

# Militant

## International Review

Number 38

Autumn 1988

Price 90p

### EYEWITNESS IN ARMENIA

ТРЕБОВАНИЕ ЗАБРАТОВКИ  
ПРИЗНАНИЕ 1915 ГЕНОЦИДА  
СУМГАИТ 1988 - МЯСИС...  
ЗАЩИТИТЬ АРМЯНСКИЙ НАРОД ОТ  
ДАЛЬНЕЙШИХ ПОПЫТОК ГЕНОЦИДА

Plus... Gorbachev and the left  
Market Socialism? 1905  
Women in the USSR

**The cover photo depicts part of a mass demonstration in Yerevan. The banner reads: 'We demand a strike against the 1915 genocide and Sumgait 1988. For the defence of the Armenian people against further acts of genocide.'**

Printed and published by *Militant Publications*, 3/13 Hepscoot Road London E9 5HB

ISBN 0906582 121

---

# Militant

---

## International Review

---

3/13 Hepscott Road London E9 5HB.

Editor: Alan Woods.

### Contents

**Editorial: Britain — The real situation.....3**

---

**Gorbachev and the left.....7**

By Peter Taaffe.

**MIR Exclusive: Eyewitness in Armenia .....15**

**Women in the Soviet Union .....19**

By Jen Pickard.

---

**A reader's letter and a reply: why has the slump been delayed? .....24**

**The market economy or socialist planning.....26**

By Bob McKee

**Global pollution threatens ecosystem breakdown.....32**

By Ronnie Sookhdeo

**The history of Bolshevism, part nine.....35**

By Alan Woods

**Book Reviews .....44**

---

# Britain: The real situation

## Editorial

A day does not pass without a new upheaval in social relations in the countries of the ex-colonial world. The poorest country in the Western hemisphere, Haiti, has experienced a new stage in its continuing revolution since the overthrow of the Duvalier regime. General Namphy has been expelled by an NCO coup in the army and many Duvalierist generals have been arrested or retired. The dreaded Ton Ton Macoutes who renewed their reign of terror under Namphy have fled for their lives. In Chile, the collapse of the Pinochet dictatorship is in its beginning after his defeat in the October plebiscite. In Algeria there was a virtual insurrection as the poor revolted against the austerity imposed by the privileged strata within the ruling FLN at the behest of the International Monetary Fund.

These developments are like the heat lightnings before a new storm of class struggle in the Third World. These new nations have seen one upheaval after another since 1945, but there are even more momentous battles ahead. Workers and peasants in these countries show no lack of will to struggle, but what is missing is the subjective factor: a party capable and willing to go all the way and with the

theory, perspectives and sure understanding of the tasks of revolution.

For the first time, there is a simultaneous crisis throughout the Stalinist countries: with Gorbachev's attempt to improve the state of the economy leading to political upheavals in many of the nations, such as Armenia and Latvia, which make up the Soviet bureaucracy's fiefdom. And this process is having repercussions throughout Eastern Europe as recent developments in Poland and Czechoslovakia demonstrate. But the solution will not be found in 'a turn to the market' or in 'decentralisation' as the economic crisis in Hungary and the events in Yugoslavia prove. This issue of the *MIR* again takes up these developments and shows the complete failure of the leaders of the labour movement, both right and left, to understand the processes unfolding in the Stalinist regimes.

Superficially, in contrast to these other sectors of the world, there appears to be comparative social peace in the advanced capitalist countries.

But this merely masks underlying processes which are leading to a new period of upheaval unequalled since the inter-war period.

In Britain we have had nine years of 'Thatcherism'. The Tory government of the 1980s has systematically attacked the 40 per cent of the population who are below or around the poverty line. The rich have made a killing through a bonanza of tax concessions to higher income receivers, to industry and above all to property and financial speculators in the City of London.

In the last few years of the Tory government there has been a 'boom' in the economy. Manufacturing production has finally passed its peak last, achieved in 1979—it has taken nine years under Thatcher for British industry to recover from the ravages of the 1979-81 slump. Nonetheless the Tories have managed to win three elections in a row, despite their attacks on working people. The reasons are threefold: firstly, the luck of a quick victory over General Galtieri with relatively few casualties; secondly, the relative boom in the world and British economy; and last but by no means least, the complete failure of the labour and trade union leaders to provide an effective socialist alter-

native to the Tories.

Each defeat electorally and industrially has tended to confirm the weak-kneed prejudices of the labour and trade union leaders. They have begun to ape the ideas of Thatcherism. That was easy for the small capitalist parties of the Liberals and Social Democrats to do, but now the right-wing of the Labour Party is following suit. Neil Kinnock's attitude towards British capitalism and Thatcherism was expressed most clearly when he baldly stated to delegates at the October Labour party conference: "we have to face the fact that the kind of economy we will be faced with when elected is a market economy, and we have to make that work better than the Tories".

The Labour leaders have abandoned all the socialist content in Labour's programme and, without openly dropping Clause Four, Part Four of the party constitution, have in reality returned to Gaitskellism. Gaitskell's affirmation of capitalism in 1959 also reflected the belief then that capitalism had solved its problems and it was the job of the Labour leaders to make it work better or 'fairer'. In this issue of the *MIR* we explain again the basic superiority of democratic socialist planning over the workings of market forces in meeting the needs of people.

Neil Kinnock received 90 per cent of the vote in the leadership election, although it was nearer two-thirds if you take off the minority votes in the local parties and the unions that went to Tony Benn. And yet he is disliked by trade union leaders, by MPs right and left, and by the rank and file. He won so clearly however, because there is no viable alternative and because the memories of the policies of the last Labour government are becoming dimmer in the minds of the party membership. They do not recall that the Labour government of 1974-9 cut public spending more severely than even Thatcher (by £8bn), and doubled inflation and unemployment, in their efforts to make capitalism 'work better than the Tories'. Neil Kinnock's claim that the most important thing is to win the election without any consideration of the policies, which in fact is to assume that socialist policies are unpopular and would lose an election, is the main argument used to sway trade union leaders and party activists.

However, it is an argument that did not hold sway at all times at the Labour Party conference. As the week went on Neil Kinnock's 'mandate' to 'review policy', in other words to abandon socialism, looked less secure. The party leadership saw conference carry, against its advice, motions for a statutory minimum wage of £135 for a



Neil Kinnock stated that Labour should make "a market economy...work better than the Tories."

35 hour week; for a boycott of the Tories' Employment Training scheme; and most notably for the reaffirmation of the party's commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament. The party leadership was also forced to make a vague commitment to full employment and more spending on pensions and social services; and even public ownership of the utilities that have been privatised by the Tories.

Over the next year however, the Labour leaders will attempt to reverse all these defeats through the policy reviews. They will attempt to jettison all the socialist policies that the party membership joined the party for. Interestingly, in this regard, a recent survey of party members—not activists—of two constituencies in Sheffield, carried in the *New Statesman/New Society* magazine, found that over 50 per cent wanted the next Labour government to nationalise the top 200 companies and more than two-thirds wanted unilateral nuclear disarmament.

## Artificial boom

Neil Kinnock, however, has swallowed the Tory myth that their policies have revived British industry and prosperity. But the present 'boom' and its accompanying apparent social harmony hide the stark truth: that Thatcherism has been a disaster for British capitalism. Relative peace in industrial relations has been bought at a price by employers conceding wage increases above the rate of inflation—in the teeth of opposition from the Tory cabinet, who then took the credit for the rise in the standard of living for those in work to win the last general election.

But the rise in profits for British industry which made possible these concessions on wage increases, has

been at the expense of the sinews, nerves and energy of a reduced workforce. The intensity of labour has been sharply increased so that industry now produces the same output that it reached in 1979 with 30 per cent less workers. The results of this were shown in a survey reported in the *Daily Express* which revealed that 44 per cent of workers in Sheffield had seen their doctor as a result of general stress and illness directly related to the pressure in their workplace.

But workers have grudgingly acceded to this speed-up, partly through what one economist called a climate of industrial relations altered by "fear, competition, decentralisation and collective bargaining", and partly through obtaining increased real wages. But that fear of redundancy has now changed into frustration and even boiling anger at the methods of management in the workplace. The rash of strikes that continues to break out to disturb the industrial peace under the Tories is a product of that growing discontent: the Post Office dispute over management measures and casualisation; the Barrow workers who struck for months over the attempt of employers to reduce holiday entitlements; the seafarers who went into their momentous struggle over shift schedules that would have made them virtual slaves of the P&O management; and the Lancashire textile workers who went into their first strike in 40 years over their poverty pay against the background of rising profits. The class struggle at the workplace is not dead. The recent disputes are just the first bars of the music of the future.

As 1988 passes, the real legacy of Thatcher's policies are being exposed. The present boom was artificially fuelled by the government budget tax cuts for the rich and by an uncontrolled expansion of credit and money. The

Tories have doubled the money supply in three years. As a result inflation is accelerating towards 6 per cent a year and soon could reach the figures of the 1970s. When the Tories faced a rise in unemployment they 'solved' it by fiddling the statistics, now they are planning to do the same with rising inflation by removing mortgage rates from the prices index.

More immediately, Lawson has resorted to raising interest rates to try and 'cool down' demand. British industry under Thatcher has recovered by increasing the work rate of its reduced work force during the 1980s, not by increasing investment in machinery and new techniques. As a result when the credit and money boom took off it could not take full advantage, and foreign imports have flooded the British market, driving up the balance of payments deficit to a forecast £15bn by the end of the year. Britain now has a trade deficit which as a proportion of national output is equal to the USA, whose financial and market power is much greater. Lawson has raised interest rates to try and reduce demand, but this threatens to cut off investment and production while keeping the value of sterling artificially high in foreign exchange markets and so make the deficit worse.

## Fainthearts

The critics of Thatcherism within the Tory party are now raising their heads above the parapet again. Ian Gilmour has predicted that "it is only a matter of time before the party is through with Chancellor Lawson's policies" and Biffen has called Tory Britain a "fat cat society" which will rebound against the government. Now the average wage earner will lose more from increased mortgage costs than was gained from the tax cuts—a recipe for Tory unpopularity. The truth is, as several public opinion polls have revealed, that Thatcher is disliked and loathed by nearly half the population. She is remote from the people and the Tories remain ahead in the polls only because, on the one hand, Thatcherism is apparently working and, on the other, there is no real alternative presented to their policies.

Thus the labour and trade union leaders are desperate to avoid any campaign that might be 'unlawful' and yet the latest measures of the Tories will force people to break the law—and at the same time present wonderful opportunities for defeating Thatcher. With the poll tax and the Housing Bill Thatcher has bitten off more than she can chew. These two laws alone will

provoke a wave of explosions against the government. Already sections of the left, including the Marxists, are leading major movements in Scotland against the poll tax. The labour and trade union leaders just plead for people to 'wait for the next Labour government'. But people cannot wait who cannot pay and there is no guarantee anyway, given Neil Kinnock's policies, that there will be any relief under Labour in 1991-2.

The labour and trade union leaders are cut off from the mood of frustration and anger in the working-class. They are looking backwards at the past **relative** passivity of the workers under the Tory assault. (Of course, it was only relative, given the movement of the miners, the printers, Liverpool council etc and the possibilities that were there to defeat the Tories in each of these struggles.) They are not looking forward to the fight back against the Tories now in its beginnings. These fainthearts have already conceded that they cannot win the next election. A majority of Labour MPs surveyed recently thought Thatcher would win another term!

The Tory government is now heading for stormy waters. It has survived because it appeared to deliver the goods, at least for some sections of the working-class: relatively stable

prices, but faster growing than any other major competitor; rising incomes, although slower than any other major competitor; and falling unemployment, albeit still well above two million. But the economy will enter a calamitous reverse within the next period, as we explain in this issue, and with it the grudging support of millions of workers for the government will vanish like the snows of yesteryear. The collapse of the Tories in Scotland will be repeated in England and Wales through the 1990s.

## Socialism

A recent poll found that over 50 per cent of the electorate would prefer some sort of socialism. Socialist policies would gain immense support if they were explained and campaigned for, while 'Thatcherism with fairness'—the policy of Neil Kinnock—rouses no enthusiasm and Labour continues to fall behind. But neither Thatcher nor Neil Kinnock can ignore the coming economic storm and the political and industrial struggles that will ensue in a period of unexampled turbulence. Then the ideas of Marxism and socialism will begin to transform the trade unions and the Labour party into fighting organisations of the working-class.



## Business Manager's Report

# Step up sales drive for bimonthly MIR

Sales of *MIR* number 37 were the highest ever recorded for a single edition! This magnificent response to our appeal to build the *MIR* saw many areas comfortably surpass their previous highest sales including Birmingham, the Pennines, South East Lancashire, Manchester Withington, Liverpool Garston, Knowsley and the London boroughs of Southwark, Lewisham and Hackney. Bristol, consistently good sellers, sold over 100.

Sales were made not just to regular *Militant* readers. Newham North West supporters sold five *MIRs* on a Saturday morning street sale. Comrades in Watford, having sold out of papers on an estate sale, went round with the *MIR* on its own. While Andy Blake sold four copies to members of his east London Union of Communication Workers branch committee.

Readers' comments revealed that all the articles were well received. But the article discussing strategy and tactics in the battle against the poll tax was particularly welcomed.

This is significant, for it is precisely this type of material that a bi-monthly *MIR* would be more able to carry—articles to arm labour movement activists in struggle.

This task would still be



One reader sold 4 *MIRs* to UCW members. Wherever the *Militant* is sold the *MIR* can, and must, be sold as well.

balanced by articles of a more general theoretical character examining the fundamental processes taking place in the economy, in society and in the consciousness of the working class.

### Discussions

Marxism gives us a scientific understanding of society, with a predicative ability. As Peter Taaffe explains in his article, *Trotsky's Revolution Betrayed*, although written 50 years ago, provides a more modern explanation of the crisis unfolding in the Stalinist regimes than any of today's 'analyses' by the leaders of the labour movement, right or left.

A bi-monthly *MIR* would allow a more timely examination of the pro-

cesses underlying contemporary events, enabling a less general prognosis of likely developments to be drawn. And a more refined analysis provides a more defined guide to action.

Of course, for Marxists, perspectives always have a conditional character, never absolute. They are inevitably incomplete and provisional as facts not available at the time come to light. As we explain in our reply to a reader's letter, this is particularly true in regard to the exact timing of important changes in the world economy.

A more frequent *MIR*, fed by such correspondence from our readers, could play a vital role in checking out the perspectives of Marxism—and its programme,

strategy and tactics—against the actual course of events. This essential participation in the journal by the readers could best be achieved by systematically discussing the contents of each edition in local Marxist Discussion Groups, with readers encouraged to send in their comments.

### Cash

Clearly then a bi-monthly *MIR* would be an important weapon in building the influence of Marxism. The sales achieved for *MIR* number 37 show that a bi-monthly could be financially sustained—if what is now the best sale becomes the 'norm'. The responsibility for achieving that, however, lies in your hands!

PETER TAAFFE, Editor of the *Militant*, examines the response of the left of the British labour movement to the tumultuous events unfolding in the USSR and Eastern Europe.

# Gorbachev and the left



The coming to power of Gorbachev over three years ago was undoubtedly a momentous event in the evolution of the 'Soviet Union'. Gorbachev's attempt at reforming the Stalinist regime has generated colossal interest amongst the working class in the capitalist West. The concept of 'glasnost', (openness) and 'perestroika', (restructuring) have almost become part of everyday language.

Recognising the world significance of this process, the *MIR* and *Militant*, in a series of articles and pamphlets have sought to provide the advanced workers of Britain and the world with an analysis of these events.

In vain does one look for a similar approach in the speeches and writings of the leaders of the labour movement. Predictably, the right wing regurgitate the morsels thrown to them from the ideological dinner table of the bourgeois itself. Thus Neil Kinnock pronounced in May this year "the West (read capitalist West – PT) should encourage Mr Gorbachev's liberalisation." Looking towards Gorbachev's success, in an interview in *New Socialist* Kinnock hoped that "we actually do see achieved the real liberalisation and modernisation of the Soviet Union".

Kinnock's chief ideologist, Bryan Gould, has gone a step further. Obviously recognising a kindred spirit in Gorbachev, he compares the left of the British labour movement to the 'conservatives' in Russia: "we face some of the same problems Mr Gorbachev does. We have our Ligachevs too – the same conservatism and the same fear." *The Independent*, June 4 1988.

## Tribune

But, despite this attempt at a neat amalgam, it would be more accurate to say that the right wing display the same morbid fear of the rank and file of the Labour Party as the Ligachevs do to the working class of the USSR. Gorbachev, as well as Ligachev, are in favour of 'democratic elections' so long as all candidates are 'communists', that is Stalinist bureaucrats. Gould and Kinnock are in favour of 'democratic procedures' within the Labour Party in the selection of parliamentary candidates but in Govan have imposed their own shortlist! But it has been left to Barbara Castle, the ex-left winger and a current Euro MP, writing in *Tribune* in February of this year, to express the real

views of Labour's conservative officialdom on events in Russia and Eastern Europe. She recounts a discussion with a leading Polish bureaucrat and comments: "As I listened, I thought: It must surely be the aim of every sane person to try to prevent disintegration and allow reforms to proceed gradually and progressively. Then they will stick." She approvingly quotes Zbigniew Brzezinski, former Security Adviser to President Carter: "For the West this situation creates a historical setting for an enlightened policy on East-West issues. Massive revolutionary outbreak in the region is not in our interest... gradual change, on the other hand, is desirable. It should be facilitated and it is feasible."

*Militant* has commented many times that the capitalists are as terrified as the Stalinist bureaucracy of a movement of the working class of Eastern Europe and the USSR in the direction of workers democracy. This is confirmed by Brzezinski's statement. But Castle demonstrates that in the final analysis the right wing of the labour movement, in fundamentals, share the outlook of the bourgeoisie on events in the USSR. But a survey of the press and the statements of leading left spokesmen

reveal similar illusions in Gorbachev mixed up with theoretical confusion and bewilderment.

*Tribune*, still naively considered by some as a 'left' journal, has not had one serious analytical article this year on the events in the USSR. Instead its readers are fed a diet of titbits, usually contained in book reviews without any serious attempt to explain what is happening in the USSR. Even Tony Benn has displayed a lack of clarity on the nature of the regimes of Eastern Europe and the USSR. His description of them as 'socialist' is to besmirch the concept of socialism and to confuse leftward moving workers as to the character of these regimes. Similarly, according to the January 1987 *New Socialist*, Michael Foot, when leader of the Labour Party, persisted in inviting 'Soviet representatives' to the Labour Party Conference "because the USSR, in spite of its errors and everything else, is socialist".

Only Eric Heffer alone of leading left spokesmen sheds a little light on what is happening in the USSR. He pointed out that: "The group he (Gorbachev) represents in the Communist Party leadership in the Soviet Union wants to open things up more. While that would not mean a democratic society, it could help open the way to those who are fighting for such a society. In that sense it is very important indeed." As somebody who was expelled from the British 'Communist' Party and who has been influenced by the Marxist analysis of Russian society, strongly represented in the Liverpool labour movement including in his own constituency of Walton, he does not hesitate to describe these regimes as 'Stalinist'. Eric Heffer is located on the side of the working class of these states: "It is interesting to note that out of every workers' upsurge in the Stalinist states, there is always the call for workers' councils, for workers' control and for democratic bodies."

Contrast this with the stand of the leadership of the Scottish Trade Union Congress. They are trying to re-create, on a smaller scale, the infamous Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee which played such a pernicious role in the derailment of the 1926 General Strike. The STUC, according to the *Morning Star* on August 15 1988, announced an agreement "between Campbell Christie, General Secretary of the STUC, and Gennady Yanaev of the All-Union Central Council of Soviet Trade Unions, AUCCTU, setting up a joint committee to be called the Scottish-Soviet Trade Union Committee. It will promote joint social and economic interests". Such a move will do nothing to assist the workers in the Stalinist states who, as the events in Poland have

demonstrated, view 'Soviet trade unions' as the equivalent of company unions in the capitalist West, even less representative of their views than the EETPU in this country. This agreement indicates the baleful influence the 'Communist' Party exercises on the labour movement.

And yet it is precisely in the 'Communist' Party – in all three of them that is – in which the greatest ideological confusion now reigns on the subject of the USSR. Gorbachev's real aims since coming to power and the meaning of the recent Party Conference have revealed the most glaring contradictions in the position of these organisations. There is not the semblance of an explanation as to why Gorbachev has been forced to proceed in the seemingly 'audacious' manner in which he has done so. He himself described Russia as being in a 'pre-crisis' situation on the eve of his assumption of power. It was the absolute impasse of the Stalinist regime which provoked Gorbachev's attempt to carry through what he claims to be "a revolution without shots". In the past Stalinism was a relatively progressive factor in the development of science, technique and the organisation of labour, the productive forces. Now, at least in the USSR and in Eastern Europe, it is an absolute fetter on further progress.

### Why Gorbachev?

There is no disputing the huge historical achievements of nationalisation and a plan of production, notwithstanding the attempts of the bourgeois commentators in the West to denigrate them. But these advantages have been vitiated by the monstrous incubus of the bureaucratic elite that dominates Russian society. Almost 20 million strong, it is numerically greater than the entire working population of South Korea! Any relatively progressive role which it played in the past in supervising the borrowing of industry and technique from the capitalist West and laying the foundations of a modern economy, has now been exhausted. Completely stultifying and clogging up the pores of society, the bureaucracy in the Stalinist states, as with the capitalists in the West, is now an obstacle which prevents further real progress in the development of society.

The signs of decay, including a significant slowing down in the development of the economy, was evident under the Brezhnev regime. Some of the capitalist countries of the West, such as Japan, have recently outstrip-

ped the economic growth of the USSR. Corruption on a gargantuan scale flourished under Brezhnev. This has now been officially revealed in a series of sensational trials, such as the recent one involving Brezhnev's son-in-law. The openly Stalinist wing of the bureaucracy, it has now been revealed, resuscitated a dying Brezhnev who was almost a zombie for six years. Like the supporters of Franco who kept him going on a life support machine at the demise of his regime, the Stalinist Mafia wished to postpone the day of reckoning by hiding behind Brezhnev. Even the former KGB chief, Andropov, when he assumed power, understood the necessity of reforms in order to stave off an impending catastrophe.

The access of the secret police to all layers of society probably convinced them, more than any other section of the bureaucracy, of the bubbling discontent just below the surface of society. Not only was the USSR not "catching up and outstripping the capitalist West" within 20 years, as Khrushchev had promised in 1961, but it was threatening to fall further and further behind. For example, recent figures have revealed that the life expectancy for men was actually falling in contrast to the trends in other advanced industrial countries. The untrammelled rule of the bureaucracy has produced unparalleled ecological disasters and was failing to deliver the 'quality of life' which the mass of the Russian and USSR population was demanding. It is against this background that all the measures of Gorbachev, Andropov's protege, must be viewed.

Gorbachev does not represent some qualitatively new force to 'debureaucratise' Russian society. Like Khrushchev in 1953, he represents an attempt at 'reform from the top' in order to prevent revolution, political revolution, from below. But there are a number of crucial differences in the background against which Khrushchev acted and the situation which Gorbachev faces today. Society in the USSR, and the Russian working class in particular, has undergone a colossal development since 1953. There is not just a highly educated and mighty industrial proletariat, with perhaps the highest cultural level in the world, but one which has completely lost its terror of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Khrushchev's attempts at 'liberalisation' were very carefully circumscribed, the struggle against the old Stalinists restricted to the ranks of the bureaucracy itself. Khrushchev's famous denunciation of Stalin at the 20th Congress of the Russian 'Communist' Party was in secret and the speech has not been distributed in the USSR to this day.

But such is the inertia of Russian society now and so resistant to change is the bureaucracy, particularly the middle layers, that Gorbachev has been compelled to conduct an **open** struggle. Hence 'glasnost' and 'perestroika'. In an attempt to cut down some of the swollen privileges of the middle layers of the bureaucracy he has been compelled to lean on the lower layers of the bureaucracy and even on the working class. But this has in turn conjured up forces which represent a mortal threat to the rule of the bureaucracy. There have been the tumultuous events in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, which represent one of the biggest mass movements in history, with wave after wave of strikes and demonstrations in the past ten months. Also, in the Baltic states of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia the national question has re-emerged with mass demonstrations rivalling those of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia.

Gorbachev has described the situation in Russian society as one gigantic 'debating chamber'. We caught a glimpse of this in the events leading up to the extraordinary conference of the 'Communist' Party which took place in June. Demonstrations of 50,000, 100,000 and 150,000 took place, sometimes in football stadiums, to 'send off', that is to pressurise, delegates to this conference. The intervention of the masses, although still in its elemental stages, has in turn produced turmoil within the bureaucracy.

## Morning Star

Boris Yeltsin, the former Moscow Party Chief, while never going completely outside the limits set by the bureaucracy, nevertheless reflected some of the pressure and discontent of the masses. He did something unprecedented for the bureaucrats, by riding on public transport in Moscow! He sacked a whole layer of the most corrupt officials and policemen. And he expressed dissatisfaction with the 'slow pace of reform', attacking in the process Gorbachev's wife, Raisa, for her lavish lifestyle. This brought him into collision not only with the most openly Stalinist 'conservative' wing of the bureaucracy, represented by Ligachev, but with Gorbachev also, who attempted to adopt a middle position. But the manner of Yeltsin's dismissal from the Politburo in December 1987 showed that behind the thin veneer of 'liberalisation' the Stalinist regime remained intact. He was compelled to make a degrading 'confession' worthy of Stalin's times. He subsequently complained that he had only done this because he was drugged

and dragged from his hospital bed! Yeltsin has since openly called for the removal of Ligachev from the Politburo.

But it was Ligachev and the 'conservative' wing of the bureaucracy who emerged if anything stronger from the recent 'extraordinary' conference. Even here, at a conference of the charmed elite, the huge difficulties confronting the bureaucracy, particularly the Gorbachev wing, found some expression, if only in a muted form. But Gorbachev hit back at the hastily convened Central Committee at the end of September. Gromyko, the former President, has been pensioned off, while Solomentsev was also eliminated from the Politburo. Chebrikov was removed as head of the KGB, and given a relatively minor post dealing with 'legal reform'. Ligachev, on the other hand, was relieved of his position as 'party ideologist' and given the bed of nails of agriculture.

It is clear that Gorbachev, who has now become President as well as party chief, was waiting for such an opportunity to strike back at the conservatives. His latest moves were triggered by the hostile reception which he had received during his Siberian walkabout. These events were a forceful reminder to Gorbachev of the frustration and growing impatience of the Russian working class with the concrete results of his 'reforms'. As commented earlier, it also demonstrated that the working class have lost their terror of Stalinism. Failure to push ahead with these reforms, which were being undermined and frustrated by the bureaucracy, threatened even greater mass discontent.

Gorbachev seized on this to steamroller these measures through the Central Committee. But the manner of his victory speaks volumes as to the real nature of the Gorbachev regime. The Central Committee met precisely for one hour. Only two speakers were allowed: Gorbachev himself and Gromyko who was at least permitted to say 'goodbye', unlike in the past when he would have been sent to a Siberian power station or something worse. The decisions of the Central Committee were unanimous, as was the Supreme Soviet which rubber-stamped Gorbachev as President. This means that the real decisions were taken behind closed doors. So much for glasnost. These changes, however, which were largely anticipated by the June Special Conference, have not fundamentally altered the situation in the USSR.

Needless to say the organ of the 'tankies', the *Morning Star*, was swooning in delight over the conference. On June 28 its editorial declared: "Socialism is the future". It then gave a

thinly veiled apologia for the crimes of Stalinism: "Socialism has not had an easy birth, childhood, or adolescence. There was no shortage of those who wanted to strangle the life out of it because they correctly saw it as posing a threat ultimately to their privileges and wealth... The emergency measures introduced at the beginning to cope with the urgent problems posed by intervention and backwardness were initially intended to be temporary, but they came to acquire forms which persisted long after the need for them had passed away. The result was to build up an accumulation of negative influences, and these came to act as a brake on development, creating ultimately what has been described as a pre-crisis situation." Thus in one phrase, 'negative influences', the crimes of Stalinism are explained away.

Despite the minor 'aberrations' of the slave labour camps, the millions who perished through Stalin's blunder of forced collectivisation, the decapitation of the Red Army through the purges which left Russia enormously weakened at the time of Hitler's attacks, not to say the slaughter of Lenin's closest comrades-in-arms and the annihilation of the last remnants of the Bolshevik Party in the 1930s purges, the *Morning Star* can still happily describe this regime as 'socialist'. All these crimes are still ascribed by the *Morning Star* to one man, Stalin. Their correspondents reporting on the special conference, Roger Trask and Kate Clark, approvingly quote Georgi Arbartov, director of the Institute of US and Canadian Studies: "We have to look at our history... many of the mistakes could have been avoided if Stalin had retired in 1934, and Brezhnev in 1974". There is no question that Stalin was probably insane, particularly towards the end of his days, but the crimes of his regime could not be ascribed to just one man.

## Stalin

As Trotsky pointed out, in his brilliant analysis of the rise of Stalin and of the system of Stalinism, Stalin merely personified the growth of the bureaucracy in Russia. This in turn was the product of the lag of the world revolution and the cultural backwardness of Russia. If Stalin had died in 1934 some other figure would have been promoted from the ranks of the bureaucracy who in fundamentals would have carried out a similar policy, perhaps avoiding some of the more monstrous crimes attributed to Stalin himself. The same process would have developed if Brezhnev had been removed from the scene in 1974. The emergence of Gorbachev has not fundamentally undermined what one

delegate to the conference correctly described as the 'caste of untouchables' which dominate the party, the state and the army, the summits of Russian society.

The columns of the *Morning Star* are full of glaring contradictions on the character of the regime in the USSR. Thus on July 5, 1988 an editorial declares: "Socialism and democracy are inseparable from one another". Yet in their communique from Moscow Kate Clark and Roger Trask declare: "For the first time in memory, a delegate spoke from the tribune against one of the proposals in the Party General Secretary's report." Why had no delegate spoken against the General Secretary in the past? It is no accident that this question is never posed by the *Morning Star*. They are fully aware that to have done so under Stalin or the regime of his successors would have probably resulted in the arrest and transportation to a labour camp for the said delegate. Even under Brezhnev such outspoken views warranted incarceration in psychiatric hospitals. And this is described as socialism! Is it possible to think of any better way of denigrating the very idea of socialism in the eyes of the British workers? The *Morning Star* supporters are trapped in an historical timewarp.

