Savage labour laws punish 'economic sabotage' by death and absenteeism or leaving your job by jail.

**Late 1932:** Communications between Trotsky and his co-thinkers in the USSR are finally cut off.

**January 1933:** The Comintern's 'third period' policy, pursued since 1928-9, of breakaway 'red' unions, no united front, etc., finally opens the way for Hitler to take power. No self-criticism from the

Comintern: Trotsky abandons the orientation of reform of the Comintern and calls for a new International. Soon afterwards he calls for revolution rather than reform in the USSR.

**February 1934:** Rakovsky capitulates — the most prominent surviving Trotskyist leader in the USSR.

Over the year 1934, Comintern shifts from the 'third period' policy to one of a 'popular front' with bourgeois forces against fascism.

**December 1934:** Assassination of Kirov (the local supremo in Leningrad) becomes the signal for the start of the Great Purges. Not only oppositionists, but also the great majority of the delegates to the solidly Stalinist party congress of 1934, are purged, jailed or executed. By 1940-2 ten million people are in labour camps.

**1936-8:** Moscow Trials.

**March 1938:** Hitler seizes Austria.

**October 1938:** Hitler seizes the German-speaking part of Czechoslovakia.

**March 1939:** Hitler seizes the rest of Czechoslovakia.

**23 August 1939:** Hitler-Stalin pact, including agreement on:

**1 September 1939:** Simultaneous German and USSR invasions of Poland, which lead to World War 2.

**November 1939:** USSR invades Finland, seizes 16,000 square miles of territory.

**July 1940:** A Stalinist agent murders Trotsky.

**June 1941:** Germany invades USSR.

**January 1943:** USSR wins battle of Stalingrad. Tide of war turns against Germany.

**November 1943:** Tito establishes a government in Yugoslavia; in the following months Tito's Communist Party, at the head of a guerrilla army, wins full power in Yugoslavia.

**1944-45:** USSR army advances through Eastern Europe, winning control over some 80 million people. Coalition governments are set up, sometimes including monarchists and fascists, but with Communist Party members in key ministries. USSR also occupies northern Iran, but is forced by diplomatic pressure to withdraw in 1946.

**February 1945:** Yalta conference between US, Britain and USSR.

**May 1945:** Germany surrenders.

**July-August 1945:** Potsdam conference between US, Britain and USSR finalises deal worked out at Yalta — partition of Germany; shifting both eastern and western borders of Poland far to the west, putting former Polish territory in the USSR and former German territory in Poland; deporting 15 million Germans from Eastern Europe.

US and Britain concede Kremlin overlordship in Eastern Europe. Stalin repays them by holding West European CPs to collaboration with their capitalist rulers.

**August 1945:** Atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japan surrenders.

**1947:** 'Cold war' between USSR and the West begins. Stalinists in Eastern Europe move to take full control, using the 'salami tactic'. They co-opt some of the political opposition and suppress the rest.

**January 1948:** Stalin condemns Tito. Tito turns to the West for aid.

**February 1948:** 'Prague coup' — CP takes full power in Czechoslovakia.

significance of the revolution is thus borne out in full measure. But at the same time, the possibilities of reaction and regression in all fields, including the economic, within the *framework of these production relations*, have been shown to be infinitely vaster and more dangerous than anyone could have thought. These two factors must stand out clearly from our analysis.

The same complexity likewise appears in the present situation of the USSR, as it has emerged from the war and the first years of the imperialist 'peace'. Although the Soviet Union has come out of the war as the first military power on the European continent, it has not improved either its internal or international situation, relative to capitalism. Internationally, the policy of pillage and bureaucratic expansionism has in no way succeeded in altering the relationship of forces, which has deteriorated as a result of the constitution of a single imperialist bloc. Internally, the reconversion of economy was carried out through a series of violent collisions which assumed the form of a real crisis. The bureaucracy has only maintained itself because of the unstable equilibrium between the proletariat and the restorationist tendencies in Russia itself, and between the world proletariat and the world bourgeoisie, has not yet been upset in one direction or another. But the bureaucracy has proved more than ever incapable of eliminating any of the contradictions undermining its power. More than ever before, the fate of the USSR depends on the fate of the class struggle on a world scale, and for the degenerated workers' state the fundamental alternative remains: *Forward toward socialism, or back toward capitalism...*

