

Militant

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USSR AND EASTERN EUROPE
REVOLUTION!



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Editor: Lynn Walsh

3/13 Hepscott Road London E9 5HB.



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Revolution in Eastern Europe Special Issue

These are explosive times. Only a few weeks have passed since our Autumn edition, *MIR* No.41. Then, in an article focused on Poland, we referred to the 'gang of four' unreconstructed Stalinist regimes of Bulgaria, Rumania, Czechoslovakia and East Germany. Pointing to what were still just portents, we remarked that East Germany could "well be the first to trigger upheavals throughout the Stalinist world." Now three of these regimes have been swept aside. Millions of workers and youth have taken over the streets of Berlin and other cities. This magnificent movement is the beginning of the political revolution.

Time has not stood still in Poland or the USSR. The tendencies towards capitalist restoration identified in *MIR* No.41 have crystalised further under the Mazowiecki Solidarity government. National movements challenging the rule of the Russian bureaucracy have developed in the Ukraine, Moldavia, the Caucasus and the Baltic states.

These profoundly significant events, testing all the ideas of Marxism, demand analysis. This edition, therefore, has been published as a special issue concentrating on the crisis of Stalinism. While we carry an editorial statement on Britain, where there have also been important developments, most of our 'normal' features – Book Reviews, Economic Notes, Comment – have been dropped. These are not 'normal' times!

But to produce this special issue, and more frequent further issues as events demand, requires more than normal efforts by our readers. Sellers in Newham North East constituency sold 65 copies of *MIR* No.41; in Swansea, 111 were sold. Every area can emulate these excellent sales. Certainly every reader can make a commitment to the future of the *MIR* by taking out a subscription (see form on p40). Then we could seriously plan our next steps forward.

The writing on the wall: workers' power

In a few weeks, East German workers and youth have swept away Honecker and the old Stalinist dinosaurs. But what now? Alejandro Rojas outlines how the political revolution may unfold.



Last month hundreds of thousands of people flooded onto the streets of every city and town throughout the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). But they were not demonstrating support for the capitalist West. On the contrary, from the outset, they were campaigning for action against the corruption, privileges and repression of the previously hardline Stalinist regime, striving for the establishment of a genuine workers democracy and not capitalist restoration. Singing the *Internationale* in the streets of Leipzig, Drezden, East Berlin and

other cities, they chanted: 'All power to the people — for democratic socialism!' 'Down with the privileges of the SED' (Communist Party), 'Privileges for everyone'. As one placard proclaimed on a demonstration in East Berlin, 'More Democracy, More Socialism'.

After a somewhat stunned delay, Bush and the other leaders of world capitalism welcomed the opening of the Berlin Wall and the lifting of restrictions on East Germans travelling to the West. The capitalist media tried to portray the demonstrations in East Germany as a movement in favour of the restoration of capitalism. Douglas Hurd even claimed that the Wall was opened due to the pressure from the Western powers. But as one East Berliner shouted at Krenz, the new SED leader: 'We in street forced it open not them'.

Now the strategists of capitalism have raised the possibility of German reunification. But there is no prospect of this while two conflicting social systems exist within Germany.

Most of those who came to the West after the lifting of travel restrictions did so to take advantage of newly conquered freedoms to travel and buy goods still unavailable in the GDR. The overwhelming majority returned after a few hours. When interviewed most proclaimed their support for a 'socialist but democratic' society. These are sentiments and aspirations which have found little echo in the capitalist press and media.

Of all the upheavals in Eastern Europe, the movement of the masses in the GDR offers the most favourable opportunity for the proletariat to take over the management of society. In outline, the conditions exist for a classical unfolding of the political revolution.

In East Germany there are not the same illusions in capitalism that have been expressed in Poland and Hungary. From the beginning, consciousness has been on a higher level. Instinctively the East German masses are searching for a regime of genuine workers democracy.

Once the masses gain confidence in their own strength and enter the arena of struggle, events which looked like taking years have arisen in a matter of months, weeks, days and even hours. Such has been the speed of events in the GDR, what seemed impossible a week ago has become reality today.

In six weeks the GDR has been transformed from one of the most stable Stalinist regimes in Europe, to the most explosive. Erich Honecker, the hardline Stalinist leader, his government and his politburo have all been toppled and the hated Berlin Wall opened. From a demonstration of 5,000 in Leipzig on September 25, the scale of protest escalated to one million in East Berlin by November 4. New Forum, an umbrella group of opposition tendencies, has exploded from 12,000 members in mid-October to



300,000 registered supporters today.

This movement has shattered the quiet undisturbed life of the party elite, divorced as they are from the everyday problems of workers and youth in their luxurious Wandlitz suburb of East Berlin. They have been forced to implement a policy of reform from the top, to try and avert revolution from below. But their reforms only encouraged and emboldened the movement from below, as each concession was taken as a further sign of weakness.

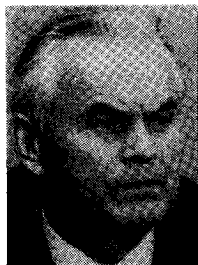
The powerful traditions of the German workers movement have featured during each episode of the recent events. The defeated revolution of 1918, the rise of fascism and its consequences for the working class, and the traditions established by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht have helped shape the outlook of workers, young and old, in the GDR. In particular, the collaboration between the capitalists and the Nazis in the 1920s and 1930s is not forgotten — expressed in the ruthless rep-

ression unleashed against the workers movement in such towns as Leipzig. These experiences have sustained the hostility towards capitalism.

Also, unlike Poland and Hungary, the benefits of the planned economy are clearly visible. From 1945-55 wage rates rose by 68%, giving East German workers the highest standard of living in Eastern Europe. In the mid-1960s economic growth reached 7% per annum. By 1980 gross national product per head was higher than Britain, Austria or Canada. Despite the corruption and consumption of the bureaucracy, the planned economy had generated significant improvements in living standards. Honnecker even won some popularity in the early 1970s when he raised subsidies on transport, housing and food. The average East German worker only pays 10% of his income on rent. Since 1971 three million flats have been built or modernised. In July 1989 500,000 were under construction.

From the beginning, consciousness has been on a higher level.

**The
present
upheavals
are on a
much
bigger
scale than
1953.**



Hans Modrow.

These developments created a powerful and very cultured proletariat with aroused expectations which the bureaucracy was unable to fulfil in the recent period. Economic growth has now ground to a virtual halt, reaching only 3% in 1988 on official figures — in reality below 1%. Simply to maintain the subsidies on housing, food and transport the economy must grow at 5% a year. These subsidies account for DM67bn out of a total state budget of DM275bn.

Unlike Poland, basic commodities are quite widely available but so-called luxury items require patience to obtain. There is a 16 year waiting list for a Wartburg car! Almost everybody has a fridge but a television set costs six months wages for an average worker. Only 20% of houses have telephones, although this has been largely due to 'security' reasons rather than lack of technical knowhow. Patience has now run out.

During the 1980s the GDR invested less than half its gross national investment in industry, compared to 66% in the USA. Consequently, the productivity of labour is 25% lower than in Western Europe. Inefficiency and lack of parts has meant that construction work begun five years ago has ground to a halt. Lack of controls and checks by the workers has led to environmental disaster — common to all Stalinist regimes. According to one report 70% of the water supply is polluted.

The stifling effect of the bureaucracy reaches into every aspect of life, smothering every initiative. Now the accumulation of frustration and bitterness against the bureaucracy has burst through the dam of repression.

A collision between the workers and youth against the bureaucracy has been brewing for sometime. In 1986 students marched through East Berlin carrying quotes from Luxemburg and Liebknecht, demanding more democracy. New Forum, although dominated by students and especially intellectuals, began to develop — an important sign of discontent among the petty bourgeois layers. It was the first breeze of the hurricane which has now arrived.

The uprising of 1953 was a more recent tradition drawn upon by workers and youth. While the capitalist West was pouring \$20bn of aid into West Germany between 1948-52, Stalin was looting East German industry. Factories were stripped almost bare, machine tools and even railways were shipped back to the USSR. 45% of industrial capacity, worth \$66bn, was dismantled.

In 1953 the bureaucracy decided to increase work norms and cut pay. That led to mass strikes in 274 enterprises involving 372,000 workers — 10% of the population. Workers demanded the removal of the bureaucrats, the democratisation of the SED (which had been bureaucratically 'merged' with the SPD in

1945) and the trade unions. Building workers marched through East Berlin chanting: 'We are the real Communists not you.'

The lower layers of the bureaucracy were drawn behind this movement and supported the workers' demands. But, against a different background of national and international conditions to today, the party bosses were able to call in Russian tanks to crush the movement. 260 workers were killed, over 1,500 were put on trial and a purge of the party was carried out. 62% of all regional leaders, 71% of district secretaries and 33% of the Central Committee were removed. Significantly between 60% and 70% of these had been members of the KPD in pre-fascist Germany.

The recent upheavals have been on a much bigger scale than 1953 and the bureaucracy is in a far weaker position. The first signs of protest began in May with the participation of a few hundred on demonstrations in East Berlin, Leipzig and Dresden. The local elections in the same month were blatantly rigged by Krenz, then responsible for internal security. In many areas up to 27% voted against the SED but results claiming over 98% support were announced. This produced further protests including one in Leipzig by two thousand students which was brutally repressed by riot police.

By the summer groups of youth had begun to organise. One group produced leaflets on a printing machine which they had made themselves by rebuilding old washing machines!

Then, in September, the movement acquired a new dimension with 8,000 marching in Leipzig. Now the demonstrations have mushroomed up to one million in East Berlin. **The masses have entered onto the arena of struggle, the essence of any revolution.** The bureaucracy can only respond to events on a daily or even hourly basis.

A massive politicisation has swept through the GDR. Around churches, in parks and cafes, groups gather to discuss the crisis. At some meetings workers have demanded that the state-owned presses, as 'the peoples presses', be taken over to produce opposition papers.

The regime branded the demonstrators as 'criminals', 'anti-social rabble' and 'fascist counter revolutionaries'. The hardline Stalinist dinosaurs were more ossified and isolated than ever. As the German writer Bertold Brecht put it during the 1953 uprising: 'If the leadership have lost confidence in the people, let them elect a new people.' Honecker and his supporters clearly imagined that they could simply crush the movement in its early stages as had been done in China a few months earlier. Krenz supported the actions of the Chinese bureaucracy and even went to Beijing to congratulate them. Honecker spoke quite openly of a 'Chinese' situation and solution!

The 'dinosaurs' almost succeeded in implementing this policy. On October 9 machine gun nests were positioned in Leipzig for the now weekly protest against the government. The borders were closed on the October 10. The so-called 'workers militia' was given special training in riot and crowd control. In Leipzig orders were issued to fire on the expected five to seven thousand demonstrators.

But despite warnings that any demonstration would be suppressed, 70,000 poured onto the streets. Had the troops opened fired it would undoubtedly have provoked an explosion, probably of insurrectionary proportions. **Such loss of fear in the face of possible repression marks a critical stage in the unfolding of any revolutionary movement.** Confronted with such a movement, the local party and military leaders withdrew instructions to open fire.

The militiamen in their trucks fraternised with groups of youth who approached them with flowers explaining their demands. This was repeated in other cities. In East Berlin a few thousand youth marched up to the police ranks singing the *Internationale*. They also sang *The Workers United Front* from the 1920's: 'Join the workers united front for you are workers too.' These appeals did not fall on deaf ears. In the bars conscript soldiers discussed with the youth.

In China a successful political revolution could have been possible from the movement that erupted this year. If the leaders of the pro-democracy movement had appealed to the rank and file of the NPA, the Chinese army, with a rounded out political programme, it could have been possible to avoid the Tianenman Square massacre and overthrow the bureaucracy. But the lack of a conscious leadership for the mass movement opened the way for the bureaucracy to lean on the peasant base of the NPA and inflict a bloody defeat on the Chinese workers and students.

But despite Honecker's wishes, it was simply just not possible to repeat the experience of China in the GDR. Conditions are fundamentally different in the GDR. The proletariat has a crushing social weight. The army and police are made up of the sons and daughters of the workers from the cities. They are far less insular and more receptive to the pressures of the proletariat than a peasant based force. They are less isolated from the masses than the party bosses. Consequently they are more receptive to class appeals.

The Moscow bureaucracy understood this well. They pressurised the SED leadership to hold back from repression and instead implement reforms. The Soviet Embassy was reported to have threatened Honecker that should an explosion erupt they would not help



— although if the movement had got completely out of hand, the Russians may have found themselves with little option but to attempt an intervention.

Honecker tried to fight it out but in the end he was defeated in the politburo and forced to resign. 'If we budge an inch everything will collapse,' warned Honecker, only to be told: 'Bloody insurrection will happen if we don't.' As events have subsequently shown, both interpretations were correct! Gorbachev lectured Honecker: 'When you fall behind, you are punished by life.' The problem for the bureaucracy is that it is unable to keep up!

The movement from below split the bureaucracy, especially at local level. In Leipzig the party leadership held back from confrontation. In Dresden the 'reformist' Modrow opened four days of dialogue with the largest opposition group, New Forum. This did nothing to placate but only increased the confidence of the movement. Honecker's replacement by Krenz, far from containing the movement, served as a provocation. 10,000 surrounded the party headquarters to protest. As head of the security forces, Krenz was viewed as little more than Honecker's groomed successor.

**No egoism!
No Krenz!**

**Honecker's
preferred
'Chinese
solution'
was just
not
possible.**

By November 4 the demonstrators' demands had widened. In East Berlin banners appeared expressing solidarity with the Chinese, Romanian and Czechoslovak youth, some written in Chinese. Another read: 'Berlin 1953, Budapest 1956, Prague 1968, Beware!' and 'Democratic Socialism'. Others boldly proclaimed: 'We are the people and we are millions' and 'GDR — October Revolution 1989.'

Under the pressure of the masses, Krenz has been forced to make concessions. The politburo was reconstituted on November 8 and the government replaced. New Forum is to be legalised. Election laws are being amended, although no date has been set for elections.

But these changes are largely cosmetic. Of the 11 member new polit-buro, seven were hardliners. At a massive rally in Leipzig a New Forum speaker shouted that: 'many heads have rolled in the last few weeks.' The crowd roared back: 'Yes, but not enough. More, more more.'

The new politburo provoked new protests. Bohme, the SED leader from Halle, was removed from all his posts by his local party and an 80,000 strong demonstration took place the following day. In Cottbus a similar protest took place against the inclusion of Walde. As Krenz publicly announced the new line up, even party members were jeering and booing the known hardliners. Within three days of their election, Bohme, Walde and a candidate member of the politburo were removed.

There are now open splits in the SED which only a few weeks ago was regarded as totally monolithic. In its claimed membership of 2.6 million, there is a layer of genuine workers who believed they were joining a Marxist party. So the SED is inevitably more subject to pressure from the proletariat. A faction around the 'reformist' Modrow is desperately trying to speed up reforms to head off an explosion and to safeguard their positions. This wing did not have a clear majority in the leading bodies but has succeeded in bringing forward the convening of a full party congress, where it seems likely they will attempt to remove Krenz, and replace him with Modrow and begin a more thorough policy of reform, possibly including the calling of elections. These elections will probably be far from 'free' and 'democratic' as the people are demanding.

Modrow replaced Willi Stoph as Prime Minister. He immediately appointed a new government, of whom eleven out of 27 are non-SED members. Modrow wants to demonstrate that serious reforms are now being carried through. But the parties in this coalition are little more than appendages of the SED and do not reflect the interests of the masses. So the new government will be very unstable and may have only a short period in office.

Sections of the party, especially its hardliners,

have become demoralised. New Forum reported that 1,500 ex-SED members had joined their ranks in Leipzig alone. Three hardliners committed suicide. In Leipzig the 'Stasi', the hated military police based in the work places and estates, met the New Forum leaders to ask if they '... could realistically guarantee our safety (and)... would it be possible to censor some of the banners being carried on the demonstrations, especially the placards demanding punishment for those responsible for attacking demonstrators and banners proclaiming, 'Stasi to the coalmines', and 'Stasi to production — we pay your wages you lazy b....'.' These fears were justified when the government announced that 15,000 of 100,000 Stasi were to be set to work in the mines because of the shortage of labour and 'to improve their reputation'.

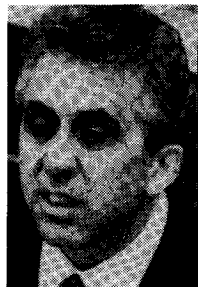
Revolution is not a single act but an unfolding process in which the masses learn from experience the different social interests represented by various groupings, parties or strata. The East German workers, unlike their brothers and sisters in other Stalinist states, have not yet passed through the school of the 'reformist' wings of the bureaucracy. So, for a period, they may harbour illusions in Modrow and other so-called reformers.

As mayor of Dresden, Modrow adopted a far more 'liberal' policy which had brought him into conflict with the party leadership. But support from the Moscow bureaucracy under Gorbachev ensured his survival. His popularity is further enhanced by his lifestyle, especially when weighed against the lavish living standards enjoyed by the bureaucracy as a whole. Refusing to move from his flat on a working class estate in Dresden, he also rejected the official chauffeur-driven limousine and drives his own Lada.

Should he oust Krenz and gain the upper hand, it is possible that the bureaucracy will have a certain breathing space. The party, although widely hated, still has a certain, although rapidly dwindling, basis of support reflected in its membership. The achievements of the planned economy and the traditions of the powerful Communist Party, the KPD, in pre-Hitler Germany are still attractive.

After the enforced merger of the KPD and SPD, the Stalinists consciously selected ex-KPD workers, many of whom had been imprisoned in concentration camps under the Nazis, and installed them into the leadership of the new party. They rapidly became bureaucratised and totally removed from the working class. Honcker was one of these. That they suffered under the fascists gave the old regime a certain legitimacy in the eyes of a layer of workers. Thus the SED, at this stage, is not so discredited as the party is in Poland.

Nevertheless, the SED's monopoly of power



Egon Krenz.

**Revolution
is not a
single act.**

and its abuse is universally hated and reflected in the slogans taken up on the demonstrations: 'No privileges for the SED', 'For the right to form political parties'. Eventually the bitterness which exists towards the party leadership will become generalised and destroy any basis of support for the SED. Already opinion polls indicate that only 10% to 30% would be prepared to vote for it. However, should Modrow take over the party leadership and continue the reform programme which he has now begun, expectations could be raised in the same way as they were when Gorbachev came to power in the USSR.

Under the pressure of events, Modrow is quite likely to go further and include New Forum in the government. But this will resolve nothing and will only pave the way for even more powerful movements of the masses. Fresh layers and reserves still exist to be drawn into the struggle. Most specifically, despite the massive participation by workers on all the demonstrations, the proletariat has still not used its power in industry. Despite reports of some miners' strikes and the announcement by some workers in East Berlin of an independent trade union, a massive strike wave has not yet taken place.

One of the reasons the proletariat has not moved has been the reaction of the bureaucracy. The immediate demands of the demonstrators have been met with some concessions at each stage — not enough to satisfy but sufficient to avoid an explosion up until now. In the factories and workplaces, demands have been drawn up on conditions, working practices and general grievances. The response of the bureaucracy has been to concede everything demanded.

Also, the outlook of many workers has been affected by developments in Poland. There is a mortal fear of economic collapse. This has been highlighted by the recent influx of Poles to sell goods on the streets in the GDR, and now even to apply for the jobs left by those who have emigrated to the West. Nearly 700,000 Poles entered East Germany during October, most to sell goods at markets. One remarked that the price of one cigarette packet in East Germany was equivalent to the weekly purchasing power of his father who is a lecturer in Poland!