It is in the monumental works of Leon Trotsky that a thoroughly scientific explanation is to be found of the character of the regimes that now exist in the USSR and Eastern Europe. For Marx, Engels and Lenin, the beginning of socialism implied a higher development of the productive forces than that reached by the most developed capitalism. This would mean a higher level of society both in its productive output and in the living standards of the population than exists in America, Sweden, West Germany or Japan at the present time. Clearly this was impossible on the basis of the backwardness of Russian society and the isolation of the Russian revolution. Lenin and Trotsky perceived the Russian revolution as an overture to the world revolution. On the basis of world socialism it would have been entirely possible to have completely outstripped the rate of growth and development of capitalist society. But such a task was impossible on the basis of one isolated revolution, moreover in a backward society at that. Trotsky therefore characterised Russia as a transitional regime between capitalism and socialism. The growth of the bureaucracy personified by the rise of Stalin, created an historical obstacle on the road to socialism. This now constitutes a massive roadblock — which will have to be removed — preventing the further real development

of Russian society. But Trotsky's scientific appraisal, and brilliant predictions, of the character of the Stalinist regime, is a book sealed with seven seals as far as the *Morning Star* adherents are concerned.

Reporting on the special conference the *Morning Star* on June 29, 1988 came out with the very r-r-r-revolutionary slogan of 'All power to the Soviets'. This it claimed was the ringing message delivered by Gorbachev to the Conference. And yet it did not occur either to the reporters to the Conference or to the editors of the *Morning Star* that such a slogan posed for them more questions than it answered. Firstly this was the celebrated slogan of the Bolshevik party throughout most of 1917 and prior to the October Revolution. This was at a time when real soviets, workers' and peasants' councils, existed and were vying for power with the various bourgeois coalition governments. A regime of dual power existed in Russia at this time. To employ this slogan in the officially titled 'Union of Soviet Socialist Republics' at this stage would surely imply that the 'soviets' had not hitherto had 'all the power'. If the 'soviets' did not have the power, who did? Was it not the bureaucratic elite that had promoted from its ranks Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko and now Gorbachev? In fact, real soviets, organs of management and control of the state and society by the working class, as envisaged by Lenin and Trotsky, were completely emasculated under Stalinism. The state is called 'Soviet' in the same way as Napoleon's dictatorship was still called a Republic!

## New constitution

Moreover, under the proposals of Gorbachev, adopted by the special party conference, the 'soviets' will not be vested with real power. Gorbachev originally proposed to exclude party chiefs from the soviets, together with the election of a 'parliament' and a president through the use of a secret ballot. He clearly wanted to lean on a section of the working class as a weapon to cut down the privileges of the bureaucracy. As Trotsky pointed out in 1936: "In order that this mechanism (the Stalinist system, PT) should keep on working Stalin is compelled from time to time to take the side of 'the people' against the bureaucracy — of course with its tacit consent. He finds it useful to resort to the secret ballot in order at least partially to purge the state apparatus of the corruptions which are devouring it." Gorbachev, while representing and defending the bureaucracy, like Stalin himself, is not

averse to leaning on the masses and striking blows against the bureaucracy. Trotsky pointed out that this was one of the purposes of Stalin's 1936 constitution, 'the most democratic in the world'. The Spanish Civil War, with the hot flames of social revolution threatening to provoke political revolution in Russia, compelled Stalin to abandon his plans and to launch his one-sided civil war against the last remnants of the Bolshevik Party.

Even Gorbachev's mild measures were nullified by the decision of the conference to allow party chiefs to sit in the 'soviets'. Amongst the 5,000 delegates gathered at the conference were 600 'Communist' Party chiefs. It was their pressure which carefully circumscribed Gorbachev's mild measures of reform. Moreover the conference explicitly shattered the hopes of the 'liberals' in the West for a move towards 'pluralism'. The political monopoly of the 'Communist' Party was reinforced in a resolution to the conference. What kind of 'socialist democracy' is it that allows only candidates from one party to stand?

As has been explained many times by Trotsky and the Marxists, the outlawing of other parties in the infancy of the Russian workers' state arose from the exigencies of the civil war and the support of these parties for military measures to crush the young workers' state. Lenin and Trotsky envisaged them as purely temporary measures which would be lifted with the lifting of the siege of Russia itself and the spread of the revolution internationally. The Stalinist one-party totalitarian regime did not have its genesis in the Bolshevik Party, the most democratic workers' party which ever existed in history, but in the cultural backwardness of the country and its isolation.

Oliver Cromwell, in order to defend the English bourgeois revolution, was forced to resort to the sword to hold down the feudal counter-revolution, assuming in the process dictatorial powers. Such is the strength of capitalism today, such are the material advantages of capitalism compared to feudalism for the mass of the population, that present day advocates of a return to 'Merrie England' would indeed be a source of 'merriment' rather than a danger to the capitalists.

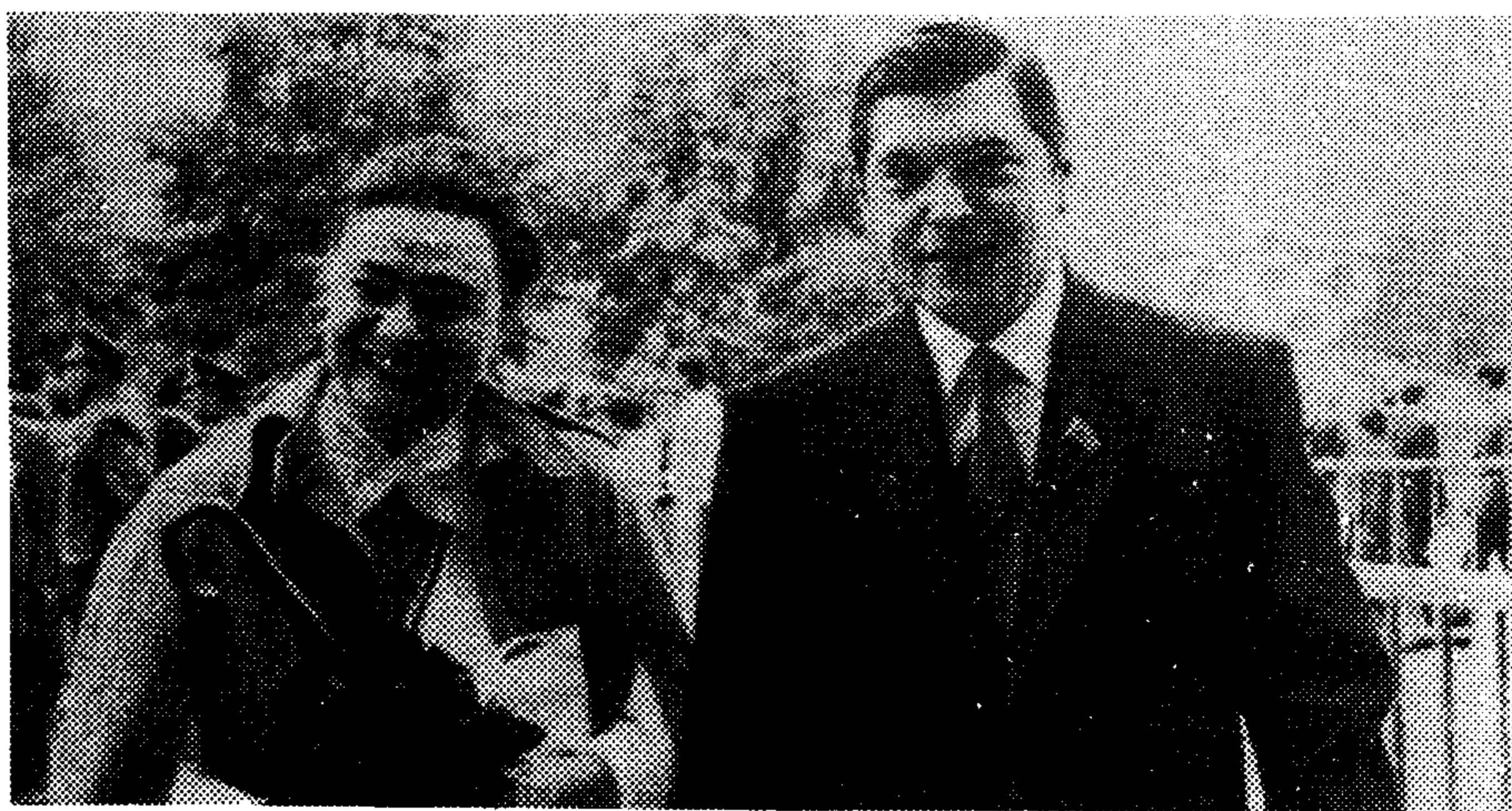
The material conditions for socialism in the colossal development of the productive forces now exist in the USSR, particularly if they were part of an integrated world plan. A socialist Russia would permit even pro-bourgeois parties to exist. They would have no attractive power such would be the advantages of a planned economy together with workers' democracy.

Would the British workers tolerate candidates in shop steward or union elections who were only allowed to be in one party? No more does the Russian working class support such undemocratic, not to say totalitarian, measures. Even at the special conference, one or two isolated voices demanding the end of the 'Communist Party monopoly' were heard. Once the working class moves against the Stalinist regimes the inevitable demand for the ending of 'Communist' (read Stalinist) Party control is raised. Yet the *Morning Star* slavishly supports the monopoly of the Stalinist elite.

## Marxism Today

But things are little better if one turns to the journals of the other 'Communist' currents, now reduced to little more than squabbling sects. The 'Eurocommunists' claim to represent a big advance on the Stalinists. In the journals *Seven Days* and *Marxism Today* can be found some criticisms of Stalinism. Monty Johnstone, leading theoretician of this trend, in *Marxism Today* in November 1987 subjected Gorbachev's USSR to some withering comments. Perhaps anticipating Ligachev's ludicrous claim at the recent special party conference that privileges for the bureaucracy were non-existent, Johnstone writes: "Another issue for concern is the continuation of special stores and other nomenclature privileges, despite the public criticism expressed in the pre-conference letters published in *Pravda*... after Moscow carried through the shake-up in Kazakhstan following the Alma Ata riots, the press reported that luxury dachas built by party leaders there at party expense were confiscated to provide hospitals, children's homes and hostels with places for 2,000 people. It was also revealed that hundreds of people employed in Alma Ata university were related by blood or marriage. The existence of such privilege and patronage, which nobody seriously believes are a specifically Kazakh phenomena, is deeply resented. Most people, however, did not see what they could do to change it in Kazakhstan or feel able to act to end it where it still exists elsewhere."

Then Johnstone provides a key for understanding precisely why the working class does not 'feel able to act to end' privileges etc: "In the local elections... the increasingly criticised procedure of only one candidate standing continued in the great majority of soviets. But in about five per cent of them, on an 'experimental' basis, there were more candidates than were deputies to be elected (930 candidates for 740 seats) and some leading local



Brezhnev's daughter Galina with her husband who is now on trial under charges of widespread corruption.

officials came bottom of the poll. I have, however, seen no evidence of contests in which electors were presented with policy alternatives."

*Seven Days* and *Marxism Today* are full of ex-Stalinists who no doubt sincerely recant on their former idealisation of Stalin and his regime. But nowhere in the columns of either the 'popular' weekly *Seven Days* or in the more 'theoretical' *Marxism Today* is any attempt made to draw up an objective balance sheet of the historical and objective causes for the rise of Stalinism. To do so would be to draw on the rich theoretical treasure trove of Trotsky's writings on this issue. Indeed the 'Eurocommunists' fondly hope, like the overwhelming majority of the left leadership of the British labour and trade union movement, that by piecemeal measures Gorbachev can gradually 'debureaucratise' and democratise the USSR. They recoil in horror at the idea of a political revolution by the masses of the USSR and Eastern Europe to overthrow the bureaucratic elite. In fact a thinly veiled contempt for the independent initiative and mobilisation of the masses against the bureaucracy is to be found in these journals. For example Monty Johnstone in *Marxism Today* writes: "Due to the paralysis of the independent initiative of the working people brought about by Stalinism, the ushering in of change could only come from above. As in Czechoslovakia in 1968, but unlike Poland in 1980, this was to come from the Communist Party, and was spearheaded by a newly elected general secretary." Thus the working class of Russia and the rest of the USSR, 'apathetic and paralysed by Stalinism', must await liberation from above by an 'enlightened' wing of the bureaucracy.

Johnstone and the rest of the 'Eurocommunists' act as political attorneys for this 'liberal' wing of the bureaucracy. It is no accident that they have

invoked the figure of Dubcek as their ideal model for Russia: "If Mikhail Gorbachev had advocated just one of his current ideas on the necessity for reforms and democratisation in Czechoslovakia in 1970 he would have been expelled from the KSC (the Czechoslovakian Communist Party) and would be working somewhere today as a stoker or a navvy, without his communist conviction or his university education making any difference."

## Dubcek

But Dubcek represented national Czechoslovak Stalinism, as Gomulka before him had reflected the Polish variety. In no way did he aim to challenge the fundamental basis of Stalinism. But his attempt at 'reforms', as in Russia today, inevitably led to the masses coming onto the political arena. This threatened to detonate similar independent movements of the masses throughout Eastern Europe and eventually in the USSR itself. This was the background to the intervention of Russian tanks and his removal in 1968. Dubcek has recently stated his belief that Gorbachev would never have authorised the 1968 military intervention in his country. But as Neil Ascheron, writing in *Marxism Today* correctly pointed out: "For my part, I will wait and see for a few years before feeling able to agree with him." The hopes of Dubcek and *Marxism Today* look a little naive, to say the least, against the background of the recent deployment of troops in Nagorno-Karabakh!

Gorbachev is a consummate, and intelligent, representative of the bureaucracy. His 'reforms' are an attempt to breathe new life into the system. He does not stand for the abolition of privileges. He has merely attacked the 'illegal' privileges and corruption of a part of the bureaucracy.

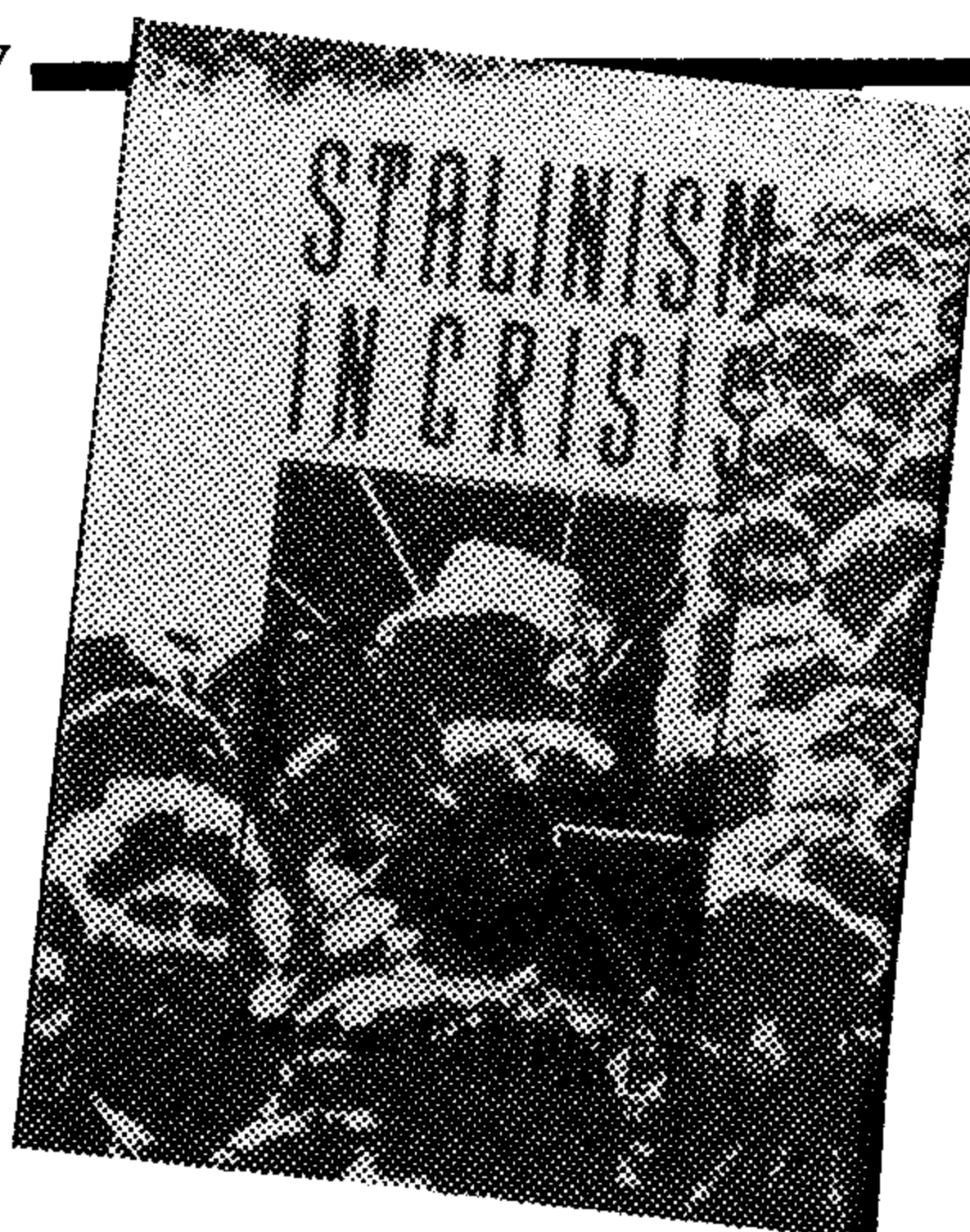
Indeed he is for even greater 'legitimate' rewards and privileges for the elite. The resolution on 'perestroika' accepted at the special conference makes this clear: "We must make people much more interested in the best end result, to utterly overcome equalisation tendencies". A gulf separates Gorbachev and those he represents from the approach of Lenin who insisted on clear maximum differentials of no more than four to one for skilled personnel.

One of the real indications of the transition towards socialism will precisely be the 'equalisation tendencies within society'. It is true that even a democratic workers' state would not be able to introduce the maxim, 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs'. This would only be possible on the basis of a society of superabundance, a socialist society. But the first act of a democratic workers' state would be the immediate slashing of the privileges of the bureaucracy. In place of the 'differentials' whereby the gap between the bureaucrat and the worker is as wide if not wider than under capitalism, there would be a return to Lenin's clearly defined maximum differential (which could now even be less than four to one).

## Inequality

Monty Johnstone agrees with Gorbachev's position. In his denunciation of nomenclature, mentioned above, he makes the qualification that it is "a quite separate question from increased income differentials now being promoted to stimulate production". From reports which have appeared in the Russian press it seems that the working class, passive and indifferent according to Johnstone, does not entirely agree with him. Indeed the authoritative *Moscow News*, precisely at the time of the party conference when Ligachev was claiming otherwise, showed that the criticism of the privileges of the bureaucracy is of volcanic proportions. It revealed that one in three of the letters it received about the party conference dealt with 'social justice' and the privilege system.

Moreover in a poll of Muscovites only 44% "believed their country had a broadly fair system." Only 23% of those polled thought that Soviet society is definitely 'just'. According to the article the groups "condemned for undeserved perks" were "in order of severity, officials of the Young Communist League, trade unionists, ministerial and departmental bureaucrats, workers in the party 'apparatus', and economic managers". The list of



**Stalinism In Crisis**, reprints from the *Militant*. 60p plus 20p postage from World Socialist Books, 3/13 Hepscoot Road, London E9 5HB.

privileges those questioned condemned as unjust, no matter who benefited from them, included "receipts of goods (including obviously, food) from 'closed' and other shops and canteens, 84%; free purchases of books from a 'special list of subscribers', special access to theatre and film tickets, 80%; the grant of flats and apartment blocks of 'improved plan and in better districts', 67%; the lease of state dachas or construction of personal dachas in prestige areas nearer town, 65%; access to hospitals, clinics and sanatoria reserved for leaders, 60%; special access to rail and air tickets, 52%; and the grant of a car, 44%."

The discontent of the Russian masses even sometimes creeps into the pages of the *Morning Star*. Thus on June 17, 1988 a letter from a worker to *Pravda* was published: "Let's have an end to the permissiveness and impunity which certain leaders enjoy. Because just as before you can still see cars belonging to the city committee (of the party), the city council executive committee and other officials outside the gate of the meat plant, fish farm and trade warehouse. But you don't meet these elected representatives in the queues." Is it little wonder that at the time of the special conference a poll conducted by the Institute of Sociology at the Soviet Academy of Sciences of 120 main industrial plants revealed that 73% believed that "instead of real perestroika, we are just having a lot of talk".

Another 33% blamed local bureaucracies for preventing economic reforms at this level. Even at the special conference the one or two worker delegates who managed to get to the rostrum complained about the lack of food in the shops despite 'perestroika'. As commented earlier, Gorbachev was assailed in his recent visit to Siberia when workers openly challenged the effectiveness of 'perestroika' on one of his walkabouts, revealing both the seething

discontent but also the complete loss of fear of the Stalinist bureaucracy on the part of the new generation of workers. Stalin's open methods of terror would be unworkable in the changed and explosive atmosphere which now exists in the USSR.

But notwithstanding the fond hopes of *Marxism Today* the bureaucratic elite will not vacate the scene of history voluntarily. Like Gorbachev himself the 'Eurocommunists', never mind the Stalinist elements around the *Morning Star*, perceive bureaucracy as merely 'red tape', and 'inefficiency'. But the bureaucracy is a privileged caste which will fight with all possible weapons to maintain its position in society. It is true that it feels itself to be an excrescence on society. The crisis of its regime is undoubtedly reflected in the open splits within the ranks of bureaucracy which we have commented on elsewhere. (See *Militant*, 20 May 1988) But as Trotsky pointed out: "No devil voluntarily cut his own claws". The bureaucracy cannot be removed without a political revolution.

"That will mean violence" will undoubtedly shriek the adherents of the *Morning Star*. On the contrary, with a far sighted and clear leadership the political revolution could be carried through peacefully, or relatively peacefully. In Poland in 1980-81 the masses were driving in the direction of political revolution. All the elements of a programme to overthrow the bureaucracy were contained in the movement around Solidarity. The masses improvised the equivalent of soviets, there were demands for the abolition of the privileges of the bureaucracy, and in the beginning, no member of the 'Communist' Party was allowed to sit in the workers' councils. The Polish workers in effect improvised all the elements of the programme that Trotsky had laid down for the beginning of the political revolution. This included the slogan "for the bureaucracy to be driven from the soviets". They had even gone a step further and demanded the end of one-party rule.

## Roy Medvedev

The terror of the 'Eurocommunists' at the prospect of political revolution leads them to cling to the coat-tails of a figure like Gorbachev as a kind of 'liberator from above'. And as the interview with Roy Medvedev in the August 1988 edition of *Marxism Today* demonstrates, they end up to the right of even a section of the 'liberal' bureaucracy.

Monty Johnstone interviews Medvedev and presumably concurs with

his views because there is not a hint of criticism of Medvedev's statements as he tortuously dissects the different wings of the bureaucracy in order to justify support for Gorbachev. He does not locate Ligachev in the most 'conservative' wing of the bureaucracy.

He characterises the Ligachev group as "mostly honest communists and soviet people, but they have got used to the old ways of working... this group embraces the majority of regional and city party secretaries, the majority of the apparatus." Medvedev concedes that Ligachev represents "the strongest group in our party."

He even admits that "Ligachev warned Gorbachev, and it was an unmistakable warning: 'without us you wouldn't have become General Secretary of the party' — that is, without the votes in March 1985 of Politburo members Chebrikov, Gromyko, Solomentsev." And yet his support for Gorbachev leads him to supporting 'an alliance between Ligachev and Gorbachev' while attacking Yeltsin. He subjects the latter to the charge of "vanguardism in the party. He doesn't represent a trend as such but only some individuals. He wants to push perestroika ahead more quickly, more energetically, but this is not realistic."

In a statement that would be worthy of any right-wing reformist leader of the labour and trade union movement in this country, Medvedev declares "Yeltsin is saying much that Gorbachev was saying at the beginning, but there is very little support for this now. Yeltsin's political collapse is due to not appreciating that if we start going too fast it will lead to the end of perestroika rather than its success. In our conditions it is possible for perestroika to move forward fairly quickly but not by leaps. Politics is the art of the possible." Thus 'slowly, slowly, catchy monkey' is the philosophy of Medvedev who clearly is an apologist for the 'liberal' wing of the bureaucracy as the *Militant International Review* correctly pointed out. (See the review article on Medvedev's book, *On Socialist Democracy* in *MIR* No.19, Spring 1980.)

Yeltsin at least echoed the enormous discontent of the working class, particularly the Moscow working class. Medvedev, and his British counterparts within the 'Eurocommunist' wing of the CP, in adopting such a position, put themselves firmly against an independent movement of the working class. If Johnstone and co were transferred to the Stalinist states they would at best play the same baleful role as did the supporters of KOR, like Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik, in the Polish events of 1980-81. They acted as a huge brake



**Demonstrations in Armenia. One of the biggest mass movements in history.**

on the movement of the masses. They are presently advising the Polish workers to 'cool down' for fear of provoking Jaruzelski. They look towards a Polish version of 'Gorbachevism' to deliver Polish society from the catastrophe which Stalinist mismanagement has resulted in.

Similar social types were at the head of the recent movements in Armenia. After negotiations with Gorbachev they played the role of a fire hose on the Armenian movement. Nevertheless the Stalinist regime is incapable of finding solutions to the explosive national question throughout the USSR.

Despite the promises of Gorbachev, the bureaucracy is incapable of granting the legitimate national demands of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. Even the hint at concessions to the Armenians reinforced the national movement in the Baltic states.

## **Nagorno-Karabakh**

Violating even its own constitution, the central Moscow bureaucracy has denied the right of self-determination, with agreed guaranteed rights for the Azerbaijani minority, to the peoples of Nagorno-Karabakh. The resolution on 'Inter-ethnic relations' of the recent conference, it is true, speaks about "one of the central tasks is to create conditions for the greater independence of regions, and to carry forward co-operation whereby each republic should have a stake in bettering the end results of its economic activity as the basis of its own well-being and the common prosperity and power of the soviet state."

And yet precisely such rights are denied to the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. Despite the claims for a 'multi-nation society' with full account taken of legitimate national rights, an iron grip is still exercised by the central Moscow bureaucracy.

The liberal wing of the bureaucracy, like Roy Medvedev, and their supporters in *Marxism Today*, envisage in the USSR a situation similar to bourgeois democracy in the West. But there is an important difference: the capitalists can switch from military dictatorships to democracy and back again. They can tolerate, under certain historical conditions, democratic rights for the working class.

Indeed bourgeois democracy is the cheapest form of rule for them. The capitalists have roots in bourgeois society, they are its 'trustees' as Marx pointed out. They play a role in the development of industry. Where the working class has democratic rights and resorts to strike action they do not generally immediately demand the removal of the capitalists.

But the situation is entirely different in the Stalinist states. Once the working class has its own organisations, has freedom to criticise etc, ie 'democracy' — the very existence of the bureaucracy is brought into question. In Poland there was the immediate demand for the removal of all the privileges of the bureaucracy. Therefore a period of any length with the proletariat having its own organisations and rights is impossible under Stalinism. There can be periods of dual power as existed for 14 months in Poland, but unless the political revolution is carried through a bureaucratic counter-revolution will triumph.

It is possible that certain improvements through decentralisation can be made although recent economic performances are dismal. A certain 'fund of credit' will still be extended by the Russian masses to see whether 'perestroika' and 'glasnost' result in any material benefits to them. But eventually it will be borne in on the mass of the working class that it is itself the only agent of renewing Russian society on socialist foundations.

The left of the British labour movement, and particularly the remnants of the 'Communist' Party, while criticising this or that aspect of Stalinism, are incapable of carrying through their analysis to a conclusion. To do so would lead them back to the immortal works of Leon Trotsky and the programme that he worked out for the political revolution. Basing himself on the four points of Lenin, Trotsky, in his monumental work, *Revolution Betrayed* gives us the most modern analysis of the events that are presently unfolding in the USSR and also outlined an alternative programme.

It is true that even in the USSR, Trotsky, the 'non-person', is once more the subject of discussion in the press. Some of his books, it seems, have been restored to Russian public libraries. It remains to be seen how far this process will go. But the bureaucracy, including the most liberal of the 'liberal' wing, while no longer able to avoid mentioning Trotsky, do it in such a way as to completely distort what he stood for.

## Trotsky

One such article appeared in September in *Pravda*. Entitled 'Demon of the Revolution', it was a largely hostile and lying account of Trotsky's record. But according to *The Independent*, it "clearly acknowledged Trotsky's foresight". It even quotes his commentary on fascism in 1938: "Fascism goes from victory to victory and finds its greatest support in Stalinism. Terrible warlike threats are knocking at the door of the Soviet Union and Stalin chooses this moment to do terrible damage to the army (this was the time of the worst military purges - PT). There will come a time when history will judge him." Even *Pravda's* perjured account of Trotsky's role is forced to concede "one must give Trotsky his due. He did not break, like many others, under Stalin's dictatorship."

The article, it seems, is also an advance over previous explanations of the manner of his death: "One article a few months ago suggested that he had died in a car crash". Now however the author of the *Pravda* article "gives an explicit account of how an agent of the GPU (the forerunner of the KGB) put an icepick through the revolutionary's head at his home in Mexico City in 1940." *The Independent*, 10 September 1988. But even if Trotsky's writings, or at least some of them, were to be published, the literary Mafia at the disposal of the bureaucracy would be deployed to completely distort and undermine his teachings.