*The fundamental contradictions of present Russian economy are the following:*

a) *Contradiction between the production relations on the one hand ('collective ownership of the means of production'), the maintenance of which imperiously demands the restoration of workers' control, the progressive introduction of workers' management of production; and on the other hand, the bureaucratic management of the state and economy, which increasingly endangers the maintenance of this collective ownership, threatened by the pillage of the bureaucracy ('the bureaucracy digs into collective property as into its own pockets') and by the more and more pronounced tendency toward stagnation in the development of productive forces. This is concretely expressed by a more and more manifest diminution in the rate of accumulation.*

b) *Contradiction between the tendency toward centralisation, coordination and conscious planning of economy inherent in the production relations and the tendency toward primitive accumulation, the crystallisation of a 'parallel' economy of simple commodities and toward anarchy resulting from the failure to satisfy the masses' needs by the bureaucratically managed economy. "The tendency toward primitive accumulation, created by*

want, breaks out through innumerable pores of the planned economy" (Trotsky).

...The bureaucracy has been incapable of ensuring a harmonious development of production, a diminution of the contradiction between town and country, an easing of the sharpness of social contradictions. To attain these ends, economy would have had to be oriented first and foremost toward a satisfaction of the needs of the masses; the aims of the plan would have had to be calculated and controlled by the intervention of millions of producers, economic progress would have had to be measured in terms of the progressive rise of the masses level of consumption and education. However, the bureaucracy defends the essence of the production relations inherited from October only as a basis for its privileges, and not as a basis for socialist development. Under these conditions, the preservation of the regime which collides more and more with the immediate and historic interests of the masses, could only be accomplished through the imposition of the most totalitarian police dictatorship in history. The development of productive forces, while developing the needs of the whole population, has only assured the satisfaction of the needs of a privileged layer and has tremendously accentuated social inequality instead of reducing it. The bureaucratic regime, substituting a spirit of lucre, coercion, arbitrariness and terror for revolutionary devotion, creative energy, the critical spirit and free initiative of the masses as the motive power of planning, has corrupted the latter at its roots ...

The more the bureaucracy tries to embrace in its plan all of the country's productive forces, the more the latter escape its hold. Theft on a gigantic scale, migration of millions of workers, peasants and even technicians, the development of the free market, both peasant and handicraft, are the clearest signs of this tendency. To counteract these, the bureaucracy can no longer appeal to material interest. It must resort primarily to terror. Large-scale compulsory labour camps, the regimentation of the whole of social life, the arbitrary imposition of all living and working norms, give more and more of a caste character. In this trait is summed up the reactionary role of the bureaucracy and its incapacity really to keep in check the disintegrating forces which it has itself unleashed. Under these conditions, the progressive character of the production relations means nothing else but that a change in property relations is not necessary for the overthrow of the bureaucracy. The production relations and bureaucratic management are more and more inextricably bound up. Consequently, the progressive character of the Russian economy which is determined by its capacity to develop the productive forces, tends to become eliminated by the bureaucracy. The greatest attention must be devoted to the study of this development...

Not only does collective ownership in Russia today not have a socialist character, but it is becoming more and

more inadequate to guarantee by itself, that is, without the political overthrow of the bureaucracy, any further economic progress. The fall of productive forces resulting from the war only emphasises the tendency inherent in bureaucratic management, of becoming more and more an absolute brake on economic progress...

If we apply the term 'degenerated workers' state' to this social organism, we are perfectly aware of the necessity to constantly bring up to date the complete and precise meaning of this definition. In reality, it is impossible to give any exact definition of present Russian society without a lengthy description. The relative superiority of this formula in comparison with all the others proposed up till now lies in this, that it takes into account the historic origin of the USSR and at the same time emphasises its non-capitalist character and the instability of its social relations, which have not yet acquired their final historic physiognomy, and are not likely to in the next few years...

From an uncontrolled caste, alien to socialism, the bureaucracy has become an uncontrollable caste, mortally hostile to socialism both in Russia and on a world scale. It possesses all the reactionary traits of the old owning classes — parasitism, waste of the surplus social product, cruelty toward the oppressed, exploitation of the producers. But it does not possess any of their progressive features, connected with a necessary historic function of introducing and defending an economic system that is superior from the standpoint of the division of labour and the ownership of the means of production.