The response of many workers has been 'we don't want to strike, but work hard to build a better socialist GDR.' The exodus to the West has reinforced this mood. Some factories and workplaces have lost decisive sectors of the workforce which has already slowed industrial output. But moods change quickly. Should the bureaucracy stumble and workers feel they have been deceived, it could provoke a general strike, even under the 'reformist' Modrow.

The declaration by workers at the Wilhelm Pieck engineering works when they proclaimed

the formation of an independent trade union, 'Reform', is a portent of the future. They demanded the right to strike, the right to demonstrate, freedom of the press, the right to free travel and an end to all official privileges. They finished with an appeal: "In today's critical situation, we appeal to all colleagues in our enterprise and all workers in our Republic to take on the responsibility for our common future." Modrow will have to tread very carefully if he is to succeed in containing the proletariat. His government's announcement that it will lift subsidies on housing and food could, when implemented, provoke further eruptions.

The decisive issue is: how can the working class conquer political power for itself? If the crisis in the GDR is to be resolved, the bureaucracy must be overthrown. Its continued existence is the barrier to the further development of society and the productive forces. Four years of perestroika in the USSR have already demonstrated that the 'reformist' wing will prove unable to overcome the disastrous effects of bureaucratic rule. Even in this early stage the workers are instinctively striving to rid themselves of the parasitical bureaucracy.

But if these steps in the direction of the political revolution are to be completed and are not to end in a defeat, they must find an expression in a conscious programme to take power. In any movement, especially during a revolutionary upsurge, different layers arrive at different conclusions at different times. The more advanced layers can attract behind them those who are drawing conclusions more slowly. New, fresh layers can enter the struggle and propel it further forward. The essence of revolution lies in the entry of the masses into the arena of struggle. Then they learn in days or even hours what previously required weeks, months or even years of experience to appreciate.

But the absence of a clear and decisive leadership at such a critical stage can complicate an otherwise objectively favourable situation. Confused and contradictory policies and actions can derail the movement and protract the process of revolution. And unless the right decisions and initiatives are taken at the correct times, there is no guarantee that the struggle will automatically end in victory.

After years of a repressive dictatorship there is a mass demand for free elections to be called. The critical questions are: who is to call them and to what are people to be elected?

Modrow is trying to open up discussion in the existing 'parliament', the Volkskammer, to give the impression that a genuine democracy is being implemented. But can the bureaucracy be trusted to call genuine elections which would deny them the power and privileges they have accumulated? No, the bureaucracy will never accept that. They will attempt to cling to

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power by making concessions. So the call for free elections must be directed in such a way as to ensure that they are genuine. The bureaucracy cannot be trusted to do this.

A massive movement must be organised and unified. Failure to do so will result in its eventual dissipation. Already on the demonstrations, drawing upon the revolutionary traditions of the workers' movement and especially the revolution of 1918, people have carried banners calling for the creation of workers' councils. **These must be established as the most urgent task posed before the revolution.**

The currently rigged Volkskammer cannot be entrusted to represent workers or elect a new government to defend their interests. No worker in the GDR trusts the bureaucracy. As one banner read: 'You can't pay for 40 years of frustration with four weeks of dialogue'.

Free elections must be organised at every workplace and college to the workers' councils now being demanded by the youth on the streets. These must be linked up on a city and nationwide basis. The councils must undertake the organisation of the movement and prepare an offensive to remove the bureaucracy and implement a genuine programme of workers' democracy. These workers' organisations should then convene free elections to a Democratic Republic of Workers' Councils. Only democracy. These workers' organisations should then convene free elections to a Democratic Republic of Workers' Councils. Only such steps can enact the programme of the political revolution: the election of all officials subject to immediate recall with no official to receive more than the average wage of a skill-



**Gorbachev
kisses
Honecker
goodbye.**

ed worker (as demanded by demonstrators in Leipzig); the rotation of administrative posts; the control of the armed forces by the workers councils together with the establishment of a real militia of workers; the right of all parties

**General, your tank is a powerful vehicle,
It smashes down forests and crushes 100 men.
But it has one defect;
It needs a driver.**

**General, your bomber is very powerful.
It flies quicker than the storm
And carries more than an elephant.
But it has one defect;
It needs a mechanic.**

**General, man is very useful,
He can fly and he can kill.
But he has one defect;
He can think.**

Bertolt Brecht.

except the neo-fascists to organise; and a free press with space allocated by the workers' councils on the basis of support received.

Such a programme must also include a clear orientation towards the armed forces to transform their sympathy into active support for the movement of the workers and youth. Soldiers must be approached to organise their own committees, link up with workers and take up the call for the election of all officers and the abolition of all privileges they currently enjoy. By establishing a clear alternative to the current regime, the vast majority of soldiers and even police would flood to the side of the workers movement and simply break in the hands of the bureaucracy should they attempt to use them against the masses.

Any appeal to the armed forces must include a campaign to approach the 350,000 Soviet soldiers stationed in the GDR. Once convinced that it was not a counter revolutionary movement and that a clear alternative regime of workers' democracy was being proposed, they too could be drawn behind the banner of the proletariat. The demand to end 'the quarantine' of Soviet soldiers raised by some demonstrators shows the correct instincts of the masses.

However, for a regime of workers' democracy in the GDR to survive, the revolution could not be confined within its borders. Such a regime would have an immediate attraction as a counter weight to the capitalist class and the Stalinist regimes with earth-shattering repercussions throughout Europe. There would be attempts to overthrow it, and if a workers GDR remained isolated the inevitable economic privations would create the material conditions for the eventual degeneration of the regime and the re-emergence of a bureaucracy. So an internationalist perspective for the political revolution is essential to ensure the establishment and survival of a workers democracy in the GDR.

The crystallisation of a mass Marxist party is essential for the success of the political revolution. But the leadership of New Forum has been content to play a cat and mouse game with the bureaucracy. Dominated by intellectuals, they have adopted a contemptuous attitude to the working class and youth. Their national leadership declared that they will not constitute a party and challenge the SED and even rejected the demand being taken up on the streets for immediate elections.

New Forum leader Jens Reich complained that the opposition has no programme yet and so an immediate election would only mean the workers would vote for 'any demagogue'. This provoked the New Forum leadership in Leipzig to disassociate itself from Reich. New Forum are however holding the movement back and searching for an agreement with the bureaucracy, rolling along as its fifth wheel. On the

demonstration in Leipzig when the workers and youth were prepared to march on the police headquarters they were held back by a ring of New Forum activists!

It is even quite likely that sections of New Forum will be incorporated into a coalition with the bureaucracy. Some of its founders like Rolf Henrich are ex-members of the SED. Such participation may gain widespread support for a period but would eventually result in New Forum being discredited when they fail to resolve the underlying crisis. Already frustration at the role of New Forum has led to the development of the SPD in East Germany, which may develop as a powerful force despite the reactionary role being played by its founders.

In the absence of a successful political revolution, the movement could become exhausted and lead to a re-emergence of the 'dinosaurs'. Without clear leadership at the head of the movement, the drama of the political revolution will extend over a more protracted period.

It has already had earth shattering effects on Europe, especially in West Germany, terrifying the ruling class, despite their attempts to confuse the real processes taking place in the media. Even before these upheavals the West German bourgeois were supporting the GDR to the tune of £1.7bn a year to try and avert an explosion. As Kohl explained: "no-one is interested in a crisis-like development in the GDR with potentially disastrous consequences for all of Europe... We don't want to stabilise the existing regime but we don't want a destabilisation which could lead to incalculable risks". It is precisely for this reason that the West German ruling class has demanded reforms to head off an upheaval which would have tremendous repercussions in the West.

Now the question of German re-unification is being posed. According to recent opinion polls over 70% of East Germans are against it. Kohl was booed in Berlin by workers from both East and West. Among workers in the GDR it reflects a fear that under capitalism the GDR would simply become a colony for West German capitalism which at this stage has no attraction for them.

The GDR acts as a buffer between two different social systems. Krenz and the Soviet bureaucracy have made it clear that they would not tolerate a re-drawing of boundaries and the withdrawal of the GDR from the Warsaw Pact. On the capitalist side, a reunified Germany would be resisted by the other European powers such as Britain, Italy and France for fear that it would lead to further domination of the EEC by a strengthened Germany with a larger market. Thus, on the basis of the continuation of two conflicting social systems, the reunification of Germany is impossible.

However, if there was a political revolution in the GDR and the overthrow of capitalism in West Germany, then there could be unity of the two regimes of workers' democracy. That would rapidly open up the prospect of the overthrow of capitalism throughout Western Europe and of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Alternatively, unification could be carried through by counter revolution in the GDR, resulting in the re-establishment of capitalism. Such a perspective has not been posed so far. The overwhelming majority of the masses in the GDR for the reasons explained would fight to prevent any attempt at capitalist restoration at this stage.



Modrow's decision to privatise small shops does not represent a movement towards capitalism. As in the USSR with the establishment of the co-ops, it is a measure to try and unblock the delays and shortages caused by an over-centralised bureaucracy. If it is implemented it will prove as equally unpopular when prices rocket.

There are 112,000 private tradesmen and 75,000 private shopkeepers and restaurants. Private plumbers in Berlin refuse even to make an appointment without being slipped DM50. The government was already planning to expand the number of private shopkeepers by 3,000. In 1960 there were 423,000, most of whom were taken over by the state. A reversion to the previous situation by Modrow is not a threat at this stage to the nationalised basis of the planned economy.

However, developments in Poland and Hungary are a warning to the working class of the GDR, should the political revolution not be carried through. The continued strangulation of the economy by the bureaucracy will turn current stagnation into retrogression. Under such conditions, and given the strength of the West German economy, illusions in capitalism could begin to develop, particularly if the working-class suffers serious defeats.

But social revolution in the West could also cut across such tendencies. Nevertheless, the threat does highlight the urgency of creating genuine forces of Marxism with the necessary programme and ideas to ensure the victory of the political revolution in the GDR. An outstanding opportunity exists. It must not, nor will it, be lost. □

Free travel
not mass
exodus.

**The GDR
acts as a
buffer
between
two
different
social
systems.**

National turmoil erupts in USSR

Gorbachev's reforms have unleashed the outrage of the national minorities within the USSR, suppressed for decades by Stalinism. But as Peter Taaffe explains, Gorbachev's solutions to the 'national problem' are a million miles removed from Lenin's.

The Kremlin is besieged by nationalist unrest

"There has not been a single quiet day in the last one and a half months" complained Gorbachev at the reconvened September Supreme Soviet — the USSR's so-called parliament. He was not just referring to the summer strikes which convulsed the country. The Kremlin is also besieged by a seemingly ever rising tide of nationalist unrest.

Bloody clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis have uprooted 250,000 people and in the last few months this conflict has widened. In the predominantly Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh both groups are armed to the teeth. Guerrilla camps have been observed by Soviet pilots and Kremlin spokesmen talk of the threat of 'civil war' or 'Ulsterisation'. In October, Gorbachev despatched troops to break the stranglehold exercised by Azerbaijan through its economic blockade of Armenia.

April saw the massacre of nationalist demonstrators, mostly women, by shovel-wielding troops in Georgia. This was followed in July by armed clashes between Georgians and Abkhazians in Sukhumi, the capital of the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic, an enclave within Georgia.

Add to this the clashes in Uzbekistan between the Uzbeks and Mezkhethian Turks, the huge

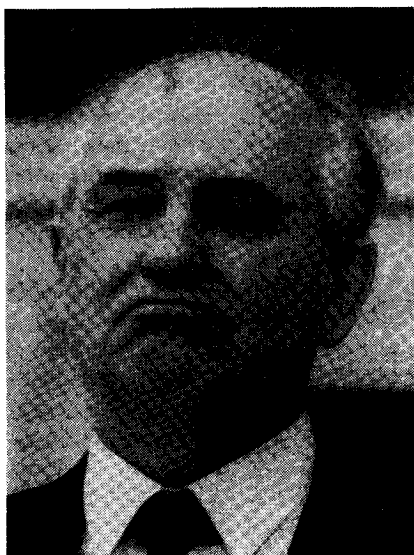
protests in Moldavia at the denial of elementary language rights and the massive nationalist opposition in the Baltic states, and it is easy to see why Gorbachev has been compelled to rush out an 'acceptable' nationality and 'ethnic' programme for the USSR.

Yet, only two years ago, Gorbachev wrote in his book *Perestroika*: "If the nationality question had not been solved in principle, the Soviet Union would never have had the social, cultural,

economic and defence potential as it has now. Our state would not have survived if the republics had not formed a community based on brotherhood and co-operation, respect and mutual assistance."

There is not much 'brotherhood and co-operation' in the Caucasus, the Baltic states, Moldavia and Georgia. These problems and the legitimate aspirations of the growing nationalist movements in the Ukraine and Byelorussia cannot be satisfied on a bureaucratic basis.

The 'liberal' Gorbachev is a million miles removed from Lenin in his approach to the national question. Trotsky described Lenin's teachings on the national question as 'one of the eternal treasures of mankind'. Tsarism was the 'prison of nations' where 47% of the population, the Great Russians (in reality



the landlords and capitalists), ruled over 53%. The Bolsheviks championed the right of self-determination of these oppressed nationalities. But they were not 'evangelists of separation'. They did not advocate that each nation should separate, they merely defended the **right** of self-determination, including the right to secede. In 1918 they accepted the secession of Finland.

The new society, argued Lenin, could not be built on even the slightest compulsion of one nation by another. At the same time, the Bolsheviks implacably opposed bourgeois nationalism. They were for the unification of all workers, irrespective of nationality, race or religion, within one organisation — be it the workers' party or the unions.

While advocating the right of self-determination, the Bolsheviks stood for voluntary union of the Russian people on a socialist basis. Lenin argued that this would remove the fear of national oppression. "If we have a voluntary socialist federation, the nationalities will not cut away." This brilliant dialectical approach was vindicated with the formation of the USSR in 1924.

Prior to this, those states which adhered to the Soviet regime were linked together in a confederation, ie separate states co-operating with one another. Lenin, as one bourgeois commentator correctly points out, "sought to weld this vast area into a federation of equal, common, sovereign republics which would have the right to self-determination and even, theoretically, the right to secede. The federation, he said, is invincible and will grow freely without the help of lies or bayonets". (William Millinship, *Observer* 3 September, 1989) He goes on: "It was a noble concept. Stalinism preferred lies and bayonets".

At one level, the Russian bureaucracy played a relatively progressive role in the national sphere. Peoples kept in the dirt by tsarism began to acquire the basic elements of culture. Nations were formed out of races and tribes. Alphabets had to be invented for the more backward peoples where none existed before.

But at the same time Stalin, personifying the ruthless Moscow centralised bureaucracy, suppressed the slightest 'nationalist' deviation, real or imagined. In the aftermath of the Second World War, whole peoples were uprooted and dumped thousands of miles from their home-



June 1989. Demonstration in Armenia.



Nagorno-Karabakh blockade.

**USSR has
100
distinct
nationalities
and 400
ethnic
groups**

lands. This happened to the Crimean Tartars, the Mezkhethian Turks, the Volga Germans (transported to Siberia and Khazakstan) — who are now emigrating in their thousands to West Germany — and also the Kalmyks, the Karachay, the Balkharians, the Cheshens, the Ingush as well as Koreans, Greeks and Kurds. These insane crimes of Stalin have rebounded on his Kremlin heirs.

In many ways the national question in the USSR is more complicated than it was for the Bolsheviks under Tsarism. On the one side are the unresolved national questions inherited from Tsarism. At the same time and superimposed on them are new oppressed nationalities and minorities, which are a product of Stalinism. Moreover, through huge internal migrations, particularly of the Slavs, some nationalities, like in Latvia have actually become minorities in their own homeland.

The stored up nationalist rage, released by Gorbachev's 'reforms', has been fuelled by the catastrophic economic situation. Of the 1,200 items in the Standard Soviet Consumer Goods Basket, no fewer than 1,000 are in short supply. The 20% unemployment in Uzbekistan was a trigger for attacks on Mezkhethian Turks.

Sometimes these racial conflicts have been encouraged by the local bureaucracy to embarrass Gorbachev and shipwreck perestroika, as in Georgia and Uzbekistan. Conversely, in the Baltic states and Moldavia, the Russian minority, fearful of discriminatory legislation from the 'little' regional or incipient nationalist bureaucracy, have taken strike action.

The local 'Communist' Party bosses, facing regional elections next year and increasingly discredited in the eyes of the oppressed minorities, seek to clothe their nakedness by putting themselves at the head of 'nationalist' movements. Such is the case in the Baltic states, in Armenia and in Azerbaijan.

Faced with this witches brew, Gorbachev convinced the Supreme Soviet to accept his document on the nationality question. But can Gorbachev succeed or will the USSR break apart at the seams?

The USSR is composed of 15 republics, with 100 distinct nationalities and 400 'ethnic groups'. Sixty million people live in republics other than those of their ethnic origin. Even a healthy workers' state would have to exercise the greatest sensitivity on the national question. This would involve reconquering in action the confidence of all the nationalities of the USSR.

On a bureaucratic basis this is impossible. The right of self-determination is formally conceded in the USSR's Constitution. However the Congress of People's Deputies, largely dominated by the Russian bureaucracy, can 'ratify the Soviet Union's borders'.

In today's changed situation, where the pro-

letariat and nationalities are losing their fear of mass terror, the methods of state police terror of the past cannot work. Stalin could uproot whole peoples. Khrushchev could arbitrarily dislodge the Ukrainian Crimea from the Russian Federation in 1954. Kazakstan handed over regions to Uzbekistan in 1969. White Russia conceded land to Latvia; Kirgisiya surrendered territory to Tadgikistan.

But now Gorbachev is even incapable of resolving the murderous conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. The Azerbaijani and Armenian bureaucracies are concerned for their own power, prestige and privileges, not the peoples of both areas. The Azerbaijani bureaucracy denied cultural and linguistic rights to the Armenian majority when they controlled the enclave. As eyewitness reports in *MIR* No.38, Autumn 1988 showed, they encouraged pogroms against Armenians in Sumgait and Baku, causing hundreds of deaths.

It was ordinary Azerbaijani workers who attempted to protect their Armenian neighbours from mobs whipped up by the bureaucracy. Even in the massive demonstrations and strikes in September some of the Azerbaijanian workers were at pains to distance themselves from the extreme nationalists. One declared to *The Independent*: "this is not an anti-Armenian protest." The organising of the general strike and demonstrations in Azerbaijan were in the hands of committees, ie Soviets.

Azerbaijani nationalism is reinforced by the region's economic situation. Six million Azerbaijanis feel discriminated against by Moscow. This fuelled demands for greater control over Azerbaijanian resources. For the Baku bureaucracy not the least motivating factor is that many have villas and farms in Nagorno Karabakh — 'the Switzerland of the Caucasus'.

The Armenian bureaucracy are a mirror image of their Azerbaijani counterparts. Corruption and mismanagement mean that thousands of Armenians still live in tents in the areas devastated by last year's earthquake.

A real Communist Party in Azerbaijan would have educated the masses in the spirit of internationalism and in defence of the right of the population in Nagorno Karabakh to self-determination, including the right to secede from Azerbaijan and join with Armenia if necessary, with full democratic guarantees for the 20% Azerbaijanian population.