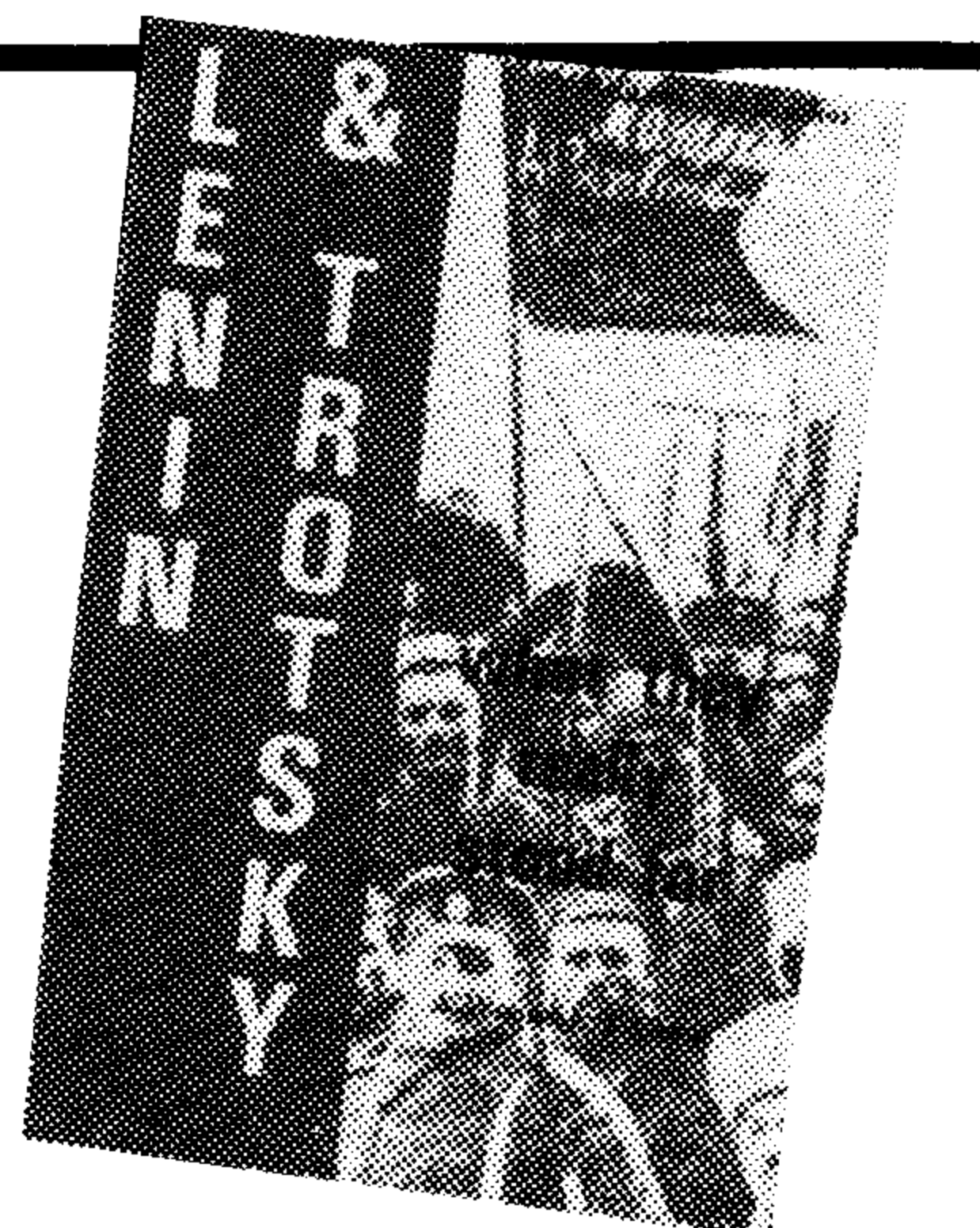
The kind of slanders that will be directed at Trotsky by the new 'Red Professors' surfaced in a 'dialogue' between leading 'Communists' in the September edition of the *World Marxist Review*. Ramirez of the Mexican CP, approving the rehabilitation of Bukharin, also stated: "I think the same should be done with regard to Leon Trotsky who never was a 'fascist agent' or an 'imperialist mercenary'. We may accept or reject his views, but we cannot deny that Trotsky was a leader of the Bolshevik Party, head of the Petrograd Soviet and the man who commanded the Red Army. I believe an attempt is being made to re-evaluate his historical role properly, but one should move faster to re-habilitate Trotsky politically... Trotsky was politically slandered and then killed."

But in reply Krasin, rector of the 'Social Science Institute under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union', states bluntly: "Historians must, of course, adequately re-create his role in the October Revolution. But I don't think this will mean Trotsky's political rehabilitation. After all, the concepts he advocated stipulated the establishment in the USSR of what we now call a system of administration by fiat. In other words, paradoxical as it may seem at first glance, there is an inner affinity between Trotskyism and Stalinism; both relied exclusively on coercion and administration by fiat in running the country. I don't think we can describe this as a positive attitude, for a political rehabilitation calls for just that."\*

Incapable of completely denying Trotsky's great historical role, they wish to throw dust in the eyes of the new generation in the USSR. Nevertheless the best of the Russian working class, particularly the youth, will find the road to Trotsky's writings which will be the theoretical weapons that will enable them to carve out a new socialist future.

Even the *Morning Star*, it is true in a niggardly and tardy fashion, have been forced to comment on the rehabilitation of the Old Bolsheviks murdered by Stalin. Thus on July 11 1988 in an item tucked away on the bottom of the back page, the *Morning Star* concedes "USSR redeems Bukharin and Rykov". It has even mentioned the possibility of

\* For reasons of space we cannot reply here to these slanders by this new 'Red Professor'. We will however reply fully in a future issue. In the meantime we would refer the reader to the book, *Lenin and Trotsky: What They Really Stood For*, by Alan Woods and Ted Grant.



**Lenin and Trotsky: What they really stood for**, by Alan Woods and Ted Grant, £1.50 plus 30p postage from World Socialist Books, 3/13 Hepscoot Road, London E9 5HB.

Trotsky's rehabilitation. But there is absolutely no explanation of the comments of the *Morning Star's* forerunner the *Daily Worker* at the time of the infamous purge trials which questioned "where is the shame in the detection and punishment of a counter-revolutionary plot, instigated by Trotsky and the Nazis," *Daily Worker*, 31 August 1936. JR Campbell, infamous attorney for Stalinism, in the same issue of the *Daily Worker*, commented: "Stalin's firmness and the fairness of the party majority who supported him not only saved the revolution; it put the revolution on impregnable socialist foundations. The peoples of the Soviet Union, viewing their transformed country, have every reason to rejoice under the leadership of Stalin... Why was it necessary for anyone to discredit Trotsky. Politically he was never so isolated and discredited as today." Fifty-two years later very few remember the author of these lines but Trotsky is remembered. He is a towering figure to the working class, and particularly the youth, whose works will be drawn on to transform society.

If the adherents of the *Morning Star* were genuinely attempting to draw up a balance sheet of Stalinism they would ruthlessly examine their own shameful past, which in turn would reveal the analysis of Trotsky and the Trotskyists as being entirely borne out by the march of events. Only in the pages of the *Militant* and the *MIR* can the most conscientious and politically aware workers find an explanation for the tumultuous events which are developing in Eastern Europe and the USSR. Most of the left are either stuck in an historical cul-de-sac or have, with their traditional neglect of theory, abandoned any attempt to explain the processes unfolding in the USSR and Eastern Europe at the present time.

An MIR exclusive

# Eyewitness in Armenia



A demonstration, in March of this year, at the memorial to the 1915 genocide of Armenians.

Of all the problems facing the leadership in the Soviet Union, the most acute is the national question. Hardly a week has passed this year when there has not been a massive protest or demonstration in the different republics under the banner of national self determination. On Constitution Day this year, October 7 and the weekend following, a public holiday to commemorate the introduction of the new constitution by Khrushchev in which the rights of national minorities are supposed to be guaranteed, there were demonstrations of 100-150,000 in the Baltic states.

Gorbachev is facing and failing his

toughest test at present in the southern republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan. His apologists in the West are singing Gorbachev's praises in his attempts to liberalise the regime in the Soviet Union,

## First hand reports

but they studiously ignore the repressive measures he is using in an attempt to put down the movements centred on Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. While using troops to put down the strikes, demonstrations and protests which have

been on an unprecedented scale since February, the regime has only recently allowed western reporters to travel to the Armenian capital, Yerevan. They, reporting from a capitalist point of view, only superficially touch on the real situation there and its causes.

But eyewitness reports from Nagorno-Karabakh, from Yerevan and from Sumgait, where in February the regime reported the massacre of 32 Armenians (but local witnesses put the number in hundreds), tragically but brilliantly confirm the analysis of Trotsky and the *Militant* of the national problems faced by the Stalinist regime.

The national problem in Nagorno-Karabakh stems back directly to the ham-fisted implementation of national policy by Stalin in the twenties. Nagorno-Karabakh, a small enclave of 160,000 people, is predominantly Armenian, a people who have a long history as victims of oppression. In 1915, nearly 2 million Armenians were murdered in the genocide carried out by the Turkish regime. How can a people feel safe after such a massacre? Such problems require the utmost sensitivity, which takes into account the wishes of the people themselves and guaranteed by a democratic workers' state which ensures the right of self determination. Such was the approach adopted in the early stages of the Russian revolution.

The Soviet revolution did not reach the southern republics until 1920. In April, soviet power was established in Azerbaijan, including Nagorno-Karabakh and the two remained united. It was only seven months later that the Armenians established soviet power in their own country. Lenin's policy on the national question was based on the scrupulous recognition of the right of self determination. This was accepted by the workers of Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh was voluntarily transferred to Armenia in 1921.

## Stalin

However, as Commissar of Nationalities, Stalin approached the national question from the point of view of administrative convenience. He was in the Caucasuses in 1923 to carry out a territorial reorganisation of the region. In the words of the Armenian writer Zori Balayan, (who unfortunately is playing the role of defusing the movement in Armenia) when Stalin arrived, "Nagorno-Karabakh was torn from Armenia and returned to Azerbaijan. The absurdity of such an annexation is obvious even if only because in our country all the autonomous regions, republics and districts are named according to their national identity, Tartars and so on. And yet, Nagorno-Karabakh is simply an autonomous region, because it is near Armenia. And to call the neighbouring region Armenian means to simply underline the absurdity of such a division".

But despite Gorbachev's campaign against Stalinism in Soviet society, he has shown himself to be the inheritor of Stalin's approach. Instead of Lenin's sensitive approach of negotiations and the guarantee of self determination, Gorbachev has sent in the troops to break the strikes and protests. Young conscripts of 18 and 19 years (for obvious reasons, none of them from Armenia itself) have been pitted against the mass protests but



Yerevan airport. Gorbachev has sent in troops to try and break the movement.

have been unable to stop the movement. One small battalion of 100 troops returned from Yerevan recently with at least five of its members nursing fractured skulls.

However, the words of one young student from Yerevan explain the real cause of the unrest around Nagorno-Karabakh: "The national question is not the reason for the protests but the excuse. We are against all oppression".

This is backed up by the words of an Azerbaijani pensioner from Sumgait: "We lived in harmony with our neighbours, the Armenians. If we did not have such oppressive police, things would be better. The deputy head of the police, Major Skandaryan, and the chief of the passport office, Captain Vartanyan, are constantly rude to us. When one of us petition them about something, they insult us. When we are leaving, they tell us to get out of here!"

As Trotsky explained: "It is a question therefore, not of the oppression of one nationality over another in the proper sense of the word but of oppression by the centralised police apparatus over the cultural development of all nations".

The whole history of national relations in the Soviet Union since Stalin has been dogged by a bureaucratic, insensitive attitude to the 'friendship of nations'. Silva Kaputikan, who in the past participated in the official friendship ceremonies (in reality, an excuse for the bureaucracy to organise drinking sessions) and who is now, with Zori Balayan, attempting to moderate the movement, shows what they were like: "How magnificent and profuse our 'friendship meetings' always were! Cognac flowed like rivers. Slogan followed slogan... how they loved to talk about the friendship of nations!"

It will take more than rivers of cognac for the peoples of Armenia and Azerbai-

jan to forget the horrific events of 1988 or the feelings of power that they experienced in protesting against the oppression of the Soviet regime.

The leadership in Moscow have tried to explain the movement in Armenia as the work of a few 'nationalist extremists' or of hooligan elements. But these reports are as far removed from the truth as Gorbachev's policy on the national question is removed from Lenin's. Their dismissal as extremists has caused tremendous bitterness amongst the Armenian people. One woman from Yerevan explained:

"The press only reported that they were 'a group of extremists'. Half a million extremists? And at the meetings in the town, with the people who had arrived from the regions, we had more than a million. And we are all united! Maybe the whole nation is extremist? We are not against the Azerbaijan people, but not in one interview have they said what we really want. Not once on the TV have they said we only want the reunification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia."

## Mass movement

This feeling is supported by an old man in Yerevan who told a reporter: "Write this down! I am a Kurd. Tell Gorbachev what I say. I was in the war. I have worked all my life. I am not an extremist. I am in favour of the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. Why are mothers not able to return to their children? And why are her tears called extremist. Write this down. If you are telling lies, may your hands drop off!"

Such was the scale of the movement that a *Pravda* reporter in Armenia was forced to offer his resignation in protest at the way his reports had been rewritten (see inset).

The First Secretary of the Yerevan Party Committee described the situation: "The complexity of today's situation is that for decades we have carried on as if we had no nationality problem. I have been among my people these nine days. I have spent the evenings with you, eaten and drunk with you. I have been among thousands of people and I have not seen one anti-Soviet slogan or heard one word against socialism. What is happening is not a blind mass movement devised by various individual troublemakers. An idea has united the people, it has been imbued in the consciousness of all. This is a vast movement of people. Thousands of people come here from the regions. They travel tens of kilometres. The first reports in the press that this was the work of nationalist groups provoked terrible anger and annoyance which could not be expressed in words. This was an insult. And all the same, you notice that our people displayed such tolerance. There were no laws broken in reply to your incomprehension. No disorder. Even after the tragedy in Sumgait, when Yerevan was numb with horror and grief, not one hair was harmed on a single Azerbaijani."

## Pogrom

However, it is the rank and file of the movement who best understand the situation. Gorbachev faces a dilemma. If he makes concessions, he will add fuel to the fire, but unless he does, the protests will continue. One young teacher explains why he can not afford to make concessions:

"They tell us that demands for territorial changes are unprecedented. But the comrades are not good at history! They have apparently forgotten that in 1954, the RSFSR handed over the Ukrainian Crimea. Kazakhstan in 1969 handed over several regions to Uzbekistan. Kirgysiya gave up part of its territory to Tadjikistan and White Russia conceded part of its territory to Latvia. If it was possible then, why is it not so now? Only because such changes were led 'from above' but now the petition resounds 'from below'. Or was it because then no-one protested in the squares?"

Initially Gorbachev adopted a 'sit and wait it out' approach to the mass movement that had developed. But on February 27, he was forced to make an unprecedented personal appeal for calm and for a return to work, promising negotiations about the future of Nagorno-Karabakh. Advised by the leadership in Yerevan to accept this appeal, the mass meeting in Yerevan even took the decision to work extra days to make up for the production lost through the strikes.

## ПРАВДА

Орган Центрального Комитета  
Коммунистической партии Советского Союза  
КОРРЕСПОНДЕНТ  
ПО АРМЯНСКОЙ ССР

ГЛАВНЫЙ РЕДАКТОР  
ТОВ. АРАКЕЛЯН В. Г.

Уважаемый Виктор Григорьевич!

Статья "Эмоции и разум" о событиях в Нагорном Карабахе и вокруг него, фактически, являлась редакционной статьей, выражающей волю Центрального Комитета КПСС.

При беседах с Вами я осознаю, что ни в Секретариате, ни в Политбюро ЦК не делают глубоко выводов в проблеме Нагорного Карабаха и, по сути, от неведения, в решении ЦК КПСС игралась роковая ошибка, названная по сути, народ экстремизмом. Отсюда и пошли массовые мирные демонстрации и митинги в Ереване, и защита справедливости, очевидцем которых был и Г.Ор-

Уважаемый Виктор Григорьевич!

И. Писемский, а также Виктор Григорьевич, мол судья журналиста, корреспондента в Ереване и Нагорном Карабахе и Секретариата ЦК КПСС.

21.03.1988г.

Г.Ор-  
к.р.р.

## Excerpts from the letter of the Armenian correspondent of Pravda to its editor-in-chief:

"Dear Victor Grigorevich,

The article about the events in Nagorno-Karabakh entitled 'Emotion and Reason' which appeared in an edited form expressed the will of the Central Committee. Before talking to you, I explained that it appears no-one in the Central Committee wants to understand fully the problems of Nagorno-Karabakh and therefore, out of ignorance, a fatal mistake has been made by the CC who have, in essence, blamed the extremism on the people. From this developed the mass peaceful demonstrations and meetings in defence of justice in Yerevan.

Yet today, in *Pravda*, the Armenian people discover that they have a 'manifestly anti-socialist outlook'. This is said about a people who are endlessly devoted to Russia and the cause of socialism. A people who miraculously survived the Turkish genocide of 1915 thanks to the great October revolution and to the commonwealth of fraternal Soviet nations. And today, in the era of perestroika and glasnost and the democratisation of society, we have been forced to witness genocide in Sumgait. It is frightening, really frightening, to realise this.

It is difficult even to weigh in the political balance the national fervour, the religious fanaticism, the latent hatred whipped up, not without the knowledge of the leaders of the Azerbaijan state as shown by its attitude to the peaceful Armenian population; and in contrast to that, the peaceful meetings, demonstrations and events in Armenia, allowed by the Soviet constitution and in support of the simple implementation of perestroika, during which the law enforcement agencies reported not the slightest misdemeanour on the part of the population.

It is clear to me that the essence of the edited article did not objectively reflect the course of events in Nagorno-Karabakh but it appeared above three signatures, including mine. As a 'Pravdaist' and with a deep sense of shame, I acknowledge that the 'higher ups' are trying to unravel the complex tangle of international relations in an extremely frivolous and simplistic manner. At the very least, this testifies to political shortsightedness.

As a communist, journalist and citizen, I consider that the plenum of the CC must arrive at a more competent and equitable solution of the national question and bring the guilty their deserved punishment. But, to be honest, the article in *Pravda* does a disservice to the CC and personally to Mikhail Gorbachev, in whom all our people have such great hopes.

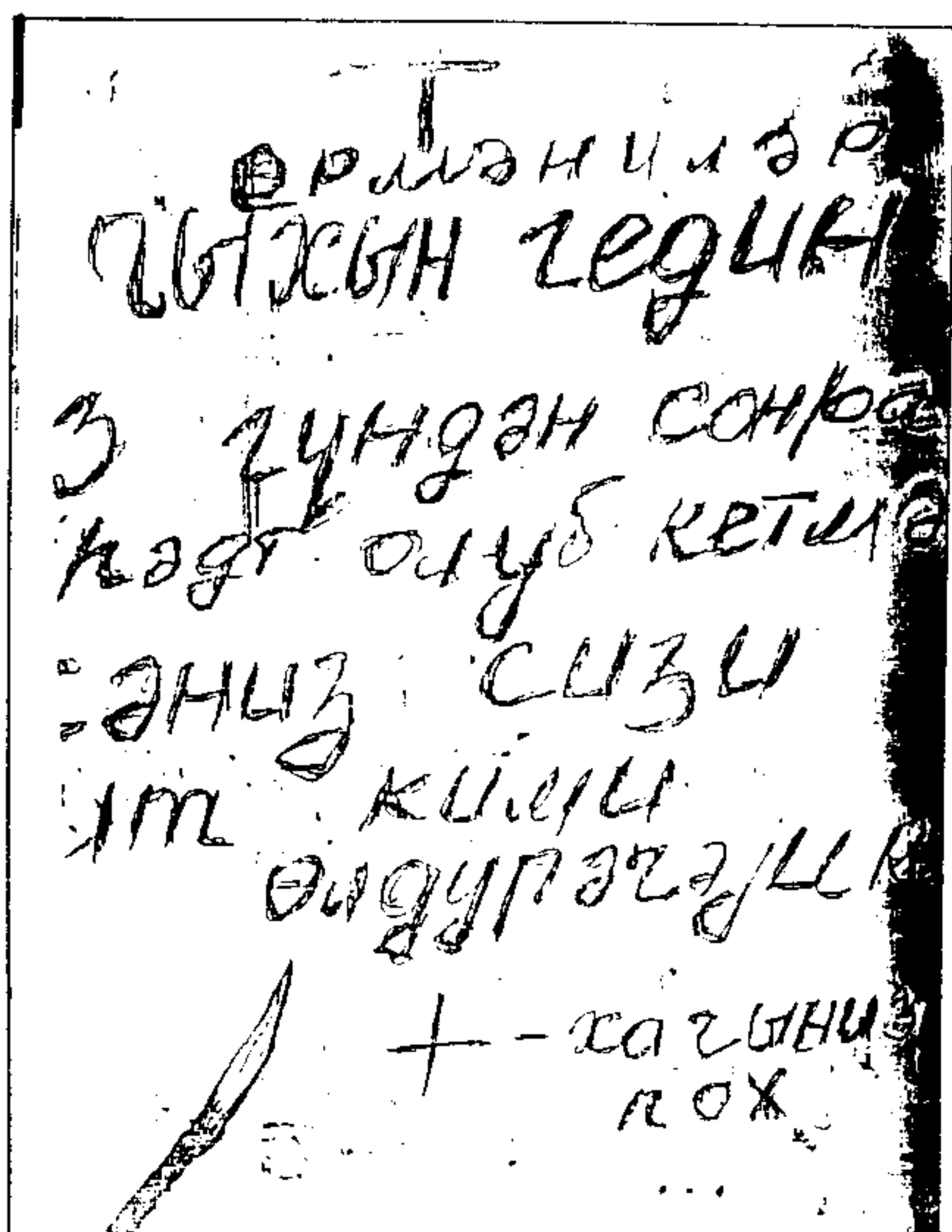
For many years, I have been proud to place my signature under articles in *Pravda*, but today, for the first time in my life as a journalist, I have realised the cruelty of my chosen profession. By putting my signature to material on the instruction of the CC, you have shamed me before my people.

My mind is already made up to clear this disgrace. I am duty bound to apologise to the whole Armenian people and to all the honest people of our country. Unfortunately, by its one sided presentation of the problem, *Pravda* has made an irredeemable blunder, which may in future have unforeseen consequences.

Evidently, I must pluck up my courage and honestly declare that my job was complicated enough without your aggravation of the situation in Armenia. And since I intend to remain united with my people, my future as a journalist, a communist and a citizen is in your hands and those of the secretariat of the Central Committee.

Yuri Arakelyan,  
Armenian Correspondent of *Pravda*,  
March 21, 1988.

But it was not that simple. Faced with a threat to their privileges and their spheres of influence, the Azerbaijan Communist leadership was forced to respond. On February 27, the massacre of Armenians started in Sumgait. In scenes reminiscent of the pre-revolutionary pogroms against the Jews, notices were stuck on the doors of Armenians:



"Armenian-get out of here. If you have not gone in three days you will be killed like dogs. Your cross-sign of the devil!"

Eyewitnesses tell a horrible tale. A metallurgist: "On February 27, I was returning from work. A crowd came out of the market. There, Armenians from the Martunovskii region were selling potatoes, the crowd had beaten them mercilessly, driven them into a cellar and moved on the square of the Regional Party HQ. It was on my way, my home is near that square. An Azerbaijani friend spoke to me, lets go together, speak Azerbaijani and they won't trouble us. On the way, the crowd smashed up a shoemakers booth and a newspaper kiosk. There were 100 people, maybe 40-45 years old. In the square was a vast crowd, several thousand people. The Secretary of the Town Committee, Muslim-sade was speaking. Refugees from Armenia had spoken. They shouted that there, they had been killed and raped and they sought revenge from us. An actress spoke. She shouted: 'Kill the Armenians! But don't touch state property'. I and my family hid in the house of my Azerbaijani neighbour and I warned my relatives. The police were nowhere to be seen".

A worker in a joinery factory described how "from the side of the bus station a crowd of 300 surged down the app-



One of the Injured at Yerevan airport.

roach road. They at once dragged three people out onto the asphalt and broke their legs. I watched from the window.

From the house opposite, two young Armenians darted and fought with the crowd for a long time, a very long time. And further on, they were driving a girl, stripped naked, she fell and one of them dragged her by the hair along the asphalt. I think she was already dead. They dragged her past the house. I was unable to do anything. I stood as if I was dead, my heart even stopped. Hardly had things died down when we escaped to Baku. To the Azerbaijani who gave me a lift, thank you for not taking a single kopeck. I later discovered that five of my relatives who had decided to sit it out were simply killed in their flat".

The most important question of all was asked by a machine operator and party member: "Everyone is interested to know, who organised this? You know it was organised. To collect such a number of iron rods, sharpened and sawn off to be put on sticks, hatchets with long handles, is not possible in a day. Somewhere, they were made in a factory. But whoever organised this, I am sure that the town's leaders and the police were involved. This band of several thousand, maybe 15,000, was operating with impunity for several days. Even when the group of 100, 150 people on the 27th demanded slaughter, they could have been stopped, but the police only watched. And then, it was as if they had disappeared. For 2 days, furniture was thrown out of windows, it was burnt in the streets, cars were set alight, children were beaten, women

raped and dragged by the hair through the streets. Surely the police were telephoned about this. Why did they disappear? In the papers they wrote it was the work of 'individual hooligan elements'. Is it difficult to catch a few 'extremists' who do not hide but are on the rampage in the streets in front of everybody...? Well, OK, First Secretary Muslim-sade has been punished, expelled from the party, but he was not alone. Where were the rest, the Komsomol, the trade unions?"

## Bitterness

Clearly, events such as these have left a bitterness that will not easily be overcome. One woman who was ready to pour petrol over herself and set it alight rather than be attacked by the mob pointed out to a party official who tried to get her to return to Sumgait: "Nothing could persuade us to return as I would have to walk on the ground where blood was split, in the flats where my friends were killed and look onto the balcony where one of my pupils was raped and then burnt".

The national question has never been an easy problem to solve and in Armenia and Azerbaijan, the 'Communist' bureaucracies have released a force they will not be able to control. Only a return to the methods and ideas of Lenin and Trotsky, of the right of self-determination of nations and the establishment of a federation of genuine democratic workers' states will create the conditions in which mutual confidence and trust can once again be established.

In his book *Perestroika: New Thinking for our Country and the World*, Gorbachev claims that women in the Soviet Union have "the same right to work as men, equal pay... every opportunity to get an education, to have a career and to participate in social and political activities." The reality, however, is different. Seventy years after the revolution, despite legal equality, the Soviet Union still cannot justifiably claim the liberation of women. JEN PICKARD examines why.

# Women in the Soviet Union

October 1917 was a milestone in the emancipation of women. For the first time the complete economic, political and sexual equality of women was put on the historic agenda. The Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky envisaged that with the development of industry and a planned nationalised economy, women would be given the opportunity to work outside of the home and, with the establishment of political democracy at all levels, would be able to play a full role in all spheres of political and social life.

To achieve this goal, women would have to be released from the traditional confines of domestic chores, with child-care becoming the responsibility of society as a whole through the provision of cheap, good quality public dining halls, laundries, sewing centres, creches and nurseries. The Bolsheviks were accused of 'breaking up families and relationships' but the provision of these facilities, lifting the burden off the shoulders of women, would enable relationships to be formed on an equal and voluntary basis.

Some of the earliest decrees after the revolution were to further the economic independence of women. For example, a woman was no longer obliged to live with her husband or to accompany him if a change of job meant a change of house. As well as the fundamental socialisation of the means of production, property relationships changed to give women equal rights to hold land, be head of a household and to receive equal pay. Attention was paid to women's childbearing role and special maternity laws were introduced forbidding long hours and night work, and establishing paid leave at childbirth, family allowances and child-care centres. Abortion was legalised in 1920, divorce was simplified and civil registration of marriage was introduced.

However, as Lenin wrote on International Women's Day 1921, while "in Soviet Russia, no trace is left of any inequality between men and women under the law... this is only the first step in the liberation of women". There had to be the **practical means** to ensure that legal equality could become a reality, as well as a fundamental change in attitudes about the role of women in society. The estab-

lishment of the first worker's state was a transitional stage in the building of a new socialist society where attitudes would be determined by the new social relations and material conditions rather than being based on the old ideas prevalent under tsarism.

One of the immediate tasks of the Soviet government was to mobilise millions of women workers and peasants to participate in building the new society. A series of conferences were organised, leading up to the First All Russian Congress of Working Women in November 1918, where Lenin argued that "the experience of all liberation movements has shown that the success of a revolution depends on how much women take part in it. The Soviet government is doing everything in its power to enable women to carry on independent proletarian socialist work."

## Early advances

To assist this work commissions for agitation and propaganda among working women were set up, becoming in 1919 the women's department of the Bolshevik Party, the Zhenotdel, with a monthly publication, *Kommunistka*. On the second anniversary of October Lenin again used the yardstick of women's emancipation to judge the achievements of the Soviet republic, arguing that in two years, in one of the most backward countries of Europe, "more has been done to emancipate women, to make her the equal of the 'strong' sex, than has been done during the past 130 years by all the advanced, enlightened, 'democratic' republics of the world taken together." But he also added that while the Bolsheviks could be proud of these achievements in clearing out the old laws, the complete end of the degradation of women would only come with the building of the new society, a society hardly begun construction.

The Zhenotdel did not function as a separate organisation but worked under the general direction and programme of the party. Lenin continually reproached comrades for their lack of attention to work among women, arguing that it was the concern of the **whole party** rather than

that of the women comrades alone. He emphasised the need to change attitudes as well as policies and although he supported the idea of a women's department he warned against a separate organisation of women: "we derive our organisational ideas from our ideological conceptions, we want no separate organisations of Communist women. She who is a Communist belongs as a member to the party just as he who is a Communist, and has the same rights and duties. But the party must have organs—working groups, commissions, sections, with the specific purpose of rousing the broad mass of women, bringing them into contact with the party and keeping them under its influence; special methods of agitation and forms of organisation. This is not bourgeois feminism but a practical revolutionary expediency."

The specific task of the women's department was to bring the broad mass of women into politics by visiting factories and villages, selling the monthly *Kommunistka* (circulation about 30,000), organising literacy classes and discussion circles. In the countryside in particular, it was important to raise the sights of the peasant women from the problems of their own individual lives and to enable them to see issues such as child-care as the responsibility of society as a whole. Again, in the rural areas, one of the main obstacles to the involvement of women in the party itself (by 1922 still only 8 per cent were women) was the high level of illiteracy. However, through the makeshift schools and study groups which were set up, hundreds of thousands began to educate themselves and to take up delegate positions in the soviets.

In the ten years of its existence the Zhenotdel played a crucial role in the political mobilisation of women. By 1927 there were eighteen women's journals with a circulation of nearly 400,000; by 1928 there were two and a half million women attending conferences organised to assist with political education, training and recruitment of women. Of course the dangers of a special women's department were recognised. Leading Bolshevik, Nadezhda Krupskaya, at one point warned that the women comrades were too involved in issues of social welfare, health and nurseries rather than playing a full

role in all fields of economic and social reconstruction. A campaign had to be waged within the party itself to change attitudes to women. These changes did not occur overnight and required a conscious campaign; Lenin himself took to task the party activists who paid lip service to the emancipation of women yet refused their own wives the opportunity to participate in the work of the Zhenotdel.

Material advances were also made to facilitate the full involvement of women in all spheres of social, economic and political life: the provision of free school meals, milk for all children, special food and clothes allowances for children in need, pregnancy consultation centres, maternity homes, creches and other facilities. Between 1919 and 1920, ninety per cent of Petrograd was fed communally.

But by 1921 the economy was in ruins following three years of savage civil war. Industrial production was only 10 per cent of the 1913 level. Agricultural production had fallen by 16 per cent between 1917 and 1921. The working class in the cities was drastically weakened and exhausted, many of the best elements having been killed in the civil war. Starvation reigned in the countryside and the peasants, with the immediate threat of the restoration of the landlord removed with the end of the civil war, began to resist the emergency restrictions of 'war communism', the forced requisitioning of grain, the militarisation of labour, etc.