If its regime seems to be 'more stable' than the decadent capitalist regime, this is exclusively due to the fact that it has succeeded in using to its own advantage production relations which are infinitely superior to those of capitalism. In reality the bureaucracy has, during the past twenty years, occupied a much less stable position in Russian society than even the most decadent bourgeoisie occupies in its society. It has no juridical or economic safeguards of its privileges. It is in constant fear, not only of losing its privileges but also of losing its individual

freedom and life; terror weighs on its privileged layers just as heavily as on the masses. The success of every bureaucrat does not depend on his birth, wealth, personal capabilities or on the success of his work, but on the arbitrariness of the hierarchy. Not only has the bureaucracy not worked out a distinct ideology, not only does it not have the instinct or characteristic of every social class, but in the course of the unceasing transformations which it has undergone, and as a result of the terrible blood-letting entailed by the consecutive purges, it has become demoralised even before it could attain an understanding of its role.

...The *foreign* policy of the bureaucracy has undergone an essential and definite change following the Second World War. Before this war, that policy was based on the possibility of *neutralising* the pressure of the capitalist environment on the USSR by setting off against one another the antagonistic imperialist blocs, and to a lesser extent, by manipulating 'national' Stalinist parties. The subjective reflection of this policy was the theory of 'socialism in one country' which was based on the conception of a more or less gradual development of productive forces in Russia, independently of the development of the capitalist world.'

The disappearance of German, Japanese, Italian and French imperialisms as first-rate powers and the extreme weakening of British imperialism, have placed the Soviet bureaucracy face to face with American imperialism. The latter has more or less succeeded in setting up a 'capitalist united front' against the USSR. The united front is not based on the 'fear' of the 'revolutionary' nature of Stalin...

'Defend what remains of the conquests of October' is a *strategic* line for the revolutionary party, and not alone a 'slogan'. This strategic line has its historic justification; it must also be seen, in each concrete situation, in what tactical form it is to be applied within the framework of the Fourth International's *general strategy* of world revolution.

The historic justification of this strategy derives from four fundamental

considerations:

a) The historic superiority of the Russian production relations vis-a-vis those of the capitalist world;

b) The objective weakening of world imperialism resulting from the exclusion from its market of the Russian sphere;

c) The crushing of the USSR by imperialism would historically signify an enormous step backward; for the great mass of the workers, this would not signify a defeat of Stalinism as such, but of Communism itself.

d) The necessity of preserving what is left of the conquests of October, as a condition — not sufficient, but necessary — for a socialist development of economy.

By defending the remnants of the conquests of October we do not in any way consider the USSR as a whole. On the contrary, we believe that the policy and the very existence of the Stalinist bureaucracy constitute a permanent threat to all that is, in our opinion, still worth defending...

It will be necessary to continue this revolutionary class struggle consistently and uninterruptedly in the case of the occupation of any given country by the Russian army, even though the revolutionary forces clash with the Russian army, and also in spite of the military consequences which this might entail for the Russian army in its operations against the imperialist military forces. In any case, the use of military means remains subordinated to the necessities of the revolutionary class struggle of the proletariat in whatever countries it may be. Thus, our defence of the USSR remains identical in all cases with the continuation of the revolutionary class struggle...

It is particularly important to stress the following points.

a) It would be the gravest mistake to apply the strategy of the 'defence of the USSR against imperialism' to the different tactical diplomatic or military manoeuvres of the bureaucracy, to its temporary retreats, to the concessions which it is forced to make to imperialism within the framework of international power politics. 'Defend what is left of the conquests of October' means, in the face of these problems to denounce the reactionary character of the Stalinist policy which lays the most solid bases for a concentration of petty bourgeois, peasant, etc. forces in the camp of imperialism and fundamentally discredits every notion of communism in the eyes of the proletariat. This means, under all circumstances, not to remain silent on a single crime of the bureaucracy, not to offer an apology for a single one of the monstrous manifestations of its policy, which constitutes the main break on a revolutionary development of the workers' struggles.

b) All formulas along the line of 'last bastion of the revolution', 'socialist economy', 'factories belonging to the workers', 'workers and peasants' power' which constitute gross deformations of a Marxist definition and tend to create illusions regarding the nature of the Stalinist dictatorship, thus discrediting the Fourth International, must be expunged from our vocabulary.



The slogan reads: "The Friendship, the Example, the Aid, of the Soviet Union are the guarantee of the fulfilment of the six-year plan".