Such an approach is impossible for the bureaucracies of both areas whose interests are uppermost over the needs of the masses. Nor can Moscow produce any lasting solution. Despite direct rule, over 100 Russian soldiers have been killed in a year with only two people brought to trial. This underlines the impotence of the Kremlin in Nagorno Karabakh.

Gorbachev has declared that the answer is

the Soviet Federation, authority and budget... regional Soviets." On the relationship between the centre and the republics, his document is full of laudable sentiments.

He states that: "one condition for stability and successful development of our federation is to establish an optimum relationship between the rights of union republics and the USSR as a whole... In this connection, we should clearly define the terms of reference and mutual obligations of the Union and the republics. The Union must be vested with legislative powers necessary to determine the foundations of the political and economic system; to ensure the country's defence and security; to pursue foreign policy; to coordinate and fulfil common tasks in the sphere of the economy, science and culture... to ensure the... development of the country's national economic complex."

The republics "must be entitled to decide all state and social matters, except those they voluntarily delegate to the Union." The operative word here is 'voluntarily'. The relationship between the republics and 'the Union' is precisely not 'voluntary'.

But who decides on the 'Union law' or on 'rights of the republics'? It is the 'Congress of Deputies' and the 'Supreme Soviet' elected by it. This body has a built-in 'Communist' Party majority — the party of a privileged bureaucratic stratum which dominates the state, the unions, the government etc. A voluntary union as envisaged by Lenin is only possible on the basis of a completely free election to Soviets open to all parties — and a democratic workers' state.

Gorbachev has no intention of dismantling the bureaucracy despite his championing of 'democracy'. As the *MIR* has commented before, Gorbachev stands for **greater differentials between the bureaucracy and the mass of the working-class and farmers**. His attacks on 'bureaucracy' are aimed primarily at the middle layers. Their colossal swindling, mismanagement and waste is swallowing a huge portion of the surplus.

The bureaucracy will not vacate the scene voluntarily. Gorbachev is attempting to breath new life into the system. His incapacity to go outside the limits of the system means that his 'nationalities policy' will be stillborn.

The document itself declares: "A precise definition of the rights and responsibilities concerning the ownership and management of property requires the establishment of the social property status of industrial, transport, agriculture, trade, service and other enterprises. This should determine which are the property of the republics (union or autonomous)..."

But who is to determine which are the prop-

erties of the whole union, and which are the properties of the republics?

There is widespread support in the Baltic states for the resources in their 'republics' to be controlled by themselves. Such a mood is fuelled by the bureaucratic centralism of Moscow in its relationships with these areas.

At the same time the bureaucracies of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania display all the features of the full-blown 'liberal' national Stalinism of the other states of Eastern Europe. The Latvian Popular Front has the tacit support of the 'Communist' Party — one-third of its members are CP members — for its 'ultimate goal' of outright political and economic independence.

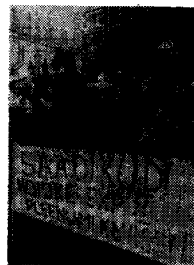
Gorbachev, no more than the 'conservative' wing of the Russian bureaucracy, would not tolerate any of these states separating from the USSR. The nationalities document states: "it is utterly wrong to allege that peoples of the USSR have no right to self-determination and to reduce self-determination merely to secession, thereby impoverishing this universal principle of the solution of the nationality problem." This is all that it says about the right of self-determination!

This has nothing in common with Lenin's approach to the question. Nor are the Latvian, Lithuanian or Estonian 'Communist' Parties any better. They have reinforced divisions within the proletariat in order to maintain their faltering grip on power.

The Estonian Supreme Soviet recently proposed discriminatory measures on the language question and in voting rights against the Russian-speaking population: 40% of Estonia's population is 'non-Estonian', 30% of whom have lived in Estonia for 40 years! The Estonian bureaucracy proposed that residency in the country of at least two years and in some cases five years was necessary for Russian speakers to vote. This provoked the organisation of Inter-Front, of Russian and other immigrants in the country. Its organisers include the pre-dominantly Russian managers of the industrial plants throughout Estonia.

The Russian speakers tend to be proletarian, with the native Estonians concentrated in the professions and white-collar jobs. Thus the national divisions also tend to run along class lines. The Estonian bureaucracy and the local Russian bureaucracy lean on their respective populations against one another as a means of shoring up their position. And this is from parties that claim to be 'proletarian internationalist'. Moscow vetoed the discriminatory election law, but not before widespread strike action closed most factories in Estonia. The Estonian government sought to ban strikes, in anticipation of their big brother Gorbachev in Moscow who has now introduced similar measures in 'essential' industries.

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Latvian
nationalism
surfaces.

**Gorbachev's
incapacity
to break
with the
bureaucratic
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make his
nationalities
policy
still-born**

**Lenin
opposed
privileges
for any
one
language**

Despite the nationalist poison injected by both the Estonian 'Communists' and the leaders of the 'internationalists', the basic instincts of the proletariat were shown in the demand for 'soviets'. Trotsky once remarked that it was necessary to differentiate between the nationalism of the landlords and capitalists and of the masses. The awakening to political life of formerly backward peasants and workers sometimes manifests itself in the growth of powerful nationalist movements. This should be distinguished from bourgeois nationalism, for it was the merely the 'outer shell of an immature Bolshevism'. Such tendencies have been revealed in the recent national movements in the USSR.

In the Baltic states, and in the vicious pogromist atmosphere in Azerbaijan, 'soviets' and strike committees were set up. A similar process has unfolded in Moldavia where a mass movement has developed against Stalin's forced 'Russification' of the region. Moldavians are mainly ethnic Romanians, who like their Romanian cousins over the border, had a Latin language and alphabet before Russian occupation in 1945.

Crushed by the Ottoman empire, brought under the heel of the Austro-Hungarian empire, the Moldavians were then dominated by the Russian central bureaucracy which brutally imposed the Russian Cyrillic alphabet and the Russian language. Quite naturally a movement has developed against compulsory teaching of Russian and for the Romanian language to be a state language. This movement took on a mass character, with the improvisation of a 'mini-police force'. The slogans of the August demonstrations were 'Down with the mafia!', 'Down with the bureaucracy!'.

However, the Moldavian bureaucracy sought to atone for one crime, Stalin's policy of forcible Russification with another: discrimination against the Russian speaking population. Romanian was proclaimed as **the** state language.

Lenin, arguing against the Russian liberals 76 years ago, castigated their not so 'liberal' attitude to the language question. He wrote: "Why should huge Russia, a much more backward country, inhibit her development by the retention of any kind of privilege for any one language". He pointed out that "tiny Switzerland has not lost anything but has gained from having not one official language but three — German, French and Italian. In Switzerland, 70% of the population are Germans (in Russia 43% are Great Russians), 22% French (17% in Russia are Ukrainians) and 7% Italian (6% in Russia are Poles and 4.5% Byelorussian).

"Italians in Switzerland often speak French in the common parliament. They do so not because they are menaced by some savage police law (there are none such in Switzerland), but because the civilised citizens of a democratic

state themselves prefer a language that is understood by a majority. The French language does not instil hatred in Italians because it is the language of a free civilised nation, a language which is not imposed by disgusting police measures".

The huge hostility to the imposition of the Russian language in Moldavia does not justify discrimination against Russian speakers. A democratic, let alone a socialist position, would involve the acceptance of not one 'single official language' but two: Moldavian-Romanian and Russian. Lenin argued: "if all privileges disappear, if the imposition of any one language ceases... (the) horrible... thought that speeches in different languages would be heard in the common parliament" would be laughable.

In a multi-national society there would obviously need to be a common means of communication. This would, as experience has shown in the USSR, be Russian. However, this would be impossible with the slightest compulsion, of forcing one language down the throats of another nation or minority. Lenin again points out "the requirements of economic exchange will themselves decide which language in a given country is to the advantage of the majority to know in the interests of commercial relations".

He goes on: "This decision will be all the firmer because it is adopted voluntarily by a population of various nationalities". The position of the Bolsheviks on the defence of national rights of oppressed minorities stands out clearly compared to the shameful position of all wings of the 'Communist' bureaucracy.

In his unfinished work on Stalin, Trotsky quotes a resolution of the Bolshevik Org-Party conference in December 1919. "In the view of the fact that the Ukrainian culture... has for centuries been suppressed by tsarism and the exploiting classes of Russia, the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party makes it obligatory for all members of the party to help in every way to get rid of all obstacles to the free development of the Ukrainian language and culture.

"Owing to the centuries of oppression, nationalist tendencies are to be found among the backward sections of the Ukrainian masses, and in view of this fact, it is the duty of the members of the party to treat them with utmost forbearance and discretion, putting before them a comradely explanation of the identity of interests of the toiling masses of the Ukraine and of Russia. Members of the party... must actually enforce the desire of the toiling masses to study in the Ukrainian language and to use it in all Soviet institutions... striving... to render the Ukrainian language a weapon for the Communist education of the toiling masses. Steps must immediately be taken to ensure a sufficient

number of employees in all Soviet institutions who know the Ukrainian language and to see that in the future all employees should be able to speak Ukrainian". (*Stalin* p43)

Last year in the Ukraine, riot police attacked football crowds for flying the Ukrainian flag. The national question has re-emerged, shown by the recent huge demonstrations in Kiev and elsewhere. Gorbachev must be reaching for the panic button. Ukraine is the bread basket and the industrial locomotive of the USSR. With a population of 51 million, it occupies a vital position, far more important for the Kremlin than the Baltic states or the Caucasus.

Despite desperate efforts by the Moscow bureaucracy, it is impossible to solve the national question on a bureaucratic basis. Trotsky, writing 53 years ago in *The Revolution Betrayed*, gave the key to the solution of the present national problems facing the USSR when he wrote: "The tendencies of cultural autonomy and economic centralism come naturally from time to time into conflict. The contradiction between them is, however, far from irreconcilable. Although there can be no once and for all prepared formula to resolve the problem, still there is the resilient will of the interested masses themselves.

"Only their actual participation in the administration of their own destinies can at each new stage draw the necessary lines between the legitimate demands of economic centralism and the living gravitations of national culture. The trouble is, however, that the will of the population of the Soviet Union in all its national divisions is now wholly replaced by the will of a bureaucracy which approaches both economy and culture from the point of view of convenience of administration and the specific interests of the ruling stratum". (p171)

These lines retain all their validity in characterising the present bureaucratic leadership of the USSR. Only a democratic workers state will begin to provide a solution. With the limitless economic, social and cultural possibilities which will then be unleashed, it would be possible to begin to solve accumulated problems in the national sphere.

In the Russian press there are attempts to grapple with these problems that even now give a glimpse of what is possible in the future. Thus in *Soviet Weekly*, 23 September 1989, Professor Edward Bagramov, in relation to the Crimean Tartars wrote: "I have suggested an ethnic area for the Crimea Tartars in the Crimea steppe. We could restore similar settling areas for Greeks, Bulgarians and Armenians who lived there before the war and were exiled to other parts of the country."

But with economic stagnation and even regression in some fields in the USSR, together with their concomitant shortages, such a pro-

posal is a formula for racial or ethnic conflict. The Crimea Tartars were transported from the bountiful Crimea to the arid wastes of central Asia. Some would like to return, others, particularly the younger generation, would prefer to remain in their new 'homeland'. On the basis of a democratic USSR, it will be entirely possible to begin to satisfy the legitimate national aspirations of the Crimea Tartars.

After all, Trotsky and Lenin once considered giving land to the anarchists for them to put into practice their utopian schemes. They believed such an experience would convince the anarchists of the superiority of the ideas of Marxism. This experiment was cut across by the civil war.

Lenin considered that the maximum 'autonomy' would be possible and even necessary on the basis of a socialist federation. But the key to solving the national problem remains a political revolution to overthrow the bureaucracy. To even carry through this task it will be necessary for a force to be created in the USSR which is as bold and sensitive on the national question as were Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks. This would involve a policy of recognising the rights of self-determination, up to and including the right to secede.

Gorbachev cannot possibly support such a measure without risking immediate overthrow. The present Politburo is the most 'Russified' ever with only one non-Slav member. To counter the independence movements in the Baltic, Gorbachev is compelled to falsify history. Conceding that the Baltic states were 'illegally annexed' by Stalin he then argues that the 'peoples of the area' expressed support for such a step later on. Yet all historical evidence proves that the region was forcibly annexed by Stalin through the infamous Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939.

While supporting the right of self-determination, at the same time the forces of Marxism, the subjective factor necessary to guarantee a victory over the bureaucracy, would advocate the closest union of the workers throughout the USSR. Without a clear position on the national question, the forthcoming political revolution against the bureaucracy is no more possible than was the Russian revolution 72 years ago.

Further upheavals, racial conflict, pogroms and a living nightmare for the peoples of the USSR are inevitable on the basis of the bureaucratic system. The ultimate break-up of the USSR cannot be ruled out if the bureaucracy continues to exercise its grip on power for any length of time. Only Marxism and Trotskyism can provide the theoretical and practical weapons for the peoples of the USSR to establish harmonious relations on the basis of a democratic workers state. □

**Only
workers'
democracy
can begin
to solve
national
conflicts**

Poland and Hungary Returning to capitalism?

Lynn Walsh considers whether it is possible or even likely that Poland and Hungary could revert to the orbit of capitalism. There are many conditional factors involved.

The political revolution has begun. The earth-shaking movement of the Vorkuta, Siberian and Ukrainian miners during 1989 has rocked the ruling bureaucracy to its foundations. Gorbachev's reforms, aimed at heading off revolution from below, have neither solved the crisis of the bureaucratic economy nor satisfied the demands of the working class. Changes in the Soviet Union, moreover, have accelerated the crisis in the Stalinist states of Eastern Europe. On the streets of Leipzig, Dresden, and Berlin, millions of workers and youth have forced the ruling elite of East Germany on a sudden, unintended course of reforms. Mass demonstrations in Prague and other Czech cities have also brought down the regime of Husak and Jakes installed in 1968 in the tracks of Brezhnev's tanks.

The bureaucracy, "a privileged and commanding stratum...(which) has expropriated the proletariat politically" (Trotsky), has steered the planned economy into an impasse. Without the democratic involvement of the workers, science, technology and production cannot be

taken forward. Cocooned from society's problems by their privileges and riddled with corruption, the bureaucrats are an immense drag on the economy. Under Gorbachev, the leadership is grasping at one expedient after another in a desperate attempt to find a way out.

For over 60 years, the Stalinist regime, through a monolithic apparatus of repression and political control, ruled society like an iron-clad monster. But the ruling caste failed to consolidate an enduring social position. Although it has built up a Byzantine superstructure of control, its strength has been eaten away by a remorseless process of decay.

The monolith is now cracking up. The deep inertia of peoples atomised by decades of political terror is giving way to a profound ferment and explosive workers' struggles. Events have placed the political revolution on the agenda. What we have seen is only the beginning.

History, however, rarely proceeds in a straight line. While the movement towards political revolution is gathering pace in the USSR, East Germany and Czechoslovakia, there appears, paradoxically, to be moves towards counter-revolution in Poland and Hungary. In both countries, reformist governments have come out in favour of large-scale privatisation of state industries and a transition to a predominantly market economy.

The question has been raised by a number of our readers: **Is a return to capitalism now possible in Poland and Hungary?** A second question then raised is: If it is possible, how likely is such a counter-revolutionary transition?

In Poland, the Solidarity-led government of Mazowiecki is attempting to tackle the country's economic catastrophe with market policies, closing unprofitable factories, cutting state subsidies, and raising prices. In October, the government appointed a Minister of Privatisation, Krzysztof Lis, to oversee the sale of state industries and the creation of small businesses. In co-operation with Britain's right-wing Adam Smith Institute, merchant banks, and big accountants (like Price Waterhouse), the Polish government is drawing up plans for the denationalization of most of the state sector — to be carried through within the next two years.

At the same time, the reformist wing of the Communist Party (officially the Polish United Workers Party) around Rakowski is proposing that the party should be changed into a Democratic Socialist party, with acceptance of

**My friend, all theory is grey,
and green
The golden tree of life.**

Goethe

the market as a key plank of its new programme.

In Hungary, the reform wing of the bureaucracy led by Pozsgay and Nyers advocate market policies, privatisation, and an appeal to the West for capital investment. But the Hungarian Democratic Forum and other opposition groups will challenge the Hungarian Socialist Party, the revamped Communist Party, in the general elections next year. Leaders of the Democratic Forum are even more fervently committed to a transition to a market (i.e. capitalist) economy.

Quite clearly, a section of the ruling elite is ready to abandon the centralised, planned economy and accept a return to capitalism. For 40 years the regime has rammed a distorted, statist counterfeit of socialism down workers' throats. Now a 'new management' are ready to declare themselves economically and politically bankrupt and opt for voluntary liquidation. This is a new factor in the situation.

Historically, the bureaucracy's overriding aim was to preserve its own privileges and monopoly of power. Politically, it maintained its power through control of the bonapartist state apparatus. Ultimately, however, it defended the planned economy as the foundation of its source of income.

Under the pressure of the workers' movement, especially the magnificent struggle in Poland in 1980-81, the ruling elite's hold over society began to break down. Support for the bureaucracy's ruling party and acceptance of the ideology and methods of Stalinism was eaten away. The majority of the bureaucrats lost confidence in their ability to run society. After the election in Poland, the editor of the CP Central Committee's paper confessed: 'Now we may as well raise the white flag of surrender. The party is exhausted, incapable of responding.'

They abandoned all hope of rescuing the planned economy. Under their stewardship it was strangled by inefficiency, waste and corruption. But the last thing they would do is turn to the working class, who alone have the ability to take the planned economy forward. Demoralised about the nationalised economy, they have been thrown off balance by the long post-war upswing of capitalism and especially beguiled by the boom since 1981. They are deluding themselves that capitalism has all the answers. Completely lacking in Marxist understanding, the pro-capitalist intellectuals are incapable of understanding the uneven, superficial and temporary character of the 'Reagan boom'.

The reformers are not merely preparing to introduce market elements, which was attempted in varying degrees in the past. They are proposing policies which, if carried through, would mean the restoration of capitalism. How



far they will go does not depend purely on the outlook and intentions of the current Polish and Hungarian leaders. But at the moment the initiative is in their hands, and it would be a mistake to ignore the possible consequences.

But, it may be raised, surely the gains of the social revolution in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, despite the distortions of Stalinism, are irreversible? Once landlordism and capitalism has been eliminated, surely there can be no going back? Will the bureaucracy not defend the planned economy as the basis of their privileges and power? Above all, will not the proletariat fight to defend social relations which, despite Stalinist deformities, correspond to the historical interests of the proletariat?

The planned economy has ensured the development of countries like Poland and Hungary into predominantly urban, industrial societies, with basic education, health and welfare services for the workers. Would not an attempt to destroy these social achievements necessitate a counter-revolutionary assault on the working class, a civil war to smash the resistance of the working class?

These are vital questions. But they cannot be resolved merely by applying general principles, however correct. In 1936 Leon Trotsky wrote his brilliant book, *The Revolution Betrayed*, which is still the most up-to-date analysis of Stalinism. In it he warned that the transitional character of the deformed workers' state (the Soviet Union, to which the East European states were added after 1945: states intermediate between capitalism and socialism) means that 'finished social categories' must be abandoned.

"Doctrinaires...would like categorical for-

Walesa looks to the capitalist West.

