FROM OCTOBER TO AUGUST

The Soviet Union: from revolution to counterrevolution

Jack Conrad
Dedicated to Bedir Aydemir
Workers of the world unite!
From OCTOBER to AUGUST

The Soviet Union from revolution to counterrevolution

(From Brumaire 27 to Thermidor 4)

Jack Conrad

NOVEMBER PUBLICATIONS
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Preface

With the August counterrevolution we face an unprecedented barrage of bourgeois triumphalism. “We are witnessing a counterrevolution” *The Independent* hallelujahed in one of its more honest editorials; it is the “beginning of the end of the Communist Party”.¹ It was hardly alone. Across the spectrum of the bosses media they are celebrating not the fall of a government but a system. “It was not Genardy Yanayev’s coup which ended in debacle last week: it was Vladimir Ilyich Lenin’s”.²

Now the bourgeoisie believe they will last for ever. They want, they need, to believe that they have beaten not simply this or that Communist Party, this or that revolution. No, they want to believe that the collapse of ‘official communism’—the ‘suspension’ of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the post coup scramble of various ‘official communist’ parties to rename themselves is the *organisational expression* of capitalism’s final victory over Its own mortality.

We have heard this type of reactionary crap before. Ever since the first publication of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 the bourgeoisie has felt compelled time and again to announce before the population the latest “death” of Marxism. and thus its own immortality. This or that new theory, this or that desertion from our ranks, this or that change in the composition of the proletariat -everything is marshalled in the campaign against the living truth of Marxism.

There is no doubt though, that the implosion of bureaucratic socialism -objectively representing the defeat of the October Revolution - has passed an enormously powerful propaganda weapon into the hands of our enemies. We can be sure that they will exploit It for all its worth.
It is necessary, therefore, for all class conscious workers to have the firmest hold on the real truth. We must understand why the Soviet Union fell to internal counterrevolution so that we can fight back, come back strengthened tenfold, and this time win irreversibly through the triumph of universal communism.

Comrade Jack Conrad’s book shows that over the years we never wavered in our pro-Soviet stance. Our determination to defend the USSR through communist criticism runs, like a red thread, through the whole spread of Jack Conrad’s writings and speeches collected here. Adherence to proletarian internationalism and unconditional defence of the USSR unequally marked us out from the academic, reformist and petty bourgeois revolutionary left. As can be seen, Leninists successfully plied their way between only criticising and never criticising the USSR. The Marxist method that allowed us to do that is rooted in historical materialism and enabled our organisation to warn where Gorbachev’s perestroika would lead. It also enabled us to come to an immediate and correct assessment of both the August 19 State Emergency coup and the Yeltsin counter-coup that followed.

In contrast, it has to be said, other organisations on the left had a disgraceful record.

The Euros, as a micro-tendency within bourgeois politics, were quick to add their shrill little squeaks to the ruling class cacophony. Nina Temple, their secretary, announced: “The tradition that emerged from the 1917 Russian revolution, with the common features in every country of Marxism-Leninism and democratic centralism, has been identified with a period of history that is exhausted”.3

The revolutionary left was hardly any better. They too joined the bourgeois celebration, only putting a ‘proletarian’ gloss on it. None have a genuine understanding of the need to combine communist criticism with partisan defence of the International gains of the working class. Without this there is the danger of the most reactionary conclusions.

For example, every week the ‘What we stand for’ column in Socialist Worker claims the Socialist Workers Party is building a revolutionary socialist party”. Precisely what type of “revolutionary socialist” organisation is clear from its response to the August counterrevolution: “Communism has collapsed” it headlined, and this supposed ‘fact’ should “have every socialist rejoicing”.4
The SWP is simply the most explicit anti-communist group on the revolutionary left. All suffer to one degree or another from more or less the same disease; all invested the Russian flag waving pro-Yeltsin movement of biznlsmen and ko-operators with “courageous” revolutionary properties. All, to one degree or another, thus bowed before counterrevolutionary anti-communism.

The working class in Britain deserves better. Jack Conrad’s book is an important contribution towards making sure our class gets the reforged Communist Party It deserves and needs.

Provisional Central Committee
Communist Party of Great Britain
September 1991
Introduction

This book consists of published and unpublished writings and speeches on the Soviet Union from 1983 to 1991. A few stylistic changes have been introduced, but apart from adding notes we have not tried to update what we said. With the advantage of hindsight the limitations, mistakes and unrealised hopes are easy to detect. No matter the reader must judge, warts and all. We say this not to excuse what was said, rather to show our confidence. Much of what is collected here was written in the heat of the moment; however, at every turn of events we attempted to deepen our analysis and understanding of bureaucratic socialism and the historic struggle of the working class for communism. If, as we think, our substantive analysis, polemic and prognosis were true, and developed over the years, this is entirely due to the Marxist method.

JC
1. Thatcher’s “world revolution”


In her speech to the Tory conference faithful, Thatcher credited the election of the Tories in 1979 as sparking off a “world revolution” which is now sweeping “Leipzig, Warsaw, Budapest and even Moscow”. The 1917 revolution was apparently a mere “coup d’etat”. It is what is “happening in Eastern Europe and Russia today” which is the “real revolution”.

We will not waste space disputing Thatcher’s twaddle. Reactionary politicians by their very nature have to turn truth on its head. Thatcher’s revolutionary credentials are as real as Hitler’s, Mussolini’s and Mosley’s. Nonetheless, when the Iron Lady praises communist’ leaders it sounds an alarm bell for all on the other side of the class barricades.

However, there are those whose theory is so hopelessly flawed that they insist on not hearing. The SWP and RCP types say that, as the October revolution has left nothing worth defending, they cannot see what all the “fuss” is about in Eastern Europe (*The Next Step*). From a different angle, although just as criminally, the prostitutes of the New Communist Party and the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain claim that what is going on is the renewal of socialism”. If this were the case, Thatcher would not be welcoming it, would she? She would vilify it, seek to crush it, not offer praise and friendly advice.

In fact what we are seeing is a decisive moment in the general crisis of bureaucratic socialism; a crisis which, although played out more slowly - involving states as well as parties - is on a far higher scale than the collapse of the opportunist parties of the Second international into social chauvinism in August 1914. Those who
will not face up to this are clearly far more part of the problem than they are the solution.

No longer able to play any sort of progressive role, behind a facade of democratic rhetoric the ‘reformist’ or technocratic wing of the bureaucracy (in another travesty of the truth labelled the left’ by the bourgeois press) is itching to transform itself into a fully fledged capitalist class through a peaceful counterrevolution.

Gorbachev personifies the capitalist road. It is no wonder therefore that this counterrevolutionary has received approbation from the counterrevolutionary Thatcher. But Poland and Hungary are at the moment ahead of the USSR, and as such point to where Gorbachevism will lead. Poland has a Solidarnosc government openly committed to the restoration of capitalism. And in Hungary the ruling party has just transformed itself into a social democratic organisation which has the same declared aim.

What we are witnessing, though, is not only the general crisis of bureaucratic socialism, but the collapse of ‘official communism’ into social democracy worldwide. The Communist Party of Italy has, in all but name, already turned itself into a party of capitalism:

other ‘official communists’ will go the same way. Gorbachev does not object. Euro CPGB general secretary, Gordon MacLennan, has just returned from the Soviet Union saying that he found agreement there that the ‘world communist movement’ was dead and that any future international get-togethers would have to be in cooperation with social democrats and greens. Another word for this is liquidation.

For genuine communists there can be no room for despair or demoralisation. The collapse of the Second International was followed five years later by the birth of the Third: the collapse of ‘official communism’ too will find its answer. As to the capitalist road, well capitalism has no answer for humankind. It is a system of unemployment, mass starvation and war. The October 16 stock market wobble shows that capitalism is on the verge of a new devastating crisis that will dwarf the 1929 crash. Communists must close their ranks, strengthen their discipline and prepare. Our time is coming.

2. Stalin and centristism in the Soviet
The 17th Congress of the CPSU held in January 1934 was given the title ‘Congress of the Victors’. Praise for Stalin was universal; for the first time there was not one dissenting voice. Delegates gave stormy applause”, “prolonged applause”, “thunderous applause to Stalin’s declarations that all “anti-Party groups” had been smashed and scattered”; that the five year plan’s success had utterly demoralised them” and that “the Party” was now “united as it had never been before”.

Among those attending the congress were not only those who had stood with Stalin, first against the left, then the right, but also the former leaders of the left and right. Having ‘recanted’ their views, they joined in the eulogistic acclamation of Stalin, the “labour dictator” (as Marx called Ferdinand Lassalle). However, despite bitter memories of past battles and the humiliation of the defeated, there was a genuine wish to let bygones be bygones. A number of former oppositionists were elected to the new Central Committee - Pyatakov as a full member, and Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky as candidates.

Yet, in spite of the desire for reconciliation, unanimous votes and cries of “Hurrah for Stalin!” and “Long live Stalin!”, within five years more than half of the 17th Congress delegates were branded “degenerates associated with fascism” and either placed under arrest or shot dead.

How could It happen?

Why, after declaring that capitalism in the USSR had been eliminated” along with all ideological “deviations”, did Stalin
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launch a violent assault on his own Party which saw communists butchered in their hundreds of thousands?

This question has been answered by those who came to lead the Soviet Union after Stalin’s death, in a whole series of Party documents - the resolutions of the 20th Congress, the CPSU Central Committee’s resolution of June 30 1956 On overcoming the personality cult and its consequences, the Central Committee’s resolution on the Fiftieth anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, speeches and statements by Party leaders and the Pravda editorial on Ninety years since the birth of JV Stalin. Unfortunately their analysis, and even the depth of their factual enquiry leaves much to be desired to say the least.

For example, according to the resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU of June 30 1956, it was all the fault of one man, Stalin, who:

“overestimated his own merits beyond all measure, came to believe in his own Infalibility ... began transferring some of the limitations on the Party and Soviet democracy, unavoidable in conditions of a bitter struggle against the class enemy and Its agents, and subsequently during the war against the Nazi invaders, into standards of Party and governmental life.”

The resolution also claims that: “Any opposition to him ... would not have been understood by the people.”

Does this mean that opposition would have been wrong?

Perhaps so, because the resolution goes on to say that despite great mistakes” and “negative consequences of the cult of the individual”, nothing Stalin did harmed the “nature of” the “social system”. In fact the 1956 resolution strains might and main to split the crimes of Stalin semantically from the character of the Soviet state and Party. All crimes are attributed to one man and his close associates’ promotion of his personality cult, nothing caused the ship of state to veer off its splendid historic course.

This idea was not peculiar to the Krushchev era. In the editorial in the CPSU’s theoretical journal Kommunist marking the 100th anniversary of Stalin’s birth, we read:

“In Stalin’s day ... the Soviet Communist Party confidently and unswervingly followed Lenin’s course In the principal and essential areas of activity, always turned to the mass of the people and saw their

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support as the vital force of Its policy ... The personality cult did not
change the general direction of Soviet society’s stage-by-stage advance to the economic and socio-political maturity of socialism.”

It is true that nowadays Stalin is only rarely mentioned in the Brezhnevite official press, but when he is, Soviet communists still carefully distinguish the individual from general politics. This approach, also applied by reformist dissidents’ like Roy Medvedev in his *Let history judge*, owes more to idealism than to Marxism. Indeed it is alien to the Marxist method, which sees the role of the individual and socio-economic forces as an organic unity. This question is of great Importance, not least because the Soviet Party, the most influential in the world communist movement, proclaims that it still follows the general political line set in Stalin’s time.”

So let us try to reunite the Individual with the socio-economic forces of society. If we do so successfully, we will have taken a necessary step forward in our understanding of contemporary reality in the USSR, and at the same time we will strike a blow against those opportunist forces in Britain which tail the Soviet Union.

These forces are doubly vulnerable. Both the New Communist Party and the Communist Party members around *Straight Left* combine an uncritical attitude towards the CPSU with, at the same time, promoting a semi-secret Stalin admiration society. *Straight Left*’s leading writer, for example, uses the pen-name ‘Harry Steel’ - Harry, to link the writer with Harry Pollitt, the longest serving general secretary of our Communist Party of Great Britain, and Steel, to link him to the ‘man of steel’, Stalin. It is only to be expected then, that these centrists remain silent on Stalin’s crimes and their consequences for Soviet society.

Having mentioned the centrists we must also mention the Euro-communists. While the centrists paint the Soviet Union virginal white in a cackhanded attempt to defend it, the Eurocommunist critique is fixed in anti-Sovietism, as if in concrete boots. It is not aimed at overcoming problems in the Soviet Union, but conciliation with the bourgeoisie. This does not mean everything the Euros say about the Soviet Union is a fabrication - obviously not. But it is essential to understand that they are not motivated by Internationalism. Bemoaning the purges of the 1930s, censorship, the general lack of liberty, and the interventions in Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan, is actually about creating an unbridgeable gulf between themselves and the foreign CPSU; these traitors want to serve the bourgeoisie at home and see the proletarians of the world consigned to

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hermetically sealed national tombs.

Our approach is diametrically opposed to the centrists’ unthinking tailism and to the Euros’ prostration before bourgeois public opinion - we are really committed to proletarian internationalism. This places on us both the right and the duty to criticise mistakes by other detachments of the international proletarian army, irrespective of country. Indeed, as the CPSU is the most influential Party in the world communist movement and the Soviet Union is the world revolutionary centre, it can only enhance the importance of putting into practice this principle as regards the CPSU and the Soviet Union.

The creation of the Soviet Republic was a great victory for the proletarians and their peasant allies in Russia. It was also a triumph for all workers, no matter from what country. Why? Because the working class can only find liberation through world revolution; October represented a first step towards that end. Thus proletarian internationalism is neither a sentimental relic, nor an attempt to impose one party’s view on the world communist movement. No, for the working class it is an objective necessity.

Proletarian internationalism means we must openly criticise what we regard as important mistakes or deviations. Naturally this must be done in a disciplined fashion; we are not out to prove how clever we are, but to strengthen the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries in the interests of the world revolution. It is because we consider open criticism the best way to overcome problems that we welcome the statement by L.I Brezhnev at the 26th Congress of the CPSU that Soviet communists would “pay close heed to comradely constructive criticism”, because, as he said, “when communists fight for the common revolutionary cause patient comradely discussion of differing views and positions serves their common aims best of all”. We trust that he means what he says.

There are always those who want to be more Brezhnevite than Brezhnev. Because we dare venture even the most tentative criticism, some centrists in Britain have the gall to label us anti-Soviet. These people would formally accept the proposition that people make mistakes, and that the leaders of the CPSU, being human,

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also make mistakes (to paraphrase Socrates). But ask them what criticisms they have of the CPSU? One is lucky to get a shrug of the shoulders. They have no desire to admit mistakes let alone locate their origins.

Of course it is not just a question of logic. History proves what logic demands. Soviet communists have deviated from Marxism-Leninism. They
are far from being Infallible. No doubt the capitalist media uses criticisms of real mistakes to their own advantage. What do we expect them to do? But to deny there is a need for open criticism makes communists look like foolish sycophants and does nothing to overcome problems, only leaves them to fester.

This Is of no concern for our leading centrists. These ‘hardliners have elevated the CPSU to the status of a deity to be followed whatever course It takes. Our neo-god builders have resurrected the Hegelian spirit, turned Marx on his head as Marx once turned Hegel on his feet. For the Hegelians the Prussian state was the embodiment of progress, the ideal. This role has now been transposed by the centrists on to the Soviet Union.

In defence of this they ask why, as we consider the Soviet Union the world’s revolutionary centre, we do not follow the line of the CPSU faithfully, as they do? What a perfect muddling of the objective and subjective. The world revolutionary centre is a fact and exists independently of the policies of its workers’ movement, good or bad ... and we have no intention of following or excusing what we consider bad.

Now, while we refuse to tail the communist movement in the Soviet Union, we must recognise that it has enormous influence and prestige as a result of its role in leading the state in the world revolutionary centre - the country where the proletarian struggle finds its highest expression. It is for this reason that it Is particularly vital to reach some sort of a focused understanding of Soviet society, a central component of which must be understanding the role and significance of Joseph Vissarionovich Djugashvili.

2.1. Role of the individual

Stalin’s personality had an enormous impact on the events over which he presided, not least the industrialisation drive and the war against Nazi Germany. But Marxism has always recognised that

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the political power of certain individuals is, in the last analysis, determined by the “development of productive forces and the mutual relations between men in the social-economic process of production”.16

We cannot and have no wish to deny the individual stamp Stalin placed
on history. Notwithstanding that though, the measures he Initiated and his response to the movement of events was, in the lost analysis, determined by the general historical situation and the socio-economic relations which prevailed in the Soviet Union.

As we have said, the CPSU only pays lip service to the Marxist understanding of the role of the Individual. Its leadership attempts, for its own reasons, to prise apart the individual and society. No doubt this is not unconnected to the fact that most were promoted by Stalin in their youth, and not only claim to, but do, carry out essentially the same politics as Stalin. Because of this it should hardly surprise us that to a man the post-Stalin leadership claims, so to speak, that the “evil Stalin did is Interred with his bones, the good lives on after him” (to reverse Shakespeare’s formulation). Thus the Stalin personality cult, his mistakes and monstrous crimes, snuffing out dissent In the Party, were neither the result of, nor linked to, the socio-political direction of Soviet society.

Obviously all great events and upheavals thrust forward leaders. But what causes one to rise while another falls is no simple matter of brilliance or stupidity. Leaders are servants of socio-political forces. In a very real sense they come to personify particular classes. We can consider the role of individuals in relationship to one class overthrowing another, but also to the struggle within a class. A premiership of a Foot or a Healey, a Thatcher or a Benn, a Jenkins or a Webster would not alter the bourgeois nature of the British state. But it would signify a change in the inner-relationship and inner-balance within the ruling class, and the method by which it chooses, or is forced, to rule.