# Is the USSR Imperialist?

By John O'Mahony

**The US is a brutal imperialist power. This scarcely needs to be said on the left. But many on the left think that we should align ourselves with the USSR and with its gambits in arms diplomacy. They believe that condemnation of the USSR implies cold-war bigotry and jingoism, like that expressed in the memorable phrase of one of Reagan's script-writers about 'The Evil Empire'.**

Socialists have no time for this chauvinism. But we should have no time for dishonest cant either. Or for the ignoble thought that we should not bother too much about the evils of the Russian system because we want peace with that system at all costs. Socialists want peace; but socialists who make political and ideological peace with the vile oppression of the working class and of subject nationalities which is Stalinism are selling their socialist birthright. We should be as bigoted against oppression in the USSR and by the USSR as we are bigoted and irreconcilable against the oppressions of capitalism at home and abroad.

For what is the superpower conflict about? Our world is dominated by two power blocks — one led and loosely dominated by the US, and the other tightly dominated by the USSR. Nothing less than the future of humanity depends on the prevention of all-out nuclear war between these blocks.

Nuclear peace has been preserved for four decades on the basis of a balance of nuclear terror. Wars between the blocks have been confined to Korea and Vietnam, and have involved not the USSR but North Korea and China, and North Vietnam. Conflict has otherwise been confined to the struggle for influence and dominance in the Third World.

The US's typical ally in this competition has been the right-wing military-based regime linked to archaic and corrupt local oligarchies and ruling classes. The USSR's best allies have been the local — usually peasant-based — Communist Parties and their military formations. Those Stalinist movements have channelled, and organised into powerful forces for social change, nationalist grievances as well as the social discontent of workers, peasants and urban petty bourgeois.

But the superpower conflict is not a contest between progress and reaction. The international Stalinist movement, linked to the USSR, has shown itself to have a dual character. It is sometimes capable of being revolutionary against capitalism and pre-capitalist systems — but always it is simultaneously counter-revolutionary against the working class. Mobilising peasants and, sometimes, workers to gain power, it imprisons the working class in a totalitarian vice once



**Stalin**

it has succeeded in gaining and stabilising control.

During and after the Second World War, the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy demonstrated first that it could survive, then that it could expand, and finally that it could replicate itself in countries as distant and as different as China and Cuba. The bureaucracy has shown itself to be more stable and durable than Trotsky, who saw it as a transitory and aberrant freak, believed possible. The pattern of the bureaucracy's rise is perfectly plain in retrospect.

In the decade between the final crushing of the working class Left Opposition in 1927 and the Moscow Trials of the mid '30s, the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy took to itself all the worst characteristics of a ruling class. In 1928 it faced down the revolt of resurgent capitalist forces — the kulaks and the NEP-bourgeoisie — and, as Trotsky later (1940) put it, made itself the sole master of the surplus product.

Slave-driving the working class, and converting many millions of workers and peasants literally into slaves in labour camps, the USSR rapidly industrialised. Surrounded by hostile imperialist powers, the bureaucracy manoeuvred and fought for advantage, and began to compete with those powers on something like equal terms.

In mid 1939 it signed a pact with Hitler's Germany which freed the hands of the Nazi regime to unleash the Second World War, and gained for the USSR partnership with Hitler in the partition of Poland and Nazi acceptance of Russian annexation of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, the three Baltic states since incorporated into the USSR. Various other spheres of joint activity were discussed between the Nazis and Stalin, including invasion of then British-controlled India. One of the reasons why they fell out was a dispute over whose sphere of influence Bulgaria was in.

The sudden Nazi invasion of the USSR in June 1941 came close to toppling the Stalin regime, but by 1943 the

tide had turned and Stalin's armies began a relentless march west, at the very heart of Germany.

At Yalta in 1944, Russia's control of Eastern Europe was acknowledged by the big capitalist powers. There followed two or three years of interregnum during which Stalin's armies, allied to largely (though not entirely) manufactured local CPs, established iron totalitarian control in occupied Eastern Europe and Germany. Stalin had been forced by US pressure in 1946 to evacuate the northern part of Iran, which the USSR had invaded in 1941; and his plea to the UN that the USSR should be given 'the Mandate' over former 'Italian' North Africa (Libya) was unsuccessful. But by 1948 Stalin's system had extended itself to incorporate vast areas of Europe and about 90 million people.

That is where it is today, acting as a brutal occupying power. It used military force to repress the German workers in 1953, the Hungarian people in 1956, and the Czechs in 1968. It used the threat of it to limit and ultimately destroy Poland's Solidarnosc in 1980-1.