The Bolsheviks under Lenin had always envisaged that the revolution in backward Russia would be followed by socialist revolution in the more advanced capitalist countries like Germany. Fraternal socialist co-operation would then lead to the integration of these industrially advanced economies with backward Russia. However, the revolutionary wave unleashed at the end of the first world war, because of the role of the workers leaders, did not lead to victory and the Russian revolution remained isolated. The Bolsheviks were forced to retreat and give concessions to the peasants, small businessmen and foreign

investors. This New Economic Policy, NEP, introduced as a temporary measure to revive production, had serious consequences for women workers. A rise in unemployment hit unskilled women hardest. In 1923, 58 per cent of the unemployed in Petrograd were women; in the textile industry between 80 and 90 per cent of the unemployed were women. Now that divorce had been simplified, the problems for women workers were compounded. Without economic independence and a job, divorce only added to the insecurity and hardship of many women, rather than giving them freedom of choice.

The New Economic Policy, along with Russia's isolation and economic backwardness, laid the basis for inequality and privilege in Soviet Russia. Starting as a tiny minority of the population, the working class was decimated by the world war, the civil war and famine. Exhausted, working long hours, workers participation in the soviets—the organs of their democratic rule—began to fall away. Successive defeats of the international revolution in Germany, Bulgaria and China, added to the demoralisation. The interests of the Kulaks, rich peasants, and the speculators who fed on the shortages, began to be reflected within the Communist Party, the government and the state. Policies both within Russia and internationally began to reflect the interests of these privileged layers. The developing bureaucracy personified in Stalin consolidated its grip with the theory of 'socialism in one country' and the purging of opposition, including Trotsky, from the Communist Party. This bureaucratisation within the party and the Communist International was accompanied by parallel changes in the position of women in Russia.

There always had been economic constraints placed on the Bolsheviks in the early days after the revolution, limiting the practical measures which could be undertaken to transform the role of women and realise in full the legal changes of 1918. The extent of the resources necessary to free women from domestic drudgery was summed up in a study at the time showing that over seven

million domestic workers would be needed to do the shopping, cleaning, cooking and childcare for every 20 million of the population. Initially there had been a short period of uncertainty about creches and kindergartens, but very quickly women workers and peasants recognised the advantages of collective childcare. Nevertheless, the resources did not match up to the plans and hopes of the Communist Party or to the needs of the workers and peasants. If workers can not afford to buy meals in the social dining room or the quality of food is poor, then families will go back to eating at home with the position of women as cook and cleaner reinforced. But while the party of Lenin fought these economic constraints to raise the social position of women, the party of Stalin began more and more to use the constraints to reverse the gains made in the past. There was a rundown in communal creches, and kitchens were cut back.

## Cult of the family

By 1928 the Kulaks had enriched themselves to the point where they represented a real threat of capitalist restoration, hoarding grain, gold and even guns. The bureaucracy panicked and, in a complete about turn, switched to a programme of rapid industrialisation and forced collectivisation. This, coupled with the consolidation of a monstrous totalitarian state, represented a turning point in the position of women. Millions were quickly mobilised into the workforce, but whereas the involvement of women in work outside of the home would generally be a progressive step, this mobilisation was based on coercion rather than opportunity and choice. In 1922 women were 22 per cent of the workforce but within ten years this figure had grown to 32 per cent. Between 1922 and 1937 out of 4 million new workers 82 per cent were women. Employment represents the potential for women's liberation but, in itself, having a job outside of the home does not constitute liberation. In fact, under the emerging bureaucracy, it meant increased oppression because of other changes in legislation regarding the family. It was at this time, in 1930, that the women's department was formally abolished.

The bureaucracy found the traditional conservatism and discipline of individual family units useful in reinforcing its own social and economic policies. In 1936 new legislation to reinforce the traditional role of the family was introduced, restricting women's rights to independence and mobility. Divorce became more difficult

**The bureaucracy, Stalin and Gorbachev alike, see the family as an important element of social control. Trotsky wrote in 1936 that "the most compelling motive of the present cult of the family is undoubtedly the need of the bureaucracy for a stable hierarchy of relations, and for the disciplining of youth by means of forty million points of support for authority and power."**



Although women are a vital element in the Soviet workforce, their wage rates are still only three-quarters that of men.

to obtain. Legal abortions were abolished except on health grounds and women were instructed that they had no right to deny the 'joys of motherhood.' Abortion became the privilege of those who could afford it. Ordinary women, out of necessity, were forced to procure illegal abortions without adequate sanitation and facilities. Many women suffered mutilation and medical problems. The benefits of life under a socialist system as envisaged by Lenin, where women would have a full and equal life with proper childcare, would have removed the insecurity and fear which the birth of another child often brought, thus eliminating the need for many abortions. This approach contrasted with the coercive instruction of the Stalinists to 'enjoy motherhood'.

Behind these legal changes and coercive methods lay the economic requirements of the bureaucracy. With millions of workers killed in the war and civil war, rapid industrialisation resulted in a desperate shortage of labour. Hence the necessity for such methods to ensure an increase in the population.

In 1934 homosexuality and prostitution were declared crimes with penalties of up to 8 years imprisonment. In 1936 there were over 1,000 women arrested for prostitution in Moscow alone. The fact that out of economic necessity thousands of women, many born after 1917, were resorting to prostitution—which represents the extreme degradation of women—was a crushing refutation of the myth of the bureaucracy that 'socialism had been achieved'.

These changes with respect to the position of women and the family were not the result of economic problems and

the difficulties of 'building socialism', as the Stalinists argue. The Bolsheviks had faced even greater problems but they recognised that, within the bounds of what was possible, the degree of emancipation of women was a measure of the success of the revolution. The changes made under the bureaucracy were in fact a reflection of the political degeneration taking place. This degeneration was a contradictory process: women were becoming involved in production, yet for women the political gains of the revolution were clawed back concurrently with the crushing of political democracy for the working class as a whole. Policies to bring women into production, or to expand the population, were consciously decided upon by the bureaucracy only from the point of view of consolidating its privileges, prestige and caste interests.

## Gains reversed

The new cult of the family was a natural progression of Stalinism, necessary to ensure stable social relations within the newly-bureaucratised Soviet Union. Marital stability was considered essential for the proper upbringing of children and the responsibility for childcare was once again shifted back to the individual family, ie women. In *The Revolution Betrayed* Trotsky sums up the changes taking place: "The triumphal rehabilitation of the family is caused by the material and cultural bankruptcy of the state. Instead of openly saying 'we have proven still too poor and ignorant for the creation of socialist relations among men, our children and grandchildren will realise this aim', the leaders are forcing people to glue

together again the shell of the broken family, and not only that, but to consider it, under threat of extreme penalties, the sacred nucleus of triumphal socialism."

The family was a means of disciplining youth. The Bolsheviks had always recognised the importance of its support among youth, with its new ideas and fresh approach. But the Stalinists imprisoned or exiled those who adhered to Bolshevism and dared to question the leadership. At the Tenth Congress of the Communist Youth in April 1936 the General Secretary called on the youth to "end the chatter about industrial and financial planning and other important state problems as though we are going to decide them". Yet the age of maturity was still 18! The rehabilitation of the family in the 1930s was a conscious plan of the bureaucracy to clamp down, through the discipline of individual families, on the questions youth would raise about changes taking place.

Housework was considered socially useful labour, yet there were enormous differences in the lives of ordinary women workers and the wives of the bureaucrats, who had cooks, telephones with which to order the shopping, and cars. Ordinary working women had to fit in running to the shops, cooking dinner, carrying children to the kindergarten (if they were fortunate enough to have a place) with a full time job. The return of women to family responsibilities was further reinforced with the decline in standards of creches and nurseries. Some were no better than bad orphan asylums, rather than being a place where women could leave their children confident that they were being well looked after and receiving more attention than they would in the in-

dividual home. The better kindergartens were, of course, restricted for the use of the bureaucracy. Even the increase in kindergarten places to one million by 1935 was a drop in the ocean.

In addition, the standards and costs of the social dining halls and laundries made them unacceptable to the majority of ordinary workers. With the continuing responsibility for children and the home, divorce represented, not the door to freedom, but to destitution. But divorce itself became more difficult to obtain and by 1944 was virtually restricted to the privileged layers in society. There were massive increases in the payment required to register a divorce and the more times a person divorced the greater was the payment. Even in law the equality introduced in 1917 was being taken away. Only the affluent could afford divorce and unregistered marriages were no longer recognised. For ordinary working class families this meant that for the first time since the revolution there was a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children. Stalinism engulfed every aspect of daily life.

## Russia today

The position of women in Russia today stems from the policies laid down in the period where the bureaucracy consolidated its power and privileges. Women are involved in production but without being freed from their domestic responsibilities. In fact under Stalin it was argued that for real 'fulfillment' a role in both production and the home were necessary. Motherhood was declared a patriotic duty with the tantalising carrot of a 'Glory of Motherhood' medal for those women with nine or more children! This attitude was reflected in the education system with any semblance of equal opportunity and freedom of choice being swept aside. Girls were taught needlework, domestic science and childcare while boys studied electrical repairs and map reading. Co-education was abolished in 1943 although it has been reintroduced since.

Nonetheless, there have been positive developments for women as a result of the planned economy. Despite the devastating destruction of the second world war, the Soviet economy was rapidly reconstructed, increasing five times since 1945. In the 1950s and early 1960s the economy grew by 10-11 per cent a year, two or three times faster than most capitalist countries. This allowed steady improvements in living standards for women, including retirement at 55 (60 for men), no discrimination against working mothers

in terms of employment or rates of pay, and the right of pregnant women to transfer to lighter work with fully paid maternity leave for 56 days before and 56 days after the birth of a child. New laws in 1970 abolished night work and underground work for women.

The number of women in higher education as a percentage of the total has risen from 28% in 1927, to 43% in 1960, to 49% in 1970. The only other countries where women are over 40 per cent of the total in higher education are Finland, the USA and France. There have been improvements in pre-school care for children—in 1960 there were 500,000 places but by 1971 this had risen to over five million, even though parents still have to pay 20 per cent of the cost of the upkeep of children at preschool institutions. The transformation of Russia from a semi-feudal country where 99 per cent of agricultural power was animals, to one of the two most powerful industrialised nations in the world, has seen a doubling of the life expectancy for women from 30 to 74 years and a reduction in child mortality of 90 per cent.

However improvements such as the increase in childcare facilities merely reflects the attempts by the bureaucracy to manipulate the female workforce according to the needs of the economy. The vast shortage of men in the Soviet Union arising from the first world war and the civil war years was compounded by the second world war, leaving only 59 men between the ages of 35-59 for every 100 women. Women again had to be mobilised into industry.

But in the 1970s, the growth rate fell to a mere 3 per cent as the bureaucracy, now presiding over an advanced, modern economy, became an absolute fetter on production, incapable of producing better results than the capitalist economies. At the same time, there was a new trend in the demographic crisis with women in the European republics rarely having more than one child. So the bureaucracy launched an assault on the alleged detrimental effects of institutional childcare in an attempt to persuade mothers that it was better for them to stay at home with the children. This 'back to the home' policy reflected on the one hand the shortage of adequate childcare facilities but was also part of a scheme to increase the birthrate. Pressures are brought to bear such as stressing the dangers of abortion (still the main method of birth control) and the greater risk of cancer in an unused womb.

The issue of women's wages in the Soviet Union is assuming more and more importance, as in the West, especially since by 1959 almost one

third of households were headed by women. But women still occupy jobs at the lower end of the wages scale. In 1975 in Russia women's wages were still between 67-73 per cent of men's. The issue of low wages is further reinforced by the sex segregation that exists in employment opportunities. Some occupations have an almost exclusively female workforce, and in fact this segregation has increased. In 1940 women working in education were 59 per cent of the workforce, but by 1975 this figure had risen to 73 per cent. In 1959 one third of women were in occupations where 70 per cent of the workforce were women, but by 1970 this figure had risen to 55 per cent. 98 per cent of nurses are women, as are 75 per cent of teachers, 95 per cent of librarians and 75 per cent of doctors. In agriculture too, men occupy the better paid skilled jobs and women do much of the heavy manual labour. In all these areas of work the proportion of women decreases the further up the scale. Although there has been a rapid growth in the number of women scientists (in 1950 there were 600 female doctors of science, in 1984 there were 5,600), in the top Academy of Sciences only one fifth are women. At the June 'extraordinary' conference of the 'Communist' Party Zoya Pukhova, chair of the Soviet Women's Committee, conceded that there was "a gap between the official policy of equality for women, and the reality, in which few keep pace with men in the working world", *Guardian*, 4 July 1988.

## Double burden

Clearly, it is women's position in the family that has had far reaching consequences for women's involvement in all other areas of life. The family has had to absorb the additional burdens of female employment. It has not meant a reduction in the time spent on household chores. Women still spend two to two and a half times as much time on housework as men. Added to this, the emphasis on heavy industry, combined with the bungling and mismanagement of the bureaucracy without the check of workers management and control, has meant fewer and inferior consumer goods such as washing machines, vacuum cleaners, or refrigerators. The growth in female employment has not been matched by the expansion of services such as cheap, good quality dining halls. This, coupled with a housing crisis which in 1970 meant that 23 per cent of households were made up of three generations living in the same house, has added to the strains within family life.

Since the revolution, educational and professional opportunities have been opened up for women, but for most ordinary women these economic obligations, on top of the traditional responsibilities, have made life increasingly hard. The programme of the Bolsheviks to free women from domestic drudgery has been buried as more and more are compelled to combine their roles as workers and mothers. 85 per cent of women between the ages of 20-55 work full-time with the responsibility for childcare often falling on the shoulders of elderly female relatives. The bureaucracy is attempting to solve the fall in the rate of economic growth since the 1970s on the backs of women, by looking for cheaper ways to provide childcare and domestic services in the form of individual family units. The programme of the Bolsheviks relating to women is clearly incompatible with the needs of the economy under bureaucratic control, and with the interests of the privileged bureaucracy.

Lenin emphasised that the oppression of women would not be automatically eliminated by the socialist revolution but that further measures would be needed to remove the sexual division of labour that keeps women tied to the home. Under Stalinism, the employment of women represents only the **potential** for the emancipation of women and in fact has clearly revealed the double burden that working class women bear.

The contradictory position of women in the USSR with their involvement in industry on a mass scale without any reduction in family responsibilities, is part of the general contradictions that are developing in Soviet society. There is a basic conflict of interests between the bureaucracy and the working class as a whole. Gorbachev's 'reform' programme is an indication of these contradictions. The slowing down of the Soviet economy threatens the position of the bureaucracy. As living standards are affected, the discontent of the workers will develop. To prevent a political revolution from below Gorbachev wants to carry out reforms from the top. But it will prove impossible to transform Soviet society, to end waste and corruption without eliminating the bureaucratic system itself.

The limits of Gorbachev's 'reform' programme are revealed by its application to the position of women. The reforms are being introduced alongside a campaign to push women back to the confines of the home. A new course, 'The Ethics and Psychology of Family Life' has been introduced into the school curriculum and is shown on television. This course is designed to

## **The limits of Gorbachev's 'reform' programme are revealed by its application to the position of women. The reforms are being introduced alongside a campaign to push women back into the confines of the home.**

reinforce the traditional role of women in the family. Teachers are urged to 'train and train again, girls to be girls and boys to be boys'. This instruction on the different roles of girls and boys is even carried over into different diets—from the age of 14 or earlier, boys are given less sweets and more meat!

Faced with low growth and, according to one of Gorbachev's economists, the prospect of unemployment arising out of the closure of uneconomic factories, the bureaucracy has effectively abandoned any prospect of providing universal childcare facilities. Instead, shifting the responsibility firmly onto the family, Gorbachev announced at the 27th Congress of the 'Communist' Party, a plan "to extend the practise of letting women work a shorter day or week, (ie part-time working-JP) or to **work at home**". But this is not just a question of material problems in providing childcare facilities. As Trotsky explained in *The Revolution Betrayed*, the restoration of the family went "infinitely farther than iron economic necessity demands. To the objective causes producing this return... there is added the social interest of the ruling stratum in the deepening of bourgeois law. The most compelling motive of the present cult of the family is undoubtedly the need of the bureaucracy for a stable hierarchy of relations, and for the disciplining of youth by means of forty million points of support for authority and power." Gorbachev, like Stalin before him, clearly sees the family as an important element of social control.

## **Gorbachev**

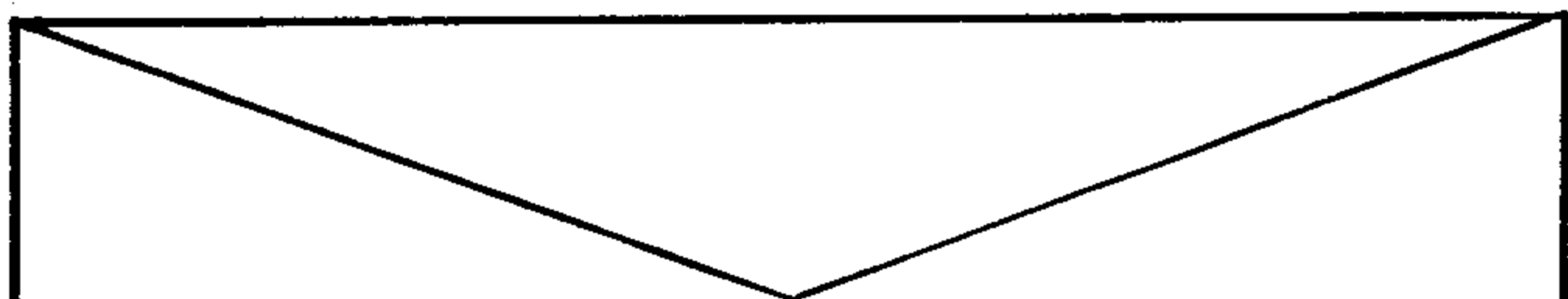
This is confirmed by Gorbachev himself in his book, *Perestroika: New Thinking for our Country and the World*, when he argues that "women no longer have enough time to perform their everyday duties at home—housework, the upbringing of children and the creation of a good family atmosphere. We have discovered that many of our problems—in children's and young people's behaviour, in our morals, culture and in production—are partially caused by the weakening of family ties and slack attitudes to family

responsibilities... we should... make it possible for women to return to their purely womenly mission."

Fundamentally, the attempts of the bureaucracy to manipulate women to suit the needs of the system will only be overcome by the involvement of the mass of men and women in the political revolution. The political revolution has the same role to play in the emancipation of women as for society generally; working class men and women have exactly the same interests in overthrowing the bureaucracy and instituting workers democracy.

Marxists can be confident that the demands and aspirations of women workers in the Soviet Union will not be to turn the clock back and return to the confines of the home but will be to extend their rights and conditions. They will demand the full implementation of the ideas and laws made immediately after the 1917 revolution so that the emancipation of women can become a reality and the promises of the revolution can be fulfilled. Despite the gains of October, the level of women's emancipation in Russia has to be measured, not on the basis of a backward economy, but on the basis of a modern industrialised nation.

In the early days of the revolution, Lenin used the same yardstick of success that Marx and Engels took: "No nation can be free when half the population is enslaved in the kitchen." The conclusion to be drawn must be that there is, as yet, still no society internationally where children, women and men have been liberated. Fifty years after *The Revolution Betrayed* was written by Trotsky, his words have as much significance today as in 1936: "How man enslaved woman, how exploiter subjected them both, how toilers have attempted at the price of blood to free themselves from slavery and have only exchanged one chain for another—history tells us much about all this. In essence it tells us nothing else. But how in reality to free the child, the woman and the human being? For that we have as yet no reliable models. All past historical experience, wholly negative, demands of the toilers at least and first of all an implacable distrust of all privileged and uncontrollable guardians."



# LETTERS

Send letters to *MIR*, 3 – 13 Hepscoot Road, London E9 5HB. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the ideas of the Editorial Board. We reserve the right to shorten excessively long letters.

## Why has the slump been delayed?

Dear Comrades,

The editorial of *MIR* Number 36, Winter 1988, on the world economy said: "While one could not theoretically rule out the possibility of a temporary agreement which would only serve to postpone the slump a year or two, while making it more severe when it finally arrives, at the present time, all the signs point in the opposite direction." Doesn't this perspective need to be reassessed in the light of the latest evidence? To say that all the signs pointed in the opposite direction of a postponement of the crisis is surely not true.

Predictions of developments in capitalist economics must represent a balance of probabilities. In particular, the prediction of short term trends must be conditional because of the nature of

capitalist society. Prior to the crash, unlike 1929, production was rising in all the main capitalist countries, quite strongly in Japan and Britain. In the aftermath of the crash, also unlike 1929, interest rates fell and the money supply was allowed to increase. These factors pointed to a strong possibility of a delay in a slump or recession, although of course deepening the fundamental contradictions.

Since the stock market crash a year ago economic growth has not fallen, it has even increased in some countries. Recent rises in interest rates worldwide mean this will not continue and the stage is set for a downturn, though not in 1988.

Yours fraternally,  
George Passmore,  
East London.

new stage in the development of post-war capitalism. The strategists of capital were terrified of the possibility of a worldwide slump and its social consequences. So immediately after the crash, the seven dominant imperialist powers (the so-called G7 countries) came together to work out a new policy. They believed that they could prevent a new world recession by pumping 'liquidity' ie credit into the world economy. The temporary agreement they reached is something we took to be a possibility as the passage from the *MIR* editorial that George Passmore quotes confirms, just as it was only the Marxists who forecast the stock crash well before its arrival last October.

### US dominant

Even then, when discussing the prospects for a slump in an *MIR* article written **before** the stock market crash, we stressed that **"at all times we must make a caveat."** We must take into account the enormous resources that have been created by the labour of the working class, by science and technique, in the course of the last 50 years..." *MIR* No 35, Summer 1987 (emphasis in the original). "Are the capitalists prepared to waste the resources accumulated in the course of the last 50 years?" we asked. "Can they defer the onset of a fresh recession, given the accumulation of the US budget and trade deficits? It is possible, temporarily, but it would depend on a whole series of circumstances" including developments on the political plane. Thus the question in America is, as the *Financial Times* put it in September, "whether the new administration—be it Republican or Democrat—will take determined action to rebalance its economy by cutting the budget deficit, or rather whether it will do so before the markets impose their own solution."

Let us remind ourselves of the underlying processes in the world economy which led up to the stock crash. The

post-war period began with the overwhelming economic, military and political dominance of US imperialism. The USA was able to force down national tariff barriers for its exports and established the dollar as the main means of exchange and store of wealth after gold (of which it held over two-thirds of the world stock in 1945). But the whole post-war period has been characterised by the relative decline of the USA in relation to the growing countervailing economic power of Europe (led by West Germany) and Japan. The US share of world production and trade was reduced at the same time as the world economy accelerated upward on the basis of an expansion of world trade and international division of labour. Now the world economy has never been so integrated—as the worldwide chain reaction that followed the initial fall in share prices in Wall Street demonstrated. In the 1929 crash the fall was at first restricted to the US stock market.

Capitalism expanded through an unprecedented growth of world trade, combined with the secondary factor of Keynesian methods of state spending. However the first simultaneous world recession in 1974-5 brought a sharp change in the policies of the capitalist strategists. Keynesian policies of state subsidy and expenditure had failed to avoid a slump. The new answer was monetarism—in reality a return to the old orthodox economics of 'sound budgets' of the 1920s and 1930s.

But it was monetarism only in words. In practice the Reagan government adopted what we have termed as 'negative Keynesianism' ie massive state spending not on civilian projects but on arms. It was a policy to avoid slump that echoed Hitler's policies of the 1930s. Hitler also adopted an arms programme to reduce unemployment. Hitler faced the choice of slump or war and opted for the latter by building up arms and then using them. Although Reagan has easily

### The *MIR* Editorial Board replies:

Firstly we must welcome George Passmore's letter because a discussion of the points he raises should help us to understand better all the factors involved in analysing current developments in the world capitalist economy. Marxism is the science of perspectives—the analysis of the underlying processes and general trends in society as a

guide to action. But as Trotsky once said, perspectives are not blueprints of the future. They cannot forecast or predict every event and that is particularly true in relation to each twist and turn in the economy and above all in the exact timing of important changes.

The stock crash of October 1987 **did** mark a definitive

outspent Hitler he does not have the option of a world war. But the massive arms spending created a huge deficit on the budget which could only be financed by borrowing. To make it attractive to invest in the US government, interest rates for lenders were kept high. This drove up the value of the dollar and raised the costs of investment for US manufacturing. US exporters were driven out of world markets and a huge trade deficit was built up. The USA moved from being the world's largest creditor ie lender to being the world's largest debtor ie borrower.

## Banks

This process could not continue and the main capitalist countries have made strenuous attempts to try and reduce the US deficits while avoiding a slump. They have tried to control the fall in the value of the dollar to give it a 'soft' landing. Between 1986 and the beginning of 1988, the central banks of the G7 countries spent \$150bn in trying to control the dollar's value. But inexorably interest rates began to rise in 1987 to the point where it threatened to drive the world economy into slump. That fear triggered off the stock crash. We argued that the relatively sluggish growth of the last eight years would either turn straight away into a slump or it would accelerate into an uncontrollable boom and then swing back sharply into slump. It is true that there has not been an immediate slump but all the underlying conditions for it remain. Since the stock exchange crash there has been an acceleration of growth in the world economy—although only in the advanced industrial nations. In the so-called Third World growth has declined as their huge foreign debt rises and wealth continues to be sucked out of these countries by the imperialist powers—over \$200bn since 1982.

It is not possible accurately to predict how the underlying processes in the economy

will unfold both in detail and in timing. But it would be wrong to conclude that because there has not been an immediate downturn in world production and trade after the stock crash that capitalism has avoided a slump. The same underlying factors which pointed to a slump still continue to operate.

The G7 countries responded to the crash by saying that they would avoid the mistakes of the 1930s and of 1979-81 by lowering interest rates and pumping liquidity into the world economy. But the result has only been to temporarily stave off a recession at the expense of beginning a new inflationary spiral. This runaway boom will inevitably go bust. The US **trade** deficit has improved, if only marginally. However, the **current account**, which includes invisible earnings like shipping, insurance and tourism, is worse in the first quarter of 1988 than in 1987 as the cost of interest payments on all that borrowing mounts up. The budget deficit has hardly been dented. Now all the serious commentators are worried and the stock markets remain nervous and swing around at the smallest movement in trade figures or interest rates. The US financial system remains perilously weak, as the US government has to bale out bank after bank that is forced into difficulty. The collapse of the savings banks may cost the US government \$50bn and as the *Financial Times* recently remarked: "financial disaster could spread like a forest fire if recession ever took hold."

So all the main factors that pointed to recession in October 1987 are still present. The delay in the coming slump, which has been postponed by the attempt of the G7 nations to lower interest rates and expand the money supply, threatens to set off a new bout of inflation. So now interest rates are rising again. The capitalist powers try to control the economy, but the forces of the market really control them. Their attempt to delay the recession is only stoking up an even worse

**It is not possible accurately to predict how the underlying processes in the economy will unfold both in detail and in timing. But it would be wrong to conclude that capitalism has avoided a slump. The same underlying factors which pointed to a recession still continue to operate.**

downturn later on. And they are being forced to adopt policies of rising interest rates in contradiction to their original aim at the beginning of this year.

Of course there are differences with the 1929-32 slump when there were special and unique factors at work. In any event, an exact replay of the 1929-31 events is highly unlikely. However, as we explained in *MIR* No 36 it is not true, as George Passmore suggests, that governments and bankers in the 1930s restricted money supply and kept interest rates high. Between 1929-33 US interest rates fell from 6% to 2% while prices fell faster than money supply. Money was plentiful and cheap but it made no difference because the market for profitable production and investment was too poor to revive the economy. Monetarism and balanced budgets existed during the boom of 1924-9. So these policies were not decisive in causing the slump of the early 1930s.

## Inflation

What is different is that now the next slump will take place while prices continue to rise. In the 1930s the slump was characterised by sharp falls in prices of goods. Now it is more likely that we will have a slump along with some price rises ie slumpflation or stagflation, although the price of raw materials could fall. The world economy is now dominated by huge multinational companies who can exert some control over prices. Any collapse of markets leads to them cutting back production to preserve price levels. Thus the process of capitalist crisis now takes form not so much through an overproduction of goods but

of excess capacity, where even in boom periods up to 20% of productive potential lies unused. In slumps that excess capacity reaches much higher levels, forcing industry and commerce into closures and redundancies to try and write off this 'excess' capital.

The capitalists have tried to stave off the world recession by the input of extra credit. In so doing they are fuelling the fires of inflation, which they are also desperate to avoid after the experiences of the 1970s. So 1988 starts off with falling interest rates and ends with rising rates—such are the twists and turns of policy as the capitalists try to weave a narrow path between inflation and slump. But they cannot control the world capitalist economy in that way. The forces of the market will exert themselves. The imbalances between the capitalist powers expressed in the payments surpluses and deficits, and in the net transfers from the ex-colonial countries to the industrial economies, can only be corrected at the expense of an enormous contraction of production and trade ie a slump. Again we must emphasise that it is difficult to ascertain exactly when the world recession will take hold. It could be next year or it could even be postponed for another two to three years. But it is inevitable that this present boom will go bust. It was some nine months after the Wall Street crash of 1929 before there was the first real downturn in world trade and production, and the bottom of the slump was not reached until July 1932. As George Passmore says himself, the recent rises in interest rates show that the accelerated growth of the last year cannot continue and the stage is set for a downturn.

# The market economy or socialist planning

The market economy is now the vogue. The exchange of goods and services for a price on a market is now heralded as the most efficient, fair and practical way of meeting the needs of human beings. The 'freer' the market is from state 'interference' and 'bureaucratic obstruction' the better it will work for all who participate. And this 'free market' inspires the spirit of self-interest which in turn generates self-motivation and enterprise which not only makes the wheels of production turn but also makes people more prosperous and happy.

This is the professed philosophy of Thatcherism and Reaganism. Through buying and selling on the market, available resources and products are distributed to people in the most efficient and equitable way. The allocation of resources does not take place by conscious decision, but by the operations of supply and demand through the movements of price, indirectly by the 'invisible hand of the market' as the classical economist of the late 18th century, Adam Smith, characterised it. Each individual choice made by the buyer and seller of any transaction on the market simultaneously promotes and harmonises all individual actions for the social good.

## Keynes discarded

The leaders of capitalism have returned to this unbridled defence of the market because of the perceived failure of 'state intervention and planning' in Western capitalist economies. The unprecedented growth of investment, production and trade, accompanied by relatively full employment from 1948-73 was commonly held by supporters of capitalism to be the result of the judicious use of state subsidy, state expenditure and state projects backing up market capitalism, along with careful regulation and guidance to the direction and operation of private capital and markets. In other words cooperation between a state-owned productive sector and private capital, characterised in Britain as the 'mixed economy'.