Stalin knew all about the hardships and hazards of underground work, Tsarist prisons and exile. He personified the ‘committee man’ who devoted his whole life to the cause of the revolution. Stalin was a brilliant and singleminded organiser, he was a member of the Party’s Central Committee since 1912 and played a leading role in the October Revolution and the civil war against the Whites - none of this we will forget. Nor will we forget how later, as Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars and Supreme Commander-in-

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Chief of the Soviet Armed Forces, he wheeled and dealed at the highest levels on the world stage at Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam and oversaw the spread of socialism Into Eastern Europe.

But we want to examine Stalin’s role primarily around the contours of the Inner-struggle of the working class state. We will argue that on this terrain,
following the death of Lenin, Stalin’s political career was not driven by any desire to complete the world revolution. Rather it was driven by a contradictory attempt to preserve what had been won. This change of direction from Leninism took place not as the result of one class overthrowing another, but the coming to dominance of bureaucratic centrism in the Soviet working class movement. Stalin possessed the qualities needed by this trend. His political outlook was above all characterised by an unbending commitment to the power and success of the Soviet state: “Our orientation in the past and our orientation at the present time Is towards the USSR, and towards the USSR alone” Stalin declared.  

Before turning our full attention to Soviet society and what features, tendencies and causes led to the rise of Stalin, we can get an instructive example of the relationship between individual leaders and the struggle within a class if we touch upon the French Revolution of 1789. The revolution represented the victory of class against class. But it was not as simple as that. The victory of the bourgeois revolution was hidden by the form it took: the victory of the Third Estate over the monarch and the top aristocracy, The Third Estate consisted not only of the common people’, the peasants and sans culottes, but centrally the bourgeoisie. Having swept away the ancien regime, the united wave that was the revolution quickly began to exhibit a Florealian differentiation and contradictions, not only between the constituent classes, but also within classes. The upper stratum of the bourgeoisie became first a force for retreat, then reaction. In contrast, the petty bourgeoisie favoured taking the bourgeois revolution to its most far reaching extremities.

Leaders such as Mirabeau, Robespierre, Danton, Barras and Bonaparte personified the various sectional interests inside the bourgeoisie; their rise and fall reflected the rise and fall of strata within this class. We can see this with particular sharpness if we look at Robespierre. His pure, austere single-mindedness did not determine his rise to power, but instead it promoted, served and

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coincided with the needs of the day. The cult of reason, terror and revolutionary wars bore the stamp of Robespierre’s personality. Yet all these details were, in the end, determined not by the whims of this or that individual but the collective victory of the Jacobin mountain over the Girondin plain, the victory of the petty bourgeoisie over the upper
bourgeoisie and the consequent drive to crush all waverers and aristocratic remnants. The same applies to Robespierre’s liquidation of forces which stood on his left, the Herbertistes and the Enrages, centres that articulated the politics of the sans culottes. The Robespierrian Thermidor can only be understood in light of the nature of petty bourgeois revolutionism.

We can therefore talk of Robespierre expressing the unconscious forces rooted in the development and contradictions of the socio-economic processes of production. Likewise other leaders, including Stalin, cannot be separated from socio-political and economic factors and trends. On the contrary, it is only by seeing them in relationship to these forces that we can fully understand them and their significance.

Leaders can only play a decisive role when all objective conditions are ripe for dramatic changes of direction. Then the subjective factor becomes central, then the decisions and character of individuals can decide the fate of the countries, classes, strata they lead. Objective socio-economic conditions are something that individuals can swim with, influence, but never transcend. They can certainly never be considered in isolation from them; for as Marx declared: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness”.

2.2. What is centrism?

It is impossible, some of our critics say, to have centrism in a socialist country. Base equals superstructure, they repeat mantra like. As the Soviet Union is a socialist state and as its superstructure is determined by its base, its leadership must be true socialists, true communists. The world of these idealists is as simple as adding one and one and making two. There are the forces of goodness, true communists, and the working class; there are the forces of capitalism, the fascists, and the agents of capitalism. And

that is it. This lifeless view is the sorry result of a non-dialectical method which would have us believe that the economic element is the only determining factor in society.

It is not. Economics - the production and reproduction of human life - is ultimately the determining factor. But constitutions, politics, traditions
“which haunt human minds”, the reflection of struggles “In the brains of the participants”, that is how individuals think and act all have their influence, as does the endless host of accidents. So it is wrong to imagine that politics perfectly reflects some imagined abstract socialist society. The Soviet Union is a living society created by a complex history. The politics that flows from a living society and in turn interacts back on it is equally complex, knowing a multitude of transitional features shaped by the ever changing tempo and course of events. One of these transitional features - an extremely important one - is centrisim.

What is centrism? Centrism is a wide category in Marxist terminology covering those forces and tendencies standing between revolution and reform. As such it consists of the most diverse forms: some retreating from Marxism, some breaking from reformism, some going to the left, some to the right, etc. Hence centrism can have as many varieties as there are possibilities for movement in space and time.

What causes centrism to emerge?

The answer to this is as complicated as the diversity of centrism itself. Essentially though we can say that it is caused by changes in the class struggle, being produced by both upturn and downturn. To illustrate this let us examine its history.

Classic’ centrism, the one that felt the lash of Lenin’s pen, quietly gestated during the long years of social peace preceding World War I and then hatched into treacherous form as soon as the slaughter began. It was personified by Karl Kautsky, the leading theoretician of the German SDP and the Second International. Until World War I he produced many worthwhile works and took part in the fight against Bernstein revisionism. This said, his struggle was waged in a bookish, scholastic fashion. It was not designed to equip the working class for revolution. No, what motivated Kautsky was maintaining the unity of the workers’ movement. To this end he and his close colleagues urged Bernstein and the other revisionists to water down or disdain from publishing their more extreme

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Ideological heresies. This lax, over tolerant attitude was even more evident when it came to the increasingly class collaborationist practices of their friends in the labour bureaucracy.

It was conditions of social peace which fed both centrism and revisionism. In the main only propaganda, electoral and trade union work were possible. This, and the development of Imperialism, created a section of the working class which had a material interest in the continuation and prosperity of capitalism. It also engendered a passivity among the mass of
Kautskyian centrism put off the revolution to the distant future. Furthermore, that far off socialism was thought of in a purely mechanical fashion and not something workers should actively encourage and prepare for. That would be anarchism. This dull, cosy state of affairs was shattered by the outbreak of inter-imperialist world war. The great majority of labour movement leaders rushed to support their own bourgeoisie and enrol themselves as labour lieutenants of capital. Despite this the centrists continued to argue for unity with them, and this by definition provided these quislings with a useful ‘orthodox’ cover.\textsuperscript{21}

Kautskyian centrum, because it maintained only an academic organisational commitment to Marxism, collapsed to the right once it was faced with a sharp turn of the class struggle. War, and the shift of revolution from the realm of propaganda to the realm of immediate action, exposed centrism as unstable and unable to unite its theory with practice.

Due to the labour bureaucracy passing into the camp of open class collaboration, the centrists were paralysed and the working class momentarily found itself effectively leaderless. Yet, as the war dragged on, workers began to move in ever greater numbers from the politics of economic resistance to the politics of revolution. Their movement to the left swelled the ranks of consistent revolutionary organisations, such as the Bolsheviks in Russia and the Spartakusbund in Germany. It also gave life to new examples of centrum. This new centrum was heterogeneous, being a combination of a genuine proletarian movement against capitalism and a cynical attempt by some more far-sighted sections of the labour bureaucracy to maintain their hold over the masses.

In Britain this found expression in those truly inspired by the Russian Revolution; the leaders of the Shop Stewards and Workers’ Committees, the British Socialist Party and the Communist Unity Group, who, under the guidance of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, broke from left-centrism and formed our Communist Party of Great Britain. But there was also the Independent Labour Party. Before the war it had been the epitome of reformism. Growing general disgust at the war and the ‘red shift’ in the ILP rank and file dragged some leaders in that direction too. Its leader (and future prime minister) Ramsay MacDonald began the war as a timid social pacifist and ended it advocating workers’ and soldiers’ soviets.

In Germany the pattern was similar, only on a higher and larger scale. The German ‘ILP’, the Independent Social Democratic Party, became mass and

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pro-communist. The majority of its membership voted to fuse with the Communist Party, leaving an embittered minority right-centrist rump around the renegade Kautsky’ to limp back into the SDP, a party whose leaders had meanwhile butchered the November 1918 revolution.

Hence centrism can result from a drift from Marxism, which although imperceptibly slow in conditions of social peace, becomes dramatic with the eruption of war and revolution - the very conditions which can cause the development of centrist movements from the other direction, as workers previously under the domination of reformism shift to the left and carry all sorts of leaders with them.

Clearly though, unlike reformism and Marxism, centrist ideology lacks a closely defined point of reference. Reformism, open class collaborationism, represents the ideas of the bourgeoisie inside workers’ movements. This is articulated in the main by the labour bureaucracy, which is not only an intermediary between labour and capital, but, showing its social roots, is on occasions entrusted with governmental office. Marxism in contrast represents the scientific expression of the long term interests of the whole working class, which can be summed up as doing what is necessary to realise communism.

Anything that stands between these bourgeois and proletarian ideological poles in the workers’ movement is centrism. Not being solidly based on the interests either of the main classes in capitalist society, centrist ideology is unstable and transient, representing the ebb and flow of alignments inside the movement. We must therefore consider and evaluate centrist trends and groups in terms of the direction in which they are moving.

Those moving to the right must be roundly condemned. Those moving to the left must be encouraged. Here encouragement does

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not, of course, mean concessions should be given to centrism ideologically, No matter how revolutionary the statements of some left centrist groups may be, only by fully embracing Marxism can they provide the working class with a consistent revolutionary guide to action. Anything short of this by definition is in need of criticism.

Having examined centrism generally, let us now turn to it under the conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

2.3. Russia’s revolution
To understand how centrism triumphed in the Soviet Union we must understand the conditions which gave birth to it, and to do that we must understand the dialectics of the Russian Revolution itself.

The revolution presented Marxists with a set of circumstances which even in their wildest dreams (or nightmares) they could not have envisaged. It was not that revolution exploded in Russia before a European conflagration - that was expected. No, what came as a bolt from the blue was that the revolution found itself suffocating because of drawn out isolation.

Lenin had, since 1905, regarded Russia as the centre of the world revolution, a precursor, a spark that could ignite the tinder of world proletarian revolution. Such a role was made possible by capitalism creating a world market, a world economy and a world revolutionary process, something already noted in the late 19th century by Marx and Engels.

Their concrete theorising led them to modify their initial assumption that revolution would develop in more or less direct correlation to the growth of productive forces and the proletariat. Thus instead of putting their first hopes on advanced Britain and France, in 1882 Marx and Engels pointed to the possibility of Russia becoming the “signal for a proletarian revolution in the west” and declared that “today... Russia forms the vanguard of revolutionary action in Europe”. Engels reiterated this position after the death of Marx when he wrote to Vera Zasulich in the following terms: “What I know or believe I know about the situation in Russia makes me think that the Russians are approaching their 1789. The revolution must break out there in a limited period of

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time; it may break out any day. In these circumstances the country is like a charged mine which only needs a match to be applied to it”.

Hence in 1905, and certainly in the wake, of the revolutionary events of 1917, the Marxist-Engelsist Bolsheviks would not have been taken aback in the slightest by their “vanguard” role, their charged mine” position in relation to Europe. They had not the least problem about backward Russia marching in the forefront of the world revolution. The laws of uneven development that made Russia a weak link in the imperialist chain were well known to them. In this light, victory in October 1917 was seen not as an end in itself; for them it was merely a “signal”. The Bolsheviks called upon their European comrades to ‘catch up’. They had “applied the match”, the “proletarian revolution in the west” was now inevitable. Or so they thought.

In the couple of years that followed, this seemed as if it was on the cards.
Europe was exploding with revolutions. Soviet governments were established in Hungary, Bavaria and Finland. However, they proved tragically shortlived. Along with the revolutions in Germany, Austria and elsewhere, they were brutally crushed, primarily as a result of social democratic treachery.

Lenin knew the consequences of defeat would be far reaching and decidedly negative. “Our banking on the world revolution. If you can call it that, has on the whole been fully justified”, Lenin wrote, but its slowness “has landed us with immeasurable difficulties”.\(^{24}\) It was not that making revolution in Russia was ‘premature’, as argued by the Mensheviks, simply that war of the offensive would have to give way to an “immeasurably” difficult war of defence.

Russia was in a ruined state. Between 1914 and 1921 famine, epidemic and war had cut the population by a staggering 13.5 million. Economically things were equally bleak. Even in 1913 national income per capita was about eight to ten times less than the United States. After world war, revolution, and civil war, industry (apart from arms production) had virtually disappeared; agricultural production had fallen by 50%.

A successful revolution in Germany would have greatly eased things. Together Russia and Germany would have proved a powerful combination. Germany, with its advanced economy and highly educated population providing economic aid and technicians,

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would have dynamised Russia. Russia, with its vast expanses and immense mineral and agricultural potential, would have provided Germany with all the raw materials it needed. Interlocked, the two countries would have quickly taken giant strides forward. This would have provided a glowing example for the rest of the world to follow and immeasurably brought forward the final victory of socialism. Living socialism would have been characterised by attractive wealth, progress, cooperation and modernism.

It was not to be. The German revolution, despite dragging on fitfully, finally exhausted itself in 1923. Russia was compelled to temporarily go it alone, and socialism took on the appearance of poverty, famine and the struggle to overcome extreme backwardness. As an Isolated “contingent of the world revolutionary army the communists in Russia were only too aware that for their own final victory it was vital for the revolution to spread to the advanced capitalist countries. Lenin was certainly of this opinion: “complete victory of the socialist revolution in one country is inconceivable and
demands the most active cooperation of at least several countries” 25

But as well as “banking” on world revolution, Lenin recognised that having seized power in a backward country, it would be necessary for the proletariat to develop it culturally and economically; in itself an important contribution to the world revolution.

“But as well as “banking” on world revolution, Lenin recognised that having seized power in a backward country, it would be necessary for the proletariat to develop it culturally and economically; in itself an important contribution to the world revolution.

“Since Soviet power has been established, since the bourgeoisie has been overthrown in one country, the ... task is to wage the struggle on a world scale, on a different plane, the struggle of the proletarian state surrounded by capitalist states.

“This situation is an entirely novel and difficult one.

On the other hand, since the rule of the bourgeoisie has been overthrown, the main task is to organise the development of the country”. 26

So the “entirely novel” situation faced by communists in Russia was firstly isolation, and secondly the necessary task of building the foundations of socialism in a backward and war ravaged country. All Marxists had until then only envisaged socialism in relationship to building from the highest level achieved by capitalism; now they were faced with the prospect and tasks of having to catch up with the leading capitalist countries.

No matter how unpleasant the consequences, this attempt to

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catch up could not be shirked. The alternative was either internal counterrevolution, or conquest by imperialism. That would not help the working class anywhere. Hence Lenin put forward the perspective of economic development in order to maintain proletarian rule in the Soviet Republic. Whatever was achieved in Russia, however, had to be considered in light of the world revolution. As Lenin declared: “While capitalism and socialism exist side by side, they cannot live in peace: one or the other will ultimately triumph - the last obsequies will be observed for either the Soviet Republic or for world capitalism”. 27

Lenin never ruled out the possibility of revolutionary war to liberate Europe from capital, as Napoleon Bonaparte’s armies had swept through and shattered feudal Europe. Yet it soon became painfully obvious that because of Russia’s primitive economic level such a course was impracticable. This was brought sharply home by the failure of the Red Army’s drive on Warsaw in 1920. In place of revolutionary war the policy of peaceful coexistence between states with different social systems came to the fore. Peaceful coexistence, or as Lenin called it peaceful cohabitation, provided
communists in the capitalist countries with the most favourable conditions to make revolution because it strengthened the Soviet state. Peaceful coexistence meant living with capitalism, but for only as long as it took to make revolution and replace the epoch of Imperialism with the epoch of communism. So peaceful coexistence was a tactic subordinate to world revolution and never a form of class collaborationism.

As we said, it had been assumed that socialism would proceed from the highest level obtained by capitalism. Naturally, therefore, it was always thought that the socialist regime would have the active support of the overwhelming majority of the population. In Russia, backwardness was not just an economic and cultural question, it was also a class question. Surrounded by a peasant sea, the proletariat constituted at most 10% of the population in Russia, a figure which shrunk with post-revolution economic dislocation, Internal and external wars.

Proletarian power in Russia rested on the alliance between it and the peasant masses. This alliance was first secured through the Bolshevik promise to bring peace to the peasant army, land to the peasant masses. It had to be maintained. Only through the consent of the peasantry to proletarian rule could the regime survive; on

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that all communists, even in the late 1920s, formally agreed. Constitutionally the proletariat’s leading role had been enshrined in a voting system geared five to one in favour of the workers. All very well, but clearly a stop-gap measure, At the end of the day survival of working class power relied on first, economic recovery, then sustained growth, and finally the domination of industry over agriculture. If this did not happen the days of the dictatorship of the proletariat were numbered.

The Russian economy had by 1920-21 almost ground to a halt. Industrial production continued its downward spiral, famine gripped the towns and as a result discontent was widespread. The ‘war communism’ emergency measures taken to relieve starvation, such as food columns to requisition grain, threatened to snap the link between the workers’ state and the peasant mass. Faced with strikes, especially widespread in Petrograd, and rural disturbances, Lenin and his comrades rushed to retrieve the situation with a package later known as the New Economic Policy. Its aim was to revive trade in order to stimulate production through the market mechanism.
This represented the proletariat sacrificing short term interests for the sake of maintaining its alliance with the peasantry.