This, too, is an imperialist system, and one which today holds far more people in direct subjugation than any other imperialist power now existing. Even within the USSR's own frontiers a majority of the people belong to oppressed nationalities — like the 50 million Ukrainians, for example, who are subject to a relentless 'Russification' policy.

The argument used by most Marxists against defining the USSR as imperialist goes something like this. Imperialism in the 20th century means monopoly capitalism and its drive to expansion. Russia is not monopoly capitalist, therefore it cannot be imperialist. But this is using categories, definitions and labels not to facilitate thought but to prevent it; not to make sense of the facts, but effectively to deny them.

If this approach is pursued consistently, it must result in the denial that there has ever been in history an imperialism other than monopoly-capitalist imperialism; and that would still leave the Stalinist USSR to be linked in history with a vast number of imperialisms which were not based on monopoly capitalism, thereby defining monopoly-capitalist expansionism as some sort of aberration. That is decadent logic-chopping, not Marxism.

This nonsense passes for Trotskyism, or even 'orthodox' Trotskyism, on this question. But in fact Trotsky himself had a different position. In 1939 he recognised the 'element' of imperialism in Stalin's policy, and he did so in words that leave little doubt about what he would have made of the gigantic fact of the USSR's post-war expansion.

The USSR did expand, and for over 40 years it has managed to hold on to what it got, in face of every pressure from capitalist imperialism short of all-out war. After the defeat of Hitler's



Germany the USSR was the second strongest military power in the world, overshadowing Europe and matched only by the US. In response to the USSR's settled control of Eastern Europe the US and its allies resorted to cold war and preparations for a third world war. The USSR's power neutralised the early US monopoly of the atom bomb, balancing the threat of the A-bomb's use with the threat to take Western Europe should it come to war.

By the time Western Europe had been built up economically and militarily so as to have some chance of standing up to Stalin's armies, or at least for long enough for the US A-bombs to tip the balance, the USSR had broken the US monopoly and had its own nuclear bombs. Instead of world war 3 there was prolonged cold war, supplemented by the Korean and Vietnam wars.

On the other side, the old colonial powers, France and Britain, came out of the war enfeebled and weak. Powerful nationalist movements confronted them in the colonies, some Stalinist-influenced or controlled. The Chinese Stalinists won power in the biggest semi-colony on earth in 1949, and the Vietnamese in the north of their country in the mid-'50s.

The US aspired not to set up its own colonial block, displacing France and Britain, but to win hegemony in the non-Stalinist world on the basis of its great economic strength. It prised open the old exclusive trading blocks and nudged Britain and France towards the dissolution of their colonial empires.

A powerful wave of rationalisation and integration of the capitalist world developed, and a growth of almost free trade under the economic hegemony of the US giant. The cold war unfroze in the '50s, and not even the Vietnam war brought it back to the icy level of the late '40s and early '50s.

Then, in the 1970s, the US's unchallenged hegemony in the capitalist world came to an end. It was defeated in the Vietnam war, and faced with intense and vigorous competition from Europe and Japan. The USSR expanded its influence in Africa, and at Christmas 1979 it invaded Afghanistan to stop the defeat of its client regime there. The invasion alarmed the capitalist world and simultaneously allowed it to justify a renewed military drive to US and international public opinion. Seven years of renewed intense cold war followed, accompanied by hot wars in Afghanistan — 'the USSR's Vietnam' — and in Central America.

Peace will not be helped by pretending that either of the two bloody superpowers is other than what it is. The real road to peace lies not in negotiations between capitalist and bureaucratic imperialists, but in a different direction — the direction of consistent democracy in international affairs and the overthrow of the imperialists by the working class, East and West.

That road to peace was mapped out in a magnificent document addressed to the peoples of the world — and in the first place to the working class of every

country — by the Russian Bolsheviks on 8 November 1917, the day after the Russian working class took power. Naturally some of the specific conditions have changed, but in its fundamentals this programme is as fresh and as adequate today as it was when the Congress of Soviets — that most democratic, and at the same time most revolutionary, of representative assemblies — proclaimed it to a blood-drenched and war-weary world 70 years ago. Excerpts:

**"The Workers' and Peasants' government created by the revolution of 6-7 November and backed by the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies calls upon all the belligerent peoples and their governments to start immediate negotiations for a just and democratic peace.**

**By a just, or democratic, peace... the government means an immediate peace without annexations (i.e., the seizure of foreign lands, or the forcible incorporation of foreign nations) and indemnities...**