A section of the elite are ready to abandon the planned economy and return to capitalism

**No
relationship
of social
forces is
immutable**

mulae: yes-yes, and no-no. Sociological problems would certainly be simpler if social phenomena had always a finished character. There is nothing more dangerous, however, than to throw out of reality, for the sake of logical completeness, elements which today violate your scheme and tomorrow may wholly overturn it. In our analysis, we have above all avoided doing violence to dynamic social formations which have had no precedent and have no analogies." (p255) This is the method which must be applied to complex contemporary developments in the USSR and Eastern Europe.

No relationship of social forces, even if they represent progressive changes in fundamental property relations is immutable. The bureaucracies in Poland and Hungary, like the Soviet elite, have defended state industry as the basis of their privileges. But like their Russian counterparts, they long ago "ceased (as Trotsky said) to offer any subjective guarantee whatever of the socialist direction of (their) policy." Trotsky referred to Lenin's warning in 1922 about the dangers of bureaucratisation: "History knows transformations of all sorts. To rely upon conviction, devotion and other excellent spiritual qualities — that is not to be taken seriously in politics.' Being determines consciousness." (p251) The disintegration of the centrally planned economy, aggravated in Poland by struggles which failed to replace the degenerate bureaucracy by workers' democracy, has generated a complex, contradictory consciousness.

Moreover, the social transformation in Eastern Europe after the war did not take place under the classical conditions of revolution envisaged by Lenin and Trotsky. They had a peculiar, bonapartist character from the very beginning. Unlike Russia in October 1917, the elimination of capitalism was not carried through under the conscious leadership of the working class. The tradition of October 1917, together with the tradition of the Left Opposition's struggle against Stalin's reaction, are vital factors which still distinguish the Soviet Union from the East European states.

There were movements in Eastern Europe at the end of the war. But the struggle of class forces within the different East European countries was not, in itself, the most decisive factor. The changes within those states were dominated by the international relationship between Stalinism and imperialism. Developments in Eastern Europe cannot be understood apart from their history and the changes which have come about since 1945.

Stalinism emerged from the war enormously strengthened, while the weakened capitalist powers were forced to abandon their wartime aim of occupying Eastern Europe. (At the same time, imperialism lost China and was forced

step by step to relinquish direct rule over the colonial lands; while in the advanced countries, the restabilisation of capitalism took place only on the basis of massive concessions to the working class.) The price capitalism paid for Hitler's crimes was the loss of Eastern Europe. The old capitalist order collapsed with the defeat of Hitler and the collapse of his quisling governments. Stalin's victorious Red armies marched into a vacuum.

The new governments installed by the Kremlin leaned for support on the workers, who initially welcomed the Soviet forces as liberators. But the might of the Red armies, quickly supplemented by a security and party apparatus, ensured the establishment of regimes based on Stalin's own totalitarian model. The forcing through of change from above by the Russian bureaucracy added a national complication to the distorted social transformation. From the start, opposition to the totalitarian regimes in Poland and Hungary (clients of the Kremlin bureaucracy) was interlinked with opposition to national oppression. After 1956, through reforms in Poland and by the brutal crushing of the rising in Hungary, both regimes (under Gomulka and Kadar respectively) adopted a more independent national-bureaucratic course. When there was economic progress, they were able to secure a certain basis of support in society. Nevertheless, the historic connection of the regimes (especially the Polish) with Russian domination and intervention is still a powerful factor in the undermining of support for national Stalinism.

Now, the relationship between the USSR and Eastern Europe, which for decades seemed to be set in concrete, appears to be running out of the mould like sand. Under the impact of explosive events, the post-war settlement is breaking down.

The ideas of Trotsky in relation to Stalinism and the political revolution remain absolutely indispensable for Marxists to work out perspectives. But they do not provide ready-made schema into which all events can be fitted. They constitute a method which has to be applied to living reality.

It should not be forgotten that Trotsky's perspective for the Soviet Union, formulated prior to the Second World War, was in some respects falsified by the actual course of events. His prediction proved to be premature: that either there would be a political revolution with the overthrow of the bureaucracy by the working class, or the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union. No more than any other Marxist, could he predict the precise course of events and especially the tempo and timescale, which are determined by the struggle of living social forces, not blueprints.

According to Marxism, the determination of

all events can be traced back through chains of material cause and effect. This does not mean, however, that events are predetermined. The complexity of factors involved, including an element of accident, and above all the potentially decisive factor of consciousness which cannot be gauged precisely in advance, make it impossible to predict the exact course of events.

Marxists must base themselves on perspectives, on an evaluation of the main economic, social and political trends and their likely development. All perspectives are conditional. They must be continually tested against real processes and corrected in the light of actual events.

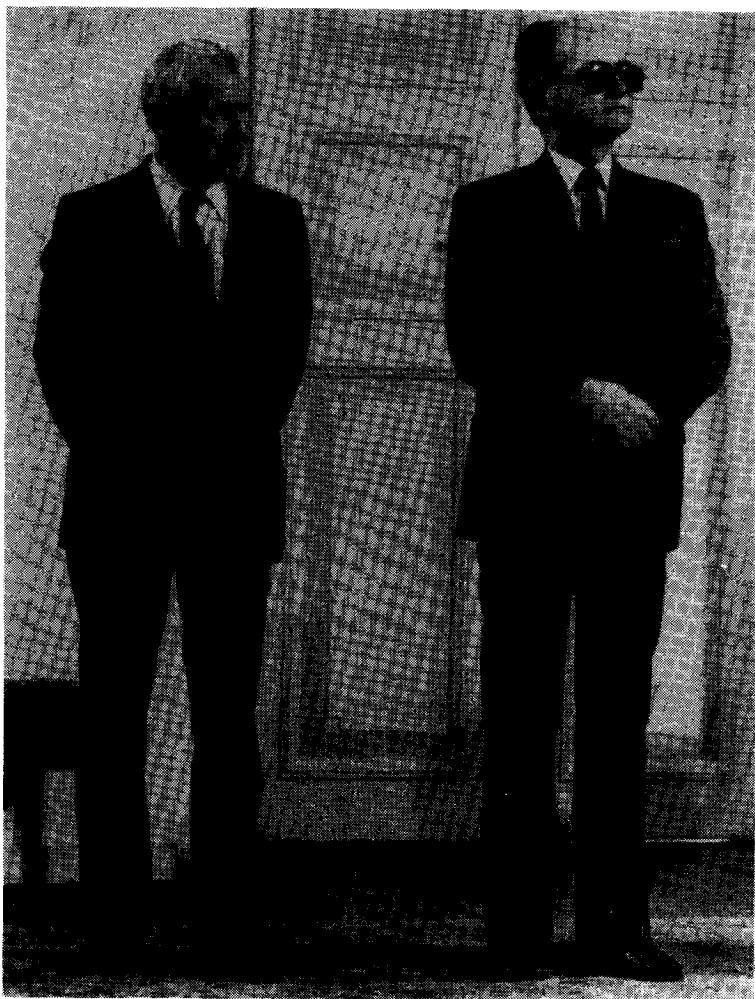
"The scientific task, as well as the political", writes Trotsky, "is not to give a finished definition to an unfinished process but to follow all its stages, separate its progressive from its reactionary tendencies, expose their mutual relations, foresee possible variants of development and find in this foresight a basis for action". (p256)

Militant and Militant International Review have for some time raised the theoretical possibility of a capitalist restoration in Poland and Hungary. Few Marxists would quarrel with such a 'theoretical possibility'. But it would be a mistake merely to regard it as a purely hypothetical possibility which is ruled out in practice. Because of the conjuncture that has developed in Poland and Hungary, Marxists must examine the idea of a restoration of capitalism as one possible course of events, even if it is not the most likely.

This conjuncture has come about because of (1) the crisis facing the bureaucracy in the USSR which has weakened its hold over Eastern Europe (2) the economic catastrophe together with the rotting and collapse of the bureaucracy in Poland and increasingly in Hungary and (3) the political weakness of the working-class in Poland and Hungary, above all the weakness of the subjective factor: the lack of Marxist forces capable of arming the workers with the programme of the political revolution.

If a counter-revolutionary development were to be carried through, or even partially carried through, it would undoubtedly be a complicating factor in the unfolding of the political revolution in Eastern Europe. But the programme and perspectives of the political revolution would in no way be invalidated. Capitalist restoration could only occur as a temporary setback in the revolutionary movement which is underway — as a result of the delay in the decisive movement of the proletariat in the USSR, East Germany and other states.

Leaving aside, for a moment, the **likelihood** of such a development, let us deal with the question: **What are the conditions which**



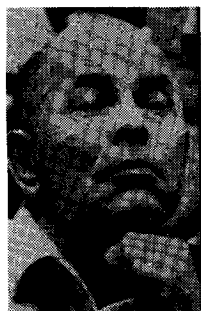
make capitalist restoration a possibility in Poland and Hungary?

Poland is the decisive country in this potentially counter-revolutionary conjuncture. The course of events there has had a big effect on the situation in Hungary (as well as East Germany and Czechoslovakia). The workers' struggle around Solidarity in 1980-81 was a sweeping movement towards political revolution. The upheaval in Poland crystallised the crisis within the bureaucracy in the USSR and accelerated the process which brought Gorbachev to the leadership. In Poland itself, the workers went to the brink of a struggle to overthrow the bureaucracy and take power into their own hands. The most advanced sections within Solidarity called for control of the economy and society by workers' soviets, for the formation of a workers' militia, and the expulsion of bureaucrats from all ruling and management bodies.

This magnificent movement was betrayed by the Solidarity leadership, dominated by Walesa's 'advisers', academics and Catholic intellectuals. They cravenly sought compromise with the Polish bureaucracy and 'self-limiting' accommodation with the Kremlin regime. This bankruptcy, combined with the fatal lack of an

Jaruzelski and Rakowski wait in the wings.

What conditions make capitalist restoration a possibility?



Jacek Kuron.

**Paradoxically
 leaders
 propelled
 to power
 by
 workers'
 struggle
 now stand
 for
 capitalist
 restoration**

alternative Marxist leadership within the workers' ranks, paved the way for defeat. Jaruzelski stepped in to restore the bureaucracy's hold through military rule. Repression alone, however, proved incapable of stabilising Polish Stalinism. "No single force on the Polish political stage" admitted Jaruzelski, "is capable of solving the problems facing our country." *Independent* 8 July 1989.

For so long, the Communist Party, the political front of the bureaucracy, claimed a monopoly of power, justifying this under the misappropriated banner of 'Marxism-Leninism'. Now Jaruzelski admits that the party-bureaucracy is incapable of solving the problems. But the other key force, the working class, is also incapable of solving the problems at this stage — because of its subjective weakness, the lack of Marxist consciousness. The former military dictator, therefore, proclaimed his conversion to 'dialogue and compromise' and increasingly leaned for support on Solidarity, drawing Walesa and his advisors into the regime.

Their support for "an alliance of the democratic opposition with the reformist wing of the government camp" (Adam Michnik) allowed Solidarity to be used to hold back the workers and gain acceptance for austerity measures. "For a long time, people couldn't strike, so someone had to fight for them" explained former dissident Jacek Kuron, now Minister of Labour: "That's what I did. I used to co-operate with strikes. Now I have to extinguish them." *Wall Street Journal* 10 November 1989. This informal alliance culminated in last July's elections, which resulted in an ignominious 'crossing off' of Communist Party (PUWP) candidates and a sweeping victory for Solidarity in the 35 per cent of seats they were allowed to contest. Jaruzelski was obliged to hand over to a coalition government dominated by the Solidarity leaders.

Solidarity of 1989 is not the Solidarity of 1980/81. Its membership has declined to about 2.2 million, compared to 10 million at its height. The official trade union organisation (OPZZ) claims to have seven million members. In some recent disputes, the OPZZ has been more of a vehicle for workers to defend their interests than Solidarity. Claiming to be the genuine opposition, an OPZZ leader said: "We don't participate in government. Our demands can become more radical than those of the government trade union, Solidarity." *Wall Street Journal*.

As the participation of the workers in Solidarity has fallen back, its leadership has become completely dominated by intellectuals advocating a return to capitalism. The degeneration of the Solidarity leadership was underlined by Walesa's sickening performance in the USA. At home, Walesa has been trying to distance him-

self from Mazowiecki's harsh measures. But in the USA he shamelessly proclaimed that Poland was up for sale: "We seek buyers for 80 per cent of the Polish economy. We can't find them in Poland, because Poles are too poor." He told businessmen: "You can make billions and billions of dollars." Addressing the annual convention of the AFL-CIO, Walesa lamely tried to explain "the fate of a Polish trade unionist (who) has to launch a publicity campaign for private entrepreneurship." Even the *Financial Times* commented on the contrast between "the atmosphere of militancy" at the AFL-CIO convention and "Mr Walesa's appeal for US capital." 15 November 1989.

The paradox of Poland is that the leaders who were propelled to power by a powerful opposition movement of the workers are the new party of counter-revolution and capitalist restoration. Although many were formally dissidents and in some cases (like Kuron) persecuted or jailed by the hard-line regime of Gierek and Jaruzelski, they nevertheless constitute the liberal, pro-capitalist wing of the ruling elite. They are deluded that there can be a gradual, evolutionary transition from 'the totalitarian system of Stalinist Communism' to 'parliamentary democracy' on the basis of a return to capitalism.

At the same time, Polish CP leader Mieczyslaw Rakowski is trying to turn the Polish United Workers Party into a Democratic Socialist Party. Before, while serving as Jaruzelski's political henchman, Rakowski dismissed Walesa as "a devious and ignorant peasant" and his advisers as "little shits". But all the bureaucratic efforts to rebuild the CP since 1981 have failed. Officially it has 2.2 million members, but the real figure is probably less than 800,000, with the average age estimated to be 47. Throughout the country, CP functionaries are being kicked out of their offices in the factories. "The party has to create a front of the social left" said politburo member, Leszek Miller, chastened by the CP's electoral hammering. "Otherwise, we will inevitably be pushed to the margin of political life and we will be dominated and removed not only by Solidarity but by other political forces." This is their plight after monopolising power for 40 years.

The CP bureaucracy controlled not only political life but literature, the theatre and other cultural activities, science, education, sport, and many other aspects of society. Yet the July election results and opinion polls show that only three per cent would vote for the CP in totally free elections. That is why Rakowski and his cohorts have turned, at least for the time being, to the path of reform.

A similar development is taking place in Hungary. There is strong opposition among sections of workers to both the hardline Stalinists who

ruled under Kadar and to the pro-capitalist reformist wing around Pozsgay. But at this stage the opposition has not been crystallised or organised around a clear Marxist programme. The defeat of Solidarity after 1980-81 and the subsequent chaos in Poland have had a big effect on the Hungarian workers: 'If we move into struggle, won't we just end up like Poland?' The bloody repression which followed the 1956 uprising and the harsh repression in the early years of Kadar's government was a crushing blow to the Hungarian proletariat. The Stalinist reaction after 1956 still weighs like a nightmare on their consciousness. Lacking clear Marxist perspectives to inspire and guide a struggle, there is a reluctance among many workers to move into struggle at this stage.

Gorbachev has stated that the Kremlin will not intervene in Poland or Hungary. The Brezhnev policy of military invasion, as in Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1968, has been repudiated. When Mazowiecki recently visited Moscow, Gorbachev appeared to express approval for the Solidarity government's sweeping market policies. He is prepared to let Poland cross over into the capitalist orbit. He is bowing to the pressure of imperialism — a reflection of the political degeneration of the Kremlin leadership.

Gorbachev's immediate policy in Eastern Europe is to support the reformers against the old guard who were installed in the Brezhnev period. In the longer term, it is doubtful whether Gorbachev has any clear policy at all. If there are upheavals of the workers in Eastern Europe, military intervention by the Kremlin bureaucracy cannot be ruled out, whatever Gorbachev says now. At the moment, however, the reform wing in the USSR, grappling with economic crisis, is not prepared to commit massive resources to bailing out the nationalised economies in Poland or Hungary.

Nobody denies that Poland faces an economic catastrophe. The heavy industries, mostly very outdated, are going backwards. Many shipyards, steelworks, and factories are virtually idle, or grossly under-utilized. Coal production, lacking modern equipment, is declining. When Balcerowicz announced austerity measures, he admitted that Polish workers had already suffered 10 years of declining living standards.

Home produced consumer goods are notorious for their poor quality and chronic short supply. Food is very scarce in the shops and markets. Three-quarters of agriculture is private but higher fertilizer and fuel costs have led farmers to cease production or put their prices up. Cuts in government subsidies and black market prices have pushed inflation up to over 850 percent, and it is expected to exceed 2000 percent by next year. Some workers now change their wages into dollars on pay day,



changing it back later to take advantage of a better exchange rate as the zloty continues to fall against the dollar.

The disintegration of the planned economy and the collapse of living standards have undermined the workers' support for 'socialism' which is equated in their experience with a bureaucratically mismanaged economy.

The government's budget deficit is zł3,600bn (£930m), and Poland owes £39bn to foreign lenders. The Stalinist functionaries have exhausted all the economic remedies known to bureaucratic 'planners', and have now been replaced by the reformist opposition leaders. Ensconced in their ministerial chairs, their solution, is to make the workers pay through savage deflationary measures for all the accumulated mistakes of the bureaucracy. They are ready to abandon the social gains of the last 30 years and open the doors to the horrors of capitalism.

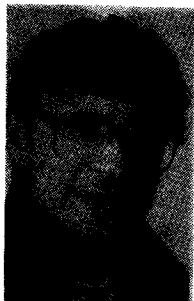
Already, bureaucrats in Poland and Hungary have taken over smaller state enterprises or started their own private businesses. It is as if they have taken to heart Marx's ironic parody of Goethe: 'My worthy friend, grey are all theories, and business alone is green.' (Letter to Engels, 20 August, 1862) The Adam Smith Institute notes that "Under the Rakowski Communist Government some 'corrupt' privatization was allowed in which party appointees were able to make enterprises private and strip assets."

More recently, "there has been a flurry of resignations as apparatchiks move hotfoot into private companies, or, in a few cases, buy shares in newly privatized state companies they used to run." *The Times* 12 September 1989.

Now the Mazowiecki government is preparing a massive sell-off of state enterprises. The myth is being peddled that new businesses will be owned by millions of workers. "However," admits the Adam Smith Institute, "it is clear that

Polish Premier Mazowiecki.

Economic disintegration has undermined workers' support for Stalinist 'socialism'



**Finance
minister
Balcerowicz.**

**There is a
mood of
confusion
and
despair
among
many
workers**

Polish citizens do not have large amounts of spare cash which they are just waiting to splash out on shares in state enterprises." In reality, the ownership will rapidly be dominated by the bureaucrats who have the necessary expertise, connections, and power to acquire assets, and international banks which would dominate a weak Polish capitalism.

Outlining the possibility of a move back to capitalism in *Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky wrote: "The planning period would be converted for the transitional period into a series of compromises between state power and individual 'corporations' — potential proprietors, that is, among the Soviet captains of industry, the emigre former proprietors, and foreign capitalists." (p252) Today the former Polish proprietors are no longer waiting in the wings, but otherwise the point applies exactly.

One supporter of a transition to a market economy in Poland, Professor Bartłomiej Kaminski, recently warned that without "prior de-concentration and de-monopolisation", the "economic dictatorship of a communist state will be replaced by the dictatorship of the privately held monopolies." The "industrial structure is highly concentrated...the share of large enterprises in various industries is incomparably higher than in the Western developed economies." *Financial Times* 28 September 1989.