The introduction of NEP was a necessary but nonetheless major retreat dictated by the backwardness of the country. Unavoidably it had far-reaching effects on the proletarian order and those administering it. The dichotomy between the primitive economic base of Russia and the socialist superstructure, which had no outside assistance, led to the superstructure being modified. In a sense it was dragged down to more accurately reflect the base. Thus a sort of atavism developed. This led to the abandonment of many communist measures which, while fully in line with the progress of socialism, could not be supported by a culturally and economically backward country. Workers’ democracy, the soviets, intellectual and artistic innovation, the most advanced reforms and even Party democracy fell victim to backwardness.

Let us pick out one area to illustrate this sad truth: workers’ and Party democracy.

The Kronstadt revolt in February 1921 was a staggering blow to the prestige and self-confidence of the Party. It coincided with a fuel and food crisis, large demonstrations and strikes in protest against the government’s policies, rumours of a new war of intervention and rumblings in the countryside. NEP was introduced, but it was not enough.

Lenin demanded organisational measures against what he called “unnecessary discussions”. The Party could ill afford them in such times. Retreat meant that discipline and unity in the Party assumed central importance: “during a retreat discipline is a hundred times necessary” argued Lenin. At the 10th Congress of the Party Lenin won the day and a resolution was passed ordering “the complete abolition of all factionalism”. Disputed issues could still be fully discussed by Party members, but the formation of groups with their own platforms was banned. Showing the seriousness of this, a secret clause was added to the resolution which stipulated that Central Committee members found guilty of factionalism could be expelled by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members.28

Signing the Brest-Litovsk Treaty which bought peace with Germany also saw the dictatorial side of the dictatorship of the proletariat wax and its democratic side wane. Because of the treaty the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries (Left and Right) came out openly against the Soviet regime and, in the words of Y Sverdlov, began “organising armed attacks against the workers and peasants, in association with notorious

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counterrevolutionaries.’ Given the desperate military and economic situation, the Right Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks were banned and excluded” from the soviets in June 1918. Although the ban was lifted from the Mensheviks in November 1918 and from the SRs in February 1919, it was reimposed on the eve of the Introduction of the NEP. The leaderships of both parties found themselves incarcerated, in part because of their real counterrevolutionary activities, but also no doubt in part because of Lenin’s fear that they could have provided a focal point for “unnecessary discussion” which could only but lead to a strengthening of the forces of counterrevolution.

To ensure maximum cohesion in the ranks of the proletariat necessitated sweeping authoritarian measures, even in the Party itself. As a result the Communist Party found itself the sole soviet party. This, like the banning of factions and NEP, was determined not by principle but by the Instability of a proletarian regime struggling to survive in conditions of extreme backwardness.

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2.4. Party and class

According to Lenin, the working class had, with the Civil War, become “declassed”. It had been decimated both by death in battle and a return to peasant life, forced on sections of the proletariat by economic collapse. There were 3.5 million industrial workers in 1913; by 1922 there were only 1,118,000 left. In the three years that followed the revolution, Moscow and Petrograd, the brilliant twin fountainheads of the revolutionary movement, experienced a massive haemorrhaging of population to the countryside - Moscow lost 44.5% and Petrograd 57.5%. What was even worse, the proletariat declined even more in quality than in quantity.

It was those *most committed* to the new order who were *most prepared to die* for it. But for the vanguard de-proletarianisation took other forms too. The best workers were syphoned off into full time positions in the Red Army, the administrative machine and the Communist Party. This was indeed one of Hegel’s Ironies of history. In order to strengthen the proletarian regime the party of proletariat saw its roots in the working class wither, this in spite of being the sole soviet party, despite being the ruling party in the workers’ state. Numerically the Communist Party had grown by leaps and bounds, from 240,000 in August 1917 to 730,000 by February
1921. Yet an increasingly small percentage belonged to factory cells - only 18% in 1923.

What did this mean? Lenin reluctantly concluded that the decline in the quality of the proletariat, its increasing demoralisation, its decreased size, could only mean in practice that “the dictatorship of the proletariat would not work except through the Communist Party”. Even here there was a narrowing. “If we do not close our eyes to reality, we must admit that at the present time the proletarian policy of the Party is not determined by the character of its membership, but by the enormous individual prestige enjoyed by the small group which might be called the Old Guard of the party”.

Not surprisingly, the distinction between Party and state became increasingly formal. With the working class becoming “declassed” and “deactivated”, the soviets lost all dynamism, degenerating from organs of proletarian debate and self-administration into something that resembled the talking shops of bourgeois democracy.

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Thus the role of Sovnarkom (Council of People’s Commissars) steadily shifted to the Party’s Politburo. Having members of the Communist Party occupy leading state positions was one thing. Being in many senses the leading element in the state machine itself was another, it meant that the Communist Party assumed some of the features of an organ of the state, as well as that of a political party.

At first there can be no question that this process fitted in with Lenin’s wishes. He encouraged the merging of certain Party and state functions and bodies. But the institutionalisation of the negative tendencies which appeared during the Civil War - appointment to Party positions from above, Party control over all important state positions - produced a change of mind. What was unavoidable and justified, given the exigencies of war, could, if untreated, mean that the regime itself could become a danger to the regime.

Lenin’s whole political outlook led him never to fear the truth. When he saw problems, he fiercely confronted them and openly presented his solutions in front of both the Party and the masses. Thus in 1922 and 1923 - towards the end of his political life - he became “much preoccupied ... with the growth of bureaucracy in the state and the party”. The result was a series of articles on bureaucracy.

In essence Lenin blamed the growth of bureaucracy on atavism. Communists working in the state administration were being swamped by the old, not least the old Tsarist bureaucracy, the chinovnichestvo, employed by
the Bolsheviks because of their own lack of experience. The reason why the new should be so affected by the old was for Lenin a matter of culture. Compared to the proletariat, the old order possessed a higher form of culture, it was in fact still the dominant culture. Lenin argued in the following manner:

“Something has happened rather like what we learned in our history lessons when we were children: one people subjugates another. The subjugator is then a conquering people and the subjected a vanquished people. This is true enough but what happens to the culture of these two peoples? The answer is not so simple. If the conquering people is more cultured than the vanquished people, the stronger imposes its culture on the weaker. But in the opposite case, the vanquished country may impose its culture on the conqueror. Is this not what happened in the capital of the RSFSR, and were not 4,700 of the best

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Communists (almost a division) submerged by an alien culture? Is it true that one might have the impression that the culture of the vanquished is of a high level? Not so: it is wretched and insignificant. But it is still superior to ours. 33

Thus one might say that Russian backwardness conquered its conqueror (to paraphrase Horace, who said of Rome’s conquest of Greece: “Greece conquered, conquered her ferocious conqueror”). It was this atavism that led to Lenin defining the Soviet Republic as a workers’ state with a bureaucratic twist to it” 34

Given this bureaucratic deformation, Lenin had no Illusions about the building of socialism In Russia. It would be a long tortuous process, during which major tactical retreats would be necessary: the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, the curbing of Party debate, appointment as opposed to election, the effective replacement of soviets by the Party. NEP and the concessions to domestic and foreign capital being the most prominent. However Lenin also noticed that atavism was having its effect on the Party itself, not least because of its pre-eminent position in the country and the merger of the Old Guard with the state.

It quickly became clear that it was no simple matter of the state bureaucracy being permeated with Tsarist officials. It was the culture of the Tsarist bureaucracy that was conquering its conquerors, not so much the Tsarist bureaucracy itself. Bribery, red-tape, insensitivity and nepotism were
not the sole prerogative of former members of the old order. These practices reappeared with a vengeance among the so-called sovbour, the Soviet functionary, who while being a communist, had the maximum Party salary, a chauffeur driven car and the ability to pull all sorts of strings.

Lenin proposed a number of measures, both economic and political. To overcome the country’s economic backwardness he boldly advocated the use of state capitalism, urged communists to learn from the west and called for the development of cooperatives. With these measures and eventual fraternal assistance Lenin believed that a cultural and economic revolution could be accomplished over a couple of decades.

But what was crucial in this perspective was the Party, its health, social composition, and ideological position. To improve the state of the Party Lenin pushed for a purge of membership. Between the 10th Congress in March 1921 and January 1922 about one third of the membership - 215,000 in all - lost their cards.

Yet despite this purge, social composition remained far from satisfactory. In early 1922 only 45% were industrial workers while 26% were peasants and 29% were office workers and intellectuals. As these figures tended to be based on social origins, statistics of actual organisation were more significant. Only 18% of members belonged to factory cells, while 30% were in peasant cells, 24% in army cells and 19% in office cells; and Zinoviev reported that the Old Bolsheviks - those who joined the Party before February 1917 - accounted for only 2% of the membership.

Lenin’s realisation that: We have bureaucrats in our Party institutions as well as Soviet Institutions”, led to a clash with Stalin. Respected bourgeois historian EH Carr tells the story:

“When Lenin returned to work after his first stroke, he was evidently alarmed by the way in which Stalin [who had been appointed general secretary of the Party in April 1922 - JCI had patently built up both the power and authority of his own office, and his personal standing: he was now for the first time a leading figure in the Party. Lenin did not like either of these developments”.

Although he had an outstanding record, first as a revolutionary and then as a leader of the Soviet state, Stalin personified the triumph of the old Tsarist culture over the new order. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than on the question of the Interrelationship between the various nationalities
under Soviet rule. Stalin might have been a Georgian, but Lenin declared that his outlook had come to be that of a Great-Russian chauvinist.

As Commissar of Nationalities, Stalin had proposed the incorporation of the non-Russian Soviet Republics into the Russian republic. When Lenin opposed this autonomisation’ plan, Stalin accused him of being a “national liberal”. But at the end of the day, because of Lenin’s authority, it was “national liberalism” that triumphed, and the USSR was formed on the basis of equality of rights, and the freedom to secede.

This was not the end of dispute around national rights. Lenin discovered the brutal and Great Russian chauvinist treatment Stalin, Orjonikidze (also a Georgian), and Dzerzhinsky (a Pole) had meted out to the local Georgian communists. In an effort to force Georgia to merge into a Transcaucasian Soviet Republic they removed the recusant Georgian Party leadership. Orjonikidze had even struck one of the Georgian leaders, “acting more like an

arrogant satrap than a proletarian internationalist” (Lenin).

Lenin considered that: “Stalin’s haste, his Infatuation with pure administration, together with his spite against notorious ‘national chauvinism’, played a fatal role”. Turning the tables on Stalin’s attack on the “nationalism” of the Georgian leadership, he made the point that: “The Georgian”... who carelessly flings about accusations ‘nationalist-socialism’ (whereas he himself is a real and true nationalist-socialist’, and even a vulgar Great-Russian bully), violates, in substance, the Interests of proletarian class solidarity”.

But the national question was not the only area of dispute between Lenin and Stalin during the latter’s resistable rise. Another area of dispute was the Workers and Peasants’ Inspectorate. Grotesquely this body, established under Stalin in an effort to combat bureaucracy and red-tapism, mushroomed into a giant bureaucratic institution in its own right. Lenin called for it to be thoroughly reorganised and given a new direction.

Towards the end of 1922, Lenin’s health began to deteriorate rapidly. Fearing death, he began to frantically dictate notes for the next Party congress. These notes became known as Lenin’s Testament. With almost prophetic accuracy Lenin warned of two great dangers he thought could jeopardize the regime. One was the breaking of the alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry, though this was something he thought distant and Improbable. The second was the danger of a split in the Party Itself, specifically between its two leading personalities Stalin and Trotsky.
It is clear from these notes that while Lenin sought to curb Stalin’s power, he had no intention of expressing a preference between the two most powerful Party leaders. He contented himself with issuing a warning of a split between them. Instead of crowning an heir, Lenin advocated the continuation of the existing binary state of affairs which existed below him.

Ten days after writing his Testament things changed. He added a postscript. This postscript entirely changed the balance. Lenin proposed that Stalin should be removed as general secretary.

“Stalin is too rude, and this defect, though quite tolerable in our midst and in dealings among us Communists, becomes intolerable in a general secretary. That is why I suggest that the comrades think about a way to remove Stalin from that post and appoint in his place another man who in all respects differs from Comrade Stalin in his superiority,”

And a short time after writing this, Lenin broke off all “comradely relations” with Stalin, apparently after Stalin had “grossly insulted” his wife Krupskaya. However, Lenin’s struggle against Stalin came to an abrupt end. Tragically, three days after this break in comradely relations, Lenin suffered his third stroke. It left him completely paralysed and despite hanging on for nearly another year his political life was finished. He never recovered, dying on January 21 1924 at the age of 54.

2.5. Genesis of centrism

Some regard the days when Lenin was leader of the Soviet Republic as a democratic golden age. The truth was different. As we have shown, Lenin himself was well aware of that. Although the Soviet Republic was synonymous with the dictatorship of the proletariat, the passive proletariat could only exercise power indirectly through the Communist Party, which had to use authoritarian methods to run the country.

Hence there existed a discrepancy between form and essence. In essence the dictatorship of the proletariat is the unfettered, unrestricted, rule of the proletariat. That was hardly the situation in a Soviet Union characterised by
Lenin as “a workers’ state with bureaucratic distortions”. The result of these bureaucratic distortions is summed up by French Eurocommunist historian, Jean Ellenstein:

“…in 1923 the Soviet Union was a country where neither freedom of speech, nor freedom to hold meetings and belong to associations nor free elections existed, where power was in the hands of a single party and within that party in the hands of a small group of men (a few thousand at most), and where the political police remained all powerful, where neither democratic traditions nor institutions existed, because of the very conditions under which the revolution triumphed.”

If we take full account of Russia’s backwardness, this state of affairs should not surprise us in the least. Marxists after all recognise that in the last analysis production lies at the base of all social structures. Taking this idea and applying it to Russia in a mechanical way would obviously lead us to the conclusion that the country possessed absolutely no prerequisites for socialism, that it could not have a proletarian revolution. Such a Menshevik conclusion would however be wrong, not only in practice, as was shown by October 1917, but theoretically too.

Neither Russia nor anywhere else dominated by imperialism can be considered without putting it into the context of the world as a whole. With Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism, it is the world as a whole that is ripe for socialism - a ripeness that manifests itself even in a backward country like Russia, simply because of the effects of combined development. This, what is now called globalisation, draws everything into the vortex of capitalist development. As a result, the contradictions in pre-revolutionary Russia could only be resolved positively by carrying a 1789-type, revolution *uninterruptedly* through to socialist tasks. Russia, despite its backwardness and its unavoidable bureaucratic distortions, could only liberate itself by taking a road which went way beyond democratic tasks.

Here we must look at socialism in comparative terms. It is essential to remember how capitalism finally triumphs. In a very real sense it emerged from within feudalism as a mode of production which had already come to *dominance* along with a class that was ready to rule directly. This is not the case with communism. The struggle for communism only *begins* with the seizure of state power by the proletariat. Socialism, which inherits its economic base directly from capitalism, is only communism in embryonic form. Moreover it is a society where the new ruling class is not yet ready to rule directly. This is only changed through the development of communism,
where the working class finds true liberation, characterised as it is by distribution according to need. Thus communism is our real aim; socialism is merely the means to achieve it.

It is in relationship to the struggle for communism that political forces under socialism must be judged. Basically we support those forces seeking despite tactical retreats to advance towards communism. If they take this orientation then, whatever criticisms we may have on this or that issue, differences could only be tactical and a matter of emphasis. On the other hand, those who advocate reconciliation with capitalism, or for that matter attempt to perpetuate transitional conditions, must be criticised because of their entire strategy, be it conscious or unconscious.

There can be no doubt that Lenin fought with every ounce of his strength to orientate the proletarian state towards the goal of communism. This is what led him to confront the worst effects of bureaucracy. He recognised that Russia’s poverty was bound to have far reaching negative effects. That did not mean passive acceptance. Lenin tenaciously fought to overcome backwardness through organising the economy and above all through “banking” on the victory of world revolution. Because of Its newness, Lenin did not develop a theoretical analysis of bureaucratic socialism, what he left us is mainly fragmentary, concerning as it does symptoms rather than the disease itself. Undoubtedly if he had lived a full diagnosis would have assumed cardinal importance. Lenin being Lenin, this would have gone hand in hand with a cure, le political struggle.

As we know, Lenin wanted to curb Stalin’s power. In 1926 Krupskaya put it more strongly. She insisted that Lenin was determined to “crush Stalin politically”: however, showing the depths of her then pessimism, she said that: if Ilyich were alive today, he would probably already be in prison”. Yet although there is good reason to believe that with good health this would not have been the case, at the end we must confront concrete reality. Stalin could have been defeated and the worst manifestations of bureaucracy eliminated. But the fact was that Stalin triumphed. He not only crushed his opponents politically but physically eliminated them in an orgy of terror.

Stalin did not emerge as leader of the Soviet state and Party simply because of ruthlessness and mastery of tactics (qualities he possessed in no
short measure). His victory was the victory of the political trend he personified - the Soviet labour bureaucracy. Its victory meant swimming with the tide in a period of retreat, it meant turning Lenin’s tactical retreats into strategic ones. However, what it did not amount to was a social counterrevolution.

Unlike the labour bureaucracy in capitalist countries, which has a material interest in the continuation of capitalism, the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union had a material interest in the continuation of a form of socialism. Its parasitic privileges were entirely due to the October Revolution and in order to maintain those privileges it was forced to defend the socialist system.

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The Soviet labour bureaucracy did not have a long history. It was purely a post-revolutionary phenomenon that emerged through the merging of Party and state Institutions, the creation of a standing Red Army, against a background of working class deactivisation and extreme economic backwardness.