**In accordance with the sense of justice of the democracy in general, and of the toiling classes in particular, the government interprets the annexation, or seizure, of foreign lands as meaning the incorporation into a large and powerful state of a small or feeble nation without the definitely, clearly and voluntarily expressed consent and wish of that nation, irrespective of the time such forcible incorporation took place, irrespective of the degree of development or backwardness of the nation forcibly annexed to, or forcibly retained within, the frontiers of the given state, and finally, irrespective of whether the nation inhabits Europe or distant, overseas countries.**

**If any nation whatsoever is forcibly retained within the boundaries of a given state, if, in spite of its expressed desire — no matter whether that desire is expressed in the press, at popular meetings, in party decisions, or in protests and revolts against national oppression — it is not permitted the right to decide the forms of its state existence by a free vote, taken after the complete evacuation of the troops of the incorporating or, generally, of the stronger nation, without the least pressure being brought to bear upon it, such incorporation is annexation, i.e., seizure and coercion.**

**The government considers that it would be the greatest of crimes against humanity to continue this war for the purpose of dividing up among the strong and rich nations the feeble nationalities seized by them, and solemnly declares its determination to sign immediately conditions of peace terminating this war on the conditions indicated, which are equally just for all peoples without exception...**

**While addressing this proposal for peace to the governments and peoples of all the belligerent countries, the Provisional Workers' and Peasants' Government of Russia appeals in particular to the class conscious workers of the three most advanced nations of mankind, the largest states participating in the present war, namely, Great Britain, France and Germany.**

**For these workers, by comprehensive, determined and supremely energetic action, can help us to bring to a successful conclusion the cause of peace, and at the same time the cause of the emancipation of the toiling and exploited masses of the population from all forms of slavery and all forms of exploitation.**

**The Workers' and Peasants' Government created by the revolution of 6-7 November and backed by the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies, must begin immediate negotiations for peace.**

**Our appeal must be directed both to the governments and to the peoples. We cannot ignore the governments, for that would delay the possibility of concluding peace, and the people's government dare not do that; but we have no right not to appeal to the peoples at the same time. Everywhere there are differences between the governments and the peoples, and we must therefore help the peoples to interfere in the question of war and peace.**

**We will, of course, insist upon the whole of our programme for a peace without annexations and indemnities. We shall not retreat from our programme; but we must deprive our enemies of the opportunity of declaring that their conditions are different from ours and that therefore it is useless to start negotiations with us. No, we must deprive them of that advantageous position and not advance our terms in the form of an ultimatum. Therefore the point is included that we are ready to consider all terms of peace and all proposals. We shall consider them, but that does not necessarily mean that we shall accept them...**

**We are combatting the duplicity of governments which in words talk of peace and justice, but in fact wage annexationist and predatory wars. There is not a single government that will say all it thinks. We, however, are opposed to secret diplomacy and will act openly in the eyes of the whole people. We do not, and never did, close our eyes to the difficulties. War cannot be ended by refusal, it cannot be ended by one side only...**

**In proposing the conclusion of an immediate armistice, we appeal to the class conscious workers of the countries have done so much for the development of the proletarian movement. We appeal to the workers of England, where there was the Chartist movement, to the workers of France, who have in repeated insurrections displayed the strength of their class consciousness, and to the workers of Germany, who waged the fight against the Anti-Socialist Law and have created powerful organisations...**

**The government and the bourgeoisie will make every effort to unite their forces and drown the workers' and peasants' revolution in blood. But the three years of war have been a good lesson to the masses; Soviet movements in other countries, the mutiny of the German fleet, which was crushed by the Junkers of the hangman Wilhelm... The workers' movement will triumph and will lay the path to peace and socialism".**

**WORKERS' LIBERTY**

## Pamphlets

### Arabs, Jews and Socialism

The debate on Palestine, Zionism and Anti-Semitism including Trotsky on Zionism) **Price £1.80**

### Is the SWP an alternative?

By Clive Bradley, Martin Thomas and Paddy Dollard.

The sectarians tested against South Africa, the socialist struggle in the Labour Party, Ireland and the miners' strike.