Unless the monopolies are broken up, writes Kaminski, the nomenklatura, the top layer of the bureaucracy, will not be dispersed but simply reappear as the new 'private enterprise' management. "Since the pathological tendencies of monopolies include gross incompetence, padded payrolls and the outright looting of enterprises, there is no reason to suppose the Polish economy will abandon its chronic inefficiency," warns Kaminski. But the professor's antidote of 'autonomisation' or the breaking-up of the monopolies into smaller enterprises is just as futile.

Those active within Fighting Solidarity are bitterly opposed to the policies of Mazowiecki and company. Even wider sections of workers would be pushed into struggle by sweeping capitalist measures, which will inevitably mean mass unemployment, soaring free market prices, and savage cuts in welfare services. Leszek Balcerowicz, the new finance minister, has already warned that "living standards will collapse." *The Times* 12 September 1989. While prices would be allowed to find their own level, wages would be curbed through an incomes policy.

But would the Mazowiecki government be able to go so far? Some advanced layers of workers have undoubtedly drawn far-reaching conclusions from the defeat of 1980-81, and the period of military rule and economic crisis

which followed. But among wider sections, the massive set-back of the struggle and the social chaos has led to confusion and despair.

"Tens of thousands of Poles travel to West Germany and other Western countries annually to seek work..." *Wall Street Journal* 10 November 1989. Many now prefer to settle in the West. With the exodus from Eastern Germany, hundreds enquired after jobs in the GDR. Without Marxist leaders who can explain events and give a perspective for renewed struggle, such moods are inevitable.

Many workers regard Mazowiecki and Walesa as traitors. But there are also widespread illusions in the present Solidarity leadership, including among sections of the workers. According to opinion polls, four-fifths approved Mazowiecki's choice of ministers for his cabinet. Two-thirds of those polled gave the government a 'good chance' of overcoming the crisis. Such polls may not be representative, and must be treated with caution. But these indicators cannot be entirely ignored. Such findings no doubt reflect 'hope against hope' that there 'must' be a way out.

A local Solidarity activist, an older worker who went through the struggle of 1980-81 and the period of underground resistance, says "There's a limit to endurance. But we have to support this government." *Wall Street Journal* 10 November 1989.

The mismanagement, inefficiency and waste in industry under the direction of the bureaucracy, have swung sections of the workers over to support for privatisation. Workers at the Ursus tractor factory near Warsaw, which employs 10,000 and was prominent in the development of Solidarity, have threatened to strike. They are demanding "a form of privatisation ... and have declared a vote of no confidence in the management for failing to introduce radical change." *Independent* 20 November 1989. They want an Ursus joint stock company: "Maybe a mixture of employee ownership and state ownership would be best."

Again, Trotsky brilliantly anticipated such a development. In the event of a collapse of the planned economy: "the more successful enterprises would succeed in coming out on the road to independence. They might convert themselves into stock companies, or they might find some other transitional form of property — one, for example, in which workers should participate in the profits." *Revolution Betrayed* p251. The Ursus Solidarity leaders said: "The new management might not pay us more than the old management, but this is an investment in the future." Because Stalinist mismanagement has demonstrated that it has no future — and in the absence of the subjective factor: an alternative Marxist programme for developing the economy — workers are desperately grasp-

ing at the illusion of capitalist salvation.

Moves towards a rapid, all-out transition to capitalism will undoubtedly be met by a struggle of the workers. But because of the defeat after 1980-81, and without Marxist leadership, further defeat of the workers cannot be ruled out.

If the bureaucracy succeeds in privatising most state property, it would in the process adapt the state to the new social relations. A ruling caste, where there is already an hereditary element with positions and privilege being passed from parents to children, would become a property-owning class. The directors of the trusts, as Trotsky put it, would transform themselves into stockholders too.

Ties would develop with capitalism in the West, with Polish capitalists occupying a subordinate position as clients of their more powerful foreign patrons. An emerging capitalist class would utilise the bonapartist state in order to force through the transition and bolster its new position. If a possessing class were to replace the ruling caste, Trotsky wrote, "it would find no small number of ready servants among the present bureaucrats, administrators, technicians, directors, party secretaries and privileged upper circles in general. A purgation of the state apparatus would, of course, be necessary in this case too. But a bourgeois restoration would probably have to clean out fewer people than a revolutionary party." *Revolution Betrayed* p253.

The Solidarity leaders, cheered on by capitalist leaders in the West, argue (like Professor Kaminski) that 'without establishing a market economy, the transition to democracy will not materialise.' This is completely false. Nothing could be further from the truth. Has the market guaranteed democracy in South Korea, in Taiwan, or in Brazil — in other words, even in the fastest growing of the 'newly-industrialising' countries? In Chile, free-market monetarist policies were combined under Pinochet with brutal military dictatorship.

Nevertheless, the experience of Stalinism, which is connected in the consciousness of the Polish people with historic national oppression by Russia, has helped to feed widespread illusions in the myth that the West means freedom, and the market guarantees democracy. For many workers 'Marxism' is equated with Stalinism, 'workers' democracy' with its totalitarian perversion, 'internationalism' with Russian intervention.

In its paper *Helping Poland*, the Adam Smith Institute admits that privatisation would have dire social consequences. Millions would be unemployed, and would find it impossible to meet their most basic needs for food, clothing, housing and heating. The high priests of free enterprise generously propose a 'social fund' to "play a role in the distribution of food aid, est-

ablishment of food kitchens, etc." But such aid "should be seen as temporary." The horrendous social effects of capitalism, however, would be far from 'temporary', especially when the world economy moves into recession or slump in the next period.

The idea of a Polish 'Sweden', with an affluent welfare state, is a delusion. Sweden, for instance, allocates 10 per cent of its budget to health compared with only three per cent in Poland, where the health service is in a state of collapse.

The reality would be a Polish 'Argentina', with millions of impoverished workers fighting for survival. Poland — and Hungary, if it followed the same course — would repeat, under new circumstances, the experience which followed their independence in 1918 following the First World War. Far from becoming flourishing capitalist democracies, they were torn by deep crisis and dominated by bonapartist regimes. Pilsudski in Poland and Horthy in Hungary resorted to semi-fascist methods and anti-semitic pogroms to crush democratic rights. If capitalism were to establish itself for any length of time, today's liberal Solidarity leaders would be replaced by hard-nosed representatives of big business and agents of the multi-nationals. In striving to defend their newly acquired gains the capitalists would prove to be every bit as ruthless and brutal as the old Stalinist leaders.

The working class of Poland and Hungary would once again be forced to struggle against capitalist reaction. They would fight to reconquer the social gains lost in the transition back to capitalism. They would have to fight once again for the nationalisation of big business. But this time, it would be under workers' control and management, with the implementation of democratic planning. Such a struggle would unavoidably be interlinked with both the unfolding political revolution in the USSR and the social revolution in the West.

A restoration of capitalism in Poland and Hungary may be possible: **But is it likely?** There are a number of factors which weigh against a return to capitalism.

The international balance of forces is crucial. As a result of the upswing since 1981, world capitalism appears strengthened in contrast to a crisis-torn Stalinism. All the indications are, however, that the capitalist boom is exhausting itself and will give way to recession or slump within the next one, two, or three years. The only real questions are 'When?' and 'How deep?' Even in the last two or three years, the enthusiasm of the Western capitalists for reforms and privatisation in Eastern Europe has not been matched by aid or the injection of capital resources. In Bush's own words, the USA has 'more will than wallet.'

**The
 international
 balance of
 forces is
 crucial**

**While
there is
talk of
new
'Marshall
Aid',
nothing
like this
is on offer**

True, after 1980-81, when the capitalist class feared the repercussions of the workers' movement, the Western banks stepped in to reschedule the huge loans of Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia etc. However, while they have applauded the pro-capitalist leaders of Solidarity and the reformist leaders of the Hungarian Socialist Party, what they have offered in material aid is extremely limited. On his visit to the USA, Walesa appealed for at least \$10bn to finance the reforms in Poland. But after squabbling between Bush and Congress, the legislature has approved an aid programme of \$938m for Poland (\$852m) and Hungary (\$86m). The European Community has pledged about \$350m. Part of this consists of grants for food, but some of it is credit. West Germany, the IMF and the World Bank together are offering about \$1bn, but in the form of credits which will incur interest charges or investment guarantees for Western investors.

In addition, the US and EC governments are contributing to a \$1bn fund to cushion a 'big bang' devaluation of the Polish zloty. There have been more than a dozen official devaluations of the zloty in 1989. A condition of Western business investing in Poland is the free movement of capital, but this is of little value unless funds can be changed between the zloty and other currencies at world market rates.

The Mazowiecki government is proposing a drastic currency reform, attempting in one go to fix the zloty at a sustainable world-market level, and issuing new banknotes with several noughts taken off their denominations. One effect of this would be to push up prices in Poland, especially of imported goods.

There is much talk of a new Marshall Aid programme, similar to the US aid to Western Europe following the Second World War. Between 1948-52, the USA provided \$13bn (\$69bn at today's values), and another \$2.6bn (\$13.9bn today) during 1951-53. This European Recovery Programme was aimed at keeping Western Europe within the orbit of US capitalism, and mostly consisted of grants which underwrote the purchase of about a quarter of Europe's imports.

Nothing remotely like this in scale is on offer today. Bush is offering peanuts in US government aid, and even the packages being pushed by more 'generous' senators are still very limited. With a massive federal budget deficit, government aid on a 'Marshall Aid' scale might well be one expenditure programme too many, posing the need for tax increases. Bush would prefer big business to find the capital for Poland and Hungary.

But the big banks and corporations are extremely cautious about committing large amounts of investment (or even loans) — just as US big business was after the war, before the inj-

ection of Marshall Aid created favourable conditions for investment. While Walesa was offering US investors the 'business deals of the century', Washington's Institute of International Finance was issuing a warning about the high risk of failure in Poland. "While the potential pay-off of successful stabilization (of a devalued convertible zloty) followed by structural reform is extraordinarily large, so is the risk of failure, which would be viewed as a political failure as well." *Financial Times* 6 November 1989. A director of the International Finance Corporation added: "Until those macro changes are made, you have got to be very careful about what you invest in." An IMF official commented: "It's complicated: it's complicated politically, complicated economically, and complicated in human terms." *Wall Street Journal* 26 September 1989.

For big business in the West, it is not just a question of acquiring assets, which they could probably obtain very cheaply. Last summer, an Austrian banking consortium bought a 49 per cent share in Hungary's electrical manufacturer, Tungsram AG, for \$110m. "If half of one of Hungary's biggest and most successful factories can be bought for \$110m", commented a Budapest economist, "West Germany alone can buy the whole country." *Wall Street Journal* 28 September 1989. But investors also need a viable economic framework in which they can make profits.

Large-scale privatisation and the creation of a fully fledged capitalist economy require an economic infrastructure — an adequate road and rail network, telecommunications, and banking and other commercial services. Unlike Russia after 1917 or Eastern Europe after 1945, there are now relatively few dispossessed landlords or capitalists waiting in the wings ready to move in to grab property. If that was the situation, the restored capitalists would gradually set about creating all the commercial links necessary for the development of the market.

Today, after 40 years of a centralised, planned economy, Poland and Hungary are dominated by large-scale industry. Although they have fallen behind the West in technology and production methods, they still require a modern infrastructure of services to function.

There are some advocates of pro-capitalist policies, including *The Guardian* 31 August 1989, who are advocating giving the assets away to workers, managers, co-ops, etc: "...it will be swifter and more sensible to give assets away than attempt to sell them." But merely handing over bankrupt factories, loss-making shipyards and mines, etc, would not be a solution from a capitalist point of view. Without the injection of massive amounts of capital into the economy through the sale of assets and the issuing of shares to bring in new capital, there would be no capital resources for the moder-

nisation of the infrastructure, the development of industry with new technology, and the rapid creation and improvement of a service sector catering for both industry and consumers.

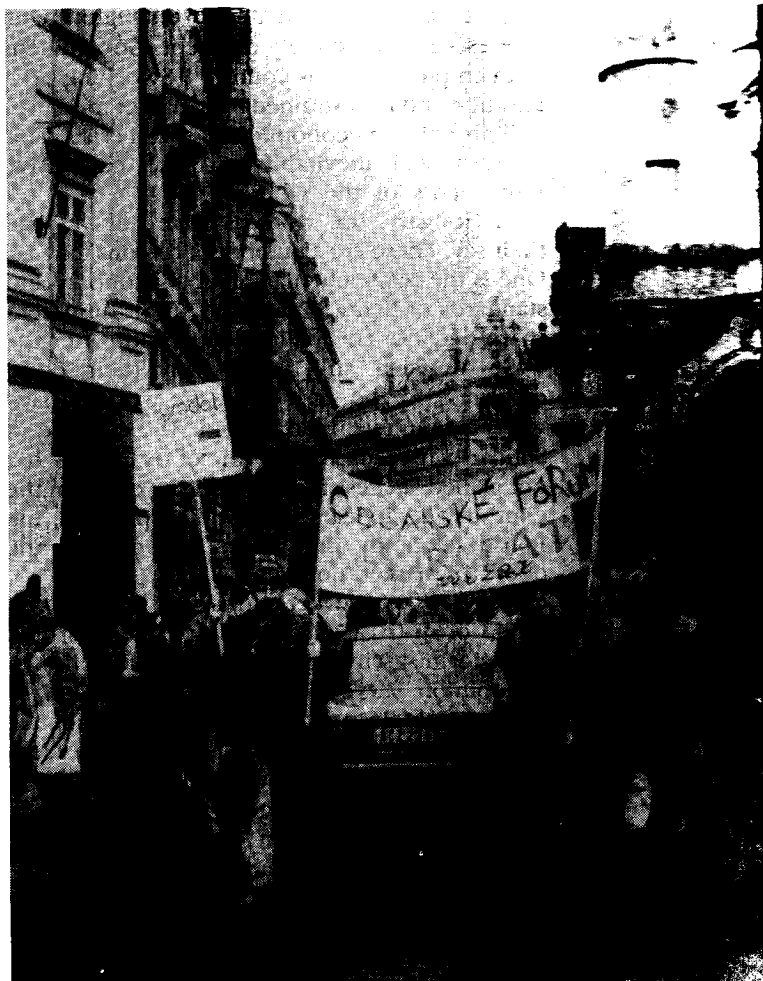
The apostles of the 'free market' forget the role played by the state in the post-war reconstruction of capitalism in Western Europe. Transportation, basic industries (like coal, steel and utilities), and research and development were all rebuilt by the state. The provision of education, health and welfare services, vital for the reproduction of a modern labour force and the expansion of the consumer market, was also the responsibility of the public sector. Post-war Marshall Aid helped Europe's capitalist governments to finance public expenditure to create the framework for a renewal of capitalism.

The main sources of the massive volume of capital required must inevitably be from abroad. There are strict limits to the amount that could be raised from the privileged layers within Polish and Hungarian society. But the Western banks, financial institutions, and multinational corporations will not invest vast amounts of capital unless certain conditions are fulfilled. They will require clearly defined rights of ownership, guaranteed contracts, the free movement of capital, and acceptable conditions under which they can operate their businesses. Otherwise their assets would not be secure and they could not be sure of long term profit-making opportunities.

However, the Adam Smith Institute, which enthusiastically advocates privatisation in Poland, has pointed out that the country is almost completely lacking in the necessary services. "The Poles", says the Adam Smith Institute, "are starting from zero, in that they have no stock market, no private banks, no insurance industry, no brokers, no proper accounting procedures, no commercial law firms, no public relations or advertising firms, and no experience of operating a market economy." Large scale acquisitions by foreign corporations would require valuations and the restructuring of firms and business operations.

The meagre resources of the Ministry of Privatisation itself are symptomatic: it has only four full-time workers, one phone line, one typewriter, and two computers. With massive injections of capital, sustained over a period of years, there would not be insurmountable difficulties in creating such a framework for capitalism. But the capitalists, on the basis of their current assessment of the prospects in Eastern Europe and for the world economy, do not appear to be willing to put up the vast amounts of finance required.

Western capitalists are also already apprehensive about the reaction of the workers to current measures which threaten to create mass unemployment, cut living standards and add to



the already spiralling inflation rate. When the government raised prices in September, Walesa denounced the government as 'incompetent' and warned that the situation was 'getting hot'. "I warn that if there are more price rises, we will not be able to keep the people working normally."

Walesa played no small part in pushing the Solidarity leaders into the government, but has already been trying to distance himself from their unpopular economic measures: "The system has cornered us in a cul-de-sac and I don't know whether we will save ourselves from civil war." *Guardian* 29 September 1989. There have already been strikes, including by miners, which the Solidarity leaders attempted to undermine. Even Walesa is aware of the contradiction of his position. Early in November, he warned that if the government forgot about society, "there will be a clash and I will be on society's side. I'm helping the government. I wish it well. But I must not forget where I hail from."

The government has enjoyed a fragile honeymoon period. One younger, local leader of Solidarity expressed criticism of Walesa's support for Mazowiecki: "We are a trade union. Our leadership should be unionist. We are too

Czechoslovak workers march to join the general strike, 27 November.

"I don't know whether we will save ourselves from civil war."

Walesa



Pozsgay.

close to the government, too entangled. Our interests are completely different. Government is an employer in this country!" Sweeping privatisation and unrestrained free market measures will provoke an economic and social crisis. This in turn will inevitably provoke convulsive movements of the workers.

In Hungary, the workers have not yet had their say. There are a number of reasons for this. One is the relatively high level of economy and standards of living in Hungary until the recent sharp decline. The Stalinist repression after the 1956 uprising still weighs on their consciousness. At the same time, the workers have watched the events in Poland. The struggle of Solidarity, because of the role of its leaders, has not gained success for the working class: on the contrary, it appears that it has plunged the Polish economy into chaos and opened the door to market policies.

Among the workers, there is a profound mood of distrust of both the old Stalinist and the reformist wings of Hungary's ruling elite. In an opinion survey carried out by Gallup in August, only 35 percent expressed confidence in the Communist Party. But only 35 percent had confidence in the new parties like the Democratic Forum. Reflecting the fact that socialism is equated with Stalinism, only 19 percent believed that 'socialism had a future.'

The bureaucracy, particularly in Poland, appears to have abandoned the defence of the nationalised economy. But the Mazowiecki government, currently in the driving seat, does not represent the bureaucracy as a whole.

Forced by the tide of support for Solidarity to give way to the Mazowiecki government, Rakowski raised a question mark over its future: "In my opinion, Polish society is not prepared to make sacrifices of this kind. You have this horrible contradiction: you need radical moves but you need the support of the people. Poles would like to work in Socialism but live in capitalism." He predicted that "after the first radical steps and the subsequent reaction, the new government will retreat." Writing in Solidarity's newspaper in the summer, Rakowski warned against the dangers of 'uncontrolled democracy.'

Jaruzelski is still commander-in-chief and holds decisive reserve powers. The question is: How far will the hardliners within the bureaucracy allow the process to go? At the moment, the balance of forces is against them. They have been forced to take several steps backwards. Military rule failed to revive the economy or stabilise the political situation. For the time being, they must hesitate to intervene with the forces of the state against the workers' movement. But if the country is plunged into chaos, as a result of sweeping privatisation, rampant inflation, and big strike movements, the bureau-

cracy could move in the other direction.