There can be no doubt that the bureaucracy was a distinct and rapidly growing social stratum. Leaving aside state and army, its growth can be seen in the number of full time Party officials. In August 1922 there were 15,325, and around 20,000 at the time of the 14th Congress in 1925; but by 1938 Stalin is reported as vaguely” saying that the number had reached a staggering 150,000 to 190,000.44

As time went by the privileges of the Party and higher state employees greatly increased, and although even Cold War warriors admit that there were those who “displayed a fanatical austerity and devotion”, it cannot be denied that there were many who were tempted to abuse their privileged position45

It is inconceivable that a young workers’ state, especially one with the primitive economic base of Russia, could dispense with a bureaucracy. But given this, the key question was to what extent would the bureaucracy be allowed to pursue its own interests? This question is decided politically, decided by the balance of forces nationally and internationally. In Soviet conditions this was fought out first and foremost in the Party.

The Communist Party by its very nature unites in its ranks individuals from a wide variety of social backgrounds - not only manual workers but clerks, peasants, artisans, Intellectuals and even some from the exploiting classes. Despite this diverse range of backgrounds these elements can be
fused into a single alloy embodying the long term interests of the proletariat. What causes this fusion to take place is the unyielding struggle to unite the Party around scientific socialism, something organisationally expressed through democratic centralism.

This went for the Communist Party in Russia. Although the largest section in it were workers, others came from a variety of backgrounds and its leadership almost exclusively from the intelligentsia. Yet in spite of this, ideologically, who can think of a more working class body than the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party in October 1917, which only contained one worker by social origin.

Following the great struggle to maintain power against internal and external counterrevolution, however, a cooling of ardour and even disillusionment was to be expected. This was especially so given the series of major tactical retreats in Russia and the defeats of the proletariat internationally culminating in the October 1923 fiasco in Germany. Taken together with restrictions on democracy - leaving the Communist Party as the sole Soviet party - differentiation began to set in, not least as various classes and strata began to seek political expression through the Party, as they had no other channel.

Again we must consider the relationship between society’s economic base and its superstructure. In the Soviet Union the discrepancy between the two was a powerful factor behind differentiation in the Party. Not only was there a certain ‘dragging down’ of the most advanced reforms because of the country’s primitive economic base, but under socialism in general the superstructure displays a much greater degree of ‘autonomy’ than under normal capitalism. The nationalisation of large scale Industry and the role of the state in subsequently planning production is obviously one factor leading to greater relative autonomy. But in Russia the ruling class, the proletariat, unlike the situation under capitalism, did not have the same cultural level as those who ran the state.

These two factors taken together could only but take the relative independence of the state to extreme heights. Indeed it created the conditions whereby the bureaucracy could break free from the political terra firma of its class base and become “master of society”. To justify this, the fact that the bureaucracy operated as a distinct privileged social caste, a mystifying ideology was obviously needed. Given all the factors we have mentioned so
far, it could neither be genuine Marxism nor pro-capitalist reformism. Soviet centrism had to be invented. It was. A cobbled together ‘Marxist’ ideology was the result. This Soviet centrism justified adaptation to Russia’s backwardness and legitimised the bureaucracy’s monopoly over the state.

As we have said, centrism stands between reform and revolution. Soviet centrism did this, but it did so in its own particular way. A particular way that made it centrism *sui generis*. We can locate three particular features which distinguish it from Kautskyite classic’ centrism.

1. It reflected economic and social backwardness. This can be seen

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in lack of debate, a crude and cavalier attitude towards truth, and a leadership cult.

2. It served a social stratum which gained its privileges to the detriment of socialism, yet a privileged stratum that was conscious that it owed those privileges to the socialist economic base. What this produced was a contradictory ideology that denied the existence of the bureaucracy and its privileges and portrayed the governing stratum as serving society as a whole, presenting a picture of the imminent realisation of utopia.

3. In spite of sharing the unstable, transitionary features of ‘classic’ centrism, it was far more durable and solid because it was the ideology of a caste, if not a class, running a world power.

2.5.1. Trends of socialism

Socialism, because of its transitionary nature, can go back, try to stay still or go forward. It is in relationship to these possibilities that we approach the major political trends that emerged in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. The nature of Soviet politics at this time, the fact that active, influential, real debate was confined to a very thin top stratum meant that the struggle between these trends took the form of a split in the Central Committee and a clash of wills between its leading individuals (what Lenin called the *main danger* in his Testament - in it he only referred to six individuals, of whom two became leaders of the Left Opposition, Trotsky and Pyatakov, two later joined them in forming the United Opposition, that is, Zinoviev and
Kamenev, while the remaining two, Stalin and Bukharin, led the centre-right bloc until 1928).

Because they existed in the top echelons of the Soviet regime, the various factions, blocs, majorities and trends that were organised around these individuals did not in the main have a closely defined, active base among the mass of the population; they did, though, broadly correspond politically with the interests of the various strata existing under the conditions of the dictatorship of -the proletariat.

Although they all put forward perspectives for advancing production, the way we judge them is not simply a matter of indexes of industrial or agricultural production. We must also look at the relative weights assigned to the various social strata in relation to

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the economy and the state, and the extent that they sought to further the world revolution.

So before further examining the progress of Stalin centristism specifically and Soviet bureaucratic centristism in general, let us briefly look at its rivals in the 1920s.

The left groupings of the 1920s represented the ‘go forward’ tendency in the Party, corresponding broadly to the long term interests of the proletariat. They called for the restoration of Party democracy and a determined push for industrialisation through planning and a banking on world revolution. Nevertheless, they were not without faults. The Left Opposition, for example, like the Left Communists and Workers’ Opposition before it, suffered from impatience and a degree of utopianism. But the main problem with Trotsky’s Left Opposition was its technocratism.

This technocratism was referred to by Lenin in his Testament. “Comrade Trotsky”, said Lenin, is personally perhaps the most capable man in the present Central Committee, but he has displayed excessive self-assurance and shown excessive preoccupation with the purely administrative side of the work.” Ditto with the other Left Opposition leader to be, Pyatakov: “he is unquestionably a man of outstanding ability” said Lenin, “but shows too much zeal for administration and the purely administrative side of work”.48

Trotsky’s - “we suffer, not because we adopt the bad sides of bureaucracy, but because we have failed so far to learn the good ones” - technocratic approach led him, when he was In a position of power, when he was the ‘prophet armed, to advocate the most authoritarian measures, Including the militarisation of the trade unions. Hardly something that would have endeared him to the proletariat when he was out of power, when he was
the “prophet unarmed”. Furthermore because it was born out of a technocratic ethos, when, at the last moment, the Left Opposition attempted to rally mass support it utterly failed (what support it did get came mainly from members of the Komsomol and Red Army).

It was not only the past that weighed heavily on the leader of the Left Opposition. EH Carr writes that: ‘The growing power of the party organisation, the lack of any positive or popularly presented alternative programme, fear of victimisation In a period of widespread unemployment, the weakness In numbers and in radical traditions of the Russian working class” all contributed “to the rout of the opposition”.

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While the main reason for the defeat of the Left Opposition we can extract from the above list was the objective concentration of power at the top of the Party, we cannot deny subjective factors. Lenin, we are sure, could have galvanised the Party and working class because of his immense political skill, authority and prestige among all sections of the Party as well as the masses. Not Trotsky. Where Lenin would have had a large body of support on the Central Committee and a popular base, Trotsky, in no small part because of his arrogance and pre-1917 anti-Bolshevik record, and his technocratism, found, himself almost alone. Moreover, when he did organise an oppositionist faction, he led it to one tactical blunder after another.

Again we see the crucial role of the individual. Faced with a struggle for the body and soul of the Party, Trotsky proved unequal to the task. For two or three years following Lenin’s death Trotsky suffered from a strange illness, which put him out of action on many important occasions (quite possibly the malady was psychosomatic). But that was the least of his problems.

When Trotsky opened his attack on “sectarian bureaucratism” in late 1923 he did not come out publicly: instead he confined himself to penning letters to the Central Committee and allowing their contents to percolate down into the ranks of the Party. Undoubtedly they met with a certain degree of sympathy. Hence although the Central Committee criticised his behind the scenes sponsorship of an oppositionist platform as a “profound political error”, the majority gave way to him on a whole range of principles. They recognised “the unequal importance of Gosplan”, the danger of “bureaucratisation”, the “degeneration under NEP of a section of party workers” and the need for more “workers’ democracy”. But Trotsky was unable to follow it through. With Lenin out the way he was a lone figure, feared and regarded with jealousy by other top leaders of the Party, who were
easily able to outmanoeuvre him and gain his silence - something he only broke two years later.

The fact that the leader of the Left Opposition was Trotsky contributed to the ease of its defeat and the fact that its supporters were prone to vacillation and often despair. Having said that, though, it is important to restate that the Left Opposition did raise a ‘go forward’ banner and therefore must be regarded as progressive.

A more weighty and significant left opposition emerged in 1925. In mid 1925 the slowly recovering economy of the USSR suffered a severe setback. Agricultural deliveries to the towns declined and as a result living conditions of workers deteriorated. Bukharin and the right proposed a neo-NEP, which would offer further concessions to the peasants, especially the kulaks, who they argued would become peacefully integrated into socialism in spite of their emergence as a rural capitalist class.

The reaction among other Old Bolsheviks was different. Those who had been closest to Lenin in pre-1917 days were not against tactical retreats, they were against turning the politics of retreat into a full blown doctrine. Instead of suspending the class struggle and claiming that socialism could be fully built In the USSR without outside assistance, they fought for a proletarian line.

Zinoviev, president of Comintern from its foundation till 1926, in particular made himself spokesman for this trend. In The philosophy of an epoch and the book Leninism he polemicised against those pressing for more concessions to the forces of commodity production at the expense of the proletariat. Above all he took up the cudgels against ‘national socialism’ (one year before Trotsky), declaring that socialism in the Soviet Union had to be built as part of the world revolution. Going it alone could prove disastrous. Progress in the economy could be made, but, he argued, because of internal and external dangers the Soviet Union could not build full socialism, which had to go hand in hand with the withering away of the state and the merging of classes.

Zinoviev’s platform was backed by the Leningrad Party as well as many leading comrades, including Kamenev, Sokolnikov and Krupskaya. Despite this, Stalin, because of his domination of the Party machine and a new alliance with the right, succeeded in defeating this opposition. At the 14th Congress, delegates “on both sides, nominally elected by their Party constituencies had been hand-picked by the Party organisations, and a solid phalanx of Leningraders were Isolated In a hostile audience”. The result

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was a walk-over; the 65 Leningrad delegates were swamped by the “hand-picked” 559 delegates supporting the right-centre bloc.

Yet again we see the role of the individual, Trotsky, illustrated negatively. In spite of the similarity between his politics and those advanced by Zinoviev, Kamenev, Krupskaya and Sokolnikov at the 14th Congress and previously on the Central Committee. Trotsky did not speak in their support. His grudge against Zinoviev and Kamenev meant he looked upon the monumental fight which

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began under his nose on the Central Committee and continued at the 14th Congress, with disdain, even contempt. As a result, the Left Opposition remained passive; a major tactical mistake only rectified when the decisive moment had passed when the short-lived United Opposition was formed.

While Trotsky was capable of penetrating theoretical insights and had tremendous energy, his genius was flawed by a consistent inability to fully identify himself with the Party. He was a man of the revolution, not the Party. When the revolutionary wave reached its peak in 1905 and 1917, Trotsky stood like a giant. But in ‘normal times’, especially in times of reaction, Trotsky was pathetic.

The brilliant ‘non-factional’ gadfly who, in the years before 1917, specialised in attacking the “Jacobin-social democrat” Lenin and the Bolsheviks for their refusal to patch up their ‘trifling’ differences with the “orthodox wing of the Party”, the Mensheviks, did not learn from his own history. Under very different conditions he was thus doomed to repeat the very same mistake.

After he was edged aside in 1923 by Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin from the very top echelons of the Party, Trotsky retreated into a period of self-imposed purdah. Putting personal feelings before politics led to the worst sort of behaviour. His sympathetic biographer Isaac Deutcher tells how between 1923 and 1925 he would turn up at Central Committee meetings “dutifully... take his seat, open a book - most often a French novel - and become so engrossed as to take no notice of the deliberations”. From here on the history of Trotsky and Trotskyism was a history of ironies.

Thanks to Trotsky’s brave refusal to recant his views, Stalin exiled him abroad. Ironically, this saved him from the fate suffered by Zinoviev, Kamenev and countless others who did recant, and allowed him to heap odium on Stalin from relative safety. Unfortunately, in these writings hatred
of Stalin led Trotsky into a subjective dismissal of the whole world communist movement as counterrevolutionary” and the formation of that mockery of a proletarian international, the ‘Fourth International’. Again ironically, after Trotsky had ordered his followers to join the counter-revolutionary parties of social democracy, in China, Korea, Vietnam and In Eastern Europe the “counterrevolutionary” communist parties headed the overthrow of capitalism. The final irony was that entering social democracy in order to revolutionise sections of it, most fragments of the ‘Fourth International’ have become Indistinguishable from social democracy.

Let us now deal with the right. Having been one of the leading members of the Left Communist faction in 1918, Bukharin flipped 180 degrees after the death of Lenin and became the main spokesperson for the right in the Party, a tendency defined by its systematic defence of NEP as a strategy for socialism. Bukharin - “the favourite of the whole Party” - was prone to such an about-turn no doubt because of his rather “scholastic” theory, which Lenin said could be “classified as fully Marxist only with great reserve”.

But the ‘market socialist’ strategy advocated by Bukharin and the right was neither a matter of theoretical nuance nor abstract debate.

Bukharin and the other main leaders of the right, Rykov and Tomsky, were against any further revolutionary or violent social upheavals in Russia, believing that full socialism could be achieved through an indefinite continuation of NEP. To ensure stability, the passage of all classes - including capitalists - into the socialist order through the eye of the NEP needle, the right favoured repeated concessions to the forces of the market and petty-commodity production.

This, the right conceded, would mean slow economic progress at first; to quote Bukharin. Industrialisation would proceed “at the pace of the peasant’s nag”. No matter, if industry “turned its face to the village” and pushed the village “from the remote backgrounds of history into its front rank”, through ‘Americanising’ it on a socialist basis”, this would “ensure the maximum rate of development”.54 Thus, in his mind, the countryside was the motor of industry, and that is why he called upon the peasants to “enrich yourselves”.

The ‘grain crisis’ of 1928 punctured NEP and the ‘market socialism’ of the right. Without sufficient goods to tempt them from industry, the peasants acted according to the rationale of the market and decided not to sell their grain at the prices set by the state. The cities were threatened with starvation and the proletarian-peasant alliance with total breakdown. Either agriculture
had to be reorganised along socialist lines or the proletarian state would have to enormously increase the price at which it bought grain and hence create the conditions for the growth of a powerful rural capitalist class. This posed the danger of a fundamental shift in the balance of class forces within the Soviet Union.

The right was paralysed. Bukharin - unquestionably, as Lenin

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said, “a valuable and major theorist” - thrashed around in an attempt to explain the crisis. He wrote about a “reversed” capitalist crisis, tried to give it a positive gloss and quoted extensively from Capital Vol 2 on the need to achieve proportionality between departments I and II. But other than arguing for NEP business as usual and musing about the possibility of taking “a few steps In the direction of Lenin’s commune state”, he had nothing to offer.55

It was not, as Trotsky warned, the right and Bukharin who crushed the centrists and Stalin. With the left out of the way. Stalin laid hold of its programme and used it for his own purposes. This applied to the left’s political slogans as well as its economic programme. Stalin suddenly began to write about the “historically constituted set of leaders” losing contact with the masses, how the “Party monopoly was carried to absurd lengths”, how the “voice of the rank and file” had been “stifled”, how bureaucracy “is one of the worst enemies” and how the “communist bureaucrat is the most dangerous”.56 Because Stalin alone possessed a positive programme, it was he and his tendency which triumphed. It was Bukharin and the right who suffered defeat.

Although the right was not counterrevolutionary, it sought to conciliate the forces of capitalism and thus objectively strengthen the basis for capitalism. Stalin rightly declared that a victory of the right “would mean an enormous strengthening of the capitalist elements in our country. And what does the strengthening of the capitalist elements in our country mean? It means weakening the proletarian dictatorship and increasing the chances of the restoration of capitalism” 57

This did not stop Stalin and the centrists maintaining a bloc with the right for five years. In fact until 1928 they had the same socialism in one country’, NEP, authoritarian programme. But where the right was strategically wedded to NEP, Stalin and the centre travelled lighter; in conversation with Kamenev, Bukharin reportedly described Stalin as “an unprincipled Intriguer, who subordinates everything to the preservation of his own power”. Once Stalin had succeeded in expelling Trotsky from the Party he
embarked on a programme of collectivisation and industrialisation which assumed a pace and scope never dreamed of by the left super-industrialisers’.

One thing amply illustrated by Stalin’s left shift was the volatile nature of centrism, which was then far from conservative, indeed

it was capable of boomeranging from right centrism to ultra-left centrism almost overnight. Bukharin attacked Stalin’s Industrialisation plans, which he said were “accompanied by a lack of resources”, as “close to adventurism” (he was supported by the non-Party experts in this). But the right was swept aside with consummate ease, defeated not least because of its lack of courage and unwillingness to engage in a decisive struggle which drew on forces from outside the Party. In other words it was unwilling to mobilise the Nepmen, the kulaks, the forces of counterrevolution. Inside the Party machine it could never hope for victory over Stalin and the centrists, who. In a real sense, were the Party machine.