But the first major world recession in production and trade in 1974-5, followed by the deep contraction of world industrial production from 1979-81, brought about a transformation in the ideas of the strategists of capital.

---

## By Bob McKee

---

Whereas they had thought that capitalism had needed the help of the state to avoid the slumps and unemployment of the 1930s, it now appeared that state expenditure and regulation of capitalism could not avoid a paralysis of production and investment growth. On the contrary it appeared to make it worse by running up huge borrowing burdens on the private sector and restrictions on investment and trade. It was time to turn back to the 'free market'. Keynesian state expenditure was replaced with monetarism; state regulation with the free market; and the state sector with privatisation. After all, as Professor Griffiths, adviser to the Thatcher government, says in his book, *The Creation of Wealth*: "It was the market economy which brought about the transformation of the Western world from widespread poverty to the level of prosperity it now enjoys".

The relative boom in the world economy since 1982 has apparently justified this return to Adam Smith. The fact that the boom of the 1980s is the weakest in the post-war period; that unemployment in the advanced capitalist world remains around 30 million; that the neo-colonial countries of the 'Third World', with few exceptions, show no appreciable progress out of "widespread poverty" is ignored by the gurus of the 'free market'. Thatcher is happy to boast that "we are now a capital-owning democracy of people and families. We have come out of the long dark tunnel of socialism. We are now the first post-Socialist society" (speaking to the Conservative Women's Conference 1987).

It is a fundamental premise of socialism, even before Marx developed his contribution to socialist thought, that the needs of human beings will never be satisfied properly through the production and exchange of commodities on a market. The market breeds inequality of income and wealth; it wastes human labour power and natural resources; and it causes periodic and uncontrollable slumps in production, employment and incomes and therefore condemns millions to chronic poverty, even hunger and death.

Therefore any revival of the idea that freedom from material want and the complete satisfaction of human need can be achieved through, and only through, the market, should be vigorously opposed by any socialist. This article attempts to carry out that task by once again going over the basic contradictions in the market economy that Marx and other socialists have identified; and restating the essential features of the socialist alternative: democratic planning under common ownership to meet needs directly.

This restatement of why the capitalist market economy has outlived its usefulness to mankind and how socialist planning must replace it if the human race is to progress, is necessary not just because the representatives of the capitalists have re-embraced the 'free market'. Unfortunately it is also necessary because the official representatives of the working-class, the leaders of the labour and trade union movement, both social democrats and 'communists', have swallowed this new orthodoxy hook, line and sinker.

## 'Aims and Values'

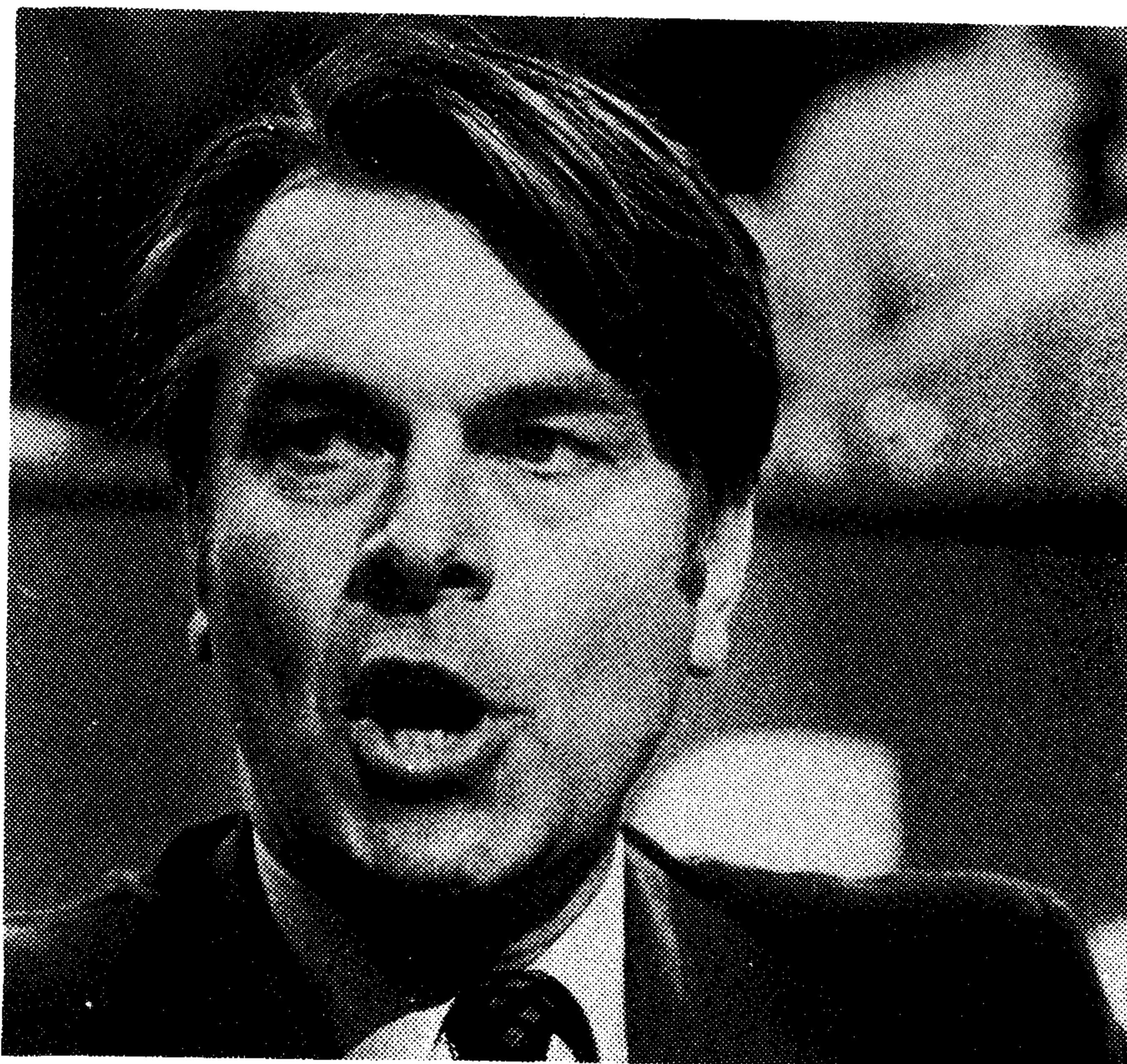
The clearest statement of capitulation to the 'market economy' is in the Labour Party NEC's *Statement of Aims and Values*, supposedly the definitive view of the present leadership on capitalism and socialism. The document states: "Market allocation and competition between companies, whether privately owned or socially owned, is essential to serving the customer by meeting changing needs, responding to demand and promoting efficiency." This view of the market was more recently backed up by Labour's deputy leader, Roy Hattersley, in an article in the *New Socialist* of May/June 1988, when he said that "market allocation was essential to ensure the efficiency which comes from competition and to provide the consumer with real choice". Of course these statements from the current leadership of the Labour Party merely confirm what they have argued over the past few years: that socialist planning and public ownership are unworkable and unnecessary. Witness what Neil Kinnock saw as his aim only two years ago: "the government's task is to lead the consensus for change, assist with finance to promote the grow-

th of markets", *Financial Times*. Similarly Roy Hattersley, when asked how to solve the basic problems of the economy, commented, in the *Guardian*, 15 October 1984: "We need a high profit economy — there is no way of creating full employment in its absence". Lord Donaghue, formerly an adviser to Jim Callaghan, the Labour Prime Minister from 1977 to 1979, put the argument for capitalist markets even more crudely: "I think the City can contribute more to a Labour society than Camden council or a nationalised gas industry"! This came from an interview with Donaghue in *Marxism Today*, the 'theoretical' journal of the 'Communist' Party, without comment.

Indeed, the capitalist market system has been even more enthusiastically endorsed by the so-called 'Communist' Party of Great Britain. Its intellectual pundit, Professor Hobsbawm, wearily told us after the Tory election victory that: "in the absence of any other party with a vision of a renewed Britain and the determination to get there, even the absurdities of the free market look better than nothing", *Guardian*, 27 September 1987. He went on to say that: "Using markets and private enterprise will be inevitable for any post-Thatcherite government given the privatised economy in which it will have to begin operating". The recent new 'Communist' Party programme, *Facing up to the Future*, endorses the need for the market "as the best way to coordinate lots of economic decisions and ensure that production responds to consumer choices" along with rejecting the class nature of society and democratic socialist planning.

The failure of the 'mixed economy' which was held so dear by Labour and trade union leaders in the post-war period; the apparent relative success of the 'free market' under Reagan and Thatcher in the 1980s; and the growing crisis of the 'centrally planned economies' of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have led capitalist, social democratic and Stalinist pundits to reassert the beneficial features of the market economy. Once again it must be the task of Marxism, the scientific form of socialism, to explain the real workings of the capitalist market economy and the socialist alternative.

Is the market the best way of allocating available resources to achieve maximum satisfaction of human needs? Such is the claim of the most prominent of economists who promote the virtues of the market. Friedrich Hayek is the prophet of Thatcherite economics and a dedicated opponent of socialism. In fact Hayek has seen it as his life long duty to refute socialism. In his latest book, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*, he states: "there is no known way, other



**What is the difference between 'social ownership' and David Owen's 'social market'?**

than by the distribution of products in a competitive market, to inform individuals in what direction their several efforts must aim so as to contribute as much as possible to the total product". Market allocation is the only system that meets the needs of mankind. How do we know? Because people would not pay the price of a commodity unless it met their perceived need, ie if it sells it satisfies.

## Adam Smith

And it is the motivation of private gain for the individual which lies behind market allocation and makes it work. As Adam Smith put it: "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from a regard to their own self-interest. We address ourselves not to their humanity but to their self-love and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantage". And this is not only the law of supply and demand or of profit, but ultimately of 'human nature'.

Now some socialists would condemn such a philosophy as 'immoral' but for Hayek or Thatcher such condemnation is irrelevant. If the market economy takes production forward, provides more commodities that 'consumers' need and allocates resources efficiently as producers compete to obtain profits, then that success is the market economy's own justification.

Marxists oppose the market economy not because it is immoral but because while it may, at heavy cost to human energy and life, have once driven the productive forces onward, it has never met the needs of the overwhelming majority of the world's population and increasingly will be unable to do so.

Why? Firstly, because there is no real 'free market' for the exchange of commodities. The competitive struggle for markets between independent producers has led to the growth of huge monopoly producers who now dominate not only their own national markets but also as multi-national conglomerates straddle the markets of the world. These large companies can exert powerful control over the price of the products they produce and the levels of production and investment in the market. So there is no free competition. This has happened precisely because of the nature of capitalism; where the owners of capital have increasingly concentrated their labour force in large production units, developed the division of labour in the processes of production and built up reserves of capital to introduce new technology and develop markets. It is the nature of competitive capitalism to turn into monopoly capitalism. The irony is that the market economy rests on the social cooperation of millions of workers, as we explain below, who do not own any means of production but who are corralled into ever larger concentrations of private capital as they drive out all the small and independent producers from

the market place:

There are two features of monopoly capitalism that flow from this development of the market economy. Firstly much of the production of modern capitalism does not now go through market allocation at all. The modern large motor company manufactures its engines in Japan; its vehicle bodies in Korea; its assembly in Spain and its spare parts in the UK. These products are not sold on the market to each subsidiary. Instead production is planned and directly allocated across national boundaries to meet the planned target of vehicle production. Only at the end does somebody pay money at a price for the finished vehicle. It has recently been estimated that 50% of the UK's international trade takes place between affiliates of the same company where the price for the traded parts of the product are fixed by the company for accounting purposes only and where no market exchange takes place at all. Mass production under modern capitalism requires considerable **planning** of production and direct allocation of products without the market.

## No 'Free Market'

The size and share of monopolies also increases their power to control prices and the movements of supply and demand in the market. And yet the struggle for profit, the private appropriation of the surplus created from the labour power of the working class to the owners of capital, continues in contradiction to the **socialisation** of the production process and its **removal** from the market. This stark contrast is one of the major contradictions of capitalism that can only be resolved by socialist planning, bringing socialised production into harmony with democratic control of the surplus produced by cooperative production. As Engels described the process in *Anti-Duhring*: "The greater the mastery obtained by the new mode of production over all the decisive fields of production and in all the economically decisive countries, the more it reduced individual production to an insignificant residuum, the more clearly was brought out the incompatibility of socialised production and capitalistic appropriation... now presents itself as an antagonism between the organisation of production in the individual workshop and the anarchy of production in society generally." (p374)

The contradiction between cooperative production and private capital ownership is mirrored by the contradiction between social need and private profit. The pursuit of 'self-gain' for the individual in the market does not meet

the needs of people as a whole. Marx has shown that the apparent equality of exchange values when commodities are bought and sold on the market for money, hides a process of exploitation where those who have nothing to sell but the ability to work are forced into employment for a wage by the owners of capital, ie the privately owned raw materials, factories, machinery and money. For this wage, workers produce value embodied in the commodities which is greater than that invested by the capitalist in the wage bill and machinery and raw materials, when sold on the market by the owner of capital.

In order to expand this surplus-value, the owners of capital exercise a tyranny over the workforce in an effort to produce commodities at the 'right' price for the market. There is no conscious decision about what to produce or whether to produce more or reduce the hours of labour. The consumer ie the market, must be satisfied so that surplus value is appropriated by the owner of capital. This surplus-value is then invested or consumed as the individual owners of capital see fit, not as society as a whole may require. In fact production and investment may be arrested if this profit created by the unpaid labour of the working class is insufficient for the owners of capital.

This method of increasing production is unique to the capitalist market economy. And it is precisely this anarchic system of production for profit and not for the consumer that leads to the cycles of boom and slump exhibited in the world capitalist economy. The market system breeds overcapacity as monopolies cut back on production to maintain prices; unemployment as the market economy descends into depression; and inflation as the market economy produces overproduction of credit ie fictitious capital. As a result there is a huge wastage of productive potential — even in boom periods under modern market economies only 80% of total productive capacity is used on average by advanced capitalist nations.

**Capitalism is a system riddled with contradictions, founded on exploitation and inequality and now foundering in chronic cycles of boom and slump.**

In another way there is considerable waste of productive labour under the market economy. Because production only takes place if commodities can be sold on a market in competition with other independent capitalist producers, massive amounts of resources are devoted towards persuading consumers to buy products, many of which are distinguishable from one another by only a brand name. Marketing and advertising, far from just informing the potential buyer of the existence of a product, consume big budgets in trying to increase or maintain a share of an already existing market. The waste of resources is revealed by figures for the amount of money invested in management, marketing, advertising and financial staff ie circulating capital, compared to production workers, in the total US wage bill for capitalist companies in the USA, taken from A Henley *Labour's Share and the Profitability Crisis*, Cambridge Journal of Economics, December 1987. Most of such expenditure is only necessary in a market economy.

### The ratio of circulating capital to the production wage bill

|      |      |      |      |
|------|------|------|------|
| 1947 | 3.69 | 1980 | 5.44 |
| 1960 | 3.72 | 1982 | 5.51 |
| 1970 | 3.78 |      |      |

But perhaps even more devastating to the argument that the market allows choice is that the market ignores the varied purchasing power of the individual. Yes, anybody can buy what they want — so long as they have enough money to meet the price. But the capitalist market economy does not create consumers with more or less equal incomes or wealth of ownership despite Thatcher's talk of a property owning democracy. The vast majority of wealth is in the hands of a few property owners, and through that inequality those owners of capital are able to extort the greater proportion of income generated by the work of the majority. The latest figures on the concentration of income and wealth confirm that. Poverty is a chronic disorder of the market economy, whether it is in an advanced industrial nation like the UK or throughout the ex-colonial countries where poverty, famine, disease and climatic disaster dominate the lives of thousands of millions. The reality of the world in the late 1980s makes a mockery of Professor Griffith's boast that the market economy has enabled people to "enjoy prosperity".

Advocacy of the market economy is based on the view that if something sells it must be beneficial. But while motor cars are sold in their millions, no account is made by the market economy

of the accompanying pollution, traffic accidents and consequent resources used in health, the need to build roads at the expense of rail etc. There are other costs to society which the market ignores in its single-minded pursuit of 'self-interest'. All around we witness the growing ecological disasters, the dangers of the destruction of the atmosphere, the rain forests etc. But if there is no 'self-interest' then the market cannot respond to social needs.

The struggle for a greater share of the market by individual producers has led to them combining politically to finance and support nationally based state machines to protect by force of arms home markets and to annex new markets around the world. Imperialist war is the direct result of the struggle for markets in the national rivalry within the capitalist market economy. What could be more wasteful of human life and energy and material resources?

Clearly, the market does not rationally allocate scarce resources, it does not maximise production, it does not meet consumer need through providing free choice for the consumer. It is a system riddled with contradictions, founded on exploitation and inequality and now foundering in chronic cycles of boom and slump leaving the majority of the human race in poverty and misery.

## Marx

The progress of mankind can only be objectively measured by the ability of human beings to expand the productive forces to the point where working is no longer necessary to meet human wants. As long as resources are scarce in relation to wants then society will still be locked in the realm of necessity. But Marx argued that the market economy, while a system of social organisation which drove forward the productive forces way beyond that achieved by earlier forms of social organisation, could never free human beings from the struggle to produce enough to meet even basic needs for the population of the world. To do that required a social organisation of "associated producers rationally regulating nature, bringing it under common control instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of nature". That meant the abolition of private property relations so that socialised production was harmonised through common ownership; and through conscious planning of the productive forces.

For Marx socialism was a society where human beings were freed from necessary labour because they had raised the productive forces to the point where material wants ie food, shelter,



Roy Hattersley believes that "market allocation was essential....to provide the consumer with real choice."

services etc were fully satisfied and human beings could use their time and energy ie work, because they wanted to, not because they had to live. Of course, such a society could not be achieved immediately. Firstly capitalism had to be abolished, not only in one country but throughout the world. And secondly planned production and technology had to be developed to the full.

Marx defined two stages in the movement to a socialist or communist society. The first or transitional stage started when the world economy has dispensed with private property but human wants had still to be fulfilled by increased production. With common ownership ending private control of the means of production and a conscious plan to develop the productive forces, a real start could be made on using the cooperatively created proceeds of labour in a rational, efficient manner to meet human needs. The plan of production would involve decisions on: how much of the total social product would be used to replace worn-out means of production, and how much to expand production further; how much for the administration of the plan's implementation; how much for the common satisfaction of needs eg schools, health, education, housing etc; and how much for the young, old, sick and disabled unable to contribute any labour. Only after that would the plan consider how the remaining proceeds should be distributed among those contributing to the total social product through their labour. (See Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*).

The proponents of the market economy argue that planning for production on the basis of common ownership, excluding the role of prices and the market to distribute the total social product, is unworkable or, at the very least, unable to satisfy human wants as

well as market allocation.

But planning is the direct allocation of goods and services to people rather than by exchange on the market through a pricing mechanism. Such direct allocation of resources already takes place in large measure under capitalism. Capitalism brought together scattered, limited means of production and concentrated and enlarged them into much bigger units of production using the labour of people together ie socialised production. Thus there arose within the market economy "division of labour upon a definite plan as organised in the factory. Side by side with individual production appeared social production". (Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*). But because the market was based on private appropriation through exchange of the products of social labour, there is an inherent antagonism within capitalism which is only resolved with its abolition through common ownership. Only then is there a "harmonising of the modes of production, appropriation and exchange with the socialised character of the means of production... socialised production upon a predetermined plan becomes henceforth possible."

## Planning

That this cooperative form of labour exists even within the market economy has been recognised by the most unlikely of sources. Michael Ivens, formerly of the pro-capitalist Aims of Industry, writes in his recent pamphlet, *Natural Partners: cooperation and competition*, published by the Tory Centre for Policy Studies, that "the lives of most men and women are not based on competition. Nor does society function solely on its values...we live through a fantastically complex arrangement of cooperation."

That planning ie direct allocation of resources, exists even under capitalism demonstrates its essential role in meeting human needs.

The proponents of the market argue that planned production is impossible because the number of consumer decisions made to buy or sell commodities is so great that they cannot be calculated and identified and are too many to be handled by people planning in advance the exertion of labour co-operatively. Only the market can handle these millions of transactions. The truth of the matter is that it is perfectly possible to calculate all the consumer choices however many there are, against available resources, especially with the use of computers.

In reality there are not millions of transactions in the market. Many commodities, as we have seen, are produced to be directly allocated within a capitalist combine or factory and never enter the market.

And there are finite limits on the number of consumer choices that can be made — there are only 24 hours in a day. The vast bulk of decisions that we make about our wants hardly vary from day to day. The basic needs for food, shelter, power, transport, education, hospitals do not vary dramatically each day or even each year. They can easily be calculated and planned for in advance.

## Equality

Even demands for household appliances can be forecast reasonably accurately in advance, and even whether we want a white coloured car or a red one. Such consumer decisions over a whole society do not vary from minute to minute and so can be planned for. That is what capitalist market research is all about.

But the proponents of the market argue that there are limited resources and the only way to distribute them when human wants are greater than supply is through pricing and the market. Obviously only when production has reached such heights on a world scale can we talk of meeting human need. Until then resources will be inadequate and must be allocated as best as possible. But already under a socialist plan, using the technical know-how, machinery and labour already available today, it would be possible to direct resources towards meeting the basic needs of people ie shelter, freedom from hunger, power, clothing, water, transport.

Demand can be satisfied in these areas which constitute up to 60-70 per cent of all consumer demand. Planned

**The proponents of the market argue that planning means a centralised bureaucracy ruling peoples lives — 'the road to serfdom'. But planning can be done bureaucratically or it can be done democratically, just as a market economy can have parliamentary democracy or a military dictatorship.**

socialist production could deliver these articles of consumption directly and at zero price without using the market. Price has little role to play in allocating resources for these basic needs. People need food and shelter whatever the price they are asked to pay, while price clearly would affect the overall demand for diamond necklaces.

Of course such a redistribution of resources would mean that there would be little or nothing left, at least to begin with, for producing Rolls Royces, yachts and other luxury goods. Not all needs can be satisfied for some time under a socialist plan, but then neither can they under a market economy.

The question people are not allowed to decide under a market economy and which they can only decide under a socialist plan is: which human needs do they want satisfied first? A Rolls Royce for a few thousand people or free public transport? Haute cuisine food in the best restaurant or the end of famine in the Sudan? If the market is the only way of allocating resources to meet consumer choice, why is it that nobody objects when food and medicine are sent directly to the dying in Bangladesh at zero price to them. Surely they should be buying these goods on the market to ensure 'fair and equitable distribution of resources'?

Initially in the transition to socialism, price rationing may be necessary for more sophisticated goods like a jet plane seat or a CD player, which cannot be provided in superabundance to begin with. But even there price rationing would be fairer because it would be incorporated into a socialist plan of

production. There would be a much higher degree of income equality to enable people to purchase many of these goods. Planned directly allocated production would cover the basic necessities, and slowly would be expanded to meeting less essential goods. Gradually the role of the market would be reduced — it would wither away as production expanded to meet human needs.

The proponents of the market argue that if there is no money incentive to produce because incomes are relatively equal and there is no profit to be made, then production will stagnate and innovation and the introduction of new techniques will stop. But there is not a jot of evidence to show that inventions that have benefited mankind were dependent on a profit to be made by the inventor — on the contrary many a great technical or scientific discovery has failed to enrich its originator personally.

Studies have found that, given a minimum level of income or satisfaction of needs, "within any one culture differential money rewards are of limited importance in transforming a less industrious workman into a more industrious one", Dahl and Lindblom *Politics, Economics and Welfare*. Would a professor still want to be a dustman just because he could earn more money clearing garbage? In fact, there is case for paying dustmen more than professors to compensate for a nasty job!

## Bureaucracy?

The proponents of the market argue that planning means a centralised bureaucracy ruling people's lives and making all the decisions for them — 'the road to serfdom' to use Hayek's phrase. But planning, ie the direct allocation of resources, can be done bureaucratically or it can be done democratically. There is no inevitability about one way or another, just as a market economy can have parliamentary democracy or a military dictatorship.

This is not the place to go into the reasons why the overthrow of capitalism in Russia led to a bureaucratic police state running a planned economy which is not accountable to or controlled by the people of the Soviet Union, but there is absolutely no reason why all the people it affects cannot control and manage a plan of production.

This is especially so if people have the time and energy to participate in the running of the economy. And that is one of the first decisions that can be made under a socialist plan — whether to produce more to meet certain consumer needs or instead reduce the hours of labour to meet the needs of leisure or democracy. Under the market there is

no choice: people must work to meet 'demand' as exhibited through the market and they must struggle with owners of capital to free them from working long hours to raise the profits of individual capitalists.

## 'Social Ownership'

At national or even world level, decisions can be made on such broad items of planning such as the length of the working week, the amount of zero priced goods, the amount to be invested overall, and the prices for those goods still to be exchanged on the market and not directly allocated. Then at regional and industrial level the plan can be fleshed out to cover available resources, technique, labour and management to meet planned targets. Obviously there would be tremendous debate about all aspects of the plan, involving people at all levels. Mistakes would happen and have to be corrected. But under capitalism if a company fails in the market place and has to close down, it is the workforce who suffer from unemployment and loss of income, not the owners of capital and the management. Under a democratic plan, any mistake would be borne by society equally.

There would still be a place for those who wish to form cooperatives to produce goods for which they can perceive a need and even for voluntary agreements between people to work for each other. But the planned publicly owned sector would control overall resources and set the prices for purchasing materials and labour and for selling the goods produced. Market relations would thus be restricted to the point of contact between the public and private sectors.

There is nothing centralised or bureaucratic in this schema — it is a practical vision of democratic socialist planning, which would steadily lead to the withering away of market allocation of goods as production rose to meet perceived human wants, and along with it the disappearance of money and class inequality and the need for a state.

The structure of a socialist planned economy in its early stages as described covers a publicly owned sector, a cooperative sector and a privately owned sector with a market. Such a structure at first glance does not seem any different to that proposed by the leaders of the labour movement who advocate 'social ownership' or 'market socialism'. They claim that the need for a 'totally' publicly owned economy is out of date as a definition of socialism. Modern socialism, they say, requires a mix of public and privately owned sectors; of markets and planned production.

The 'Communist Party have also adopted with enthusiasm the market economy. The 'Red Professor' Hobsbawm (right) echoes the words of Roy Hattersley and Bryan Gould.



As Roy Hattersley put it: "There are some areas where market allocation is desirable and some where it is not. There are some commodities which are best allocated by the market system and some which are not. There are some jobs which markets do well and some which they do very badly". But this 'balanced' view of the question hides the reality of Hattersley's position. There is a very big difference between a society where the major sectors of finance, industry, commerce and agriculture are publicly owned and run through a democratic plan and a society where the 'commanding heights' are still owned by capitalists and where conscious socialist planning is restricted to a small sector of the economy, ie the foothills, along with cooperatives. Such social ownership is just the old mixed economy under another name.

Roy Hattersley and Neil Kinnock even argue that the concept of social ownership is compatible with Clause 4, part 4 of Labour's constitution. But the history of that clause, explained in the *Militant* pamphlet, *The History of the Labour Party*, shows that when it was included in the Labour Party's constitution in 1918, it was meant to establish the aim to bring into public ownership the commanding heights of finance and industry. In 1937 Clem Attlee stated that under Labour "land will be owned by the community... all major industries will be owned and controlled by the community". Labour's 1944 conference called for "democratically controlled" public ownership of land, industry and finance.

Even Hugh Gaitskell said in 1959 that "we have no intention of abandoning public ownership and accepting for all time the present frontiers of the public sector". And yet that is precisely what the present Labour leadership are doing as they wilt under the weight of argument from the supporters of the market economy. Neil Kinnock's support for public ownership and democratic planning has undergone substantial revision since he told *Marxism Today* in June 1983 that "it is inconceivable that we could ever transform this society without a major extension of public ownership".

Now apparently it is enough to have just 'public interest' companies among utilities like gas and telephones. That is where the frontiers are drawn now. 'Social ownership' is not a redefinition of socialism; it is an attempt to replace it with the tired old pro-market formula of the 'mixed economy'.

When socialists advocate public ownership and planning to meet basic human needs, we do not have to support bureaucratically run nationalised industries of the type formed under the Labour government of 1945-50, or centralised plans controlled by a police state as in Russia. The fundamental conception of socialism is that of socialised production through common ownership and democratically controlled planning that will for the first time enable society to organise consciously to meet human needs and lift the human race beyond the realm of material necessity into real freedom. There is no role for markets in that conception.

# Global pollution threatens ecosystem breakdown

"What threatens mankind is a lethal and unpredictably volatile mixture of global warming with associated floods, ozone layer depletion with attendant cancers and disruption of ocean foodchains...the acidification of forests, lakes and crops, all combining to precipitate recurring cycles of famine and drought."

This was the devastating scenario of the breakdown of our ecological system by atmospheric pollution produced by the US National Academy of Science in 1987. The calamitous flooding of Bangladesh and the severe weather fluctuations which have devastated major food-growing areas of the world during the past year have catapulted the issue of global pollution into much greater prominence. Deforestation and soil erosion, serious stratospheric depletion of the earth's protective ozone layer, together with colossal increases in gaseous emissions — principally carbon dioxide and chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) — have underlined the fears of working people.

Such is the general concern on this issue that even Thatcher has been forced to make sympathetic noises. In the greatest metamorphosis since St Paul fell off his horse on the way to Damascus, she has suddenly discovered that the Tories have been 'green' all along. Phrases about 'acid rain' and concern for the 'Greenhouse Effect' tripped from her lips.

This is sheer hypocrisy. Britain is the only major European country to so far refuse to make a 30 per cent reduction in sulphur emissions that cause acid rain. At the same time Ridley, the misnamed Environment Secretary, delayed an international treaty to control ozone-destructive chemicals. Per-

haps this new-found concern is not unconnected with the fact that 74 'green' motions were originally tabled even for the tame Tory Party Conference.

Scientists have long argued that dramatic changes in the earth's atmosphere through gaseous pollution, mainly carbon dioxide, would have a disastrous effect on the ecological system, the so-called 'Greenhouse Effect'. It is now generally accepted that if present trends in the production of carbon dioxide and deforestation continue, the resulting global temperature rise will produce enormous weather variations which will disrupt agriculture and submerge some presently low-lying land area as the polar ice cap melts.

## Aral Sea

The planet only supports life because of the delicate and harmonious relationship between the sun's rays, oxygen and carbon dioxide. The small quantity of carbon dioxide is essential directly or indirectly for all forms of life. Plants absorb carbon dioxide and convert it into essential foodstuffs and oxygen. These in turn are consumed by humans and other animals who release more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere — completing the cycle. But today this fine balance is being disturbed and on a massive scale. The anarchic development of capitalism and the rapacious greed of today's multi-national corporations now threaten humanity with extinction.