Acknowledging that Solidarity is different from 1981, Jaruzelski supports the Mazowiecki government. But the general is unrepentant about martial law: "Without martial law, we would not have got the round table, there would not have been elections... Sometimes you need a shock." *Independent* 8 June 1989. The time may come when the strongmen of the ruling elite decide that another 'shock' is required to curb the 'excesses' of the working class. A strata of the bureaucracy who are now turning towards capitalism may draw back when it is brought home to them that capitalism offers no way out.

The paucity of aid from imperialism and a recession or slump in the West could drastically change their outlook. The hard-liners, basing themselves on the hardcore of apparatchniks, whose positions are also threatened by market policies, would attempt to reassert control of society through the apparatus of the Bonapartist state.

Faced with economic collapse, they could resort once again to strong centralisation, reinforcing state direction of the planned economy.

They would drive the workers into the state-owned or re-nationalised factories, mines, transport, and services. Market methods would be abandoned in favour of a return to squeezing production out of the workers through state coercion. This would not provide a way out. A return to Stalinist methods would drive the economy even further into the impasse of bureaucratic mismanagement. The tasks of the political revolution would be posed even more clearly.

The policy of the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union also has a crucial bearing on developments in Poland and Hungary. Gorbachev is not Brezhnev and his leadership marks a shift in the policy of the bureaucracy.

In 1968 Russian forces were sent into Czechoslovakia to crush the reform wing of the Czech bureaucracy around Dubcek which was trying to implement reforms more limited than Gorbachev's own present policies. The Kremlin installed a hard-line repressive regime under Husak, which is now being swept away by the mass movement.

According to Gorbachev, the Kremlin has ruled out intervention in Hungary, Poland, and other east European states. The USSR's internal crisis enormously complicates the bureaucracy's policy towards the former satellites. The Russian elite faces a revolt of the nationalities in the Baltic states, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldavia, etc. Under Brezhnev, the bureaucracy could ignore 'public opinion', which was virtually non-existent. Now they have to take account of the political reaction at home to any interven-

tion abroad. This began to develop, to a limited extent, even in relation to Afghanistan. An intervention in Poland or Hungary along the lines of 1956 in Hungary, or 1968 in Czechoslovakia, would have big repercussions at home.

However, it would be wrong to rule out the possibility of intervention by the Russian bureaucracy in the future. The strategists of capitalism are even now raising the question: How long will Gorbachev last? The reform wing in the Kremlin does not have unlimited time. Failure to reverse the economic decline, improve living standards, and resolve the crisis of the nationalities could produce a swing back to the hard-liners around figures like Ligachev. Who can doubt, that if they felt their power and privileges to be fundamentally threatened, they would resort to force? By the same token, they would also be ready to contemplate military intervention in Eastern Europe, if they considered developments in Poland or Hungary threatened their bureaucratic rule.

Mazowiecki and Pozsgay are adamant that their countries will not leave the Warsaw Pact. But the logic of a return to capitalism is a break from the Stalinist bloc in foreign and military, as well as economic, relations. A position like that of Finland, a capitalist state but with major trade links with the USSR and 'neutral' between the Warsaw Pact and NATO, would be theoretically possible for Poland or Hungary for a limited period. But for two strategically important central European states to occupy for a prolonged period a 'neutral' position between two blocs based on antagonistic social systems would be impossible.

In reality, any serious attempt by governments in Poland or Hungary to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact would be seen by the Kremlin bureaucracy as a threat to the strategic security of the USSR. With hard-line Stalinists back in the leadership, military intervention could not be ruled out. Intervention would undoubtedly provoke a massive reaction by the working class in Eastern Europe and the USSR itself — but it would clearly cut across a movement back to capitalism in Hungary and Poland.

There are parallel processes of revolution and counter-revolution unfolding in the Stalinist states which to some extent are intertwined. Marxists cannot avert their eyes from the current trend towards capitalist restoration in Poland and Hungary. But the overwhelming movement is towards the political revolution.

Indicting Stalin for his monumental crimes, Trotsky warned: "The vengeance of history is more terrible than the vengeance of the most powerful general secretary." *Stalin* p358. With recent events the reckoning has begun and one general secretary after another has been toppled. In a revolution "crowds fill the arena. They decide, they act, they legislate in their own

unprecedented way." *Stalin* p404. This is what has been happening on the streets of Berlin and Prague, and tomorrow it will be Leningrad and Moscow and the other great cities. The miners' struggles are just the overture to the movement of the Soviet Union's mighty proletariat.

The tasks of genuine Marxists, Trotsky wrote in the darkest days of Stalinist reaction, was "the preservation of revolutionary traditions...the preparation for the future revolutionary upsurge on the world arena as well as in the USSR." *Stalin*. The upsurge has begun and Trotsky's ideas are once again coming into their own as an indispensable guide to action.

The trend towards capitalist restoration in Poland and Hungary appears to contradict the fundamental trend in Stalinism. The workers of Poland have suffered a defeat, while the Hungarian proletariat has yet to move. This has at least half opened the door to counter-revolution. In the West, the bourgeois media are hailing this as a 'triumph for capitalism.'

But their self-congratulation is premature. Even if the reaction under the Mazowieckis and Pozsgays is carried a long way down the road to capitalism, that will be far from sealing the fate of Poland and Hungary. Capitalism can offer no way out. The impoverished, starving masses of the under-developed lands offer no recommendation for the 'miracle cure' of the market. Convulsions now being prepared in the advanced capitalist countries, of which the October 1989 Wall Street spasm was a warning, will fundamentally change the outlook for a 'capitalist renaissance' in the East. Serious recession or slump will have a profound effect on the consciousness of the workers in the USSR and Eastern Europe, shattering their illusions in capitalism and bourgeois democracy. They will be looking, not to the alluring splendours of the consumer markets, but to the struggles of workers fighting to abolish capitalism.

The consciousness of the mass of workers in Poland and Hungary, for the reasons outlined, is lagging behind the real development of the crisis in Stalinism. Great events on the world arena, however, together with the bitter medicine of market policies at home, can rapidly transform consciousness and at a certain stage propel workers into action and provoke a renewed struggle. More than anything else, the dynamic advance of the political revolution in the USSR, the GDR and Czechoslovakia will inspire the workers of Poland and Hungary.

It may be a protracted and at times circuitous route because of the subjective factor. An absolutely vital ingredient is the intervention of the forces of Marxism to ensure that the movement is armed with the programme and perspectives, the strategy and tactics, to secure the earliest possible victory of the proletariat.

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Winter 1990
Poland and
Hungary

Nyers.

**A capitalist
Poland
would be
like
Argentina
not
Sweden**

Soviet pollution

by Pete Dickenson



The Soviet Union is facing a rapidly growing environmental crisis. The catastrophic situation has been the trigger for mass movements in many republics, including Armenia, the Ukraine and the Baltic states. There is growing revulsion at the catalogue of disasters caused by bureaucratic bungling and mismanagement, from Chernobyl to the Siberian gas pipeline disaster.

In Latvia the environment is seen as a crucial political issue by the independent political movements. The first group to organise opposition to the bureaucracy after Gorbachev came to power was the VAK (Environment Protection Club), formed from several underground youth organisations. It has mobilised up to 100,000 on demonstrations and has 4000 members in Riga plus sections in the other towns.

In 1988 the Latvian Popular Front (LTF) was formed. Its programme, decided at the 2nd Congress in October 1989, had a major section on the environment (*Atmoda* 7 October 1989).

There is a huge gap between the protection theoretically provided by the law in health, safety and environmental questions, and the reality. The environmental situation in the Stalinist states is probably worse even than in the capitalist countries. This is a complete indictment of the role of the bureaucracy over decades. A healthy, democratic socialist society with genuine workers' control would ensure not only economic prosperity but a fully harmonious development of society and protection of the environment.

The Baltic states face a particularly bad situation. They are the most heavily industrialised

republics of the Soviet Union and development has taken place in very distorted way. Large sections of the economy are dominated by military production. Whole areas in the cities and the countryside are taken over by the military who operate in total secrecy and without any control over pollution and environmental damage. In Latvia there are plans to build a Chernobyl style nuclear power station, and to build a hydroelectric power scheme which will result in the flow of the river Daugava being reversed for much of the time, with great potential ecological damage.

The LTF programme on the environment demands an independent ecological assessment of new industrial projects and opposition to nuclear power and the transportation of radioactive and other toxic wastes. The defence of consumers' interests through the provision of information on foodstuffs and research into alternative energy sources.

Also, 'the LTF categorically demands that measures of environmental protection and restoration of environmental health should be taken in areas of military forces, it demands that the army should be deprived of ecologically vulnerable territories.'

Pollution and the environment are at bottom in priority for the Stalinists and it is utopian to expect them to implement an environmental programme, especially when their vital military interests are involved.

The Moscow bureaucracy will tenaciously resist any genuine independence. The Baltic states have the most technically advanced arms factories and military research centres in the Soviet

Union. It would have been impossible to build the Soviet Space Shuttle without the technological input from the Baltic states. The military bureaucracy would never be reconciled to losing control of these resources, even if Gorbachev contemplated the idea.

And does the alternative of the LTF which is similar to that in the other Baltic states, based on independence and the 'principles of market economy', offer a way forward?

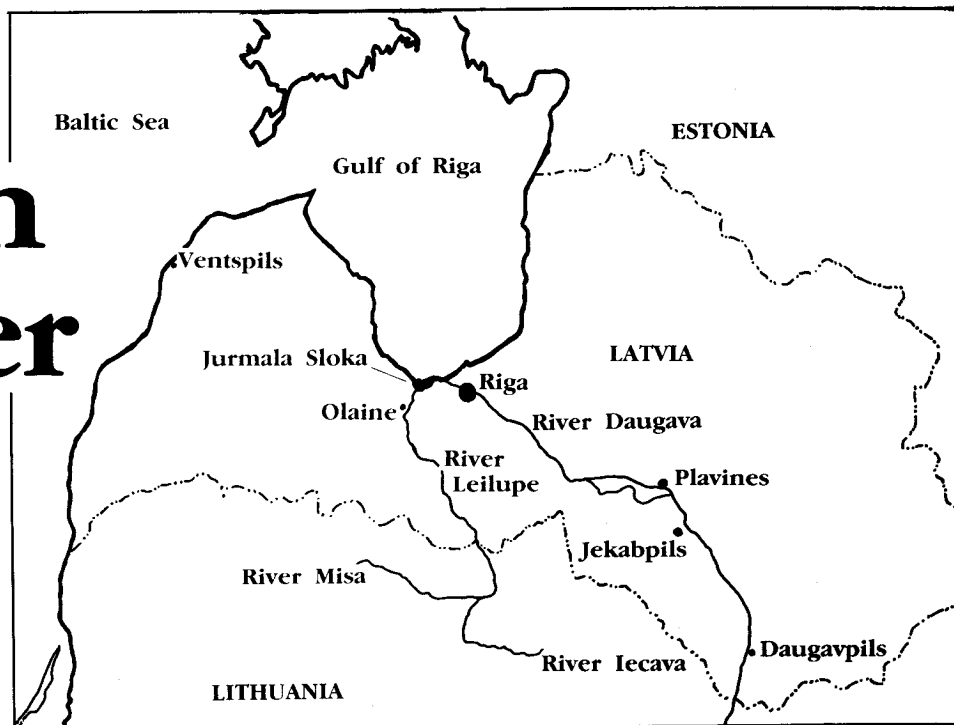
One of the worst polluters in Latvia is the Occidental Petroleum Company, the American multinational. This is the company responsible for the Piper Alpha disaster in Britain and numerous oil spillages polluting the coastline.

The 'market economy' in the capitalist countries is dominated by multinational corporations who operate under no democratic control in their quest for profit. This would be particularly true in the case of very small countries like Latvia. The multinationals play a despicable role in the underdeveloped world. The catastrophe at Bhopal in India in 1984, when tens of thousands were poisoned was due to the negligence of the American Union Carbide Corporation who owned the chemical plant involved. These companies would treat the countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in a similar manner to the underdeveloped world if capitalism was restored.

Chernobyl was the worst environmental disaster in history. Scientists predicted that 100,000 would die as a result but the bureaucracy insisted that only a handful would be affected. Today rumours are rife throughout the affected areas of the Ukraine, Belorussia and the Baltic states of an epidemic of cancer and of horribly deformed babies being born. It is impossible to verify the true situation.

The cloud of radioactive waste was no respecter of national boundaries. Similarly, a disaster at the nuclear power station a few miles from the Latvian border would devastate the country. Pollution in the Baltic Sea is caused by all the countries in the region from West Germany to Russia. Independence would not protect any of the Baltic states from environmental disaster.

Latvian disaster



A leading environmental activist in the Latvian Popular Front explains what is happening to the environment in the region.

The environmental situation in Latvia and the other Baltic states is catastrophic. This is linked to the social and economic crisis caused by Stalinist rule. Pollution and the environment are key political questions in Latvia. For decades it was impossible to discover the true depth of the crisis because of the monopoly of information of the bureaucracy. Even now the real picture is only beginning to emerge.

In Riga air pollution is 20 times above allowable levels, water pollution is also critical, with nitrates a particular problem. In January 1988 Riga suffered a hepatitis outbreak traced to drinking water contamination. Most of the sewerage (97%) flowing into the river Daugava and the Bay of Riga is untreated.

The resort town of Jurmala throws 10,000 tons a year of pollutants into the atmosphere, nearly a third generated by the Sloka paper and pulp mill. Consequently only 28% of births are normal, in Latvia as a whole the figure is just 46%!

The river Lielupe has been closed to fishermen and swimmers for the past six years. The river has a number of dead zones due to excessive pollution and lack of

oxygen. Bacteria in water is up to half a million parts per litre. The official maximum is 1000 parts per litre. The main polluter of Lielupe is the Sloka pulp and paper mill.

Olaine, an industrial area with several chemical plants, has the highest level of air pollution in Latvia. Industrial pollution is 1200 tons/sq.km annually. Only 12% is subject to any type of treatment. Ammonia levels in the air exceed allowable levels by 2.7-3.5 times, formaldehyde by 8.4 to 9 times, hydrochloric acid by 12 times, piridine by 2.1 times, carbon dioxide by 2 to 3.7 times, acetone by 5 times, hydrogen bromide and hydrogen chloride by twice as much.

Industrial accidents, such as the accidental discharge of 43 tons of nitric acid on May 7, 1988, also threaten the population. Groundwater and river pollution are also severe. The Misa and Lecava tributaries of the Lielupe contain nitrates and other pollutants exceeding allowable levels by 11 times. Poisonous chemicals have leaked into the groundwater at chemical dumping sites near Olaine, exceeding allowable levels by 100 times, in some places even by a thousand. A 16 year study of Olaine residents shows an above average incidence of hemoblastosis and upper respiratory tract ailments.

The port city of Ventspils is the most dangerous environmental area in Latvia. The major polluters are ammonia and potash cargo transfer facilities. Gas masks have been provided for thousands of people in the city as a security measure against ammonia leaks. Water pollution has also occurred due to the petroleum transfer facilities. On the average 25,000 tons of petroleum products have flowed into the Baltic Sea each year.

The oil refinery in the centre of the city is run by the American oil company Occidental Petroleum, whose multi-millionaire owner, Armand Hammer, has close links with the Kremlin.

Medical studies completed in the last 10 years show a dramatic impact of the environmental situation on the population. In Ventspils allergies and skin rashes occur at three times the rate for all of Latvia; respiratory ailments, lung cancer and leukaemia at twice the rate. Birth defects among children have increased by 3.5 times. Statistics show a high incidence of Downs Syndrome.

Most of these facts are secret in Latvia, the true situation is almost certainly much worse. Please inform as many people as possible in your country of the situation, we want to build collaboration with people in other countries fighting the same problems.

Tories head for the rocks



Nigel Lawson.

The Tory Cabinet is split over Europe, and Thatcher's electoral leadership is being challenged. In an editorial statement we examine the prospects for the British economy and ask, can the Tories recover in time to win the next election?

"He who hath no stomach to this fight, let him depart," was the rallying cry of Tory Party chairman, Kenneth Baker, quoting from Shakespeare's Henry V at this year's Tory Party conference. Nigel Lawson took the advice to heart and promptly resigned!

In so doing, he provoked the most serious political crisis for the Tory government since the Westland affair in 1986. Then, Thatcher was on the brink of resignation. Indeed, before she went to the Commons for the critical Westland debate, as she has subsequently admitted, she told her private staff that by six o'clock that evening she would probably no longer be Prime Minister. Only a particularly inept parliamentary performance by Neil Kinnock, which he also admitted later, allowed her to save her political skin.

The upheavals in the Stalinist states, particularly in East Germany, have perhaps diverted attention away from the government's difficulties. But this will only be temporary.

This crisis is far more deep seated and serious than in 1986. Nor is it likely that feeble speeches from the Labour leader can come to the rescue of the government this time. Leon Trotsky once commented that the British ruling class took great pains to screen any differences within their ranks. They were conscious that a 'third party', ie the working class, was listening in. Open divisions within the ruling class could not fail to stimulate opposition to their system by the working class. Hence the adoption by the British bourgeois of parliamentary cant, that special form of hypocrisy, whereby different factions of the Conservative Party, while plunging the knife into each other's back, still address each other in honeyed phrases and as 'honourable members'.

The bitter trading of public insults and recriminations between different wings of the Tory Party are profound symptoms of the crisis which besets the government. In the past the strategists of capital fawned over Thatcher. At the time of the Falklands War, she was a 'Boadicea'. In her confrontation with the miners,



she was the 'Iron Lady'. But, as the German philosopher Hegel liked to say, 'reason becomes unreason and unreason becomes reason'. Now according to the *Financial Times* she is a 'megalomaniac'. Brian Walden, formerly her favourite TV interviewer, accused her of 'being off her trolley'. In the ultimate insult, Shropshire farmers now refer to 'mad cow disease' BSE as 'Mrs Thatcher'. (*Evening Standard* 2 November 1989).

When thieves fall out the truth is revealed. The Thatcher-Lawson clash exposed the myth of 'cabinet government.' The denunciations of Thatcher's virtual 'one woman rule', her elbowing aside of the cabinet and of parliament, her reliance on 'advisers' such as 'Rasputin' Walters, serves to underline our previous analysis that the Thatcher government has some features of parliamentary bonapartism.

...The strategists of capital tolerated this so long as Thatcher appeared to 'deliver the goods', presiding over an economic revival and cowering the labour movement. The looming economic and social catastrophe for British capitalism, however, has changed all that.

...Ostensibly Lawson's clash with the Walters-Thatcher axis centred on the European Monetary System. Yet the underlying cause is that the British economy is heading for the rocks. Thatcher and Walters are 'Atlanticists', who wish Britain to continue as a semi-satellite of US imperialism. The other wing of the bourgeois, probably the majority, see no alternative but to throw in their lot with 'Fortress Europe'. They seek refuge from the looming economic storms

under the umbrella of the West German bourgeois, which is now the dominant economic power of Western Europe, and increasingly of Eastern Europe.

Developments in the world economy, which were of decisive importance in the Tory victory in 1987, will shape the perspectives for the British economy. The October 1989 stock exchange crash shattered the sunny optimism of the bourgeois, buoyed up when the October 1987 crash did not lead to an industrial recession but instead was followed by further growth.

The key factors sustaining this upswing were the colossal injection of fictitious capital, ie credit, by Germany and Japan — the real engines of growth in the last two years — and the expansion of world trade by 9% per annum since 1987. It was the collapse of the junk bond market, a particularly venal form of parasitism of modern capitalism, which set off the collapse in Wall Street.