2.5.2. Collectivisation and Industrialisation

The contradictory nature of Stalin centrism and Soviet bureaucratic centrism can be seen if we examine the collectivisation and industrialisation of the first five year plan. Contradictorily, the second revolution’ led to a rapid growth of the economy, strengthened socialism economically but weakened it politically. The size of the working class greatly increased, the peasantry was put on the road of proletarianisation and the USSR became a power of world standing. Yet the masses suffered in order to pay for this and there was an increased differentiation between them and the top labour bureaucracy, which came to enjoy and expect luxury. What Is more, the Stalin centrists turned to terror as a standard political and economic weapon in society, and using this method in the Party they sought to obliterate all possible opposition. Not surprisingly, the last trace of workers’ and Party democracy was extinguished as the political monopoly of the centrist bureaucracy became absolute through the medium of Stalin’s triumphant personality cult.

The Initial 1928 plans for rapid economic growth led recanting former left opposition leaders, such as Preobrazhensky, Pyatakov, and Radek, to declare that Stalin had been forced to take up their banner. But even these ‘super-Industrialisers’ must have been left breathless as Stalin and Molotov
leap-frogged one unrealistic figure after another. The plans outlined at the 15th Congress were dismissed by Stalin a few months later as ‘conservative’, and a five year plan was launched which not only envisaged a 183% Increase in national Income and a 181% growth of Industry, but a breakneck pace of collectivisation. At weekly and monthly Intervals new, successively higher, targets were set.

Almost straightaway Molotov expressed his satisfaction at the results in the countryside and even predicted that complete collectivisation would be achieved by 1930. “The countryside”, he declared with frightening accuracy, “is being turned upside down, in fact it has changed into a boiling sea.” And in a move which was to become the norm, Stalin presented the Party with a fait accompli in December 1929 when he called for the liquidation of the kulaks “as a class” without a Party congress, conference, or even Central Committee meeting. Stalin’s word had become law.

Bureaucratic collectivisation triggered a wave of terror and destruction in the villages. Tens of thousands of real kulaks were deported to work camps, and under the lash of central targets officials were forced to mete out the same unjust measures to millions of middle peasants. In a spontaneous answer, an orgy of gluttony followed. The peasants halved the country’s livestock so as to keep collectivised stock, even if it was In the privacy of their bellies. The result of Stalin’s bureaucratic and rushed approach to collectivisation was predictable - famine.

Stalin panicked, in an article, Dizzy with Success, published In Pravda, he called for the brakes to be put on forced collectivisation, and in an effort to shift the blame for the negative effects of his ‘plans’ he chided “comrades ... who for the moment have lost clearness of mind and sobriety of vision”. This shabby attempt to blame rank and file cadres for the blunders of the leadership is typical of centrism. “There is of course no doubt that Stalin’s exemption of himself and the Central Committee from criticism was a crude evasion of responsibility. His own remarks and the speeches of his close associate Molotov, at the November Plenum, greatly encouraged regional party committees to press lower organisations for a high level of collectivisation”.

Nevertheless, when it came to the economy, barbarity did overcome barbarity. Although crazy targets were nowhere near met, the potential dynamism of socialism was definitely proved. Stalin proposed to increase steel production from 4.0 to 10.4 million tons and electricity from 5.05 to
22.0 milliard KWhs, all between the years 1928 to 1932. The results fell far short. However, they were impressive: steel 5.9 million tons, electricity 13.4 milliard KWhs.⁶⁰

Back in 1921 Preobrazhensky produced a series of articles in which he formulated “the fundamental law of socialist accumulation” (published as the New Economics in 1926). He reasoned that socialism could only develop through planning unequal exchange between Industry and agriculture. The resultant surplus being used to finance what he called primitive or primary socialist accumulation.

These ideas were denounced by the right-centre bloc, including Stalin, because they supposedly jeopardised the link between the proletariat and the peasantry. Nonetheless, as we said, in 1928-29 he laid hold of them with a vengeance. In his hands the peasantry were not only ‘exploited’, as Preobrazhensky had proposed. They were expropriated in the “manner of old Russia” (Bukharin). Furthermore, in a twist Preobrazhensky had not thought of, the working class was likewise squeezed in the “manner of old Russia”. Working class living conditions deteriorated and all that remained of its right to govern was the obligation to conform.

Between 1927 and 1932 the number of workers shot up from 11 million to near 23 million. Not only did vast numbers of peasants flock into the cities and new factories, but unemployment was eliminated. These positive developments were bound to cause certain negative side effects. Time keeping and general labour discipline were new concepts for those from the land. Overcrowding in the towns became appalling. It became the norm for families to share flats, and even to divide a room. And because of dissatisfaction, labour turnover became phenomenal - in 1930 it reached a peak of 152.4%.

Partially as a result of the influx of new unskilled labour and the increased frequency of female labour, but centrally because of the need to provide finance for the plan, wages declined dramatically. “The fact... seems to be clear; 1933 was the culmination of the most precipitous peacetime decline in living standards known to history”.⁶¹ Estimates of the fall in wages vary, but a decline of 40% seems to be a generally accepted figure. To this we must add the decline in the ‘social wage’, the quality of social services,

Such developments coincided with a further shift in the balance of political power within the regime, not between town and countryside as Trotsky had initially feared, but between the formal ruling class and its formal servant, the state and Party bureaucracy. The ruling class found its
dictatorship turned “against itself by its

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alienated state over which it could not really rule.

For some this was not another quantitative tightening of the “bureaucratic twist”, it was a qualitative leap back to capitalism. Tony Cliff and his followers argue that the first five year plan was the moment of counterrevolution. With it, they argue, the bureaucracy transformed itself into a capitalist class, which collectively extracts surplus value from an “atomised” working class. “Russian” - Cliff refuses to call the Soviet Union by its Internationally recognised name - “bureaucratic state capitalism” represents the “purest personification” of the capitalist class, and thus a higher form of capitalism than In the USA or Britain.

In order to “prove” the state capitalist thesis, Cliff and Co mercilessly distort Marxist categories such as value and capitalist accumulation. A feat achieved by drawing all sorts of parallels between the Soviet Union, the Chaldean kings, the medieval Catholic church and Nazi Germany, a crude simplification - like saying sharks, ichthyosaurs and dolphins are the same because they look the same.

The fact of the matter is that although the first five year plan represented an important turning point, the bureaucracy did not usher in the most “extreme form” of capitalist society based on a combination of the so-called “permanent arms economy” and the ruthless exploitation of the working class. The bureaucratic plan mainly succeeded through quantity (a diminishing return). It could, at a “stroke”, increase the number of workers, the hours of work, the number of power plants, the number of factories, the number of products. But it did so in a military, not capitalist, fashion.

While capitalism is periodically plunged into crisis, which has at its heart the overproduction of capital and the overproduction of commodities - not, as Cliff would have it, the underconsumption of the masses - Soviet society grew at an amazing rate, not least in the midst of world capitalism’s great crash of 1929-32. What characterised Soviet society in the early 1930s and throughout its existence was not overproduction but bureaucratic irrationality, generalised inefficiency and the underproduction of use values in virtually all spheres (not only the means of consumption).

Cliff can point to the increase in hours worked by Soviet workers, piece rates, the deterioration in living standards and working conditions. But what he fails to face up to is that there was a
permanent failure to systematically increase the quality of labour and the quality of products. It is precisely because of this that the state was forced to introduce the draconian measures Cliff lists in his *State capitalism*.

Yes, trade unions were neutered, elections dispensed with, and between 1932 and 1949 the All-Union TUC failed to meet. However, the reason trade unions were reduced to an arm of the state machine, a mere docile appendage - as Trotsky had once wanted - was the failure to get workers to work harder. Anyone who has ever visited a Soviet factory will know that the pace of work is far below that in Britain. The same reason lies behind other essentially *police* measures like the abolition of collective bargaining, the legally binding government directives and work norms and desperate attempts to reduce the massive labour turnover rates.

What we need to recognise is that in spite of a loss of rights the working class exercised *negative control over production*. To overcome it Stalin issued one law after another. Not only Labour Books, which were meant to stop workers easily changing their jobs, but laws against absenteeism and strikes. The fact is, though, that managers hardly ever enforced these laws. They were more concerned to keep workers, and *connived* with them when they fancied a day off or turned up drunk. In a society of *underproduction* and *labour shortage*, workers were valuable and were thus hoarded by managers eager to fulfil quantitative targets.

The same basic problem can be seen in areas of *non-free labour* - the importance of which is much exaggerated by Cliff. In order to carry through the ‘second revolution’ and enforce it there was a rapid growth in the numbers in penal camps. In 1928, 30,000 were detained. This figure sky-rocketed to 662,257 in 1930, a figure dwarfed by the estimated 2 million in the following year and again “leap-frogged”. By 1933-5 the number was around 5 million, and it is thought that in 1942 the population of the camps stood at its peak of between 8 to 15 million, which included children.

Certainly after 1929 political repression “took on an economic content”. Political prisoners were expected to pay for their daily bread and more. Yet while camp labour became a “linchpin” for industrialisation in distant and underdeveloped regions, this *non-economic coercion* represented a massive waste of human resources. This was bureaucratic substitution of *qualitative* free labour for *quantitative* unfree labour. As such it represented yet
another *relative* fetter on the development of the productive forces, not an example of the highest stage of capitalism. In cold economic terms there can be no doubt that in the 20th century using free’ labour would have been far more efficient.

Nevertheless, while we can dismiss the theory of state capitalism, we cannot afford to dismiss the relative truths it tells us about certain features of Soviet society, above all the fact that the working class can only be considered to remain the ruling class because of where Soviet society had evolved from and because impulses in its bureaucracy for a return to capitalism were weak.

As we have said, the first five year plan was at heart contradictory. For every step forward economically, there was a step back politically. On a macro level the industrialisation drive led to an acute scarcity of skilled labour. With the continued existence of bourgeois right, the introduction of incentives for workers to learn new skills and stay on the job’ was natural. A new wage scale was introduced which stretched the differentials between skilled and unskilled to a maximum of 3.7:1. Economically this made some sense. Yet Instead of saying this was a necessary short term measure, Stalin launched a concerted political campaign against “egalitarianism” under which he erroneously claimed moves towards narrowing differentials were completely un-Marxist. He refused to admit that socialism had been forced to retreat from its basic precepts. Stalin hid the reality of retreat by turning principles on to their heads.

As we said, Increased differentials inside the working class could be justified. This could not be said of the abandonment of the principle that state officials who were members of the Party should be paid no more than a skilled worker. Abandonment of this principle had far reaching ramifications,

Already in 1928 71.4% of the personnel of boards of managers were Party members. With the abolition of the Party maximum, these functionaries came to earn four or five times the average skilled worker’s wages, and on top of this privilege they enjoyed second homes, special shops, hospitals and schools for their children. High-up government officials did even better. In 1936 the average worker’s wage was 231 roubles per month, the presidents and vice-presidents of the Council of the Union and the Council of Nationalities received 25,000 roubles per month. Numerous other examples could be given to show that during the 1930s the social
gap between the workers and the bureaucracy, the top Party and state officials, became a gulf.

A similar politically *reactionary* process unfolded in the Red Army. In the early days of the revolution, decrees were passed institutionalising the election of officers and the primacy of soldiers’ soviets in the army. Other democratic measures included the abolition of ranks and titles, saluting, decorations and officers organisations and privileges. During the course of the Civil War there were many retreats on these gains. However, in the 1930s Stalin presided over a debacle.

Privileges came back to life; corps commanders, for example, secured pay as much as 200 times as much as a private, Along with this returned the officer’s mess, as well as rigid and even brutal discipline. Symbolising “the continuity of the glory of Russian arms throughout the history of Russia”, Tsarist style decorations and uniforms came back as well as saluting and batmen - something greeted by Stalin as *victory* for the principles of socialism.

The position of women - the gauge of social advance, according to Marx - fully reflected the contradictory nature of the five year plan. The female sex as a whole was fully drawn into social labour and into areas of work traditionally the preserve of men. Nevertheless the pay differentials between women and men widened (only partly explained by the disproportionate influx of unskilled female labour from the countryside). Women workers saw their double burden increase, the nurseries and laundries, which had been such a feature of the early years of the revolution, became ever fewer and more and more inefficient.

To justify it family values’, once derided as bourgeois, were proclaimed socialist. And again showing the double edged nature of Stalin’s socialist construction, in 1936 - the year he declared the final victory of socialism in the USSR - legislation was introduced which made abortion *illegal* Prostitution too, which had dramatically increased due to the growth of poverty in the cities, became punishable with imprisonment, thus returning to pre-1917 attitudes and law.

In this way, albeit it with a socialist realist pose, the ideology of the past returned in many respects. Countless other examples can be cited: the xenophobic 1947 marriage laws effectively prevented Soviet citizens marrying foreigners, homosexuality was outlawed, experimental art, literature and music forced underground, and
perhaps even worse, Great Russian chauvinism was used to trample over the rights of smaller nationalities. During World War II entire nationalities were branded ‘enemies’, and ‘autonomous’ republics vanished without comment or trace. The German Soviet Republic on the Volga, for example, was disbanded and the entire population deported. A similar fate was suffered by the Autonomous Soviet Republics of Crimean Tatar, Kalmuk, and Chechonu-Ingush.

2.5.3. Terror

The first five year plan marked a quantitative further extension of the relative autonomy of the bureaucratic stratum. Because this stratum by its very nature caused the system to dysfunction, because it was prone to all sorts of centrifugal pulls, it was not surprising that at the moment of its triumph terroristic measures came to the fore in an attempt to give the bureaucracy self-coherence and as a means to govern society. Ironically however, while at the bottom of society there were numerous examples of arbitrary arrest and execution, at the top there was a bloodbath.

Official debate in the Party had already disappeared. The Party’s 16th Congress “was the first in Soviet history at which no voice was raised against any of the major aspects of official party policy”. To maintain this artificial state of affairs, opposition was automatically branded counterrevolutionary, and usually a tool in the hands of some foreign power. This attempt by the bureaucracy to counteract its own instability was facilitated by a process of political concentration, a process logically crowned by monotheism, the substituting of the labour bureaucracy for the working class, the Central Committee for the labour bureaucracy and Stalin for the Central Committee (to paraphrase Trotsky’s 1904 diatribe against Lenin).

Because it relied on the will and judgement of one man, centrifugal tendencies could be swiftly, easily and definitively classed as anti-Party, anti-Soviet and anti-Marxist, because they were anti Stalin. This very rational reason lay behind the growth of the irrational nonsense peddled in order to build and sustain the Stalin personality cult. Bureaucratic centrism cannot develop a unified systematic world outlook. Hence it needs a representative who has
unlimited governmental power” and appears before a cowed population as the benefactual source of the “rain and sunshine from above” (Marx on Bonaparte). So what caused Stalin’s elevation to demi-god status was not the interests of the proletarian struggle. No, it was the domination of the Party by a labour bureaucracy which, faced with a hostile world environment and its own instability, was forced to turn to one man rule.

As we have said, it was not only the masses who suffered because of this. Having turned the bureaucratic dictatorship on to the proletariat, the bureaucratic dictatorship turned on the bureaucracy. To serve the bureaucracy Stalin sought to eliminate all possible opposition to the bureaucracy; as this had become the rule of one man, eliminating all possible opposition to the bureaucracy became the elimination of all possible opposition to himself within the bureaucracy.

The terror first directed at former oppositionists, then the countryside, came ‘home’ to hit the best forces in the centrist camp in the mid 1930s; those in the ruling caste who were “infected” with the spirit of criticism, inherited from their days as revolutionaries, were not considered fit by Stalin to be builders of his new order. The security services had been used against Party dissenters in the early 1920s; indeed as the decade progressed all forms of Party disagreement became liable to punishment by jail or exile to Siberia. However, with the 1930s, persecution of the few became the extermination of the many.

It is now accepted by historians that most delegates to the 17th Congress were uneasy about Stalin’s course. A large number, it seemed, wanted to replace him by the more ‘conciliatory’ Sergei Kirov, who “stood for the idea of abolition of the terror, both in general and inside the Party”. Although Kirov did not allow himself to be nominated against Stalin, in the elections to the Central Committee, while only three delegates crossed off Kirov’s name, 270 crossed off Stalin’s. Kirov’s assassination in November 1934 has therefore not unnaturally been blamed on Stalin. But whether he was or was not responsible, Stalin used it as an excuse to launch a massive assault on the Party.

In the four years following the 17th Congress a wave of terror was launched by Stalin. Despite rules adopted at the congress there was no consultation on this. Far from debating the launch of terror at the Central Committee, the Central Committee itself suffered
monstrously. Out of its 139 members, Krushchev revealed in his famous 1956 ‘secret speech’, 98 were eliminated by Stalin. The same top down horror was applied throughout the Party. Over half the delegates to the 17th Congress - 1,108 out of 1,966 - were accused of counterrevolutionary crimes and dealt with accordingly. Krushchev also reported that in 1937-8 Yezhov had prepared for Stalin 383 lists containing the names of 40,000 leading communists who were to be killed.

In the course of the bloodletting the majority of the Old Bolsheviks perished, including outstanding communists like Bukharin, Kamenev, Orjonikidze, Rakovsky, Rykov, Saponov, Tomsky, Preobrazhensky, Pyatakov, and Zinoviev. The leaderships of the Union and Autonomous Republics, the Komsomol and the trade unions were slaughtered. In the Red Army three out of five marshals, 13 out of 15 commanders, and 75 out of 80 members of the Supreme Military council were executed. All in all an estimated 30,000 officers below the rank of colonel were put to death between 1937 and 1938 (drastically reducing the efficiency of the army - as witnessed by the disastrous performance of the Red Army during the Finnish Campaign).

Many foreign communists, including those seeking refuge from the counterrevolutionary terror of fascism, were killed too. They included individuals previously hailed as great proletarian internationalists, including Bela Kun, leader of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, Platten, a close associate of Lenin’s while he was in exile in Switzerland, and Copic, secretary of the Yugoslav Party. Others to die came from the leaderships of the communist parties of Latvia, Estonia, India, Iran, Korea, China, and Bulgaria. To cap all this, in 1938 the Communist Party of Poland was politically and physically liquidated, accused of Luxemburgism ‘; a similar fate befell the communist parties of Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia.