### Eric Hobsbawm and SDP Communism

By John McLroy. Price 50p

### Lenin and the Russian Revolution

By Andrew Hornung and John O'Mahony. Price 50p

### 'Women in a man's job'

By Jean Lane. Price 50p

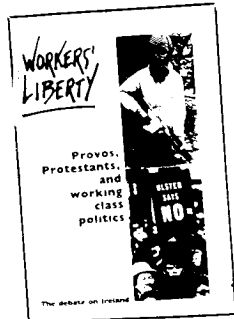
### Marxism, Stalinism and Afghanistan

Second edition. Price 80p

## Workers' Ireland series

No.1: After the Anglo-Irish accord by John O'Mahony, and debate with Sinn Fein. Price £1

## THE DEBATE ON IRELAND



A unique confrontation between the views on the left. What sort of united Ireland could win the support of Protestant workers? What way to working class unity?

Workers' Liberty no.5 the debate on Ireland. Price £1

Please include 20p p&p. Available from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA

# SUBSCRIBE!

Get Socialist Organiser delivered to your door by post. Rates(UK) £8.50 for six months, £16 for a year.

Name .....

Address .....

Please send me 6/12 months sub. I enclose £..... To: Socialist Organiser, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

## Get your copy!



## SUBSCRIBE TO WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK!

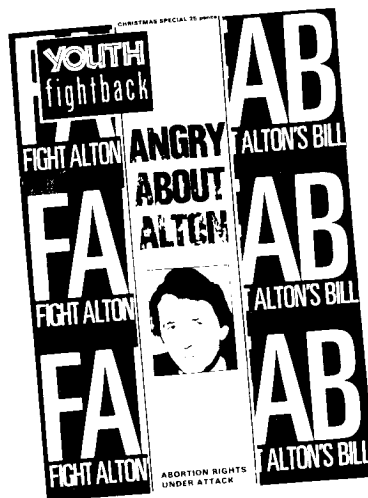
Get WF delivered to your door each month by post. Rates £1.50 for six months, £2.50 for a year.

Name .....

Address .....

Please send me 6/12 months subscription to WF. I enclose £..... To: WF, Po. Box 823, London SE15 4NA. Cheques payable to Women's Fightback.

**YOUTH FIGHTBACK**  
Paper of the left in the Labour Party Young Socialists.  
25 pence + p&p  
Available from:  
33 Hackworth Point  
Rainhill Way  
London E3



**WORKERS' LIBERTY**

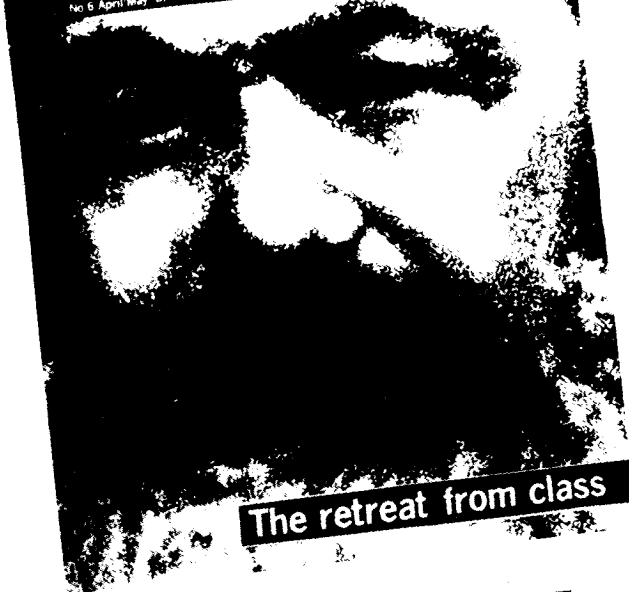
The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of sex or race.

Karl Marx

For almost forty years we have stressed the class struggle as the most immediate driving power in history and, in particular, the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as the great lever of the modern social upheaval; therefore it is impossible for us to ally ourselves with people who want to eliminate this class struggle from the movement. The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself.

**WORKERS' LIBERTY**

No. 6 April-May 87 90p



**The retreat from class**

**WORKERS' LIBERTY**



**Israel and the Palestinians**



**Le Pen: A Hitler for the 1990s?**

## Subscribe to Workers' Liberty!

One year (nos.7-12): £5 (multi-reader institutions £10). Special offer: complete run of back numbers (nos.1-5), plus sub for nos. 7-12, for £7 (institutions £15).

Name .....

Address .....

Send me: Nos.7-12/ Nos.7-12 and 1-5  
I enclose: £5/ £7/ £10/ £15 (delete as appropriate).  
Send to WL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. Cheques payable to Socialist Organiser.