While the industrial bourgeois try to discount the effects of the 'casino economy', developments in the 'real economy' are precisely the ultimate causes of the tremors on the stock exchanges. Above all, the Reagan boom in the US economy, still of pivotal importance for world capitalism, appears to be running out of steam. Despite notoriously unreliable statistics, and economic indicators which earlier this year gave contradictory signals, recent economic data point to a slowing down, with the possibility of recession in the next year or two.

The *Wall Street Journal* declared recently

Tory leaders, except Thatcher, see no alternative but to throw in their lot with Europe

**The world
economy is
caught
between
inflation
and
deflation**

"the stock market is sick because profits are crumbling". Profit levels steadily increased during the Reagan boom. But now some of the giants of US industry are reporting sharp reductions: profits in the third quarter of this year were down by 45% for Ford and General Motors, while Chrysler made an operating loss of \$178m. Manufacturing employment is falling, house building, a key economic index, is back to pre-boom levels, and investment dropped by 3.3% in April to June.

The US economy faces either a 'soft landing' ie. a slowing down in the rate of growth; a small recession along the lines of 1974-5 and 1979-81; or even a serious slump. Despite the pledge of Alan Greenspan, Chairman of the US Federal Reserve Bank, to pump in 'liquidity' to shore up the stock markets, the bourgeois fear that this will give a further twist to inflation as in the post-October 1987 period. But a continuation of high interest rates, by increasing the cost of borrowing to manufacturing industry, would choke off investment, reinforce the tendency to cut back on accumulation, and could bring the boom to an end.

The world bourgeois are on the horns of a very uncomfortable dilemma, between deflation, where production and investment fall, and inflation, where prices accelerate. The coming period will probably see a combination of both, ie. stagflation.

Marxists have never based their perspectives for the radicalisation of the proletariat on the mechanistic notion that slump equals a strike wave and an upswing in the class struggle, and boom means the opposite. The *MIR* predicted that the very upswing of world capitalism, with the jump in profits and the drop in unemployment, would reinforce the confidence and preparedness of working people to fight. This has provoked an international strike wave from which Britain has not been immune.

Offensive struggles among sections of the working class have already begun. The engineering strike for a 35 hour week in Britain is just one example. The boom meant that some employed workers received wages increases at or even a little ahead of the rate of inflation. But increased exploitation, not through increased investment but by squeezing more work out of a smaller workforce, has taken its toll. The accumulated bitterness, rage and fury at the conditions in the factories lie behind the engineering dispute.

The Thatcherite 'managerial counter-revolution' had transformed some sections of the car industry into virtual concentration camps. Neither the union leadership nor the shop stewards organisations, which in many cases have bent the knee to management, have been able to offer the necessary protection. All these unbearable tensions will break out, even if the

'best scenario' for the bourgeois of a 'soft landing' transpires.

The illusion of a never ending boomlet will be shattered. A combination of inflation, already evident in Britain, and a slowing down in the rate of growth, which will increase unemployment, will mean bitter battles on wages and in defence of jobs. This in turn will begin to transform the trade unions and the mass workers parties in Europe. Moreover the next recession or slowdown will mean the entry of the US working class onto the arena of struggle. Not far behind them will be the West German and Japanese proletariat.

One thing is clear: while the perspectives for the world economy may be conditional, the British economy is heading straight for the 'iceberg' which Lawson alluded to in his Commons resignation speech. Fords UK management have bluntly declared, "it is not a question of if a downturn will occur but when". This is the consensus of the more serious spokesmen of British capitalism.

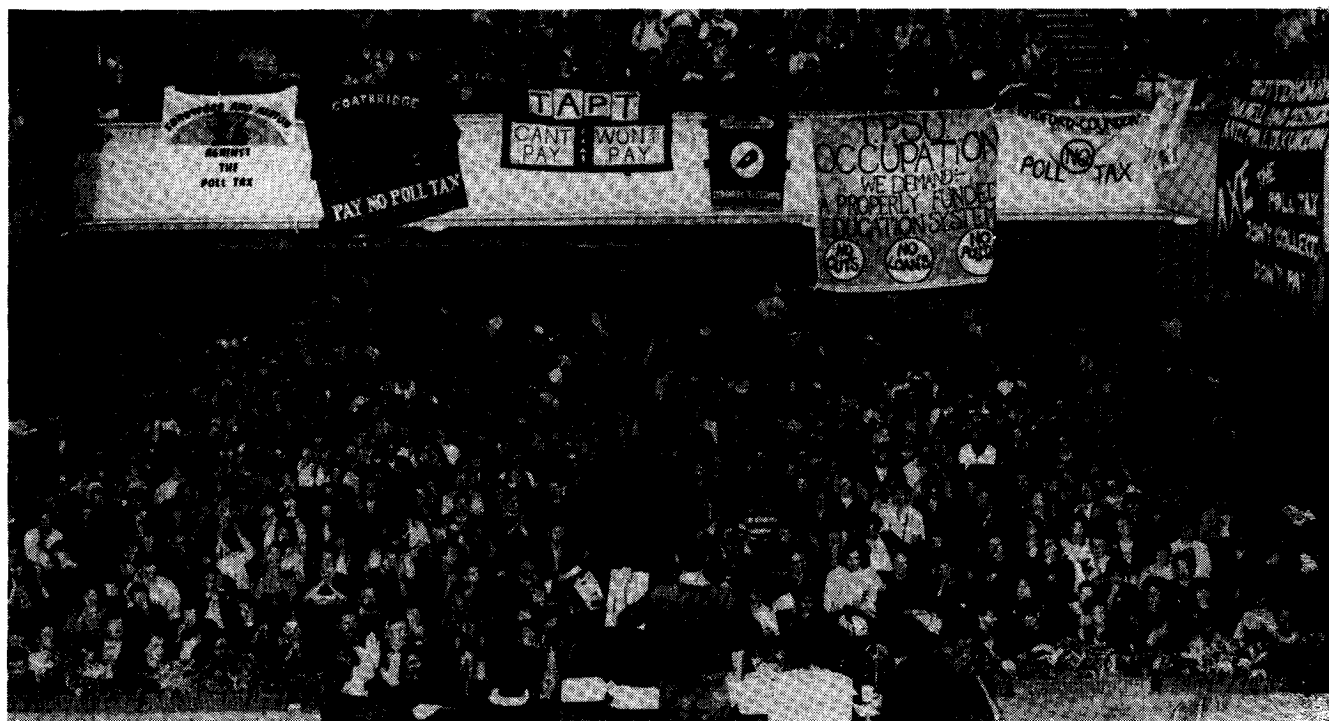
In the retail sector, contraction has already begun, spreading to the manufacturing sector. The announcement of 2,000 lay-offs by Hoovers in Merthyr Tydfil and Cambuslang is a portent of future layoffs and closures of industry.

The *Political Quarterly* described the capitalists' dilemma in stark terms as a "strategic predicament of staggering proportions with the only real alternative to a trade deficit of £40bn or more... (being a) virtual stop in growth or even an absolute decline in total demand and output". The 1989 deficit on the balance of payments, reflecting the fundamental lack of competitiveness of British capitalism, will be between £19-20bn.

The Tories' boasts of an 'economic miracle' have turned to vinegar in their mouths. In 1979 Britain's trade deficit with West Germany was £1bn. Since then it has increased to the record figure of £9bn. The deficit with Japan has shot up from £1bn to £5bn.

Social upheaval on an unparalleled scale would have been inevitable in Britain but for the temporary shield of North Sea oil, which added £78bn to government revenue in the past decade. This lucky windfall, together with the upswing in the world economy and receipts from privatisation, propped up the Thatcher government. Despite all this, unemployment still officially stands at 1.7m, with the real figure closer to 2.3m.

The Tory government is now boxed in. A section of the bourgeois favour devaluing the pound to increase the competitiveness of British exports. However, because 20% of industry was destroyed during the 1979-81 recession and investment only reached the levels of 1979 last year, there is little 'spare capacity' to fundamentally alter Britain's trade position, even



with the leeway offered by devaluation.

This year has in any case seen a 10% devaluation against other currencies. An even more substantial devaluation would not result in a greater export performance. As in the past, notably in 1967, it would probably be used by the capitalists to increase prices and thereby their profits. Moreover, devaluation would give a further twist to inflation, already the highest of the top seven economies.

High mortgage rates have meant agonies for eight million homeowners. For many, the gloss of Thatcher's 'property owning democracy' has disappeared. In the first six months of this year 35 homes were repossessed each day. By the end of the year, 400,000 families could be in difficulties with their mortgage repayments.

One of the pillars of the Thatcher miracle was the huge piling-up of debt. Household debt is now roughly equivalent to total annual household income. Cambridge economist Wynn Godley concluded that "in 1988 disposable household income was supplemented by borrowing to the tune of no less than £54bn. With high and rising interest rates and stagnant and falling house prices, the flow of net borrowing could easily fall by say £25bn, thereby directly reducing consumption by 5% or more. At the same time companies have an indebtedness higher than at any time apart from the period immediately preceding the recessions of 1974-5 and 1979-81."

Godley belongs to the Keynesian wing of bourgeois economists, the so-called 'demand siders'. Yet so desperate is Britain's economic situation, he believes that there is "no way of avoiding a recession in the short run." He there-

fore favours increases in personal taxation and further credit controls. Yet increased taxation would merely deepen recessionary tendencies by cutting consumption, ie the market, tighter credit controls, which the government is already imposing through higher interest rates, would deflate the economy.

Notwithstanding the parlous state of British capitalism, is it not possible for Thatcher to ride out a small recession or slowdown, prime the pump with further tax concessions, and sail to victory in 1991 or 1992?

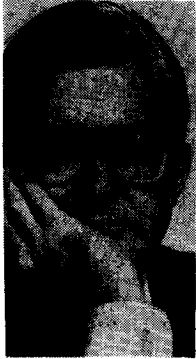
This cannot be completely ruled out but economic and social factors point overwhelmingly to a Tory defeat. John Major, the new Tory Chancellor, has planned for low or nil growth over the next year, and then a reflationary budget before the next election. But all the best plans of mice and men often go awry. Just as Major 'reflates for victory', there could be a downturn in the world economy. And that would seal the fate of his government.

Even without a world recession, the government will have problems. Any pre-election tax concessions would only drag in imports which could not be supplied by domestic industry. This in turn would widen the trade gap and provoke a run on the pound which only a further increase in interest rates could hold up. Increased interest rates would drag the economy further down.

Quite apart from these economic difficulties, the new mood which is taking place socially and politically spells doom for the Thatcher government. Thatcher herself is the most unpopular prime minister since polls began fifty years ago. She is even more unpopular, with

Founding conference of the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation.

Thatcher's 'economic miracle' has been exposed



**Kenneth
Baker.**

**Only the
Marxists
predicted
Labour's
poll
victory**

24% support, than in 1981, when 25% supported her.

In a sense the knot of history was broken in 1981, first by the Falklands war and then by the Reagan boom. It was these factors, combined with the splitting of the Labour Party and the formation of the Social Democratic Party in 1981, which ensured Thatcher's electoral victories. Now, at the end of the decade, this knot is being retied.

Following the 1987 general election, Thatcher made the fatal error of mistaking the pusillanimous tops of the labour movement as a barometer of the mood of the working class, adopting what her Tory critic Ian Gilmour correctly called "electorally poisonous policies which it would not have touched with a barge pole if ministers had ever thought Labour could become credible." Chief amongst these were the poll tax and privatisation. Thatcher took encouragement to go ahead with the poll tax when she saw Labour's front-bench spokesmen acting as front-line troops in denouncing a non-payment campaign.

Yet now we learn that various Tory grandees have 'always opposed' the poll tax. Nigel Lawson, it is now revealed, was an implacable opponent of the poll tax. So too was Michael Heseltine, a challenger for the Tory leadership. Not a word would have been heard from these gentlemen if the tax had stuck. That it has not in Scotland, that one million are refusing to pay, is entirely down to the magnificent non-payment campaign in which *Militant* supporters have played a key role.

As *Militant* and the *MIR* predicted from its inception, the poll tax alone, if persisted in, would mean an electoral disaster for Thatcher. Now in 50 key marginals, polls show that majorities against the poll tax have gone up from 54% to 63% in a year. And this is before the implementation of the tax in England and Wales. The determined opposition displayed in Scotland will result in a tidal wave in the rest of Britain which will engulf the government.

The class polarisation which is now taking place in Britain has little to do with the leadership of the Labour Party. Indeed, they are as astonished as Thatcher herself, if not more so, at the change in Labour's fortunes. The polls now put Labour at between 10-12% ahead of the Tories. It was the Marxists alone which held out the prospect of a Labour victory in the next election. The new theoreticians of Labour's right, *Marxism Today*, argued that such a possibility was well-nigh ruled out (see *MIR* No.39, Spring 1989). One third of the parliamentary Labour Party were openly canvassing for Kinnock's removal; in reality probably a majority were looking to replace him. Defeat in the Euro-elections would probably have sealed his fate. But these elections showed the greatest swing

against the Tories in 100 years. Only the Marxists predicted that the pendulum would inevitably swing back to the left, in reaction against the Thatcher counter-revolution.

Thatcher in the past was like 'Teflon-woman': nothing could stick to her. Now every scandal or even hint of a scandal, whether based in fact or totally unfounded, is widely believed to be the truth by the mass of the population. From 'the Tories greatest asset', she is perceived even within her own ranks as a heavy liability. It cannot be ruled out that she will be replaced before the next election.

The social reserves of capitalism, those layers of the population skilfully cultivated by the British bourgeois over generations, have gradually been eaten away by Thatcherism. The Archbishop of Canterbury, with his denunciations of the 'Pharisees', voices the disquiet of even the middle class at the widening class gulf. Also significant was the threat of the director of the British Museum to resign if entry charges are imposed. Thatcher personifies the triumph of the 'Philistines' within the Tory Party with everything, including culture, reduced to what Thomas Carlyle called the 'cash nexus'. She recently described museums as 'dirty old places'!

Teachers, doctors, university lecturers, scientists, have all been antagonised. Teachers, for instance, are at boiling point because of the deterioration of the schools, particularly in the inner city areas, the increased workload because of the 'national curriculum' and their totally inadequate salaries.

The deterioration in the 'quality of life', keenly felt by the middle-classes, has pitted normally pro-Tory layers of the population against the government. Clarke's NHS 'reform' is overwhelmingly unpopular. One poll showed that 12% of those who voted Tory in the last election (1.5 million people) intend to vote against the government if it persists with its 'reforms'.

The infrastructure is in a state of chronic disrepair. the rat population, which has increased by 50% in London, is the only real 'index of growth' that the Tories can boast of in the last ten years. 150,000 youth are homeless throughout Britain, with a doubling of those on the streets of London. One third of them, boys and girls, have been approached to become prostitutes! These elements of capitalist barbarism have repelled not just the working class but large sections of the middle class.

Nonetheless, is it not possible for the Tories to avoid nemesis, electoral disaster, by ditching Thatcher? If she remains, a landslide against the Tories is entirely possible. Scotland is just an anticipation of what could happen in the rest of Britain. The last opinion poll there put Labour at 51%, with the Tories on 21%, the same figure as the Scottish National Party.

The Scottish polls are in no way a vindication

of the policies of the inept Labour leadership. North of the border, millions are utterly appalled at the role of the Labour leadership in the 'Pay It' campaign. Yet criticisms of the Labour leadership, including outright hostility by many advanced workers, are subordinated in the consciousness of the proletariat now to the need to get rid of 'this government', almost at any cost. If the Tories, however, decide to ditch Thatcher for somebody like Peter Walker or Heseltine, could they creep back into power?

The more far-sighted representatives of the ruling class have seen Heseltine and Walker as reserve weapons to replace Thatcher at an appropriate time. Heseltine recently revealed that he would have been 'dead' but for the support of the media. A new leader would probably invest in the infrastructure and water down to complete ineffectiveness, or even cancel, the poll tax. But the accumulated class bitterness which has now been smouldering for a decade within the ranks of the proletariat would probably mean that, notwithstanding any 'reforms' by a new leader, the Tories would be defeated in a general election. When Macmillan was replaced by Home in 1963 it did not stop a Labour victory. Now the economic and social situation is far worse.

In the short term, a big industrial movement is possible, unless the employers concede major increases. Thatcher's attempt to use the defeat of the dockers to cow the rest of the working class has completely failed. Within a month the NALGO workers had scored a big victory in their first national strike. This industrial movement, in effect the reawakening of the British proletariat, will also result over a period of time in the transformation of the trade unions. The depth of collaboration with management by the union leadership and a layer of the shop stewards was shown at the Ford's plant at Dagenham. Shop stewards, with full time officials, actually issued circulars denouncing 'unofficial strikes'. This attempted use of the official union machinery to police the workforce will inevitably provoke oppositional movements, particularly by young workers, who will move in to replace the tired elements with a new generation of fighting militants.

While a Tory victory cannot be completely discounted, all the conditions now point to a Labour victory in the next election. This is in spite of the leadership of the Labour Party and their policies, not because of them.

The Marxists, who will work shoulder to shoulder with Labour's ranks for a Labour victory, also have a duty to warn about the character of a future Kinnock-led Labour government, given the policies of the leadership. It will be in the mould of the PSOE government in Spain whose recent victory evoked a unique response from the rich. Usually when Labour

governments come to power there is a drop in the stock exchange. Unprecedentedly, exactly the opposite happened in Spain.

A future Labour government will be more akin to the MacDonald governments of 1924 and 1929-31 than the Labour governments of 1964-70 or 1974-79. It will be subject to remorseless pressure between an aroused working class on the one hand and the bourgeois on the other. Initially a period of grace will be extended to the government. But, as we have witnessed in Spain, a recoil led by the unions is inevitable at a certain stage. Differentiation will begin to take place within the Labour Party and the trade unions and the Marxists will play a key role in this process. All the attempts to remove the Marxists and stamp out their influence within the mass organisations of the British working class have failed.

It is the experience of big events which is the greatest teacher of the mass of the proletariat. Thatcher has played a huge historical role in educating millions in the brutal realities of class society. The experience of a Labour government in action will be a further harsh lesson for the proletariat. Millions who today harbour illusions in the Labour leaders, in casting around for an alternative, will swing to the left. Marxism will become a powerful influence within a mass resurgent left-wing that will develop in the trade unions and the Labour party.

The 1980s will be seen historically as a transitional decade between two epochs. For the capitalists it has been dominated by the 'Reagan boom' with the Thatcher government subsisting on its crumbs. But it has also been marked by the titanic miners' strike and the mighty movement in Liverpool between 1983-87. As an anticipation of what is to come, the decade fittingly closes to the echo of huge class battles in Belgium, 100,000 teachers on strike in Australia, 200,000 marching against racism in Italy and of course the mighty and convulsive movements of the proletariat in the Stalinist states.

The capitalists and Stalinists, while resting on antagonistic social systems, also lean on one another to shore up their rule. But now forces have been unleashed which will shatter to their foundations both systems in the next decade. The coming ten years will be the 'red nineties', a decade of revolutionary explosions engulfing all the major cities and countries of Europe. Marxism, as embodied by *Militant* and the MIR, which has stubbornly defended the ideas of socialism, the planned economy, workers' democracy and internationalism against the ideological offensive of the bourgeois and their shadows in the labour movement, will be the main beneficiaries of the mighty revolutionary wave which looms. □



Michael
Heseltine.