Such carnage, in which at least several hundred thousand communists died, could not be the result of an individual whim; such an approach would lead one to dismiss Nazi Germany’s death camps on the basis of Hitler’s potty training and the sexual repression of the German middle classes. No, this was not and could not be Stalin “overestimating his own merits” or believing “in his own infallibility”, let alone certain “limitations on Party democracy”. The terror had its source in the triumph of bureaucratic

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centrism, not from the psychology of one individual.

The terror and Stalin’s other central policies, far from following “Lenin’s course in the principal and essential areas of activity”, represented a break from Leninism, the physical elimination of his close comrades and the attempted destruction of all sections of the Party which might have looked to Leninism for guidance. The terror was more than the result of “great mistakes” or “negative consequences of the cult of the individual”, as claimed by Krushchev. We can only understand it against the background of the distorted socio-economic relations produced by an isolated Soviet Union.

Because the Soviet Union was left isolated, poisoned by the return of the past and badly led, its socialism became deformed and assumed characteristics utterly alien to its essence.

Let us conclude this section by quoting EH Carr’s assessment of Stalin, his policies, and personality. For a bourgeois historian he skilfully connects Stalin’s personality and his relationship to the Russian past:

“Stalin had a form of vanity totally alien to Lenin, which demanded, not indeed the holding or the trappings of office, but absolute obedience and the recognition of his infallibility. No overt criticism, no expression of dissent, appeared any longer in the party press, or even in specialist journals. Such discussions of current questions as could still be found were marked by tasteless and uniform tributes to the leader, and by the celebration of often mythical achievements. Stalin became a remote, isolated figure, exalted far above ordinary mortals, and indeed above his closest colleagues. He seems to have lacked any warmth of feelings for his fellow men; he was cruel and vindictive to those who thwarted his will, or excited his resentment or his antipathy. His commitment to Marxism and socialism was only skin deep. Socialism was not something that grew out of the objective economic situation and out of the revolt of class-conscious workers against oppressive domination of capitalism; it was something to be imposed from above, arbitrarily and by force. Stalin’s attitude to the masses was contemptuous; he was indifferent to liberty and to equality; he was scornful of the prospects of revolution in any country outside the USSR. He was the only member of the party central committee who, as early as January 1918, had maintained in opposition to Lenin, that there is no revolutionary movement in the West’.

“The commitment to socialism in one country, though the attitudes which crystallised into the new doctrine were not exclusively of Stalin’s making, perfectly fitted the man. It enabled him to match professions

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of socialism with Russian nationalism, the only political creed that moved him at all deeply. In Stalin’s treatment of national minorities or of the
smaller nations, nationalism easily degenerated into chauvinism. Notes of the old Russian anti-Semitism, sternly denounced by Lenin and the early Bolsheviks, were heard; and official condemnations of it, though persistent, began to sound less decisive. In art and literature, the eager experimentation of the first years of the revolution were abandoned in favour of a return to traditional Russian models, enforced by an increasingly strict censorship. Marxist schools of history and law passed under a cloud; to seek continuity with the Russian past was no longer a cause for reproach. Socialism in one country pointed back to an old Russian national exclusiveness rejected by Marx as well as Lenin. It was not altogether incongruous to place Stalin’s regime in the context of Russian history”.

2.6. Some thoughts on the theoretical legacy of Stalin

Stalin’s heirs have, of course, denounced the “cult of the individual”, and its “negative consequences”. Yet there can be no doubt that at the very least on a number of key theoretical questions they are the direct descendants of Stalin. This can be seen if we refer to the already quoted CPSU resolution denouncing Stalin on June 30 1956. It was maintained that:

“JV Stalin, who held the post of general secretary of the party’s central committee for a long period, worked actively in common with other leaders of the party to put into effect Lenin’s behests. He was faithful to Marxism-Leninism, and as a theorist and an organiser of high calibre he led the party’s fight against the Trotskyists. right-wing opportunists, and bourgeois nationalists, against the intrigues of capitalists from without”.

So if we wish to understand the present Soviet leadership ideologically, an examination of Stalin’s main theoretical positions is of the greatest Importance. Even if they had declared a complete break from the heritage of the past this would be the case; obviously it is far more so as the leadership of the CPSU, the most influential Party in the world communist movement, says it still follows the same line as Stalin on a whole Series of key questions. Although the terrorism of Stalin centrism, used as a method of bureaucratic cohesion, has given way to the lethargic institutionalised bureaucratism of Soviet centrism, Stalin’s theory lives on. This despite the working class expanding to become by far the largest class in the Soviet Union and despite
the existence of a world socialist bloc.

2.6.1. Communism in one country

The only realistic avenue open to communists in Russia, given the tardiness of the revolution in the west, was to develop the national economy of the Soviet Republic. As we have said, this was the greatest service Russian communists could perform for the world revolution. Such a course went hand in hand with retreats, concessions and even distortions, no matter who led the Communist Party.

But with the triumph of bureaucratic centrism the local peculiarities of Russia, above all its Isolation, were presented in such a way that these problems were no longer considered problems, indeed the Soviet Union was soon presented as the paradigm for all to copy. All this was a long term disservice to the Soviet Union, and not surprisingly workers in the west have not proved particularly keen on fighting to replicate the Soviet model in their own countries. Of course, the idealisation of the Soviet Union was carried out not in order to provide inspiration for others, rather in an effort to provide an ideological justification for maintaining the status quo, including bureaucratic privilege. To do this the centrists had to cut the Marxist cloth to fit Russia’s famished and deformed frame. Orthodox theory had to be ‘forgotten’, distorted or denounced.

In the first edition of Stalin’s famous pamphlet *Foundations of Leninism* in April 1924 he maintained, as did all other Party leaders, that: “For the final victory of socialism, for the organisation of socialist production, the efforts of one country, particularly of a peasant country like Russia, are insufficient; for that, the efforts of the proletarians of several advanced countries are required.”

This passage was deleted within the year and replaced “by another, more exact and correct formulation”. The new “more exact and correct formulation” inserted by Stalin and proclaimed as ‘Leninist’ was ‘socialism in one country’. It suddenly became possible to build socialism without the “efforts of the proletarians of several advanced countries”; and those who disagreed were crudely denounced as Trotskyites.

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There was never a debate as to whether one country could have a revolution before others. No serious working class politician had denied that. What was at stake was the link between the Soviet Union and the world
revolution. Stalin paid lip service to “help from other countries” being necessary for the complete, final victory of socialism. By it he meant “having full guarantees against intervention, and consequently against the restoration of the bourgeois order.”

Except for this Stalin claimed: “We can build socialism and we will build it together with the help of the peasantry under the leadership of the working class ... for under the dictatorship of the proletariat we possess ... all that is needed to build a complete socialist society, overcoming all internal difficulties, for we can and must overcome them by our own efforts”.

Stalin believed that the USSR could overcome all internal difficulties and contradictions, while the rest of the world remained dominated by imperialism. And it could do this through its “own efforts”, although it had been sentenced to solitary confinement by world imperialism. Thus for Stalin the world revolution was not central for the Soviet Union’s long term success. The role of communists ceased to have anything to do with consciously furthering the world revolution and became simply a matter of catching up with the west. The role of foreign communists became secondary. Let them, like us, loyally serve Soviet foreign policy, became the ruling slogan. In this way the triumph of Stalin centrism broke the ideological link between Russia and the world revolution. Here was the triumph of national narrowness over internationalism.

The term ‘socialism’ has often been used in a broad way. Because of Russia’s backwardness many Bolshevik leaders argued that there would have to be a transitional period before socialism, which they linked with the abolition of classes and the leaving of capitalist levels of production far behind (some groups still take a similar position). This was one reason for Stalin’s ‘socialism in one country’ being greeted with incredulity and even contempt by the theoretically well versed section of the Party.

Nowadays though, we use the word in a straightforward, unambiguous manner. For us socialism begins with the political victory of the proletariat (we will expand on this below). Such an approach is not confined to our organisation, it is the approach of the whole world communist movement and something more or less accepted by the whole of the political spectrum. As a result debate around socialism in one country does have a certain air of irrelevance and even incongruity. The full
title of the Soviet Union Is after all, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which was coined during Lenin’s lifetime, without any serious objections, certainly not from Lenin. Today the countries of Eastern Europe, China, Vietnam, North Korea and Cuba all describe themselves as socialist and are categorised as such by world bodies such as the UN.

However what we are really concerned with is the content of words, not words themselves. If we consider the central question, that of the unity of the world-historic struggle of the proletariat and the objective dependence of the Soviet Union on the world revolution, Stalin’s original ‘socialism in one country’ theory is still important because its underlying self-sufficient and isolationist assumptions are still with us, only taken to the most ridiculous, but logical, conclusions. In the Soviet Union today it is claimed that it is communism that can be built in one country; this resting on the contention that full socialism was achieved long ago.

The source of this idea is to be found with Stalin. Having redefined things in advance of what they are, while leaving things as they are, and redefining the future in terms of what they are now, Stalin sought to give socialism a harmony it did not possess, sideling its capitalist facets, its contradictory and stormy nature. The “basic” economic law of socialism - “the securing of the maximum satisfaction of the constantly rising material and cultural requirements of the whole of society through the continuous expansion and perfection of socialist production on the basis of higher techniques” - had been realised and thus Stalin claimed the Soviet Union was on the threshold of his redefined national communism.

At the 18th Congress of the CPSU(B) Stalin announced that antagonistic classes had been abolished. The Soviet state apparently therefore only served the purpose of organising economic and cultural activity, defending the country against outside intervention and eliminating their agents. “But can development stop there. We are going ahead towards communism” Stalin declared. He then revealingly asks, “Will our state remain in the period of communism ... ?” And he answers in the affirmative: “Yes, it will, unless the capitalist encirclement is liquidated, and the danger of foreign military attack has disappeared”.

There might have been debate around the exact definition of where the first stage of communism, le, socialism, begins. This has never been the case with communism itself. Communism “presupposes the universal development of the productive forces”, because only this can take
production to the level of abundance.\textsuperscript{80} Thus communism begins on the basis of the world proletarian dictatorship and the organisation of production on a world scale - something capitalism, albeit with all sorts of contradictions, is anticipating. Attempts to build communism purely on the basis of “home bred” conditions in one country, can only but lead, in the words of Marx and Engels, to the point where the progress of the world economy “would abolish local communism”.\textsuperscript{81}

In the era of giant transnationals, world products and massive savings through the highly developed world division of labour we would do well to recall some more jointly authored words of Marx and Engels, this time from the \textit{Communist Manifesto}. Here Marx and Engels spoke about how the “need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe”. Even though it has been ‘chased’ away from the Soviet Union, it is, through its own laws, ‘chased’ back. Those who attempt to erect “Chinese walls” against the world market face the pressure to “become bourgeois” or “face extinction”. Thus it is not only the nuclear weapons of imperialism which constitute a danger to the USSR. The “cheap prices of its commodities” are perhaps more dangerous. Because of imperialism’s “exploitation of the world market” and the “cosmopolitan character” of production, national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness becomes more and more impossible”.\textsuperscript{82} We can conclude therefore that the idea of communism in one country is not only wrong ideologically, it is self-defeating.

Stalin’s perspective of communism in one country - communism with a state (sic) - was further \textit{developed} by his successor Krushchev, who was responsible for enshrining the concept \textit{programmatically}.\textsuperscript{83} In the 1961 3rd Programme of the CPSU (still binding on communists today!) we read the following declaration:

“The material and technical basis of communism will be built up by the \textit{end of the second decade} (1971-80), ensuring an abundance of material and cultural values for the whole population; the Soviet society will come close to the stage where it can introduce the principle of

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distribution according to needs, and there will be gradual transition to one form of ownership - public ownership. Thus \textit{a communist society will in the main be built In the USSR}. The construction of communist society will be fully completed in the subsequent period.”

The concluding slogan of the programme cries out in upper case:
“THE PARTY SOLEMNLY PROCLAIMS: THE PRESENT GENERATION OF SOVIET PEOPLE SHALL LIVE IN COMMUNISM!”

So we can see that at least in this area there is an unbroken chain from Stalin to Krushchev. Despite Krushchev’s denunciation of Stalin, his elimination from history, restrictions on those allowed to read his books, both Stalin and Krushchev consider it possible to build communism in the Soviet Union in isolation from the world revolution: a position which has never been contradicted, rather it has been repeated, by all post-Stalin leaders in the Soviet Union.

Before continuing, let us pose a little question for our centrists in Britain. Are the Soviet communists right or wrong in splitting their tasks from those of the world revolution? And if the Soviet communists are in possession of all the ‘facts’, so fully conversant with Marxism-Leninism, why was the aim of catching up with the USA enshrined programmatically, and why has the date for this catching up, 1971, come and gone with no debate on the question? And why, if the Soviet communists are so experienced, was the aim of communism in one country, by 1980, laid down programmatically, without one open objection to it from the ranks of the millions of CPSU members?

Your silence is our answer.

2.6.2. Economics of Socialism

Having declared that the Soviet Union had entered the stage of communist construction, Stalin again had to resort to unjustified theoretical reformulations: “I think”, he said, “we must ... discard certain ... concepts taken from Marx’s Capital - where Marx was concerned with an analysis of capitalism - and artificially pasted on to our socialist relations. I am referring to such concepts, among others, as ‘necessary’ and ‘surplus’ labour, ‘necessary’ and ‘surplus’ product, ‘necessary’ and ‘surplus’ time”. Stalin admitted the

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existence of commodity production and value under Soviet conditions. However he related this only to the existence of cooperative farms alongside state property (ignoring the determining question, which was the continued division of labour). As a result Stalin derided as “absurd” talk of “labour power being a commodity, and of ‘hiring’ of workers”
We would be the last to say that workers in the Soviet Union have to sell their labour power as a commodity, as they do under capitalism; the existence of effective full employment is hardly a small matter, nor is the expropriation of the capitalist class. Nevertheless, in spite of these great historic achievements many features of capitalism relating to working class economic life are partially retained. For example, workers still receive money according to the value of socially necessary labour performed, and the goods they consume are mainly purchased as commodities.

So let us look at the economics of socialism and communism. The fundamental cause for the downfall of capitalism can be found in the contradiction between the increasing social organisation of production and the continued individual appropriation of wealth. It is this contradiction which is resolved by the socialist revolution led by the proletariat. Yet, besides this initial task, the proletariat has a further mission - determined by its unique relationship to production - to abolish classes and achieve a state of abundance. This cannot be done overnight. The proletariat must organise a protracted struggle if it is to really liberate itself. Finally though, in proportion as anarchy in social production vanishes, the political authority of the state dies out. Man, at last the master of his own form of social organisation, becomes at the same time lord over nature, his own master - free”.

This triumph of communism, the passing of humanity “from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom”, thus sees all features inherited from capitalism negated and replaced by a free association of producers. In this way humanity masters its own destiny; the “laws of nature foreign to, and dominating him will then be used with full understanding, and so a necessity imposed by nature and history, now become the result of his own free action”. Crucial here is the law of planning, for it is the negation of “anarchy in social production” and the medium through which nature can be “used with full understanding”. It is with the increasing scope and depth of planning that socialist society advances and becomes communism.

Not surprisingly, Stalin’s idealisation of the capitalist features of socialism has today borne fruit in the revisionist outlook and policies of the socialist countries ... there are those who, taking their cue from his ideas, look towards the market, entrepreneurs, individual food production, loan

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capital and profit, and a lessening of economic planning, as the way forward. Not only do advocates of such views exist in the socialist countries, there are indications that their voices are becoming ever more influential.

Leninists are opposed to capitalism, not just in the capitalist countries, but to its continued manifestations in the socialist countries. We approach socialism not as a thing in itself to be pinned down and analysed as a fully developed mode of production. No, it is an embryo, the essence of which is rapid change and transition. Naturally, therefore, we look to the role of planning increasing. It is one of the main weapons in the hands of the proletarian state through which the proletariat conducts its class struggle for communism.

Socialism is, as Yurukoglu says: communism which caries within it the remnants of capitalist society, which find concrete expression in the existence of the state and commodity production.” Because of this the proletariat must continue the class struggle under socialism, albeit under “different conditions” to the struggle it conducted under capitalism. After the seizure of power by the proletariat the bourgeoisie is ousted from its domination of the means of production. But commodity production is initially only replaced by socialist-commodity production, for socialism as defined by Lenin is “state monopoly capitalism without the bourgeoisie”, or, in the words of Zinoviev in December 1925, a “unique state capitalism, radically distinguished from the state capitalism of bourgeois countries in that it is subordinated and limited by the working class, by the proletarian state.” However, as socialism advances, the role of the market in determining prices through supply and demand is gradually superseded by state planning of prices for the market. Value and the division of labour, of course, persist because labour still has different values - that of a collective farm worker being different from an industrial worker, that of a skilled worker being different from an unskilled worker and that of a manual worker being different from a mental worker. As a result society must calculate the value of commodities on the basis of

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socially necessary expenditure of labour.

Socialism begins with commodity production, bourgeois right in determining the exchange and consumption of production, value, money, and other features characteristic of class society. Such features show the lack of development of socialism towards communism. The situation where
prices are being *determined* (with due recognition to socially necessary labour expenditure) by the state, not the market, means that value has been fettered, and as production advances step by step towards abundance, it is reduced to merely a useful method of social accounting, increasingly reduced to a shell, steadily losing its power to the law of planning. Under these conditions, prices would in general *be planned to* reflect socially necessary expenditure of labour, but could in certain circumstances be radically lowered or raised *as a result of conscious decision* to serve the demands of long term social aims (such an approach has an important role in developing new industries and introducing new technologies).