The Stalinist bureaucracy have also displayed a hooligan attitude to the environment. Lake Balkal, the world's largest freshwater lake, is grossly polluted, so also is the inland Aral Sea. This sea is located in Uzbekis-

tan. The Uzbeki elite used the waters of the Aral Sea to irrigate the deserts of the area, which is now the major cotton-producing region of the USSR. But in so doing they have polluted the Aral Sea and the water table in the surrounding area. Irrigation canals were built without concrete linings and therefore the water seeped into the ground. The excess minerals in the land combined with the naturally saline ground, making the land so salty it can no longer produce crops unless it is flushed out with even more water. The high salinity is now affecting the underground artesian wells. With most of the marine life in the Aral Sea killed, this area, which was once rich in fish, now has to import fish from Murmansk for the canning factories situated on the shores of this now barren sea.

It must not be forgotten that the issue that triggered the upheavals in Armenia was pollution. It was a demonstration of workers from Aboyan protesting against the building of a rubber factory which merged with nationalist demonstrations in Yerevan. The whole of the Transcaucasus is recognised as a heavily polluted area, as also is much of Eastern Europe. One third of Poland has been described by the Polish government as 'ecologically damaged.' The Chernobyl disaster in the Ukraine spread throughout Europe, but was especially dangerous in Eastern Europe and Scandinavia.

For centuries, man has used coal as the principal source of fuel — for cooking and heating. But the burning of coal produces many air borne pollutants including smoke, dust and sulphur dioxide which are injurious to health and the growth of plants and animals. In England as early as 1273 attempts were made

---

**By Ronnie Sookhdeo**

---

to prohibit the use of coal in London. In 1306 a committee of inquiry was appointed to "Inquire of all such who burnt sea-coal in the city or parts adjoining, and to punish them for the first offence with great fines and ransoms, and upon the second offence to demolish their furnaces." By the seventeenth century coal burning was so out of control that John Evelyn submitted a report to Charles II claiming that "London's inhabitants breathe nothing but an impure and thick mist accompanied with a fulliginous and filthy vapour... corrupting the lungs." The rapid industrialisation of England's major cities during the industrial revolution was entirely due to the use of coal as a primary energy source. Combustion of coal was on such a scale that a permanent pall of smoke hung over many towns obscuring the sunlight and causing rickets in children. Sunlight contains ultra-violet rays which can synthesize the essential vitamin D in the skin.

## Ozone

The large scale combustion of fossil fuels — oil, coal and gas — for energy in modern times, together with the destruction of much of the world's rainforests, has enormously disturbed the carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere. Air monitoring in Hawaii and the Antarctica since the early 1950s has shown an exponential increase in carbon dioxide concentration. From an estimated 270 parts per million (ppm) in the 1850s

It has risen to an alarming 335 ppm today. Unless halted, it is predicted that the concentration could increase to as much as 600 ppm by the year 2030. Combustion processes alone release over 6.4 billion tons of carbon dioxide annually whilst jungle clearances add a further 1.5 billion tons.

The released carbon dioxide creates a dense blanket around the earth permitting the sun's rays to enter but trapping the heat that otherwise would be radiated into outer space. This 'Greenhouse Effect' has already raised global temperatures by over 0.5 degrees centigrade over the past 100 years.

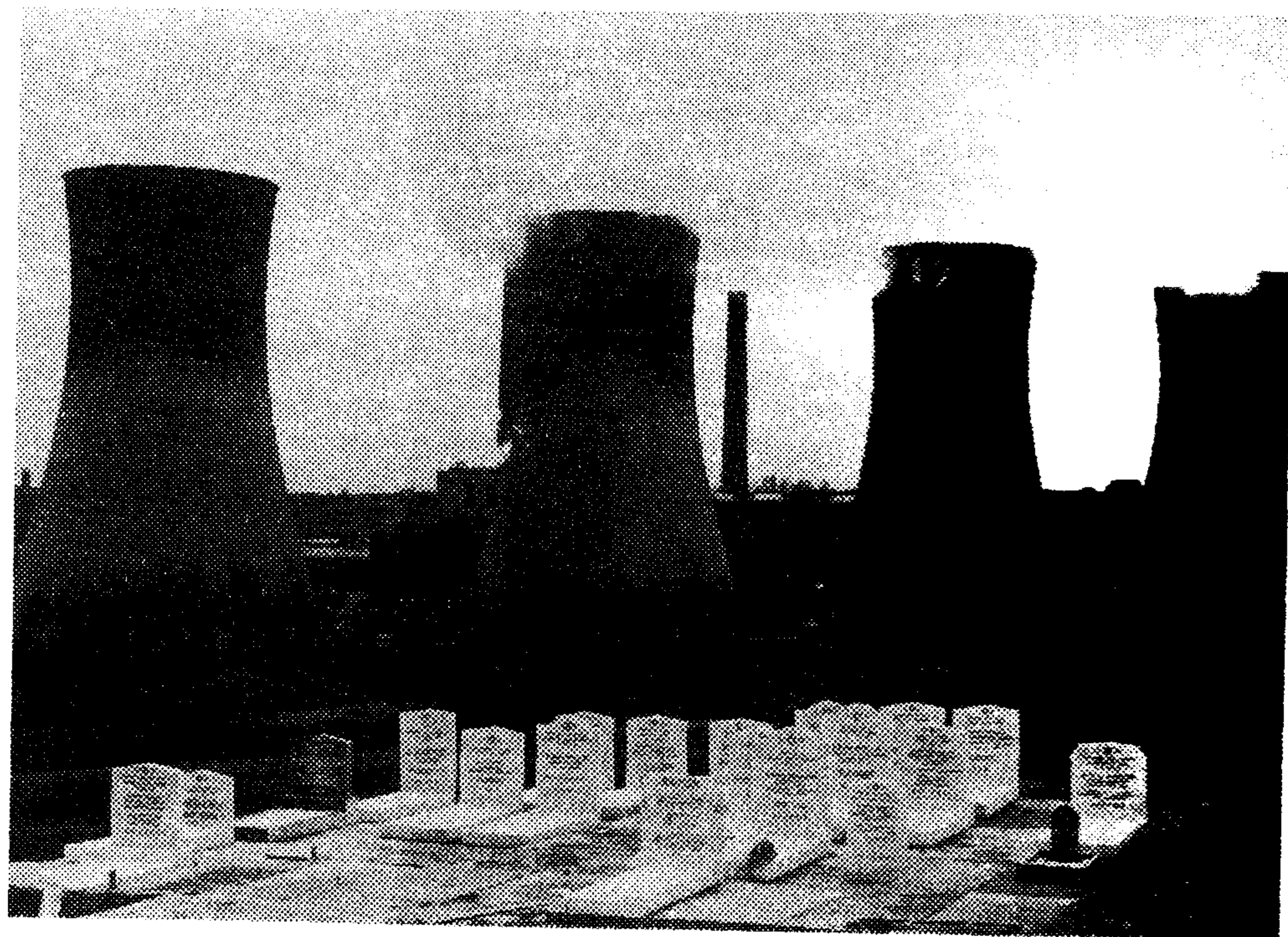
This condition is made worse by a cocktail of chemicals dumped into the atmosphere — the most notorious being the chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) used as a propellant in aerosols. Around 1 million tons of CFCs escape into the air each year. Every molecule of CFC released is 10,000 times more effective in trapping the sun's heat than carbon dioxide — producing a doubling heat effect. There is also now irrefutable evidence linking CFCs with the vast holes in the ozone layer in the stratosphere.

## Agriculture

The ozone layer acts as a giant filter of the extremely harmful ultra-violet radiation from the sun. A one per cent depletion, according to the US National Academy of Science, will cause a two per cent increase in cancer.

CFCs and carbon dioxide could push up the planet's temperature by as much as 4.5 degrees by 2030 and a staggering 8.6 degrees over the next century. Using the most conservative results, they conclude that sea levels would rise by as much as 4-5 feet. Yet a rise of just 18 inches would submerge Asia's rice growing areas.

The 'Greenhouse Effect' will make the climate hot-



ter, wetter and cloudier. The climatic changes would have a disastrous effect on agriculture. For example, high carbon dioxide levels could stimulate plant growth. But this potential benefit would be offset by the higher temperature which would stimulate plant growth which in turn would facilitate greater energy consumption. Moreover the thicker cloud cover could inhibit photosynthesis — the process by which plants manufacture their food.

But a more serious consequence of global warming could see a gradual shift of important agricultural regions to much higher latitudes. The great corn and soya bean belts at middle latitudes in the USA, for example, would move northwards to areas where the soil would be unsuitable for intensive farming. The same story would be repeated for central Europe. A much changed rainfall pattern would also exist and move north to northern Canada, Siberia and Scandinavia. These areas with their poorer soils will be unable to replace the present world's granaries. The USA and Canada supply 80 per cent of the world's trade in wheat. Diminishing reserves of food would

create mass starvation and famines that would dwarf those presently occurring in the Sudan and Ethiopia.

There is mounting evidence that this frightening picture of the irreversible breakdown of our world is now occurring and at an alarming rate. Among many tell-tale signs has been the discovery that the arctic permafrost has warmed up by as much as three degrees over the past 100 years. Alaskan glaciers have been melting and drifting has increased. Retreating snowlines on mountains the world over, the observed movement northwards of the agricultural crop line in the Canadian Prairies, the changed distribution of plants and animals: all have added credibility to the argument that the ecological system is breaking down.

## Deserts

Marxists have never opposed the tremendous achievements that science has contributed to society. But under capitalism it has been used and developed in an irrational and unplanned manner which has resulted in many catastrophes. On a global scale capitalism has

proved incapable of using the capacity of modern science and technology to ease the nightmare conditions of the 4.4 billion people of the 'Third World', described in a recent World Bank Report as "conditions of life so characterised by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, squalid surroundings, high infant mortality and low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency." While advances in science and technology have made possible the development of the microchip, computers and robots, the real 'energy crisis' for over 2 billion people is to obtain the firewood and dung they still depend on as fuel for cooking. For them, firewood can only be obtained by systematically destroying forests which, in the ex-colonial world, have been disappearing at an horrendous rate of one million hectares a month.

Denuded of any vegetation, the top soil quickly becomes washed away creating deserts and reducing rainfall. In India, the 250,000 sq mile Rajputana desert was once heavily populated. In Roman times the granary of the Empire was in North Africa. Now, without irrigation and water

management, this area is afflicted by droughts, floods, soil erosion and creeping deserts. Today the Sahara consumes 30,000 hectares each year. Throughout the ex-colonial world capitalist monopolies distort whole economies to produce a single commodity, cash crops or minerals, with no concern for the environment or the delicate interrelationships of nature. Thus in north east Brazil, whereas in 1900 an area known as the Hump was 40 to 50 per cent forest, today it is less than five per cent.

A searing indictment of the short sighted and disastrous policies of big business has been in relation to the Amazonian rain forests. The devastation of the mighty forests and its ecological system has been on such a magnitude and ferocity as that of an atomic explosion. The greatest ecological disaster in history is now making a decisive intervention on our weather.

## Amazon

The rain-forests, covering an area larger than the whole of Western Europe, have been described as the lungs of the world. The trees, accounting for over a third of the world's total, produce through photosynthesis over a half of the world's annual production of oxygen and in turn contribute to the balance of carbon dioxide. Undisturbed, the forests exist as a result of a delicate and complex interexchange with the limited amounts of nutrients in the biomass which is recycled within the system. Living almost independently of the soil, as much as 50 per cent of rainfall is recycled, also maintaining a constancy of temperature.

Such is the abundance and diversity of plant and animal life that scientists have as yet been unable to make a comprehensive classification. There are at least 17,000 insects, 500 to 600 species of flora and

over 2,000 species of birds alone. The brutal transformation of the rainforests which has now reached inconceivable proportions, not only threatens the extinction of the ecosystem but has also done irreversible damage to the environment. This has, in turn, reverberated upon the competing monopolies and has had serious repercussions for local farmers.

With the blessing of the Brazilian government the competing multinational companies launched a ferocious assault on the jungle to transform it into a vast pasture land for cattle for the world market. In just over two decades over a quarter of the forests of the Amazon basin and Mato Grosso were destroyed. In the last decade alone over 11 million hectares were cleared – corresponding to hundreds of millions of trees. Seeking spectacular profits for minimum investments and no controls, the companies ignited the great forests with napalm bombs and defoliants. The vast jungle fires, consuming hundreds of millions of trees, lasting many months, were first observed by a Landsat satellite in 1975.

The fires and smoke in turn killed off the insects and rodents whose presence was essential for the cultivation of many plants, especially the nut tree. Thus in the province of Acre, the entire population of nut trees were lost – resulting in over 10,000 nut gatherers losing their livelihood. Moreover, once the residual nutrients were washed away from the exposed soil, it became hard, brittle and infertile. The cleared jungle was planted with quick growing guinea grass whose fertility levels were such that after five years their growth declined. The lasting effects of the defoliant also killed off the vitally important broad leaf legumes, which enrich the soil by capturing nitrogen from the air and not from the soil. Problems of bush invasion, fungus and soil

leaching intensified. The loss of vegetation immediately disrupted the ecosystem. Rainfall declined by almost five per cent and the temperature soared to over 30 degrees.

Under a socialist plan for energy all types of energy production would be considered on the basis of safety, efficiency and environmental concern. An immediate programme to eliminate waste through insulation and conservation would be implemented. This could save energy and create thousands of jobs in the building industry. It has been calculated that 75% of heating for homes is lost through walls, roofs and floors and that 60% of total energy in power stations is lost as heat – through cooling water – into the environment. With recent advances in technology, combined heat and power stations can supply hot water to entire communities. These stations are already in use in Denmark, where they supply over half the country's heating requirements.

## Energy

Such a programme could be linked to re-equipping existing power stations to make them more efficient. Coal fired stations, presently only operating at 30% efficiency, could be made far more efficient with the introduction of the fluidised bed combustion process whereby air is blown through a moving flow of burning coal. A Department of Energy paper has estimated that such a programme would create half a million jobs between now and the year 2000 and, at the same time, conserve valuable coal and oil reserves.

Priority would also be given to the development of renewable sources such as wind, solar and geothermal energy which do not produce harmful pollution and irreversible damage to the

environment. Research in the USA, Japan and Australia has shown that such an integrated energy programme could provide up to 6 times as many jobs as the equivalent nuclear programme. The prestigious National Science Foundation of America recommended as far back as 1972 that an investment of \$3.5 billion in solar energy would provide 35% of the country's heating and cooling needs, 40% of fuel and 20% of electricity. A similar study in Britain in 1974, which has recently been re-examined, showed that solar power, mainly for domestic and industrial heating, could provide as much as 14% of energy needs here with wave power providing over 30%. The recent advances in solar power technologies, principally a new type of photo-voltaic cell, has made possible the large scale production of cheap energy.

Future generations may benefit from a near infinite energy source in nuclear fusion when that process is perfected and made safe. Fusion uses as its fuel Deuterium (heavy water) which is present in vast quantities in the oceans of the world – sufficient for millions of years. In stark contrast to nuclear fission, fusion would, as far as is presently known, be a safe form of energy without pollution. But the limited amounts available for research has meant that there are still technical problems to overcome.

The destruction of the environment has now reached calamitous proportions. The 'Greenhouse Effect', wanton destruction of rainforests and ozone depletion is inevitable in a society dominated by blind market forces. The inherent contradictions, antagonisms and the competition of interests makes capitalism absolutely incapable of developing the immense natural potential energy sources that exist or even introduce adequate safeguards against pollution and harmful effects.

Part nine in a series of articles by Alan Woods, Editor of the *MIR*, on the history of Bolshevism.

# 1905: The October Strike to the December Insurrection



The St Petersburg Soviet leadership before their trial in early 1906. Trotsky, the President of the Soviet is in the second row, second left.

In the Autumn of 1905, the revolution acquired an unprecedented sweep. At the head of the movement stood the proletariat, wielding its classical weapon of struggle – the general strike. “In its extent and acuteness,” as Lenin later recalled, “the strike struggle had no parallel anywhere in the world. The economic strike developed into a political strike, and the latter into insurrection.” 1.

Beginning with a small dispute at the Sytin printworks in Moscow, the printers’ strike spread to 50 printshops within a few days and then rapidly became general throughout the city. Just when the movement in Moscow appeared to be dying down, on October 2 the St Petersburg printers came out in solidarity. At the same time, the railway workers struck, and elected delegates. By mid-October, three quarters of a million railwaymen were on strike. The strikes now became general, involving Moscow, Kharkov, Revel, Smolensk,

Lodz, Minsk, Petersburg, Vilna, Odessa, Kazan, Tiflis and all the major centres. The working class, by making its power felt, drew behind it big sections of the middle class. The intelligentsia joined in the strike. “In many places juries refused to sit, lawyers to plead, doctors to attend patients. Justices of the peace closed down their courts.” 2.

The strike was accompanied by mass meetings where the workers thrashed out tactics and discussed strategy and politics. Increasingly, soldiers began to participate in these meetings, expressing solidarity with the people. The workers were beginning to organise militias for self-defence, to combat pogroms and keep order. In some places, the workers fighting squads went onto the offensive. There were clashes with cossacks in Yehaterinoslav and barricades in Odessa.

The role of the strike in general is to make the working class aware of itself

as a living social force. The general strike is the highest expression of this. Lenin was fond of quoting the words of a German song: “All the wheels stand still if your mighty arms so will!” By participating in the strike movement, especially where this achieves an active form with mass participation, the workers acquire a feeling of their own strength through unity. The strike is a levelling phenomenon, serving to bind together the most advanced, politically conscious workers with the broadest layers of the class, who are aroused in action from the inertia of ‘normal’ times.

Thus, in 1905, the September-October strike movement was sparked off not by the most experienced and advanced sections of the class, but by the more backward layers, such as the printers and bakers. In the course of struggle – prepared for by the experience of all the previous decades – the masses rise above themselves, cas-

ting off the psychology of servile and passive obedience and begin to understand that what hitherto appeared impossible is now within their grasp. The slave begins to think and act like a free man, with a mind and a personality of his own, capable of displaying initiative and creativity, taking decisions, thinking, planning and acting as a conscious force.

Against this, the reformist trade union leaders reflect the past — that immense dead-weight of routine, habit and tradition which, in the words of Marx, “weighs like an Alp” on the consciousness of the masses. This is why every strike is successful only to the degree that it is organised from below by the workers themselves. Yet to talk about a ‘spontaneous’ movement is misleading. A strike can be ‘spontaneous’ only in the sense that it is not led from the tops, that the workers themselves take control of it. But every strike is always led by the most conscious, the most daring and courageous elements thrown up by the working class. These are the ‘natural leaders’ of the proletariat, who will invariably begin to draw revolutionary conclusions from their experience.

## Soviets

In Russia, under the prevailing conditions, there was no opportunity for the creation of a mass reformist labour movement with a privileged labour aristocracy and an ossified bureaucracy at its head. The attempt to establish tame, government controlled ‘Zubatov’ unions came to nothing. After the ninth of January, many of these unions became swiftly transformed by the masses into genuine organs of struggle.

The rapid development of the forces of Marxism in Russia, and the ease with which they placed themselves at the head of the mass workers’ movement in 1905, can only be understood in the context of a politically virgin proletariat with no long history of reformist trade unions and parties. Very swiftly, the Russian Marxists were able to win over the best class fighters in the factories who in turn enabled them to play a dominant role in the mass movement.

In the absence of well-established mass trade unions, the striking workers moved to elect delegates who began to come together in improvised strike committees, which were generalised to include all sections of the class. The creation of these ‘Soviets’ in 1905 is a marvellous example of the creative genius of ordinary working people, once they enter the arena of struggle. Nowhere does the idea of Soviets

feature in the writings of the great Marxist thinkers prior to 1905. They were not foreseen in the pages of *The Communist Manifesto*, but were the invention of the Russian working class. The most authoritative and influential of these was the Petersburg Soviet which held its first meeting on the 13 October, with not more than 40 delegates present. The chairman of this meeting was the Menshevik, Zborovskiy. Very soon, the Soviet embraced practically the whole of the Petersburg proletariat. Here was an extremely broad, democratic and flexible organ of struggle. One delegate was elected for every 500 workers. Small workshops combined to send a delegate. The trade unions were also permitted representation, as were the workers’ parties. The petit-bourgeois democrats were represented by the Social Revolutionary Party. The anarchists were too insignificant to be represented in the Soviet executive. The same was true throughout the country, with the sole exception of Byelostok, where they had the majority.

From distant exile, Lenin greeted the formation of the Soviets which, in a brilliant anticipation, he characterised as embryonic organs of workers’ power. “I may be wrong,” he wrote, “but I believe (on the strength of the incomplete and only ‘paper’ information at my disposal) that politically the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies should be regarded as the embryo of a **provisional revolutionary government**. I think the Soviet should proclaim itself the provisional revolutionary government of the whole of Russia as early as possible, or should **set up** a provisional revolutionary government (which would amount to the same thing, only in another form).” 3. This, in essence, was what actually occurred in October 1917.

The October strike gave a mighty impetus to the revolutionary movement in the villages. In the last three months of 1905, 1,590 cases of peasant disturbances were reported. There was a colossal ferment among all the oppressed nationalities. Finland, the Baltic region and large areas of the Caucasuses became virtual no-go areas, especially after the announcement of reforms in the tsar’s *October Manifesto*. The ‘liberal’ prime minister, Witte, wrote in worried terms to the tsar about the situation in Finland: “During the second half of last October events took place in Finland which have no precedent in almost a hundred years since the province has been under Russian rule. A political general strike was organised. A well-armed and organised ‘national guard’ (militia, AW) made its appearance, which in many areas took over the role of the lawful police, ordering it to lay

down its arms. Certain governors have been forced, under threats by the representatives of the local political parties, to resign their posts.” 4. Similarly, the governor-general of Warsaw, Martynov, wrote that “the fantastic mood of Polish society and the hostility towards Russians have acquired hitherto unprecedented dimensions.” 5. The Ukraine was also in a state of turbulence with mass protest meetings in Kiev and Odessa in October.

Splits were beginning to open up in the ranks of the autocracy. While Witte pleaded with the tsar to grant reform from above to head off revolution from below, General Trepov, the virtual dictator of Petersburg, issued the famous command to his troops: “Spare no cartridges!”

Thus, in embryo, all the factors were present for the passing of power into the hands of the working class. The weakness of the regime, faced with an explosion of popular anger, is revealed in the panicky tone of Witte’s letters to the tsar, and the continual complaints about the lack of troops. Finally, even the thick-headed Nicolas was compelled to come to terms with reality and grudgingly concede the need to hold elections to a State Duma (parliament).

## Tsar retreats

The tsar’s *Manifesto of the 17 October* was hailed by Lenin as “the first victory of the revolution”. It was greeted by scenes of wild rejoicing on the streets. Crowds of excited people gathered in the city centres to discuss the situation. On the 18th, 19th and 20th of October, with no pre-ordained plan, the workers marched to the gaols with red flags to demand the release of political prisoners. In Moscow, the gaols were forcibly opened up and the prisoners carried shoulder-high through the streets.

Despite the mood of euphoria, Lenin hammered home the idea that *The Manifesto* was only a tactical retreat and warned against constitutional illusions and playing at parliamentarianism: “There is talk of liberty, of popular representation: some hold forth on a constituent assembly. But what is being constantly, hourly and minutely lost sight of is that, without serious guarantees, all these fine things are but hollow phrases. A serious guarantee can be provided **only** by a victorious rising of the people, **only** by the complete domination of the armed proletariat and the peasantry over all representatives of tsarist power who, under pressure by the people, have

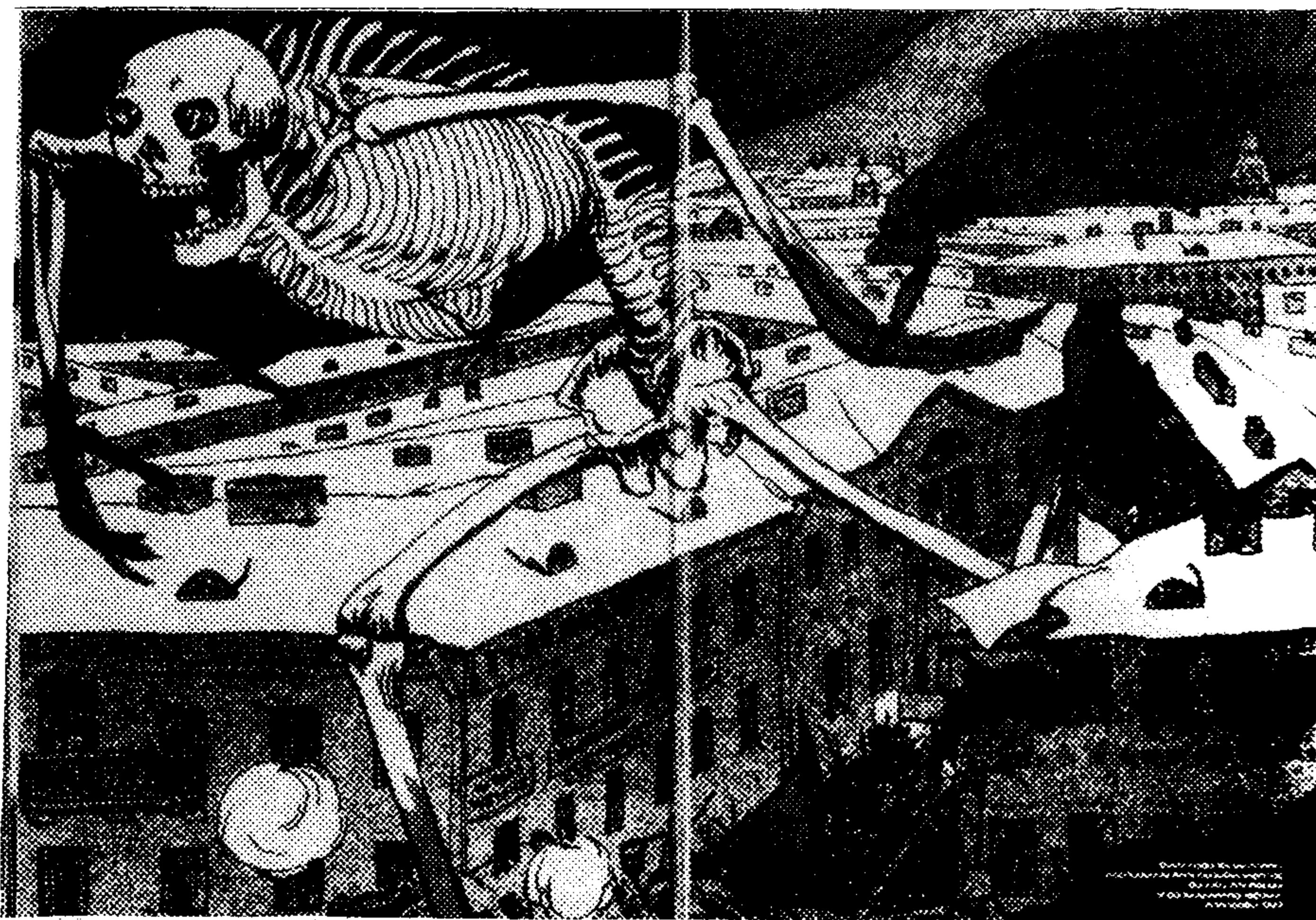
retreated a pace but are far from having yielded to the people, and far from having been overthrown by the people. Until **that** aim is achieved **there can be** no real liberty, no genuine popular representation, or a really **constituent** assembly with the power to set up a new order in Russia.

"What is a constitution? A sheet of paper with the peoples' rights recorded on it. What is the guarantee of these rights being really recognised? It lies in the **strength** of those classes of the people that have become aware of these rights and have been able to win them."

6. And with crushing realism, Lenin analyses the balance of forces at the given moment: "The autocracy is **no longer** strong enough to come out against the revolution openly. The revolution is **not yet** strong enough to deal the enemy a decisive blow. This fluctuation of almost evenly balanced forces inevitably engenders confusion among the authorities, makes for transition from repression to concession, to laws providing for freedom of the press and freedom of assembly." 7. The task of the revolutionaries in this situation was, while clearly understanding that the really decisive battles lay in the future, to grasp the opportunity with both hands, and make full use of the newly-won freedoms to build the party rapidly, extend its influence within all spheres of social life, and prepare for the inevitable showdown.

According to one estimate, there were about 8,400 'organised Bolsheviks' in 1905. Probably the Mensheviks had about the same. 8. But in the context of general pre-revolutionary ferment, the party's sphere of influence was far wider. The scope for action was vastly increased after the issuing of the October *Manifesto*. Martov recalls that: "All in all, throughout this period, on the eve of the October days, the Social Democracy in the ranks of the illegal organisations could assemble several thousands of workers, students, soldiers and peasants; but the sphere of its immediate organisational influence took in hundreds of thousands of people in town and countryside." 9.

An absolutely key question for the linking up of the small number of organised Marxists to the broad mass of workers in struggle was the attitude towards the Petersburg Soviet. As we have seen, Lenin, despite being separated from the field of action by thousands of miles, was able immediately to grasp the significance of this striking new phenomenon. For their part, the Mensheviks, with their innate opportunism, found no difficulty in adapting to the prevalent mood among the workers. Their more flexible attitude permitted them to take in-



'Death Stalks the barricades' by Boris Kustodiev, depicts the entry of the Senoyonosky regiment to crush the December rising.

itiatives in setting up Soviets, where they immediately won a head-start over the more cautious Bolsheviks.

The Petersburg Mensheviks were far to the left of the Menshevik leadership in exile. In any case, under the impact of the revolution, even some of the Menshevik leaders began to move to the left, at least in words. Thus Fyodr Dan wrote to Kautsky in November 1905: "We live here as though in a state of intoxication. The revolutionary air affects people like wine." 10.

In the course of the revolution, the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in the capital had drawn closer together. By the Autumn they had already established a joint committee. But the Bolshevik central committee members in Petersburg were uneasy at the thought of a 'non-party' mass organisation existing side by side with the party. Instead of seeing the Soviet as an important field of action, they regarded it with hostility, as a rival.

On 27 October, the Bolshevik CC published a resolution which was made binding upon all Bolsheviks throughout Russia, recommending that the Soviets should accept the party programme. This sectarian and schematic position completely ignored the need to establish a firm link between the advanced workers who stood on the ideas of Marxism and the mass of the politically untutored workers. It was tantamount to demanding that the working class as a whole should enter into the Marxist party, a completely unrealistic conception which, if pressed, could only lead to the isolation of the minority of advanced workers from the rest of the class.