We are
now
entering
the 'red
nineties'

South Africa

Defiance marches shake De Klerk

De Klerk
wants to
trap the
ANC into
co-operating

Since the apartheid elections on 6 September, in cities and small towns, hundreds of thousands have participated in the biggest protest against apartheid rule and oppression in South Africa's history.

On 29 October 80,000 gathered at a legal rally in Soweto, called by the still-banned ANC: the first such for 30 years. Under the flags of the African National Congress and the (banned) SA Communist Party, Walter Sisulu, former ANC secretary-general, and other political prisoners recently released by the new De Klerk government, addressed the crowd.

The marches and rallies and the release of the prisoners mark significant retreats by the government. They are victories for the black working class. The State of Emergency since 1986, torture, vigilantes, and state terror in the township streets has failed to inflict a serious defeat on a working-class movement which has been gaining almost uninterruptedly in strength and confidence for more than a decade. In 1973 trade unions were almost non-existent for African workers. Now the Congress of South African Trade Unions is over one million strong.

The revolutionary upsurge of 1984-86 gave way to a relative, highly volatile lull. But from early this year resistance has grown again. There have been consumer boycotts against Conservative Party-controlled municipal councils, schools' struggles, defiance on beaches, buses and trains — underpinned by a movement of defiance in the workplaces. The anti-union Labour Act, passed in 1988, is being made essentially unworkable. Organised workers have been challenging segregation in canteens, toilets and changing rooms.

Imperialism and the South Af-

rican ruling class look ahead apprehensively to the year 2000, when SA will have a population of over 47 million, with only 5-6 million whites. Repressive rule by the white minority is an inadequate instrument for holding back the African majority, overwhelmingly working-class, from workers' revolution.

The example of Lieutenant Rockman, a coloured police officer who broke ranks to denounce the brutality of the white riot police on election night in the Western Cape, is a sign of the unpredictability of blacks in the state apparatus, faced with the movement of the working class.

The SA ruling class is compelled to look for new methods of rule. The new President, De Klerk, proposes a 'five-year plan' to negotiate a new constitution. "The door to a new South Africa is open", he has said. "It is not necessary to batter it down. We wish to discuss with leaders in SA how to achieve a new, fair and just South Africa."

All this is a fraud. De Klerk has made clear that the one thing that is not on the agenda is the minimum that would be acceptable to the mass of the people: majority rule, one-person-one-vote in an undivided SA.

The ruling class will cling to their power, wealth and privilege until it is taken from them. To achieve majority rule requires the defeat of the apartheid state by the working class. The militant mood in the recent marches and rallies shows the desire of the black working class to build the ANC to achieve this.

De Klerk, for his part, has temporarily pulled back the riot police, legalised these protests and released Sisulu and the other prisoners, to create a 'climate for negotiations.' The release of Nel-

son Mandela is now likely before many months have passed.

De Klerk's aim is a constitution giving the appearance of participation by the African majority, but without conceding power to them. He seeks to dissolve the crudities of apartheid in favour of new and more complex forms of divide and rule, without undermining the cohesion of the state.

To move in this direction, he must trap African leaders with authority among the masses, especially those of the ANC, into co-operating. He hopes for their help in a long-term strategy to defuse the developing revolution.

The ruling class is encouraged by Gorbachev and the Soviet bureaucracy who, in the interests of deals with imperialism, are using their influence to press the ANC leaders into negotiations with De Klerk.

At the rally, Sisulu, admitting that De Klerk did not stand for majority rule, "repeatedly stressed (the ANC's) commitment ... to a negotiated settlement to South Africa's conflict." A message from ANC President Oliver Tambo stated that De Klerk "may yet earn a place among the peacemakers of our country." (*Financial Times* 30 October 1989)

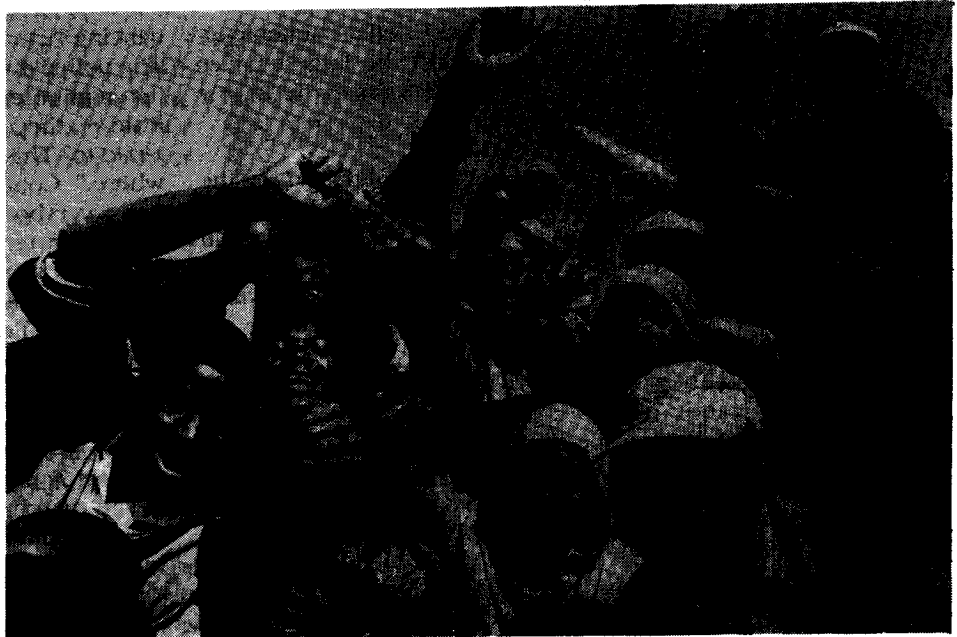
But since freedom is not on the table, why did Sisulu and Tambo not make clear there is nothing to negotiate with this government about?

Sisulu called for the defiance to continue. But neither he nor any other speaker offered any clear **programme of action** for this. Combined with creating illusions in the possibility of negotiating democracy with this government, this serves to spread confusion in the black working class.

The interpretations placed by the capitalist press on recent developments should serve as a warning. The *Independent* (12 October 1989) commented "the most remarkable thing to have emerged from Mr De Klerk's decision (to release Sisulu and the others) is the degree to which Mr Mandela and the exiled African National Congress have become participants in government decision-making." (our emphasis) The leadership needs to turn back from this course and build the forces for the revolution needed to achieve majority rule.

De Klerk cannot succeed in his

aims. Sooner or later his attempts to reconcile all the conflicting forces will break down. Sharp economic recession; a revolutionary upsurge vaster on scale than 1984-6; a renewed turn of the white lower middle class and workers (now placing their hopes in De Klerk) to the ultra-right - these are all possible developments in a volatile situation. The task for Congress activists is to base themselves on the militant mood among the masses and organise to step up the defiance. The working class needs to take into its hands the task of building a mass ANC under its own democratic control, round a programme for implementing the Freedom Charter. For this, the ideas and methods of Marxism are indispensable.



The September marches Cape Town

Just after midday on Wednesday 13 September, I arrived at St Georges Cathedral. This is normally early enough to get a front place for the usual lunch-time gatherings. But today was a meeting with a really big difference. Thousands were packing the streets. Everyone had come to show their rejection of police brutality. The church was full so loudspeakers were set up for the people outside.

As students arrived in their buses from all over the Western Cape, they were greeted with loud applause and singing and spontaneous toyi-toying. The banners said it all: "Forward to People's Power", "Release all detainees" and there was even one in red lettering which said "Viva the Bolsheviks" !

During the sermon, groups of youth continued to toyi-toyi. Every few minutes there were shouts of "Viva ANC! Viva MDM!". Thousands lined the streets to watch and as the youth passed them, they shouted: "Our struggle and march to freedom is for everyone."

All kinds of people were present: workers, youth, students, teachers, mothers, unemployed, yuppies, clergy, directors (one was apparently elected by his company to represent them!), uniformed white school students, long-lost friends - and of course a good contingent of plainclothes police.

Many garment workers from Woodstock and Salt River left work and walked from their factories. If the leaders had made the same effort to get workers there as they did for the students, many thousands more would have marched.

As the march turned into Adderley Street, I saw something not seen in this city since

30,000 people marched from the townships in 1960. The whole of Cape Town had been brought to a complete standstill. The marchers could not really believe it. The seemingly impossible had happened - it made everybody happy. There was a feeling that history was being made that day. The people had shown their power and De Klerk had been forced to concede our march.

At the town hall all the leaders made speeches. Despite all their talk of negotiations, they could not stop the crowd from shouting "Forward to the spirit of no compromise and no surrender" after every speech.

Afterwards people rushed for the trains. In every train hundreds toyi-toyed throughout the journey to the townships. As people got on at different stations, they joined in. From platforms they shouted "Viva ANC! Amandla!"

Durban

The march on 23 September was 30,000 strong and dominated by the youth. There were just a few hundred workers and the union banners were accompanied by the officials only. Placards and banners called for the release of the detainees, the unbanning of the ANC and the ending of police violence. The Phoenix women's organisation demanded houses for all and affordable rents and some banners said "Fight the LRA" (Labour Relations Act).

The march moved up West Street in four waves. Although small groups of youth threatened to break off and run wild, the mood was one of celebration rather than belligerence. The street was lined with office workers, half of them white. Construction workers hung from scaffolding, joining in the singing and waving their hammers. As everybody toyi-toyed towards City Hall, it was as if everything moved -

**On the
march.**

**Eyewitness
reports
from Cape
Town,
Johannesburg,
Durban and
East Rand.**

**The power
of the
workers
was there
for all to
see**

only the buildings stood still.

During the speeches, all defiant statements met loud approval and the largest cheer went to one speaker who warned the mayor that we were coming back to take over!

Kwa-Thema, East Rand

The crisis in our high schools began at the beginning of August when 8000 students from all seven schools went on a three day boycott in support of the defiance campaign. Then a meeting of 2000 workers, students, teachers and parents called a mass demonstration for 25 September.

They demanded that: the Department of Education negotiate with students directly; police harassment be stopped; that free discussion be allowed; and that charges against seven arrested students be dropped.

On the morning of the march it was cloudy and bitterly cold. But this did not deter 600 people from gathering outside the Civic Hall. The priests who were to leave the march arrived late and buses and taxis to take people to the city did not come. But everybody decided to foot it instead, even though it was 10km into town and back.

We broke onto the street and as the sun came through the clouds, hundreds kept away by the cold joined us. When we reached Thema Road near town there were over 6000 people on the march. People sang and toyi-toyed jubilantly. It was like a big celebration. There was not a whiff of anger in the air. Everybody marched together as one united mass.

Originally it was not planned that primary pupils should come but there they were — six to ten year olds — bubbling and singing along. Placards conveyed the messages: "Mass Democratic Movement means freedom", "We want bread not bullets", "Unban COSAS". *Congress Militant* posters calling for defiance of apartheid and one person one vote in a unitary South Africa daubed the march as well. Some students had stuck these posters on their backs with tape.

The march was blocked by a heavy contingent of army and police. Some of us shouted that we should break through but most were not in the mood for confrontation. Security police perched on a nearby building with video cameras to monitor the crowd who listened to petitions being read out. During prayers many kept their eyes open, arms unfolded and talked among themselves.

People eventually went back to the Civic Hall singing "Socialism ke thebe (Socialism is a shield)"; "Tambo sithwele kanzima kulomhlaba (Tambo we live in hardship in this land)". Whenever we came across the police we always sang: "Noma siyafa sitsho sithi haluhkho ulovalo (even if we have to die we say: we have no fear)."

At the Civic Hall there was more singing and dancing before the march broke up in waves. The police demanded the march disperse within ten minutes. People cried "ten minutes is too little — they are mad. Where should we disperse to? This is our township; we're going nowhere." Confrontation seemed imminent before everybody started trickling away slowly, well after ten minutes.

Our movement was a demonstration of strength, and along with defiance campaign of workers at Ergo and Impala Platinum, it confirms that East Rand is now entering the political upsurge nationally.

The October marches

Cape Town

The march against the LRA on 14 October was very different from the previous march in September. Missing were the company directors and the yuppies wanting to be part of something big and historic. This march, although much smaller than the previous, was 90% workers. As I walked towards the march all one could see was a sea of red and yellow T-shirts. SACTWU (clothing and textile union) and FAWU (food union) workers dominated the march.

There was a great sense of unity between African and coloured workers, especially among the SACTWU and FAWU workers. The most militant were the striking South African Breweries workers who toyi-toyed from the station to the meeting place in their work overalls. They sang two songs all the time. The first was one which compared Gatsha Buthelezi to Hoza, the gangster puppet mayor of Khayelitsha. The second was "Ilizwe lethu ya basebenzi" (our country of the workers). This song really characterised the mood — the power of the workers was there for all to see.

Throughout the march there were shouts of "Phantsi LRA!" (down with the LRA), "Phantsi De Klerk!" and "Viva ANC!". I asked one of the SAB workers what he thought of the release of the eight political prisoners. He said: "This is a victory for us. De Klerk was forced to release our leaders, now we must force him to release Mandela. But we must not be fooled, he also wants to put a mask in front of our face so that we must think that everything is OK. We must tell the people that there are still many people in detention."

The same worker commented on their strike: "Did you see the papers this morning, there is already a beer shortage. Last year SAB made a big profit and now we want to get an increase. All our workers are on strike and that is our power. We will win this strike!"

The biggest cheer on the march was when a youth draped the ANC flag on the statue of Louis Botha outside parliament. Immediately

thousands of people started shouting: "ANC, ANC, ANC!"

"Waar is De Klerk? Laat hy uit kom om te sien wie is die power in die land," (Where is de Klerk? Let him come out to see who is the power in the country) shouted a young worker as we marched past parliament.

At the end of the march there were many speeches. They were all very militant. All the worker speakers called on workers to continue the fight against the LRA and apartheid.

One worker speaker said: "we make cars but we don't have any cars, we make clothes but we don't have clothes, we make houses but we don't have any houses. We are the workers who have the power. The Freedom Charter says: 'The wealth of the country shall be shared equally amongst all the people', and that is what we are fighting for."

Dullah Omar, Western Cape UDF Chairman, acknowledged that the workers had put their stamp on the movement through their struggles and this march. He said that workers must not wait and depend on their leaders to do things for them, they must lead the struggles.

"We must be careful about what De Klerk is doing" he said. "He wants to trap the leadership with all the talk of reform. We must be clear that the monopolies in the country support his system and we will never be free as long as these monopolies still control the economy. Negotiations will not win us total freedom. We must fight for that freedom."

Then he said: "There are some people who disagree with the presence of red flags on the march. Some people have asked me why there are red flags on the march. There are red flags because they are the flags of the working class, red represents the blood of the working class and the goal of our struggle. Are there any people here who disagree with the red flag? They must say so now!" There a massive response from the crowd who all shouted "NO!"

Let me explain why this question was raised. Supporters of the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC were the only people on the demonstration with a big red flag, together with our ANC flags. We had also made small red flags which workers took and were waving all the time.

Supporters of the SA Communist Party were extremely angered by this. Leading SACP members came up to our flag but only one had the courage to say: "where is the hammer and sickle?" We replied: "this flag is the genuine flag of the working class and Marxism".

I think that what really angered the SACP supporters was that the Marxists were openly distributing the *Congress Militant* statement on 'Negotiations?' and selling *Congress Militant* No 2. Our comrades were also very vocal throughout the march, leading many workers with



Sisulu, ANC veteran.

their shouts of "Build a mass ANC on a socialist programme!" and "Reject negotiations with De Klerk because he rejects majority rule!"

There was no talk about negotiations in any of the speeches and lots of talk about socialism. I think that Congress left-wingers like Dullah Omar and union leaders can see that the main body of the leadership is moving rapidly to the right and that there is a growing opposition amongst the workers. On Saturday they were responding to this reality.

Johannesburg

The Joburg march against the Labour Relations Act on 14 October was around 15,000 strong, 90% workers. SACTWU was the best organised and most colourful. First-time marchers were enjoying the experience, but rapidly caught on to the frustration and anger of those who had marched before.

The slogans included "Long Live ANC!", "Fascists Beware! Crush AWB!". Supporters of the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC carried placards: 'Don't trust De Klerk!', 'One-person-one vote in a united South Africa'. 'Don't trust De Klerk!' was the placard of ours most people wanted to carry.

Natal

In Durban, the march against the LRA on 14 October was much smaller than the last one, with about 5-6000 people. But more than 70% were workers.

In Pietermaritzburg, the march was small, about 2000 people. Supporters of the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC were, however, strongly present. Besides placards, they had the biggest home-made banner. They distributed *Congress Militant* stickers saying 'Don't Trust De Klerk!', 'Step up Defiance!'. Practically everyone was wearing them. □

We will never be free while the monopolies control the economy

Letters

Have you a comment about this issue of the *MIR*? Let's hear from you.

Dear *MIR*,

Further to your article on blasphemy in *MIR* No.40, I would like to make a few comments. Firstly, the law of blasphemy has its basis in the class struggle waged between the Church, the largest single landowner in England, and the people, during the Middle Ages.

Revolutionary priests such as John Ball, who preached that the Bible did not condone the class system but instead supported the common ownership of all goods, were hounded, goaled and finally executed for their views which were condemned as 'blasphemous'.

Similarly hundreds of thousands of workers were burned at the stake before the Reformation in their struggle against the economic despotism of the Roman Church and for religious tolerance, which as religion and politics in Medieval times were virtually synonymous, means that they were struggling for the right of freedom of speech and thought.

Secondly, a general blasphemy law would give any religion the right to censor and have punished anyone who wished to express an independent opinion.

It is probably only accidental that the call for the revival of the blasphemy laws has coincided with government legislation to ban all books from the shelves of local authorities which have 'the promotion of homosexuality' as their theme. This could effectively ban books by some of literature's greatest names, for example, Proust, Wilde, Orton, Genet and Forster.

However it is another element of the thin edge of a totalitarian wedge which is designed to take away our hard-won civil rights, in the same way that this government has taken away our trade

union and employment rights, in order to stifle any possible outlet for dissent when this government and the system they represent face a crisis which threatens its very existence.

Paul Weare, Folkestone

Dear Comrades,

Bill Hopwood was absolutely right to criticise the book reviews in the *MIR*. With the exception of the book about Oscar Wilde the books under review are always, firstly, expensive, and secondly, obscure. Reviewers should break from their habit of reviewing dusty academic tomes and instead point out the wealth of existing useful and interesting books, both fiction and non-fiction.

There is a treasure-trove of 19th and 20th century literature written by authors who reject capitalism and hypocritical bourgeois culture. In general, the more opposed an artist has been to the status quo the more significant the work he or she has produced.

This is proved in reverse by the absolute drivel that flows from the pen of Mr Jeffrey Archer, the mouthwash served up by the likes of Barbara Cartland and the premasticated pap we are forced every day by the television.

Our *MIR* must be first in the line to combat this and inspire us with the knowledge that there is an immense untapped wealth of artistic ability in the working class, waiting to be released by the transformation of our social conditions.

Max Neil, Preston

Dear Comrades,

The last *MIR* was one of the best to date, especially the debate between Peter Hadden and Clare Short. It clearly showed the difference between a Marxist and a reformist

approach to Northern Ireland, especially regarding the state. I hope that the *MIR* will include more debates like these in the future.

How about a debate about the poll tax with someone putting the Labour leaders' alternative and someone putting the Marxist position? Debates like this are useful because it not only raises our level of understanding but also the opponents of Marxism can see their mistakes.

**Chris Fernandez,
Youth Officer, Derby North
Labour Party**



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