This intervention of planning in the economy is the essence of socialism, which is a transitional social form, characterised by the growth of the economy towards abundance, and the increasing role of human consciousness in determining production. Under socialism industry and land are not only expropriated from the old ruling classes, but develop as nationalised or state property, and as a result the state must play a central coordinating role in directing and planning production.

It is the state which achieves the economy’s singularity and causes the various components to develop in a harmonious and complementary fashion. Thus planning is essential. It acts as the brain in relation to the different components of the human body. We can therefore say that planning under socialism is an *objective law*. In the main, after all, relations between production and consumption, between accumulation and consumption, the proportionality of the economy and its tempo must be determined by premeditated acts of the state and its planning bodies and do not occur spontaneously.

The role of the state in planning is transitional. As nationalised property is transformed into social property’, with communism’s growth over capitalism within socialism *planning* becomes ever more closely associated with the creative desires of the population in a direct way, something only possible with full socialist democracy.

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Such a change would be a decisive step on the road to communism. It would mark a major function of the state being shed, and a move from the administration of people to the administration of things. This development would go hand in hand with the transition from socialist commodity production to communist production, and the replacement of the law of value by straightforward accounting, including *simple labour time* as the division
of labour is transcended along with socially necessary expenditure of labour as a means of accounting. In such conditions society would, in the words of Engels:

“... have to arrange its plan of production in accordance with its means of production, which include, in particular, its labour power. The useful effects of the various articles of consumption, compared with one another and with the quantities of labour required for their production, will in the end determine the plan. People will be able to manage everything very simply, without the Intervention of much-vaunted value”

2.6.3, State and class struggle under socialism

The term the dictatorship of the proletariat has on occasions been used only for the immediate period following the conquest of power by the proletariat, ending when industrial and agricultural production has been socialised, and socialism’ achieved. This tends to create some confusion and a certain degree of ambiguity. As we have said, we find it more useful, and in the end more scientific, to define the dictatorship of the proletariat as the essence of the state under socialism. It is therefore the state form of the revolution until the victory of communism (when the state has withered away - at least according to orthodox Marxism-Leninism). So socialism is the dictatorship of the proletariat.

What is the nature of the proletarian state and what causes its continuation after the revolution?

The proletarian state is forged in the heat of revolution; organs of state power emerge from the organs of class struggle created in the crucible of the battle to overthrow capitalism. The revolution expropriates the bourgeoisie politically and then economically. Naturally the old exploiters resist. The fierceness of their resistance increases after the immediate seizure of power by the proletariat, as

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the former ruling class overcomes Its previous inability to rule in the old way and desperately seeks outside aid in an attempt to reverse the course of history and restore its privileges.

Lenin makes the point:

“the exploiters inevitably cherish the hope of restoration, and this hope is converted Into attempts at restoration. And after the first serious defeat,
the overthrown exploiters - who had not expected their overthrow, never believed it possible. never conceded the thought of it - throw themselves with energy grown tenfold, with furious passion, and hatred grown a hundredfold, into battle for recovery of the ‘paradise’, of which they have been deprived, on behalf of their families, who have been leading such a sweet and easy life and whom now the ‘common herd’ is condemning to ruin and poverty (or to common labour .. .)”.

Hence the dictatorship of the proletariat, the socialist state, as well as being maintained against external enemies is, internally, firstly an instrument of coercion against the old ruling class. But as well as the big capitalists and landlords, other strata exist which, if allowed to develop, can come to play a role which threatens the development of socialism, and pose a restorationist danger. In Russia In the 1920s these forces included the neo-bourgeoisie created by the NEP, the Nepmen, as well as the kulaks.

Such elements have the possibility of emerging from within socialist society, spontaneously springing up from those areas not dominated by socialist production and the law of planning. Their existence, or possibility, is a reflection of the lack of development of socialism, containing as it does capitalist and communist elements. We can therefore say that the second internal reason for the socialist state’s continued existence is the fight against all proto-restorationist elements. Thus the socialist state exists to fight the class struggle after the elimination of the old ruling class, for the class struggle continues under socialism but takes on new, mainly peaceful, economic, forms. Lenin again makes the point with his usual pithy incisiveness: “Classes have remained, but in the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat every class has undergone a change, and the relations between the classes have also changed. The class struggle does not disappear under the dictatorship of the proletariat: it merely assumes different forms”.

This is in complete contradiction to Stalin’s report to the 18th Congress of the CPSU(B) in March 1939; where he claimed that the function of the state as a coercive instrument had ended inside the country, for he maintained that having “abolished” the exploiting classes: “there was no one left to suppress”. Stalin declared that the Soviet state only existed for “economic organisation” and “against external enemies” and their agents. It also contradicts Krushchev’s programmatic expression of Stalin’s idea. In the 3rd Programme of the CPSU we read the following: “The state, which arose as a state of the dictatorship of the proletariat, has, in the new, contemporary stage, become a state of the entire people, an organ expressing the interests and will of the people as a whole”. Krushchev’s formulation not only flies in the face of the
Marxist understanding of the state, all states being the dictatorship of a class. It raises the entire question of the classes that exist in the Soviet Union and the relationship between these classes, the state, and communism. There is no argument that the state ushered in by the revolution was the dictatorship of the proletariat. But what happens after large scale industry has been nationalised and agriculture has been collectivised, when the exploiting classes and their resistance has been crushed? Well it is clear that both Stalin and subsequent leaders of the CPSU considered that such conditions negate the dictatorship of the proletariat and call for its replacement with a state ‘of the whole people’ (which Stalin argued could continue under communism!). Such a position reduces the proletarian dictatorship down to merely the existence of the bourgeoisie, ignoring the proletariat’s tasks of abolishing all classes, achieving communism and ushering in the “kingdom of freedom” - an idea again succinctly formulated by Lenin:

“Only a definite class, namely, the urban workers and the factory, industrial workers in general, is able to lead the whole mass of the working and exploited people In the struggle to throw off the yoke of capital, In actually carrying it out, in the struggle to maintain and consolidate the victory, in the work of creating the new socialist system and In the entire struggle for the complete abolition of classes.

“…the dictatorship of the proletariat is also a period of class struggle, which is inevitable as long as classes have not been abolished, which changes from being particularly fierce In the period immediately following the overthrow of capital. The proletariat does not cease the class struggle after it has captured political power, but continues it until classes are abolished - of course, under different circumstances, in different forms and different means”. 94

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Lenin firmly linked the dictatorship of the proletariat to the struggle to abolish classes In general and not merely the suppression of the capitalists. For the proletariat this is a matter of self liberation - something to which other classes can be won consistently only through completing the process of proletarianisation. Hence the struggle for communism by the proletariat is the third internal reason for the continuation of the proletarian dictatorship.

To ‘forget’ this is no idle mistake, no small sup, but a pandering to the Interests of non-proletarian social forces that exist under socialism. Above all it means retreating from the goal of communism in practice, substituting non-Marxist bureaucratic idealism in its place... No matter how loudly the
aim of communism is shouted, if it has been ‘redefined’. If the new definition of communism can include the state, and if the struggle for it excludes the role of the proletarian dictatorship, then the aim of communism has been lost sight of.

As we have stated, the struggle for communism only begins with socialism. Communism is not a spontaneous development engendered by the liquidation of the bourgeoisie, it requires the continuation of the revolutionary class struggle by the proletariat to the point where the material conditions are created for communism.

Do Stalin’s propositions and the CPSU’s subsequent formulations about the state of the entire people’ aid the proletariat in Its necessarily continuing class struggle to achieve communism? Do they clarify the relationship between the proletariat and other social classes and strata under communism? Do they orientate the struggle against the remnants of capitalism carried within socialism? We must answer no!

In his report to the 26th Congress of the CPSU, Brezhnev spoke of three “classes” in the Soviet Union: the working class, “the largest class numerically”; the “collective-farm peasantry”; and the Intelligentsia (which seems to be defined simply by “work by brain” even though the “character of modern labour” is “increasingly acquiring an Intellectual content”). Thus the term “intelligentsia” corresponds to both white collar workers and what we would call the ‘middle strata’.

Although these strata might be being drawn together, if our aim is communism it is important, nay vital, to recognise their differences and contradictions. These differences and contradictions are the result of carry-overs from capitalism (the carry-overs from class society). They include the division of labour, the antithesis between town and country and between mental and manual labour, the different forms of ownership - including state, private, and collective farms - and the existence of the state (especially when this state is still the preserve of bureaucratic specialists).

These factors lead to the existence of different interests among various social groups. For example, the collective farm workers might have an Interest in the increased size of private plots, possibly therefore they might consider it against their interests for collective property relations to fully evolve into socialised forms.

Stalin and centrism 65
Certainly those who administer the state will resist moves which increase popular control, will consider it against their Interests for the parasitic state to wither away. Because of the existence of different interests it is Incorrect, even treacherous, to make declarations about the complete unity of interests of all strata in the Soviet Union, let alone proclaim the CPSU “as Party of the entire people”96.

The working class uniquely has an undeviating Interest In achieving the end of all forms of private property, the division of labour, and the state. It is the revolutionary class which seeks to advance production in order to achieve abundance. Alone it fights to democratise the socialist state in order to leave it behind and negate democracy itself; for this it must not only be the leading class but eventually the only class. This is why the dictatorship of the proletariat must continue until communism and why the proletariat needs its own party.

Surely those who refuse to recognise contradictions between the working class and other social forces, such as collective farm workers and the bureaucracy, (and who even speculate about the continuation of the state, and therefore the bureaucracy, under communism) are a fetter holding back the advance to communism.

3. Shape of things to come

For many leftists in Britain there was only one possibility in the socialist countries - a Trotsky-type political revolution. We always thought that things were more complex. As shown in the past there was also a danger of counterrevolution.

3.1. Hungary 56
The October 1956 uprising in Hungary profoundly influenced the development of the world communist movement. Coming in the wake of the CPSU’s 20th Congress and its revelations about Stalin, it opened a new chapter in our history which is full of contradictions which have not yet been resolved.

Naturally the bourgeoisie still uses the events of 1956 to the maximum as part of its campaign to show that capitalism is superior to and more democratic than socialism. There can be no doubt that in the short term the world communist movement suffered a trauma in the wake of October 1956. In Britain it led to a rightward shift in the Party as a whole and a massive haemorrhaging of membership, particularly intellectuals.

Nonetheless, historically these events helped to open the eyes of communists to the reality of living socialism and greatly weakened the hold of ‘official optimism’ over their minds. In this light the events in Hungary 30 years ago objectively acted to the benefit of Leninism and thus to the detriment of the bourgeoisie.

What happened in Hungary? Despite the Morning Star’s emphasis on “lynchings and book burnings”, one thing is clear. A large section of the Hungarian people revolted against the Communist Party leadership and were only quelled after bitter fighting with Soviet armed forces.

This is the essence of the matter. Of course Radio Free Europe and local reactionaries like Cardinal Mindszenty and Arrow Cross fascists exploited the situation to the full. But neither this nor the sacking of the Party’s HQ and the killing of communists can hide the fact that it was the working class in Csepel and Dunapentele, proletarian areas of Budapest, and industrial cities like Miskolc, often under the leadership of disaffected communists, which constituted the main centres of the uprising.

Why did the uprising take place? In the final analysis the answer to this question lies in the continued domination of the world economy by
Imperialism, the way socialism was established in Hungary and how it was forced to evolve in the Soviet Union.

As the Communist Party of Turkey’s R Yurukoglu has pointed out in his *Socialism will win*, the socialism that was established in the Soviet Union, as in every example of practice, embraced two distinct characteristics. Firstly, he says the universal characteristics which must appear wherever socialism is established and which fully reflect theory. And secondly, the temporary characteristics rooted in the specifics of the development of Soviet society itself. These characteristics need not be found in any other socialism, for they are determined by the realities of that particular society alone.

Comrade Yurukoglu rightly says all the characteristics rooted in the specifics of Soviet society “boiled down to something which Lenin strove to rectify till the end of his life: the lagging behind of the democratic aspect of democratic centralism”. One manifestation of this is widespread bureaucracy, another is the single party system and finally there is the restrictions gradually imposed on discussion in society and in the Party, especially under Stalin. None of these characteristics derived from the theory of socialism. They are characteristics of building socialism in an isolated backward country.

To return to Hungary. It is clear that the revolution was carried out from above. The old state machine was destroyed by the victories of the Red Army, not the insurgent working class under the leadership of its Communist Party. Because of subjective mistakes, not least a completely uncritical attitude towards socialism in the Soviet Union, the door was opened to a situation where the model of socialism applied by ‘Hungary’s Stalin’, Matyas Rakosi, did not reflect Hungary’s national traditions or needs.

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In fact the Rakosi leadership imposed many of the Soviet Union’s worst bureaucratic deformations. Between 1949 and 1953 thousands of honest communists were charged on crudely manufactured evidence of being “Trotsky, Tito fascists”. Among them were Janos Kadar, who was imprisoned, and Laszlo Rajk, the popular ‘hardline’ communist head of the national police force, who was executed.

Again, basing himself on the Soviet model, Rakosi attempted to industrialise the country not only through expropriating the surplus from a forcibly collectivised agricultural sector but also by squeezing working class living standards. Thus between 1949 and 1952 national Income rose by 50%, while real wages actually went down by 16%. 
Moreover, a Soviet style one party system was created through the one-sided merger with the Social Democratic Party in 1948 and the use of the so-called ‘salami’ tactic on those making up the Peoples’ Front. This meant all legal parties were reduced to adjuncts or transmission belts of the Communist Party (after 1948 called the Hungarian Working People’s Party and after 1956 the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party). This was of course all justified with reference to Soviet practice and a cliche-ridden ‘Marxism’ which is still ‘official’ today.

Such an approach produced the raw materials for an explosion. Mass student demonstrations on October 23 1956 set in motion an insurrectionary vortex which drew in people from virtually all sectors of Hungarian society. Rakosi went, to be replaced by Imre Nagy. He quickly degenerated from a ‘liberalising’ communist into a renegade who opened up the government to reactionary elements like Zoltan Tildy, an advocate of capitalist restoration. Nagy’s government attempted to quench the masses’ thirst for democracy by promoting nationalism and westernism - a process capped on November 2 1956 when it announced the withdrawal of Hungary from the Warsaw Pact and the country’s neutrality.

Under such an opportunist leadership it was hardly surprising that the Party and Institutions of the socialist state disintegrated. Such was the bankruptcy of the ‘artificially’ transplanted model of socialism that the only way to save the situation for socialism in Hungary was a presidential decree sacking Nagy and his government, the reorganisation of the Party and a call by the new government, led by Kadar, for Soviet intervention. This heavy-handed and bloody solution cost the name of communism in Hungary and the world at large dear. Nonetheless it was clearly a failure not of genuine Marxism-Leninism but of centrist ‘official communism’.

Unfortunately conditions in Hungary had not produced a Leninist communist cadre which could lead the working class, organised in workers’ councils, in battle to consolidate socialism under the banner of Marxism-Leninism and socialist democracy. Without this conscious element the legitimate grievances of the masses and their spontaneous rebellion was, despite their subjective intentions, doomed to drift Kronstadt-like in a counterrevolutionary direction. Those, like the Trotskyites, who think this is

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not the case have to dismiss the threat Imperialism constantly poses to socialism and the lessons taught by Lenin in his *What is to be Done?* about the necessity of the working class being led by a vanguard party.

What of today? Truth forces us to say the democratic aspect of world socialism still lags behind what is demanded by the objective conditions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union itself. Leninists can only but be heartened to hear similar statements from Gorbachev himself. Yet we know necessity demands far more sweeping measures than have so far been proposed by Party leaders of the Gorbachev school.

There is no room for complacency. Every decade socialism has existed in Eastern Europe we have seen large sections of the working class rebel against their Communist Party. Today, in ‘stable’ Hungary, consent of the masses has been bought with Japanese, French, American and Federal German consumer goods and a relatively tolerant political regime. This ‘westernisation’ has gone hand in hand with allowing small scale private capitalism to thrive and integration into the imperialist dominated, world economy. Has Kadar’s experience of combining the Soviet political model with ‘market socialism’ an Achilles heel?

We think it has. Because of the slide of world capitalism into a new general crisis, this has severely affected peripheral countries like Hungary. In order to remain competitive in the world market, real wages have, as in the early 1950s, had to fall, and unemployment, not seen since the 1940s, threatens to return. Surely both are ominous signs for Hungary’s much vaunted political stability. So no communist should say another October 1956 is impossible.

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3.2. Czechoslovakia 68

Editorial, *The Leninist* No67, July 31 1988

On August 20 1968 the armed forces of the Soviet Union and its closest allies entered Czechoslovak territory against the will of its people and government. There can be no doubt that this was a watershed event in the life
of Czechoslovakia and the world communist movement. The passage of time does not lessen the importance of what happened.

The reasons given by the Soviet Union for the intervention were pure invention. Certainly, neither the stories of a West German invasion and the presence of large numbers of Green Berets disguised as US tourists, nor the suggestion that social democrats were plotting an uprising convinced the Czech population, many of whom supported Dubcek because they incorrectly thought he would introduce socialist democracy.

Nonetheless, some genuine communists under the influence of Soviet centrism - among whom at that time we would include ourselves - felt that proletarian Internationalism demanded uncritical support for the Soviet intervention. We are not afraid to say we were wrong.

The intervention was contradictory. It stopped in its tracks the glasnost and perestroika style reforms of Alexander Dubcek and Ota Sik, true. That these measures, which pointed in the direction of market socialism and strengthened the forces of capitalist restoration, were scuppered was good. The methods were not.

The Soviet Union acted with great nation chauvinistic arrogance. Dubcek was beaten by tanks, not arguments. He was taken to Moscow in chains, the rights of Czechoslovakia were trampled underfoot. This was not 'proletarian Internationalism'. No wonder it was not only the imperialists and what became Eurocommunism and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia which denounced the Soviet action, but the parties of Yugoslavia, Romania, Albania and China - they feared the same fate.