The crass formalism of this line of argument was conveyed in a number of articles in the Bolshevik paper, *Novaya*

*Zhizn'*, notably one which appeared in Number Six, over the signature of P Mendeleyev, where we read the following: "The Soviet of Workers' Deputies must not exist as a political organisation and the social democrats must withdraw from it, since its existence acts negatively upon the development of the social democratic movement. The Soviet of delegates can remain as a trade union organisation, or it cannot remain at all." 11. The same author goes on to propose that the Bolsheviks should present the Soviet with an ultimatum: either accept the programme of the RSDLP or else disband! The Bolshevik leaders justified their hostility to the Soviet on the grounds that it represented "the subordination of consciousness to spontaneity." 12. They went so far as to move a resolution on these lines in the Soviet. When it was turned down, the Bolshevik delegates, led by CC members Bogdanov and Knuyants, walked out. The other delegates merely shrugged their shoulders and proceeded to the next point on the agenda!

From afar, Lenin followed the activities of his followers with dismay. His article, *Our tasks and the Soviet of Workers' Deputies*, 13. quoted above, was written in Stockholm in early November, when Lenin was on route to Russia, but not published until 1940. In it Lenin attempted, gently but firmly, to correct the mistakes of the Petersburg Bolsheviks. In the fifth issue of *Novaya Zhizn'*, an article signed by a BM Knuyants ('Radin') posed the alternative: 'Soviet or Party'. Lenin replied: "I think that it is wrong to put the question in this way and that the decision must **certainly** be: **both** the Soviet of Workers' Deputies **and** the Party. The only question — and a highly

important one – is how to divide, and how to combine, the tasks of the Soviet and those of the RSDLP.” And he adds, “I think it would be inadvisable for the Soviet to adhere wholly to any one party.” 14.

Lenin goes on to explain the elementary fact that the trade unions and the Soviets should strive to embrace **all** sections of the working class, irrespective of nationality, race, creed or political affiliation. Only the fascist Black Hundreds should be excluded, and that **within** these organisations of the masses, the Marxists should fight to win a majority for their ideas, programme and tactics. “We do not shut ourselves off from the revolutionary people,” wrote Lenin, but “submit to their judgement every step and every decision we take. We rely fully and solely on the free initiative of the working masses themselves.” 15. This is Lenin speaking. A very long way from the malicious caricature of a ‘Blanquist conspirator’, manipulating the masses from behind the scenes!

Throughout 1905, Lenin was impatient at the slowness with which the committeemen inside Russia had turned to the masses and made use of the enormous opportunities that opened up. After the October *Manifesto*, the conditions for Party work radically changed. Freedom of assembly and the press had been won, as well as the right to organise in unions. Everywhere there was a ferment of ideas and discussion. On all sides, the workers and the youth were seeking a vehicle with which to express their instinctive aspirations to change society.

The workers actually organised in the party could be numbered in tens of thousands. But there was a vast periphery of hundreds of thousands crying out for socialist ideas. The old illegal press was hopelessly inadequate in this situation. Thus the Bolsheviks launched the legal *Novaya Zhizn'* with the assistance of Gorky and other writers and intellectuals. Gorky's wife acted as publisher. The editor was a poet, Minsky, and among the contributors were well-known writers and poets, including Leonid Andreyev, Lunacharsky, Bazarov, and Gorky himself. In his first article in *Novaya Zhizn'* written shortly after his return to Russia in early November, Lenin yet again laid heavy stress on the need to open up the party. In answer to the committeemen who opposed this on the grounds that it would lead to a dilution of the party, Lenin wrote:

“Danger may be said to lie in a sudden influx of large numbers of non-Social Democrats into the Party. If that occurred the Party would be dissolved among the masses, it would cease to be

the conscious vanguard of its class, its role would be reduced to that of a tail. That would mean a very deplorable period indeed. And this danger could undoubtedly become a **very serious one** if we showed any inclination towards demagoguery, if we lacked party principles (programme, tactical rules, organisational experience) entirely, or if these principles were feeble and shaky. But the fact is that no such ‘ifs’ exist. We Bolsheviks have never shown any inclination towards demagoguery... we have demanded class-consciousness from those joining the Party, we have insisted on the tremendous importance of continuity in the Party's development, we have preached discipline and demanded that every Party member be trained in one or another of the Party organisations.” 16. But having given due weight to the need to build on strong foundations, Lenin goes on to stress the other side of the equation in terms designed to put the narrow-minded ‘committeemen’ in their place:

“The working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social Democratic, and more than ten years of work put in by Social Democracy has done a great deal to transform this spontaneity into consciousness. Don't invent bogeymen, comrades! Don't forget that in every live and growing party there will always be elements of instability, vacillation, wavering. But these elements can be influenced and they will submit to the influence of the steadfast and solid core of Social Democrats...” 17. (My emphasis, AW).

Time and again in this period Lenin hammers home the need to **open up the party**, to recruit rapidly the new layers of workers and youth who are entering the struggle, to learn to speak the same language as the workers, to link up the activity of the small group of cadres with the activity of the newly-awakened masses. That same Lenin who argued in favour of restricting the membership in 1903, now wrote the following: “At the Third Congress of the Party I suggested

**“We do not shut ourselves off from the revolutionary people,” wrote Lenin, but “submit to their judgement every step and every decision we take. We rely fully and solely on the free initiative of the working masses themselves.”**

that there be about eight workers to every two intellectuals in the Party committees. How obsolete that suggestion seems today! Now we must wish for new Party organisations to have one Social Democratic intellectual to several hundred Social Democratic workers.” 18. And Lenin goes on to argue in favour of the immediate reunification of the two wings of the RSDLP: “It is no secret to anyone that the vast majority of Social Democratic workers are exceedingly dissatisfied with the split in the Party and are demanding unity. It is no secret to anyone that the split has caused a certain cooling-off among Social Democratic workers (or workers ready to become Social Democrats) towards the Social Democratic Party...”

“Hence it is now possible not only to **urge** unity, not only to obtain promises to unite, but actually to **unite** – by a simple majority of organised workers in both factions.” 19.

The general upswing of the movement inevitably gave rise to a powerful desire for unity among the mass of the workers. As we have seen, the Menshevik workers inside Russia had moved sharply to the left under the impact of the revolution, while sections of the Menshevik leaders were pushed in the direction of centrism – that is, a tendency standing half-way between left reformism and revolutionary Marxism. Precisely this was what convinced Trotsky that it was possible to re-unite the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, a mistake which he later rectified in 1917, when Lenin wrote: “As for conciliation (with the Mensheviks, AW), I cannot speak about that seriously. Trotsky long ago said that unification is impossible. Trotsky understood this, and from that time on there has been no better Bolshevik.” 20. But in the Autumn of 1905, not only Trotsky but Lenin too, was in favour of unification of the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

This process was given a powerful fillip by the events which followed the issuing of the October *Manifesto*. As Lenin had foreseen, what the autocracy gave with the left hand, it now prepared to take back with the right. Immediately the government organised and financed the fascist Black Hundred gangs to attack and murder Jews, socialists and ‘intellectuals’. In one month following October 17 anything up to 4,000 people were murdered, and a further 10,000 injured in bloody pogroms.

Where possible, the workers organisations came together and attempted to combat the racist gangs. In his memoirs, Pyatnitsky describes the horrific pogrom against the Jews in Odessa, and the formation of a united front of Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, Bundists,

# Chronology of the main events: 1905

**JANUARY 4-7:** Strike at the giant Putilov engineering works against the sacking of four members of Father Gapon's union. The strike spreads throughout St Petersburg, involving 140,000 workers.

**JANUARY 9:** March to the Winter Palace led by Gapon. Over 1,000 are shot dead and thousands wounded. While the movement ebbs in St Petersburg after 'Bloody Sunday', a wave of strikes spreads involving over one million workers across 122 towns. The ferment develops into the countryside from the summer with strikes and widespread land, grain and cattle seizures.

**APRIL 12:** The Third Congress of the RSDLP convenes in London, boycotted by the Mensheviks.

**MAY:** General strike in the textile town of Ivanovo-Voznesensk, lasting 72 days. Town under the control of a 'Meeting of Representative Delegates', a soviet in all but name.

**JUNE TO AUGUST:** Following the defeat of a Russian fleet by the Japanese at Tsushima, sailors of the Black Sea fleet mutiny on the battleship *Potemkin*. The *Potemkin* sails into Odessa appealing for support from the workers. Eventually the

movement in Odessa is put down but 10 days later peace is concluded with Japan.

**SEPTEMBER:** Printers strike in Moscow for a shorter working day and higher piece rates. Over 50 print works are out by September 24. On October 2 printers in St Petersburg come out in solidarity.

**OCTOBER 7:** Railway workers join the movement. By mid-October, 750,000 were on strike. Very rapidly the strikes become general and spread to all major centres, drawing behind them big sections of the middle class. Schools and universities close.

**OCTOBER 13:** First meeting of the Petersburg Council, or Soviet, of Workers' Deputies.

**OCTOBER 17:** Tsar Nicolas issues his 'October Manifesto', grudgingly conceding elections to a state duma.

**OCTOBER 26:** The Alexandrovsky Works in St Petersburg begin a strike for the 8 hour day.

**OCTOBER 27:** Bolsheviks launch a legal paper, *Novaya Zhizn*.

**OCTOBER 31:** St Petersburg Soviet calls a general strike around the struggle for the 8 hour day.

**NOVEMBER 4:** Lenin returns to Russia from exile.

**NOVEMBER 12:** St Petersburg Soviet calls off the strike to ensure an organised return to work.

**NOVEMBER 26:** Khrustalyov-Nosar, chairman of the St Petersburg Soviet, is arrested.

**DECEMBER 2:** Mutiny of the Rostov regiment in Moscow.

**DECEMBER 3:** The St Petersburg Soviet is arrested, including Trotsky, now its chairman.

**DECEMBER 4-10:** Moscow Soviet votes for a general strike and an armed insurrection. Within two days 150,000 workers are on strike, militiamen begin to disarm police and soldiers, and barricades appear on the streets.

**DECEMBER 16:** Moscow Soviet Executive votes to end strike. 1,059 people had died in 9 days of fighting.

Dashnaks (Armenian nationalists) and supporters of Paol-Zion (a group set up in 1905 which attempted to combine Zionism with Marxism, a section of which joined the Bolshevik Party after the October revolution). Armed detachments were sent to try to defend the Jews, and initially succeeded in driving off the lumpen mobs, before coming up against the army and police whose superior forces compelled them to retreat, with some loss of life.

After October, the trend towards re-unification became irresistible. All over the country, branches of both factions passed resolutions demanding unity. Pyatnitsky describes how when the Odessa Social Democrats received the proposal for re-unification from the CC it was "met with a warm response from among the party members, the Mensheviks as well as the Bolsheviks. That was easy to understand: that our few available forces were weak and scattered had become evident to every Party member during the pogrom... It was obvious to the committee that the proposal of union would be passed by a great majority at the Party meetings of both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, for wherever the advocates of immediate unity spoke they were supported almost unanimously." 21. In Moscow and Petersburg the local committees had been working closely together even before October and had established a

kind of federal structure.

The October *Manifesto* radically altered the social and political balance of forces in Russia. As Lenin had foreseen, the bourgeoisie, which had all along been striving to get a deal with tsarism at the expense of the workers and peasants, now treacherously deserted the revolutionary camp. The big capitalists and landowners united in a reactionary bloc — the so-called Union of 17 October, the 'Octoberists', which threw all its weight behind tsarist reaction. At the same time the 'liberal' section of the bourgeoisie founded the

## Decisive show-down

Constitutional Democrat Party, the 'Kadets', which came out in favour of a 'constitutional monarchy', in effect acting as a left flank for the autocracy, covering up the bloody reality of tsarist rule with pseudo-democratic constitutional phrase-mongering. Lenin was particularly scathing in his attacks on this so-called 'progressive' wing of the bourgeoisie, sparing no opportunity to denounce them for their cowardice and treachery.

The going over of the liberals effectively cleared the ground for decisive action. It was now a question of

'either...or'. Behind the facade of a proffered constitution, the autocracy was prepared for a bloody settling of accounts. Such reforms as had been achieved had been conquered not by the liberal wheeler-dealers, but exclusively by the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat. Far from drawing in its horns after the October *Manifesto*, Lenin urged the working class to summon up all its forces for a decisive show-down.

The struggle to build the Party and to extend its influence over the broadest possible layers of the class now assumed the character of a race against the clock. In a series of internal conferences held in the Autumn, Lenin insisted on the opening up of the Party, and the introduction of the elective principle from top to bottom, in order to change the composition of the committees, with an influx of fresh new workers and youth. Pressure had to be applied on the 'committeemen' through the free airing of fresh views and criticisms from below and, where necessary, by the replacement of some of the older and conservative elements by new people who were capable of reflecting the real mood of the class.

The party's structures were radically altered to take account of the new conditions. Many factory branches were set up to underline the new turn. The newly-founded factory branches held

open meetings. The Lessner factory branch recorded an attendance of 70 workers at one such meeting. Further, a number of areas established workers' clubs, either on a district or factory basis. The Mensheviks originated this work. Their club at the Baltic Works in Petersburg had a membership of 120. Following their example, the mainly Bolshevik Vyborg district set up a club with 300 members. Normal membership for clubs of this type seems to have been around 200-300, at least in Moscow and Petersburg. A further development was the holding of city-wide aggregates, where the entire membership could get together and discuss the work. The district committees in big industrial areas were split into smaller units covering sub-districts. In some areas, the city committee even drew up their own rules in line with the special conditions prevailing in their areas. This was the case, for example, in Petersburg and Ivanovo-Voznesensk.

From all this we can see how extremely flexible Lenin's conception of organisation always was. At certain moments in its history, the Bolshevik Party laid heavy stress on centralism, for example, during the long periods when it was forced to work in underground conditions. But in periods when they were permitted to work in 'normal' legal conditions, the Bolsheviks, as we see here, favoured the most open and democratic forms of organisation.

As we have seen, the advent of legal conditions created vast scope for the party press. Ten days after the tsar's *Manifesto* was published, the first issue of *Novaya Zhizn'* came out. On Gorky's advice, the Bolsheviks entered into contact with liberal publishers who helped launch the venture. Gorky also played an indispensable role in obtaining financial backing for the journal from well-to-do writers and intellectuals. Under these conditions, many writers and poets, who would hitherto never have dreamed of participating in revolutionary politics, became actively involved with the Bolsheviks through the party press. Well-known writers like K Balmont and Leonid Andreyev, and of course Gorky himself, contributed articles and money.

The paper was published legally in the name of Gorky's wife Maria Fedorovna Andreyeva. The editor was a poet, Minsky. This, however, was a front for the real editorial board with Krassin and Gorky in charge until Lenin himself assumed control after his return in November. *Novaya Zhizn'* became the *de facto* official mouthpiece of Bolshevism up to its closure in early December. Its circulation was between 50,000 and 80,000, a major achievement for a party which only a month or so

earlier had been underground. But this figure, important though it is, was dwarfed by the achievement of Trotsky who, together with Parvus, took over the former liberal paper *Ruskaya Gazeta* and transformed it into a popular and militant workers' paper with a low price (one kopek). Its circulation shot up from 30,000 to 100,000, reaching a staggering 500,000 by December. Likewise *Nachalo*, which was theoretically the organ of the Mensheviks replacing the defunct *Iskra*, but in practice was controlled by Trotsky, had a much bigger circulation than *Novaya Zhizn'*. 22.

Alongside the legal mass work, the Bolsheviks also stepped up the material preparations for armed insurrection. By the end of October the ferment in the villages had reached new levels, with 37% of European Russia affected, especially the central 'black earth' zone, Latvia, Estonia, Georgia and the Ukraine. The wave of peasant discontent in turn spread to the armed forces. There was a series of mutinies in the army and navy, which underlined the importance of work among the soldiers and sailors.

## Trotsky

An outstanding organiser and technical worker, Krassin was put in charge of this secret and highly sensitive work. He was also responsible for the organisation of fighting groups. The local committees themselves established specialised units to obtain arms and set up these groups. This work was stepped up in the Autumn with the creation of underground bomb factories and arms dumps. Once again, Gorky played a key role in raising money for this work, which was partly funded by what was known as 'expropriations', or raids on banks conducted by armed groups under Bolshevik control.

Such activities, however, had nothing in common with the latterday tactic of 'urban guerillaism'. This was no secret conspiracy carried out by small groups of terrorists behind the backs of the workers, but a conscious revolutionary strategy linked to the masses. The fighting squads were closely linked to the Soviets. Legal workers' clubs set up rifle ranges where workers learned to handle arms under the noses of the police. The bloody wave of pogroms posed the need for workers' self-defence in a very concrete fashion. For their part, the Bolsheviks pressed for the formation of a united front involving the **unity in action** of all workers organisations and also petit-bourgeois democratic and nationalist groups — an agreement of all those forces who were

prepared to fight in defence of the gains of the revolution and against the Black Hundreds.

The first chairman of the Petersburg Soviet, GS Khrustalyov-Nosar was, like Father Gapon, an accidental figure, who played no independent role. In reality, the leading role in the Soviet was played by the 26-year old Trotsky, who subsequently became chairman after Khrustalyov's arrest in November. Trotsky wrote most of the proclamations and manifestos of the Soviet and gained enormous popularity with the workers.

Lunacharsky, then one of Lenin's closest collaborators, recalls that Trotsky "held himself apart not only from us but from the Mensheviks too. His work was largely carried out in the Soviet of Workers' Deputies and together with Parvus he organised some sort of separate group which published a very militant and very well-edited small and cheap newspaper (*Nachalo*, AW).

"I remember someone saying in Lenin's presence: 'Khrustalev's star is waning and now the strong man in the Soviet is Trotsky.' Lenin's face darkened for a moment, then he said: 'Well, Trotsky has earned it by his brilliant and unflagging work.' " 23.

The full significance of Lenin's reaction can only be gauged if we realise that precisely on this decisive question — the attitude to the Soviet — the Petersburg Bolsheviks made a fundamental error, which lost them the opportunity of winning the majority of active workers in the capital. The mistakes of the Petersburg Bolsheviks allowed the Mensheviks to gain a majority in the Soviet. They had, indeed, taken the initiative in setting the Soviet up, but had no idea where this step would take them.

Since the break with the Mensheviks one year earlier, Trotsky had attempted to maintain an independent position between the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions. This earned him a number of justified rebukes from Lenin whose attacks on 'Trotskyism' were closely related to the need to hold in check the strong 'conciliationist' tendency among his own followers. But despite the sharp differences over the question of unity — differences which, in any case, became increasingly irrelevant in the course of the year — there can be no doubt that on all political questions, there was a very great affinity between Lenin and Trotsky.

That Trotsky's general political stance in 1905 stood very close to the Bolsheviks is well attested to on both sides. When the first issue of Trotsky's *Nachalo* appeared, it was warmly welcomed by the Bolshevik *Novaya Zhizn'* which wrote: "The first number of

*Nachalo* has come out. We welcome a comrade in the struggle. The first issue is notable for the brilliant description of the October strike written by Comrade Trotsky." 24. While, technically, *Nachalo* was supposed to be the organ of the Mensheviks, who had now wound up *Iskra* and put their resources into *Nachalo*, the latter was firmly under the control of Trotsky and Parvus, whose line of the permanent revolution was in direct contradiction to the Menshevik policy of alliances with the bourgeois liberals. Thus, the Menshevik leader Dan wrote a grumbling letter to Kautsky: "In St Petersburg they founded a newspaper, *Nachalo*, which succeeded *Iskra*, and throughout November and December 1905 it carried the most radical pronouncements, hardly distinguishable from those in the Bolshevik paper, *Novaya Zhizn'*." 25. (My emphasis, AW). Martov's biographer, Israel Getzler, makes the same point: "Thus Martov found himself in a minority on *Nachalo* which had become a propagator of Trotskyism rather than of Menshevism." 26. (My emphasis, AW).

## Moscow

About the theory of permanent revolution and the differences between Lenin and Trotsky in 1905 we shall speak elsewhere. Suffice it to note that on all the fundamental questions of the revolution in 1905 there was virtually complete agreement between the two men. Despite the sharpness of the polemical struggle in the previous period, Lenin had a high opinion of Trotsky's achievements which contrasted favourably with the mistaken policies adopted by the Bolshevik committeemen inside Russia prior to Lenin's return. Thus Krupskaya, in the second Russian edition of her memoirs, in a passage which, along with much else, has been deleted from all subsequent editions, quotes from a letter written by Lenin in September, which has also not seen the light of day: "In the September letter written to 'Augustus' Ilyich wrote: 'To wait until you get complete agreement with the CC or among the agents is sheer Utopia. We don't want a coterie but a Party, dear friend!' In the same letter, replying to an indignant complaint that our people had been printing Trotsky's leaflets, Ilyich wrote: '...They are printing Trotsky's leaflets... dear me... there's nothing wrong with that provided the leaflets are tolerable and have been corrected!' " 27.

Throughout the Autumn, the storm-centre of the movement was in Petersburg. But by the end of November, the

workers of the capital were well-nigh exhausted. After the issuing of the *October Manifesto*, the liberal employers, who had previously appeared sympathetic to the revolutionary movement, and even paid the wages of striking workers, finally came out in their true colours. The November strike in Petersburg had involved even bigger numbers of workers than in October. But this was really the last desperate effort of a working class gravely weakened by months of struggle. Sensing that the movement was beginning to run out of steam, the employers threatened a lockout, while the police and troops moved to break up workers' meetings by force. Fearing that the movement would disintegrate into a series of guerilla disputes which could be crushed one by one, the St Petersburg Soviet decided to beat a tactical retreat and, on November 12, after a tense debate, called off the strike, in order to withdraw in a united and organised fashion, so as to preserve the forces of the working class, and prevent a demoralising defeat.

The defection of the bourgeois liberals tipped the balance in favour of the reactionary camp. General Trepov was now in the ascendancy. Fearing 'anarchy', the Liberals clung to his coat-tails. By November 26, the regime felt strong enough to arrest Khrustalyov on the premises of the Soviet Executive. The Soviet responded with the famous 'Financial Manifesto', written by Parvus, calling for the non-payment of taxes and withdrawal of bank deposits to hasten the financial crisis of the regime.

Even at this point, fresh new layers were entering the struggle every day: janitors, doormen, cooks, domestic servants, floor-polishers, waiters, laundresses, public bath attendants, policemen, cossacks — even the odd detective! Society had been stirred up to the depths. But the increasing radicalisation of the formerly politically inert mass disguised the fact that the 'heavy battalions' of labour were now almost exhausted. The December strike in Petersburg was far less unanimous than in November, involving at most two-thirds of the workers of the capital. This fact indicated that the high-point of the movement in Petersburg had been reached, and the revolutionary tide was beginning to ebb.

The initiative now passed to the workers of Moscow. A mutiny in the Rostov regiment on December 2 gave rise to hope that the garrison might come over. But the local Bolsheviks hesitated and, seeing that the movement did not spread, the troops quickly lost heart. In a couple of days the mutiny was crushed. This defeat caused

a bad mood among the soldiers and considerably reduced the prospect of them going over to the side of the workers.

Meanwhile, the mood in the factories of Moscow reached fever pitch. The workers were impatient for action. On December 4, the Moscow Soviet passed a motion congratulating the soldiers on their uprising and expressing the hope that they would come over to the side of the people. But by the time the ink was dry, the soldiers' revolt had been crushed.

Lenin had repeatedly expressed his anxiety about a premature uprising. He recognised that the party's forces were still weak, the fighting squads too unprepared, to take on the full might of the state. Above all, the massive reserves of the peasantry had only begun to enter the field of battle. More than once he expressed the hope that the final showdown between the workers and the regime should be put off till the Spring. But Lenin understood very well that the revolution cannot be directed like an orchestra under a conductor's baton. Krupskaya vividly conveys Lenin's attitude: "In answer to a question about the timing of the uprising he said: 'I would put the uprising off till the Spring, but we shan't be asked anyway'." 28.

## Insurrection

A year later, in November 1906, a member of the Bolshevik CC, speaking at a conference of fighting organisations of the RSDLP, complained that some comrades "have too mechanical a conception of the circumstances which gave rise to the December uprising in Moscow and are painting too simplified a picture of the role of the CC in the calling of this uprising. The CC — so it appears — just pressed a button and the insurrection burst forth. If the CC hadn't done this, the uprising would not have taken place!" 29. In reality, the Moscow uprising did not take place according to a definite plan. The workers were pressing for action. There was a mood of expectation in the factories, and everyone sensed the approach of the decisive moment. Zemlyachka, one of Lenin's closest associates in the early days, recalls that when local Bolsheviks got up to speak in the Soviet they saw that the issue was no longer in doubt: "it was written on the workers' faces." 30. There was a unanimous vote in favour of a political general strike and an armed insurrection.

Although the initiative came from the Bolshevik workers, the Mensheviks and SRs also participated in the uprising,

which cruelly revealed the unpreparedness of the revolutionaries. There were only 2,000 armed men, backed up by a further 4,000 militiamen, 'druzhniki', without weapons. Of these, 250-300 were Bolsheviks, 200-250 Mensheviks and about 150 SRs. The rest were made up of the militias of the students, telegraph employees and other non-party groups. There were not enough arms to go round, but the rebels counted on the support of the population and hoped that a sufficient number of the troops would go over to tip the balance in their favour.

The insurrection started as a result of a spontaneous movement from below. The initial spark appears to have been a government provocation – troops were sent to disperse a couple of workers' meetings. There were demonstrations and clashes between soldiers and militiamen. The first barricades were thrown up, and hostilities began in earnest.

Despite their misgivings, the Moscow party did not stand aside, but threw themselves into the battle, with the intention of giving it an organised and disciplined character. The militiamen immediately set about energetically disarming not only policemen but soldiers. On December 10 the masses came out onto the streets to throw up barricades, which appeared with lightning speed. These served to slow down the troops and hinder the movement of cavalry. Despite their overwhelming superiority in numbers and fire-power, the troops frequently found themselves in difficulties. Surrounded by a hostile population, they found themselves assaulted on all sides by an unseen enemy, in the form of small and mobile groups of militia. More than once, the authorities must have held their breath at the sight of a city of one million inhabitants, the great majority composed of 'the enemy', locked in combat with an army of partially demoralised and unreliable troops.

The Moscow workers fought heroically, but the lack of arms, poor co-ordination and absence of military skill began to tell at last. Once the barricades had been built, the unarmed populace could only play the role of onlookers. Their passive support boosted the morale of the fighting units and enabled them to hold out for longer than anyone had the right to expect. Finally, on December 16, only one district, Presnya, still remained in rebel hands. That day the Soviet executive committee voted to end the strike. As an act of defiance, the Presnya Social Democratic district committee voted to end the strike only on the evening of December 18. The gesture was of no avail. By nightfall of December 17, Presnya fell

to the government forces. The Moscow rising was at an end. The death toll according to the Moscow Medical Union was 1,059, of whom 137 were women and 86 children. The big majority were ordinary citizens. Casualties among fighting men on both sides were amazingly few. Only thirty five soldiers were killed, including five officers. Then began the bloody chapter of mass arrests, shootings and deportations.

When news of the Moscow rising reached Petersburg, Lenin called a meeting of CC members and activists plus the representatives of the united Bolshevik and Menshevik military organisation. The Menshevik side included VA Antonov-Ovseyenko, who in 1917 was to lead the assault on the Winter Palace, and twenty years later was murdered by Stalin.

It was clear that only the spread of the movement to other areas could save the uprising. But given the exhausted state of the Petersburg workers, there was no chance of getting them to follow suit. Support was therefore limited to the sending of arms, while AI Rykov was sent with another CC member, MF Vladimirsky, to attempt to co-ordinate operations in Moscow. On December 13 the Bolshevik-Menshevik centre issued a joint declaration entitled 'Support the Moscow Uprising!', appealing to the workers of Russia not to allow the government to put down the insurrection.

## Defeat

There were, in fact, a whole series of armed uprisings – in Kharkov, Donbas, Yekaterinoslav, Rostov-on-Don, the Northern Caucasuses, and Nizhni Novgorod. The national question led to violent upheavals in Georgia and the Baltic provinces in particular. Even before the Moscow rising there was a general strike and insurrection in Latvia. In Georgia, too, the December general strike gave rise to an armed uprising in the workers' district of Tiflis (Tbilisi), led by the legendary 'Kamo' (Ter-Petrosyan).

These movements notwithstanding, the Moscow rising did not succeed in arousing the proletariat of St Petersburg. The absence of an uprising in the capital meant that the government could concentrate its forces on crushing the workers of Moscow, and then put down the local movements one by one.

Bitterly disappointed at the failure of the Petersburg working class to come to the aid of the rising, some sections of the Social Democrats initially blamed the workers of the capital for the defeat.

Such reactions in a moment of despair, are perhaps understandable. But in later years, an entirely false interpretation of these events was unscrupulously put in circulation by the Stalinists, beginning with Stalin's notorious *Short Course* which claims that "the St Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies, being the Soviet of the most important industrial and revolutionary centre of Russia, the capital of the tsarist empire, ought to have played a decisive role in the revolution of 1905. However, it did not perform its task (!), owing to its bad, Menshevik leadership. As we know, Lenin had not yet arrived in St Petersburg, he was still abroad. The Mensheviks took advantage of Lenin's absence to make their way into the St Petersburg Soviet (?) and to seize hold (?) of its leadership. It was not surprising under these circumstances that the Mensheviks Khrustalev, Trotsky (!), Parvus and others managed to turn the St Petersburg Soviet against the policy of an uprising." 31. This is a particularly crass way of expressing a theme which has since been repeated in a variety of keys. But this ignorant slander was answered in advance by Lenin, who on innumerable occasions expressed his complete solidarity with the general tactical line adopted by the St Petersburg Soviet.

In her memoirs of Lenin, Krupskaya recalls the prevailing mood among the St Petersburg working class at the time: "The Central Committee," she wrote, "called upon the proletariat of St Petersburg to support the uprising of the Moscow workers, but no co-ordinating action was achieved. A comparatively raw district like the Moskovsky responded to the appeal, but an advanced district like the Nevsky did not. I remember how furious Stanislaw Wolski was—he had been agitating in that very district. He lost heart at once and all but doubted whether the proletariat was as revolutionary as he had thought it to be. **He failed to take into account that the St Petersburg workers were worn out by previous strikes, and most important of all they realised how badly organised and poorly armed they were for a decisive struggle with tsarism. And it would be a struggle to the death, they had the example of Moscow to tell them.**" 32.

Even in a revolutionary situation, different layers of the working class move at different speeds and at different times. To use a military analogy, the Achilles' heel of the 1905 revolution consisted of the fact that the bulk of the reserves were moving into action at a time when the advanced guard was worn out by the struggle, and incapable of continuing the struggle. This explains the apparently contradictory fact that

the more backward working class districts were prepared to come out while the more advanced sections did not respond.

The same observation holds good for the peasantry, without which the revolution in the towns was doomed to failure. Only in the course of 1906 did the movement in the villages assume massive proportions. By that time, however, the backbone of the working class movement had already been broken, although this was far from clear at the time. Throughout the year 1906, there was a whole series of strikes and movements of the proletariat, which led Lenin to believe that revolution was still on the agenda. Far from criticising the Petersburg workers for not rushing to arms in December, Lenin gave the following evaluation of the situation: "Civil war is raging. The political strike, as such, is beginning to exhaust itself, and is becoming a thing of the past, an obsolete form of the movement. In St Petersburg, for instance, the famished and exhausted workers were not able to carry out the December strike. On the other hand, the movement as a whole, though held down for the moment by

## Turning point

the reaction, has undoubtedly risen to a much higher plane.

"The heroic proletariat of Moscow has shown that an active struggle is possible, and has drawn into this struggle a large body of people from strata of the urban population hitherto considered politically indifferent, if not reactionary. And yet the Moscow events were merely one of the most striking expressions of a 'trend' that has broken through all over Russia. The new form of action was confronted with gigantic problems which, of course, could not be solved all at once..."

33. Lenin's perspective, then, was that the revolution had far from exhausted itself. The peasant movement was growing and might yet give a fresh impetus to the towns, particularly in the Spring. The regime itself was in crisis, faced with the possibility of financial collapse. The inner cohesiveness of the armed forces was still in the balance. From this point of view, it was essential that the workers should husband their strength as far as possible for the decisive all-Russian struggle that lay ahead. And Lenin specifically warned the Petersburg workers against the danger of provocation: "It would be very much to the advantage of the government to suppress the still isolated actions of the proletariat. The government would like to challenge the workers of St Peters-

burg immediately, to go into battle under circumstances that would be most unfavourable for them. But the workers will not allow themselves to be provoked, and will know how to continue on their path of independent preparation for the next all-Russian action."

34.

With the wisdom of hindsight, it is possible to see that the period from the October strike to the December uprising marked the high tide of the 1905 revolution. With the defeat of the Moscow proletariat, the movement in the towns, despite the still powerful strike movement in 1906, had effectively been broken. The mighty upsurge of the peasantry came too late. The Party, which was weak and divided at the outset of the revolution, had grown impressively in the space of a few months, but the task of uniting and leading a movement of millions proved to be beyond the capabilities of a few thousand cadres, despite heroic endeavours and sacrifice. The incredible thing was not that the Russian Marxists had failed to lead the proletariat to victory in 1905, but the way in which a tiny handful of revolutionaries, with scarcely two decades of work behind them, had grown from insignificant propaganda circles to a powerful party, with tens of thousands of activists leading hundreds of thousands of workers, in the space of just a few months.

1905 was a decisive turning-point. For the first time, revolutionary Social Democracy became a decisive force within the working class of the whole of Russia. Within a space of nine months,

the movement underwent a complete transformation. The consciousness of the workers advanced by leaps and bounds on the basis of great events, which shook the foundations of all the old beliefs, habits and traditions, compelling the working class to come to terms with the realities of its own existence. By a process of successive approximations, the working people tested one political option after another, from worker-priests and humble petitions, passing through economic strikes for better wages and conditions, constitutional reforms and imperial manifestos, bloody pogroms, street demonstrations and workers self defence squads, to the highest expression of the class struggle—the political general strike and armed insurrection.

At each stage, the breaking free of the masses from their old illusions was marked by the rise and fall of political trends and accidental figures of all kinds. The Gapon and the Khrustalyov-Nosars for a brief instant loomed large upon the stage of history before vanishing forever leaving no trace behind them. But the genuine revolutionary tendency represented by Bolshevism, despite all mistakes and inevitable ups and downs, advanced resolutely to its natural place at the head of the revolutionary proletariat. The theoretical, political and organisational weapons which enabled the Bolshevik Party to lead the workers to victory in October 1917 were forged in the white heat of the revolution of 1905, and tempered in the long dark night of reaction which followed.

## Footnotes

1. Lenin, 'Collected Works', volume 31, p27.

2. Trotsky, '1905', p111.

3. Lenin, 'Collected Works', volume 10, p21.

4. Semyenikov i Pankratova, 'Revolutsiya 1905 goda', (a collection of government documents) p22.

5. *ibid*, p224.

6. Lenin, 'Collected Works', volume 10, p460.

7. *ibid*, pp394-95.

8. See D.Lane, 'The Roots of Russian Communism', p12.

9. Martov, 'Obshestvennoe Dvizhenie v Rossii', volume 3, p575.

10. Quoted in Ascher, 'Paul Axelrod and the Development of Menshevism', p241.

11. Quoted by O.Anweiler, 'Los Soviet', p84.

12. *ibid*, p85.

13. Lenin, 'Collected Works', volume 10, pp19-28.

14. *ibid*, p19.

15. *ibid*, p27.

16. *ibid*, p31.

17. *ibid*, p32.

18. *ibid*, p36 (footnote).

19. *ibid*, pp37-38.

20. Trotsky, 'The Stalin School of Falsification', p110.

21. Pyatnitsky, 'Zapiski Bol'shevika', p87.

22. See Trotsky, 'My Life', pp177-78.

23. Lunacharsky, 'Revolutionary Silhouettes', p60.

24. Quoted in Trotsky, 'My Life', p182.

25. See Ascher, *op cit*, pp241-42.

26. I.Getzler, 'Martov', p110.

27. Krupskaya, 'Memories of Lenin', 1930, p144.

28. *ibid*, p132, 1960 edition.

29. Quoted in 'Istoriya KPSS', volume 2, p136.

30. *ibid*, p137.

31. Stalin (and others?), 'History of the CPSU (B)', p128.

32. Krupskaya, *op cit*, p142, 1960 edition.

33. Lenin, 'Collected Works', volume 10, pp93-94.

34. *ibid*, p94.

# Book Reviews

## Nye Bevan and the mirage of socialism.

By John Campbell.

Published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson, £15.95, 1987.

This book sets out to use the life of Aneurin Bevan as an indication that socialism in Britain is a mirage. Nevertheless it can still be useful in reminding us of the major battles in the labour movement that we can learn from. But even if we credit the author with attempting to be objective and factual, then we must emphasise his ignorance about the struggles to democratise the party by the left-wing rank and file.

Campbell recognises that Neil Kinnock's claim to the mantle of Nye Bevan, personally and politically, is "largely spurious". As he remarks of Kinnock: "his overriding concern, quite candidly, is to be elected and he is well aware that in the present climate socialism is a liability. More explicitly even than Gaitskell and Wilson in 1959 or 1964, he is out to recapture the middle ground now occupied by the SDP/Liberal Alliance" and "he is willing to stamp as hard as necessary on the left to keep socialism off the party's banner."

But Campbell also seeks to argue that today's left in the Labour Party bears no relation to "Bevan's understanding of socialism... By now the sentimental old Bevanites of the Tribune have been outflanked by the hard men of a new left, disingenuously lead by the born again Tony Benn, intent not only on putting socialism back on the agenda for the first time since 1945, but imposing it on the party and the country by organised 'entrism' and an

intolerant form of democratic centralism".

This is the sort of stuff that is sucked up by the Goulds and Hattersleys to be spat out at the left in conferences and in TV interviews. It also betrays the author's SDP membership (not mentioned in the book). But of course it is a travesty to suggest that Bevan's struggles do not bear immediate similarities with the fight of the left today, particularly that of the Liverpool 47 disqualified councillors.

Bevan became a leader of the fight against the iniquities of the Poor Law system in the Welsh valleys and unequivocally supported the movement against cuts in poor relief that central government imposed on elected Board of Guardians in the early 1920s, including an incident when a "large crowd... besieged the Board of Guardians for eighteen hours in the Tredegar workhouse in January 1923". What would Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley have said about this 'illegal' action? Central government suspended Boards that refused to make cuts and sent in Civil Commissioners to slash rates of benefit. Campbell recounts that "Bevan was naturally in favour of central government taking over responsibility for protecting the helpless victims of the country's economic difficulties... but Chamberlain (then prime minister) replaced locally elected people with faceless rule by unelected officials accountable to no one but himself." The similarity with present day Tory policies are striking.

So is the response of the Labour leaders, then and now. In the 1926 general strike, Bevan argued, the TUC "had forged a revolutionary weapon without having a revolutionary intention" and, when elected for the first time as an MP in the 1929 election which brought Labour into office, Bevan went to the Commons "in a mood of expectancy, but, I must confess, also with mis-

givings. I had little confidence in MacDonald, Snowden and Thomas. They had as little appreciation of the issues involved on the political field as had the trade union leaders on the industrial." Bevan could justifiably claim that he himself did. He had been chairman of the Tredegar council of action in the 1926 general strike at the age of 28 and not a lorry moved without his permission. This is a different tradition than that of Neil Kinnock with his attacks on the miners pickets and his belated and brief appearance one misty morning over Christmas 1984 during the year long strike.

## Tribune

If this book does nothing else it demonstrates how the right-wing of the labour movement organised to block the socialist aspirations of the party ranks. Bevan reflected to a degree those aspirations, partly through his earlier activities but above all through his central role in establishing the NHS.

Campbell recounts how Bevan opposed attempts by the right-wing to introduce charges in the NHS, saying he would resign from the Cabinet. Gaitskell, as the new chancellor of the day, insisted on imposing them even though they could have been avoided if cuts in defence spending had been made as Bevan suggested. In fact,

after Labour had lost the October 1951 election, largely as a result of Gaitskell's policies, it was revealed that defence had been under-spent and there was plenty of slack to avoid NHS charges.

Although Bevan was the recognised leader of the left and of the constituencies, he failed to coordinate or organise this support when it came to challenging for the leadership of the party which, at this time, was elected only by the Parliamentary Labour Party. The right wing had the media while Bevan relied just on the Tribune Group of MPs, the nearest thing to an organised base. He knew the arguments as to why he should stand against the right wing although he often felt cowed by them and tended to counter their methods of horsedealing and manoeuvres unenthusiastically with similar efforts, as opposed to mobilising a mass vote against the right.

After the 1950 and 1951 election set backs, Bevan rejected the view of the right-wing that people had voted Tory because they were 'content'. Bevan retorted: "If that were true, the answer would be another period of socialist education, not a muting of the socialist challenge... But is it the case that the socialist pulse beats more feebly than it did among the mass of Labour members?... I have



been convinced for a long time that the great bulk of the membership of the trade unions as well as in the divisional parties is ready for a new forward thrust. The truth is that this thrust has failed to find expression in the upper reaches of the party."

When the right talked of unity and no dissension, Bevan replied: "Unity must be achieved on the basis of policies which will inspire the party to fight, not by slurring over the issues which divide us. The Labour Party must have as its aim the establishment of a socialist society. Otherwise it will have no significance in the future life of the nation. It is in that faith that I have fought and will continue to fight so long as I have the strength to do so." Again after his defeat for the leadership in 1956, in words that seem particularly appropriate for Neil Kinnock and the new realists today, he warned: "This movement did not start yesterday. It is a very old one in its thinking. We do not need to go into conference to find out why we are here at all. You would have thought some of these people had only just arrived in the socialist movement. You would have thought that the history of the socialist movement began when they

came into it. The history of the socialist movement looks as though it is beginning to end when they came into it. Do we burn the books? Don't we need to bother with William Morris, or Karl Marx, or Keir Hardie?"

## 'Bevanism'

Compare some of his condemnations of capitalism with the wimpering of the present leadership on the 1987 stock market crash and the Tory budget. In November 1937 the President of the Board of Trade called for 'confidence' and Bevan replied in the *Tribune*: "The position of the government is, therefore, that it is not the coming depression which causes fear of it, but the fear of it that causes the depression. The assumption apparently is that the more ignorant one is of the future the better it is likely to be. 'Economics', said Mr Stanley, 'is fifty per cent psychology'... What we need, apparently, is not statesmen but hypnotists, not scientists but witchdoctors, not confidence born of scientific prediction of the future, but confidence created by a political confidence trick."

To the end of his life Bevan's writings and

speeches reflected a Marxist indictment of capitalism, although during and after the war he did not consistently act for or support workers in struggle. Bevanism maintained its importance for so long, as it was the nearest prominent expression of that thread of Marxism running through the main working class party, even when Bevan himself strayed from these ideas. Militant's ability to tap that thread and drive it further is responsible for the success reluctantly recognised by the author, when he says "Tribune was to be Bevan's platform, later his mouthpiece and loyal supporter, for the rest of his life—apart from one traumatic breach towards the end. Until it was outflanked by Militant in the 1970s, it remained unchallenged as the organ of the Labour left."

Campbell comments of this militant socialist tradition of Bevan that "in the moment of his death was born a conspiracy to strip his legacy of its uncomfortable content of fundamentalist socialism, a process gratefully continued by those in the Labour Party who call themselves his heirs".

I did not think when I heard Bevan's speech at the emergency Labour Party conference in 1959—after a

third Tory election victory—that the same battles against the right would still have to be fought. Bevan said at that conference: "We are going back to the House of Commons and we are going to fight the Tories. But we are not only going to fight them there, we are going to fight them in the constituencies and inside the trade unions. And we are going to get the youth! Let them start. Do not let them wait for the Executive for God's sake! Start getting your youth clubs, go in and start now! Go back home and start them and we will give all the help and encouragement we can."

## Youth

Michael Foot in his biography of Bevan called this speech 'the last of his four greatest'. Campbell does not quote it anywhere but flowing from it came the formation of the Labour Party Young Socialists. A stark contrast in attitude and action to that of the present leadership who have used every manoeuvre and device to take control out of the hands of Labour's youth.

By Keith Dickinson

## A Fate Worse Than Debt.

By Susan George.

Published by Penguin, £4-50, 1988.

The 'Third World' debt crisis is arguably capitalism's most crushing indictment. Rapacious international bankers ever hungry for higher profits, with the often tacit approval of their governments, have poured loan after loan into the countries of the ex-colonial world quite aware that they can never be repaid. For them debt only

becomes dangerous when it cannot be serviced; the longer the debt remains unpaid the longer they receive payment, in the form of interest, for the use of their money. For every 1% rise in interest rates there is a further \$2bn-\$6bn due in debt service — it is a tidy profit. From 1982, the year regarded as the point when debt went from being a problem to a crisis, until 1985, profits recorded by the US's top banks rose from 38% to 84%. The value of their shares rose respectively from between 83% and 154%.

The risks involved in such ventures were offset by the power of the Federal government and the resources of the US Treasury who have gone

to extraordinary lengths to preserve the solvency of US banking. But the generosity has not extended beyond the barracudas in the banking pool; the flip side of the coin reveals a rash of small banking failures and regional bank bankruptcies across the length and breadth of the USA.

The real consequences of the debt crisis are shouldered day and night by the men, women and children of the filthy, infested shanty towns and villages that are the feature and result of so-called 'development'. For workers and peasants in the grip of the IMF austerity programmes crushing poverty is sometimes relieved only by death.

*A Fate Worse Than Debt* is a useful and highly informative introduction. Susan George outlines the background to the crisis and the role of organisations like the IMF and the World Bank. She reveals the sometimes horrifying statistics that chart the consequences of debt and austerity in the borrowing countries.

One of the main reasons for the artificial length of the present 'boom' has been the super exploitation of the ex-colonial world by the advanced capitalist countries. Worsening terms of trade led to a net inflow of capital to the developed capitalist world of \$65bn in 1985. Debt ballooned to over \$1 trillion or \$1,000bn. Another feature

of the debt crisis has been the outright robbery and mismanagement of loans by corrupt governments. At least 15% of the Philippines debt of \$26bn was appropriated by the Marcos family. Some may have been used on Imeldas' staggering collections of shoes and knickers. But even more went on projects like the Morong nuclear power plant which was commissioned from Westinghouse for \$2.1bn in 1976. The debt servicing on this project was costing \$500,000 a day by 1987. Although the reactor is ready to function, fortunately it does not: it was built in the middle of the Pacific 'fire rim' earthquake zone at the foot of a volcano!

Failure to comply with the IMF's 'adjustment' programmes to pay for debt means the loss of credit worthiness. Threat of default on payments is met by a counter threat of seizure of a nation's assets on land, sea or air. As one US Treasury official coldly put it: "Have you ever

contemplated what would happen to the health of a country if the government could not get insulin for its diabetics?"

One study recently quantified the relationship between debt and mortality: for every additional \$10 a year in per capita interest payments there was 0.39 a year less in life expectancy improvement for the people involved. In the 73 countries studied in the 1970s each person had forgone 387 days of life ie lost a year of life. In Peru infant mortality is estimated at 80 per 1,000 births. In the worst of the shanty towns half of new born babies die before they are one year old. This slaughter is the incalculable cost of world debt. And what is the reaction of those who preside over this? Oscar Trelles, ex-President of the Peruvian Senate commented in 1981: "It is healthier to eat less; thin women are more attractive than fat ones, and just because Jewish children had

hunger in the Nazi concentration camps, it did not make them more stupid".

Driven by despair, deprivation and hunger children are forced to beg and steal. Many sell themselves into prostitution. What they face is not life but an unending, death defying and heroic struggle to stay alive.

At the end of her book, Susan George considers what to do. "The debt crisis is a symptom — one among many — of an increasingly polarised world, organised for the benefit of a minority that will stop at nothing to maintain and strengthen its control and privilege". Absolutely correct! Unfortunately, however, the author's own solution, what she calls the 'Third Solution' — debt, development and democracy — relies on this minority effectively giving up its control and privilege **voluntarily** for the good of the poor!

It amounts to this — the developing country would pay its interest payments into

a 'National Development Fund', democratically controlled by a 'broad-based development fund management'. This fund would finance various projects for the community. For every payment into this Fund the donor banks and IMF would correspondingly write off their debt repayments!

How can Susan George believe in this remedy when she quotes earlier the views of a Citicorp banker that "our strategy is not one of making loans but of making money"? Her dilemma is that, while advocating a solution within the confines of the present economic order, she marvelously exposes its constraints. Nevertheless her book puts a devastating case for change in terms of wasted resources and the potential that could be used if the world economy was planned and democratically controlled by and for the working class.

By Joe Owens

## Out of the Night.

By Jan Valtin.

Published by  
Fortress Books, £9.95,  
1988.

Jan Valtin's *Out of the Night* is a gripping autobiographical account of the period from the Russian revolution to the rise of fascism. As a child, a sailor and a Communist, Valtin takes us through the revolutionary struggles in Germany from 1918 to 1923, to the four corners of the earth and through the horrors of German fascism including torture by the Gestapo. His experiences exemplify both the heroism and the tragedy of his generation of revolutionaries.

When first published in 1941 *Out of the Night* was a best seller, going on to sell a million copies in the US and to be translated into five

other languages. From the outset it was surrounded by controversy, in the US especially.

Its exposure of the cynical tactics and brutal methods of the Stalinists touched a particularly raw nerve. At the time even CP apologists who had gone along with the show trials of 1936-38 balked at the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939 and the occupation of eastern Poland and the Baltic states. The support picked up by the CP among so-called progressive intellectuals during the 'Popular Front' period had been deeply undermined; this book served to further that process.

The Stalinist press, particularly the American literary journal *The New Masses*, launched a concerted campaign to denigrate the work as 'a hoax' with 'incredulities on every page'. The new edition appends with a postscript analysing the controversy and providing a detailed rebuttal of the Stalinists' allegations.

The present process of 'Glasnost' in the Soviet Union with the rehabilitation

of several 'Old Bolsheviks' and an acknowledgement of some of the crimes of Stalin lends a topicality to this republication. Today the substance of the book is unassailable. It shows particularly clearly that the crimes of Stalinism were not limited to the borders of the USSR but spread into the international working class movement.

This influence was not restricted to underhand tricks or individual acts of violence but extended to the broader political sphere. 'Eurocommunist' historian Eric Hobsbawm has admitted that he has avoided writing recent history as he would have been unable, as a party member, to face it honestly. A new generation of socialists will be led to question the role of such 'professors' and their parties by reading this book.

It must be said that, for a full, rounded-out analysis of the questions raised by the book, it will be necessary to look elsewhere. The strength of the work's style lies partly in its bold directness. There is

no attempt at a theoretical explanation of the events of the period. This feature of the book no doubt explains why capitalist publishers were happy to promote it as a best seller in the 1940s.

But by comparing this unblinkingly insiders view of the Comintern with the contemporary Marxist criticism to be found in the works of Leon Trotsky, *Out of the Night* can serve the very different function of providing a more concrete and vivid understanding of a period with important lessons for today. A clear introduction to the period covered by Valtin's book is provided in Ted Grant's pamphlet, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist International*.

The roots of Valtin's tragedy lie in his inability to find an alternative to the Stalinist perversion of Marxism: his theoretical weakness. Modern Marxists should emulate his heroism, but cannot afford to repeat his tragedy.

By Paul Kershaw

# We Shall Not Starve in Silence

A history of the National Unemployed Workers Movement 1920-46.

By Richard Croucher.

Published by Lawrence & Wishart, £12.50, 1987.

From the mid-1920s to the outbreak of war in 1939, the unemployed workers movement was led by sincere and dedicated Communist workers, men and women. But such gains as the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM) made were despite the zig-zag opportunism of the Communist Party. Even today, although the unemployed are still treated as second-class citizens and are relegated to the poverty trap, they still benefit from the fight put up by the NUWM.

While it would be an exaggeration to say that the NUWM brought about the welfare state (or what is left of it today), Richard Croucher is right when he says: "the NUWM laid the foundations for a new system of social benefits traditionally credited to the Beveridge Report." Beveridge himself was disappointed in the way his ideas were implemented, as well he might have been; nevertheless the provision of social security all became less humiliating than in the 1930s and the period of the infamous means test, the worst features being the 'on the parish' relief from the Board of Guardians. It is hard to conceive this would have happened without the work of the NUWM.

Many academic studies of the period including those on the left either completely ignore the role of the NUWM or greatly exaggerate it. But as Engels was fond of saying, facts are stubborn things. All

the contemporary newspaper reports show that in 1935 the NUWM did rouse whole communities to march against the new scales of benefit proposed by the National government. The NUWM organised mass demonstrations. In South Wales these took on a genuinely mass character because of unity with the miners union — bringing 300,000 onto the streets. This momentarily forced the government into retreat. Croucher describes what followed these upheavals: "Oliver Stanley, the Minister of Labour, announced next day that Board benefit scales were to be suspended and claimants would be entitled to UAB or PAC scales whichever were the higher. In effect this meant that there was to be no cut in benefit and the means test conditions were to be ignored. Wally Hannington, the NUWM leader, then sent out a circular on 4 January 1935 under with the heading 'Smashing victory for NUWM.'"

But the weakness of Croucher's analysis is that it does not adequately explain why from a peak of support in 1935, the NUWM declined into a hard core of Communist and militant workers capable only of organising publicity stunts such as laying down in snow-covered Oxford Street, or chaining themselves to town hall railings or gate crashing the Ritz hotel. Many of the lads performing these exercises were ex-members of the International Brigade in Spain.

And that was one reason for the decline — the loss of these cadres in the struggle in Spain as well as the recovery in the economy after 1935 with the expansion of the arms industry preceding the war. But this does not fully explain the withering away of the NUWM when on the eve of the war there were still one and a half million unemployed. Indeed, immediately after the outbreak of war, I personally led a demonstration of around 1,000 unemployed laid off from the old Morris works in Oxford



Cowley — so there was still a cause for the NUWM to fight for.

Instead we must look to the policies of the NUWM leadership to explain its decline. And to give Croucher his due, he does describe in some detail the often sharp differences between Hannington in the NUWM and the Communist Party central committee which sought to direct his work. The Comintern attempted to interfere in the work of the NUWM. They almost split the NUWM when they insisted on loose and vague 'unemployed councils' as an alternative to the union-like structure of the NUWM which at one time had 50,000 people paying dues. Hannington and the recently deceased Harry McShane, the NUWM secretary in Scotland, tried to compromise with the Comintern 'directive' by proposing unemployed councils alongside the NUWM. Anyway the Comintern's idea never caught on. But from then on the CP regarded Hannington with some suspicion and he was dropped from the central committee.

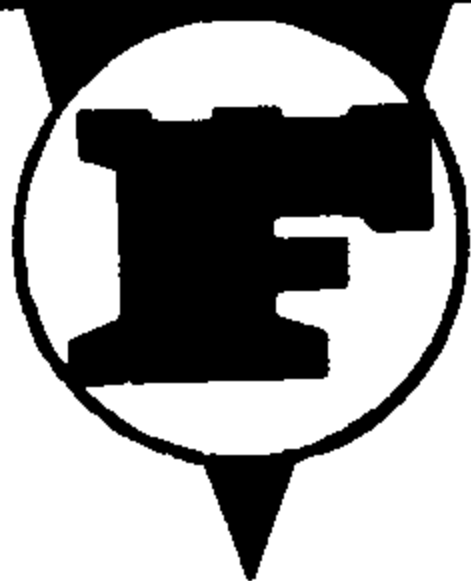
Croucher shows how the

CP's line had completely altered by 1938. The NUWM had become an embarrassment under the popular front policy of the Comintern which meant alliance and cooperation with the capitalist state. But he does not analyse the theoretical and social causes of this change in the CP line, which clearly lay with the false theories of Stalin and the leadership of the Comintern who now looked to support from the capitalist democracies to preserve their position, rather than mass action from the working-class.

This explains the decision of the CP to close down the NUWM on the eve of the war, despite many active NUWM branches and resistance from its membership. This attitude has been maintained by CP members on the TUC General Council when they opposed moves to form a successor to the NUWM in the early 1980s. It is an attitude that must and will be reversed when unemployment rises to new heights in the next world slump.

By Dudley Edwards

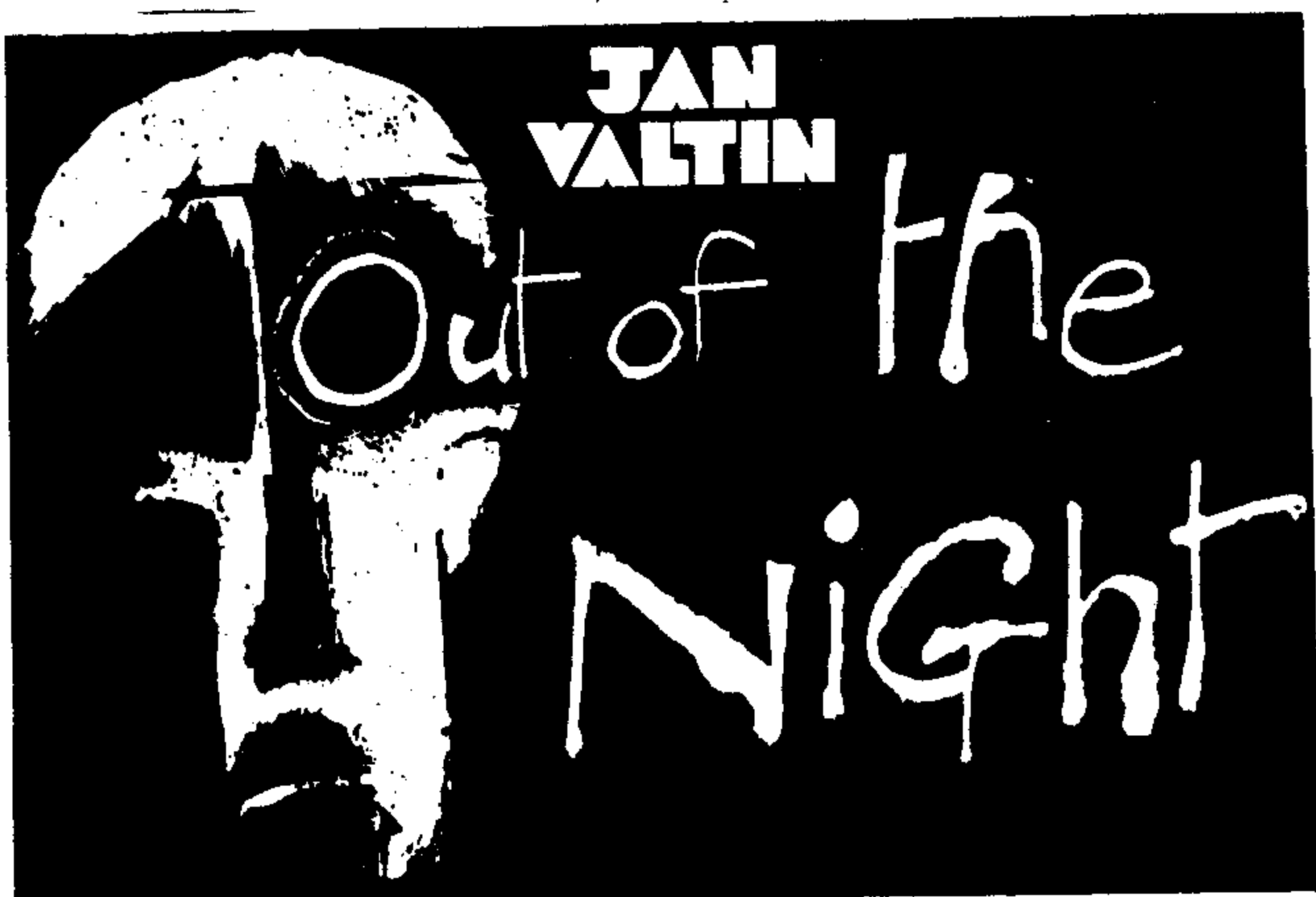
Since writing this review, Dudley Edwards has died at his home in Brighton. Dudley was personally active in the National Unemployed Workers Movement, forming branches of the NUWM in London, Brighton and Oxford. During his activity in the NUWM he joined the Communist Party, staying as a member for over 40 years, before breaking with Stalinism. He became active in the Labour Party for the next 26 years. On the day of his death he was to open a meeting room at the Brighton Unemployed Workers Centre, which was to be named after him. He will be sorely missed.



# **FORTRESS BOOKS**

**PO BOX 141 LONDON E2 ORL 01 985 7394**

## **Just Out...**



Long out of print, this classic autobiography sold nearly a million copies in five languages in the 1940s. Set in the turmoil of Europe between the wars, it follows the travels and struggles of the author, a revolutionary sailor. The description of the 1000 days he spent in the torture chambers of the Gestapo chills the spine. It was one of the earliest first-hand accounts of this horror to emerge.

**£7.95 plus £2.00 postage**

## **Also available from Fortress:**

**Liverpool-A City That Dared To Fight  
by Peter Taaffe and Tony Mulhearn**

**£6.95 plus 90p postage softback,  
£14.95 plus £1.20 postage hardback.**

**Send orders to Fortress Books, PO Box 141,  
London E2 ORL**

**Cheques payable to Fortress Books.**