Undoubtedly, Dubcek’s ‘socialism with a human face’ was a product of the failure of bureaucratic socialism. Nevertheless it was also a mask behind which was the hidden agenda of taking Czechoslovakia out of the Soviet bloc and down the Yugoslav road.

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The chances were that this would have led to the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact and a shift in the balance of forces in Eastern Europe in favour of Imperialism. This could only but put the Soviet Union, the world’s revolutionary centre, in danger. Genuine communists had to take sides.

The fact that the Czechoslovak working class was operating not as a class for itself, but merely as a passive class in itself, meant that there was no immediate possibility of Czechoslovakia going beyond bureaucratic socialism.

Trotskyites and hopeless leftists imagine that the working class spontaneously, ie, without the highest level of organisation, can fight for communism. This is petty bourgeois nonsense, as is the suggestion that the
workers were just about to stage a political revolution in Czechoslovakia. This is to misread events and to fatally underestimate the role of consciousness in true working class politics.

What was posed in 1968 was defending existing bureaucratic socialism or the Dubcek capitalist road. For genuine communists the interests of the world revolution demanded the former and we must have the courage to say that faced with such a choice Czech and Slovak national rights had to take second place.

Leninists have no fear of self-criticism. For us it is healthy. Truly for us there are no closed chapters in history. The same cannot be said of ‘official communism’. We doubt very much that the *Morning Star* and its CPB supporters’ club, let alone the NCP, will even mark the 1968 events. We predict with some confidence that until the Soviet Union speaks, the dummies will remain mute... what a fitting epitaph for ‘official communism’.

4. Perestroika at home

Economically, because of Its bureaucratic form, the Soviet Union suffered from a steady tendency towards stagnation. Official statistics show that from an 11.4% average annual growth rate during the 1951-56 five year plan, growth in 1981-85 averaged only 4%. Some claim these figures are an exaggeration. The CIA maintains that growth was down to between 1.5% and 2.5% in this period. Abel Aganbegyan, Gorbachev’s one time economic adviser, goes further. He states that If account is taken of the substitution of more expensive products for cheaper ones, without any commensurate Improvement In quality (a standard managerial ploy), then growth’ during 1981-85 was zero.99

Herein lies the cause of the crisis of the Soviet regime. The absolutisation of the tendency towards stagnation could only but produce a rupture with the past. Even with a modestly low growth rate of around 5% the bureaucracy
was able to sustain the claim that it was a worthy leader of the Soviet people and could defend socialism. But once growth sank below that Plimsoll line the priorities of the regime came into contradiction one with the other; it became impossible to simultaneously invest in industrialisation and modernisation, maintain some sort of a military balance with imperialism, and increase the masses’ living standards.

It was in this context that we attempted to understand Gorbachev and his perestroika. Perestroika was launched in March 1985, at the first CPSU Central Committee meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev at its head. Perestroika was not a previously worked out plan for action, a theoretically rooted approach designed to overcome the Soviet Union’s deep economic troubles. No, along with the catch phrase, glasnost, it was a bureaucratic reflex reaction to stagnation, and thus typically bureaucratic in form and content.

For the first two years perestroika mainly consisted of a campaign against corruption, which had reached epidemic proportions under Brezhnev, and excessive vodka consumption, which had also reached epidemic proportions. The campaign against corruption involved removing former close associates of Brezhnev from positions of power (a few were put on trial - including his son-in-law) and replacing them with Gorbachev’s own yes men - and yes, they were overwhelmingly men. His approach to the alcohol problem was not much different. Instead of tacking the causes, he concentrated on the symptoms.

Not surprisingly, his measures did little to galvanise Soviet society. More was needed. The bureaucracy either had to give way to genuine socialist democracy or break from its centrism and move towards the market, unfettered commodity production and capitalism. Understandably, not wanting to see its privileges taken away, hoping to transform itself into a
western type capitalist class, the technocratic wing of the bureaucracy found itself drawn to the latter counterrevolutionary option.

The first significant step in that direction came with the 27th Congress of the CPSU, which met in February 1986. The congress heard a detailed report on the economy and its prospects. It also had before it a new draft programme, which was supposed to guide the practice of communists in the USSR till the goal of communism was reached.

What was the content of this programme? Gorbachev unceremoniously, and without any sort of a critique, junked Brezhnev’s “developed socialism” formula, which had almost treated socialism as an additional mode of production between capitalism and communism. This was introduced in the mid-1960s, itself a replacement for the claims in Krushchev’s 1961 programme that the Soviet Union was “rapidly’ approaching communism”. On paper Gorbachev’s programme was the same as Krushchev’s, only stripped of its optimism. However, history had moved on and what was conservative under one set of circumstances had become counterrevolutionary under another.

Prodded on by’ the renewed US arms race, first strike nuclear weapons, exotic technology and the World War III winning Strategic Defence Initiative, Gorbachev promised to “overcome” the present downward trend in output-assets ratio” and get the Soviet Union and its economy’ into shape.102 There was another reason for

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this. As we said at the time, Gorbachev is “haunted by the fear” of economic dislocation leading to the rolling back of communism In Eastern Europe through democratic’ counterrevolutions”103 and a “Polish-type crisis” which reduces the USSR to a “workers’ state with a neo-colonial twist to it”..104

We “welcomed” Gorbachev’s “bombastic, loud mouthed” utopian Idealism.105 However, we expressed the view that while we prefer “short term realism” to “daft posturing”, the whole of Krushchev’s 3rd Programme “needs replacing by an entirely’ new document”.106

The reason we took this stand was because of its departure from Marxism-Leninism on a range of crucial areas: socialist democracy - we said “lack of socialist democracy is increasingly coming into contradiction with Soviet socio-economic development”, the “full extension of socialist democracy is a crying need in all spheres of Soviet life, not least in the CPSU
itself”; overestimation of the strength of socialism and the elevation of the tactic of peaceful coexistence to a strategy - “imperialism” we argued “is still the dominant force on the planet”, what is needed is the completion of the world revolution; the idea that the Soviet state had become a “state of the whole people” - this is an “absurd and false picture”, the proletariat must continue “its class struggle under socialism” in order to “overcome the vestiges of capitalism found In socialism, not least the existence of the state itself, the law of value, and a bureaucracy”.

Naturally’, where we put our criticisms on the record, the obsequious ‘official communists’ in Britain praised everything. The Morning Star’s Kate Clark dutifully’ mouthed glowing reports of growth and progress” from Moscow. The then editor of the Straight Leftist’s Communist, Brian Topping, marvelled at the “tremendous scope” of Gorbachev’s programme and extolled its “considerable depth”. Having read but not understood, he spared no Soviet blushes; they are “Infused with the confidence of a people who are now building a communist society”, he declared. Of greater significance, though, were the first tentative expressions of approval that came from the Euro camp. This really was a warning about what Gorbachevism and perestroika had in store.

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4.1. After 70 years USSR needs political revolution

Article, The Leninist No55, November 1 1987

Today, 70 years after the October Revolution, comrade Mikhail Gorbachev says he is carrying out a political revolution. The Soviet Union is certainly in need of reorganisation and openness. We have long advocated this and been attacked for it. During the Brezhnev years the economy stagnated and the sordid corruption in the highest ranks became an open secret. Brezhnev is rightly criticised. The Soviet Union cannot afford sponging bureaucrats and their mismanagement. Nor can socialism stay still. The existence of a world economy makes that impossible. All countries, whatever their system, are
Interlinked and interdependent.

The world as a whole needs socialism: imperialism is clearly a moribund system, but it still dominates the world economy. As its internal contradictions become ever more antagonistic it tries to save itself through redivisionist war in order to gain new markets, new areas to rob and exploit. Imperialism is war. All imperialism can guarantee is economic decay, a World War III holocaust and the poverty of a nuclear winter, a new dark age. So imperialism and living socialism can only co-exist on a temporary basis; in the end one or the other must triumph.

In the 1970s the Soviet Union achieved, to the detriment of its economy, something approaching nuclear parity with the US. This strengthened the cause of peace. But, under the god-fearing Carter, the US rejected MAD (mutually assured destruction) and returned to strategies seeking outright victory. The go-ahead was given for a whole range of first strike silo-busting weapons systems. Reagan carried on where Carter left off, and has done more besides. Looking at his all time high military budgets, the spine-chilling Star Wars plans, who can deny that the US Is laying the basis for a World War III winning first strike capability?

The natural reaction among the Soviet top brass was to demand the high tech hardware to match the Americans. The Gorbachev leadership insisted that the sagging Soviet economy was in no position to supply such equipment, and a number of dissenting generals have been unceremoniously sacked to reinforce the point.

In relative terms, militarily, but above all economically, the Soviet Union has certainly been declining since the mid 1970s. As a result, according to Gorbachev himself, the Soviet Union was, by the 1980s, in a “pre-crisis” situation. Of course, the sycophants of the Soviet Union say Gorbachev’s reforms are the result of socialism’s growing maturity and the shift of the world balance of forces against imperialism. This has nothing to do with the scientific Marxist-Leninist method. It is wishful thinking. Facts are facts. No matter how demanding, we must base our practice on truth:

Against the US orchestrated imperialist war drive the leadership in the Soviet Union has felt compelled to retreat abroad and reform at home. More, at the CPSU 27th Congress Gorbachev offered the US cooperation in cooling the temperature in so-called hotspots - presumably countries like Nicaragua, South Africa and Afghanistan. We who take world revolution as our starting point must openly and frankly say this is not just an example of

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retreat, it is appeasing imperialism and full of dangers.

Gorbachev’s appeasement of imperialism has been greeted by a cross class chorus of approval, and so have his domestic reforms. The ruling circles in the main Nato countries (eg the Institute of East-West Security Studies) have been joined by the opportunists ranging from the centrist New Communist Party to the right Euro Marxism Today in supporting glasnost and perestroika.

Genuine communists must stand against this stream and tell the truth. Gorbachev’s appeasement of imperialism only encourages its aggression; glasnost and perestroika are not a political revolution. This is not to say that there cannot be a political revolution under socialism, nor that there should not be one. The socialist revolution in a particular country is a step towards world communism. Immediately after the revolution the working class exercises its dictatorship over a capitalist economy, however because of a lack of culture, experience, expertise etc, it cannot rule directly. The society which operates on the principle from each according to one’s ability, to each according to one’s needs, will not be realised until the working class runs all aspects of society. This itself involves a drawn out struggle against bureaucracy and in turn raises the question of political revolution.

Even in a Britain or a Japan, working class power will have to be

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initially exercised through a bureaucracy. Socialism will start off by being to a certain extent formal. This had to be the case in Russia. Its working class operated in a peasant sea, it had a miserably low level of culture even compared to the Tsarists. Moreover, Russia was left isolated as a bastion of working class power because of the treachery of social democracy and the failure of the communist parties in the west. Socialism, which in essence is a higher form than capitalism, found itself confronted with the necessity of catching up with capitalism. This economic paradox had to have political costs.

There was never a pre-Stalin golden age. Even under Lenin socialist democracy was more an aim than a reality. This was by and large unavoidable. The CPSU’s adaptation to backwardness and its centrist doctoring of scientific tenets of Marxism-Leninism was not. The Soviet Union did not degenerate, its Communist Party did.

Centrism has opened the door to a craven adaptation to bourgeois society
by our world communist movement and now its disintegration: it has acted as a brake on the world revolution. The problem of bureaucracy has therefore been compounded in the USSR. When we have socialism starting from the base of the most advanced capitalism, we will have to fight to control the bureaucracy. The working class bureaucracy, born but combated under Lenin’s leadership, has not only spawned centrisim, become institutionalised and self perpetuating; it has also become a fetter on the development of productive forces in the Soviet Union today (and, for that matter, in the socialist countries which have copied the Soviet model). In order to remove the growing contradiction between productive forces and the bureaucratic production relations, there will have to be a hard struggle.

The bureaucracy must be brought under control through far reaching measures of socialist democracy. If the Soviet working class decides that this requires a political revolution, we will wholeheartedly support it. Certainly the political monopoly and privileges of the bureaucracy must be ended. Soviets must become the real institutions of power in the land. This means that opposition parties must be allowed and working class initiative made the determining feature of society. This will unfetter production. Unfortuantely Gorbachev is not even offering this, let alone delivering it.

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What then are we seeing today? Obviously a struggle within the existing leadership, not a political revolution, which would mean its overthrow. Against the rising technocracy, the conservative elements in the bureaucracy, those whom Gorbachev says sit in offices built and furnished like ‘palaces’, are fighting a stubborn rearguard action, a campaign of sabotage through inertia. There is nothing communistic about this campaign, but what of Gorbachev’s measures?

Glasnost has been used by Gorbachev as a weapon to expose the corruption and slothfulness of the old bureaucracy. But, as a byproduct, glasnost has also seen the emergence of large numbers of political and cultural clubs. True, most of these wholeheartedly support Gorbachev. Some, such as Pamyat (Memory), are downright Great Russian chauvinists, and anti-semitic to boot. Yet the Pandora’s box of political activity independent of the bureaucracy has been opened. It will not be easily closed. Already a Federation of Socialist Clubs has been formed. In spite of its eclecticism, this is a good thing.

But while there can be positive spin offs from glasnost, what of perestroika? Gorbachev’s New Economic Mechanism is equated with Lenin’s New Economic Policy. But this is not 1920. The USSR does not
need retreat. It does not need less socialism; it needs more. NEM can only bring short term advances and long term dangers.

In our view, there is nothing progressive about downgrading the role of planning. It needs democratising, not abandoning. Market socialism will not solve the Soviet Union’s problems. Socialism must march along the road to communism, not beat a retreat back to the mechanisms of capitalism.

The more the capitalist elements are strengthened, the greater the danger of capitalist restoration, not so much from some counterrevolution by a new peasant kulak class and Nemmen but from sections of the bureaucracy transforming their control of the forces of production into either individual or state capitalist ownership, using the NEM elements as a social base.

In spite of these dangers and the bureaucratic dead weight on socialism, the mighty Soviet working class has remained passive. This is only a temporary state of affairs. This class, which in October 1917 opened a new chapter in world history, will not remain quiet for long. Even as a class in itself it has no enthusiasm for Gorbachev’s reforms. Rightly so, The NEM orientation towards

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so-called market socialism will produce higher prices and lower real wages for workers. The practice of market socialism in Hungary, China and Yugoslavia does not bode well for the living standards of workers in the USSR.

Market socialism might mean that the NEM peasant and petty capitalist grows rich because of higher prices, but this goes hand in hand with unemployment and a fall in real wages. When this is carried out in the name of advancing socialism it is tragic, but hardly surprising, that workers become alienated from socialism. No one should forget what happened in Poland in 1981. According to The Times, Gorbachev says he is determined to push his measures through even if there is social unrest in the Soviet Union.

So there are real dangers with the road Gorbachev is taking. The pre-crisis situation he spoke of when taking over the reins of leadership could become a full blown crisis. This need not result in a Solidarnosc scenario.

The working class in the Soviet Union is far more advanced and has far greater experience, not least the collective memory of October 1917. Soviet workers have no love of bureaucratic privilege, but socialism is theirs; they made it, it was not handed down from above. They will fight tooth and nail to defend and advance it. We will support whatever measures the Soviet working class uses in the fight for communism, including a political
revolution.

4.2. For a real political revolution

Article, The Leninist No56, November 23 1987

All trends within ‘official communism’ have been thrown into crisis by Gorbachev, perhaps nowhere more so than in Britain. His recent writings and speeches, not least the one commemorating the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution, are a condemnation of all those who religiously followed every cumbersome twist and dull turn of the Brezhnev years, while maintaining a secret admiration society for the late and not lamented Joseph Vissarionovich.

Gorbachev has conjured up the ghosts of the past. Krushchev - deposed in a palace coup, Dubcek - overthrown by Soviet tanks, Bukharin - shot as a Nazi/Trotskyite spy - are walking again and haunting the sycophants. Shock there has been, but not enough to produce honesty.

For the New Communist Party leadership it is business as usual. Without the slightest self criticism of its own slavishly pro-Brezhnev past, it praises Gorbachev to the sky. Heather Sanderson drops a series of the smallest of hints in the Straight Leftists’ Communist (June and July 1987) that she does not agree with everything Gorbachev is doing. But, typically, Sanderson dares not say so openly. As to the comatose diplomatic internationalists who write Proletarian, their No3 - on the history of the CPGB - redrafted countless times already, will not see the light of day until it can be suitably Gorbachevised. The leaders of these various factions are nothing but a load of miserable toadies. But none so miserable (and interesting) as the Communist Campaign Group.

Under the title of The Second Revolution it has launched a series of four classes on the Soviet Union. The first has so far been the most worthwhile. The CCG’s speaker, Julian Cooper of Birmingham University’s Centre for Russian and Eastern European Studies, spoke on what he called the Dialectics of Perestroika. He might be an academic, but he is at least an honest academic.

Cooper outlined Gorbachev’s criticism of the dead weight of bureaucracy
in the USSR, how it had become a fetter on production. Cooper himself condemned the crimes of Stalin and the massive repression carried out during the collectivisation of agriculture and how there are still social ills in the USSR like prostitution, alcoholism and apathy. Moreover, he admitted that Gorbachev’s reforms have brought into being a growing class of petty capitalists, private hospitals and the prospect of higher prices and unemployment.

Cooper went on to blithely announce that some Soviet commentators were saying that the Eurocommunist criticisms of the USSR in the 1970s were correct and that there was a growing friendship between the Soviet and the Italian CP. But the bombshell really came when he pointed out that the CPSU was deliberately dropping reference to proletarian internationalism’. It is apparently reassessing its attitude towards the world communist movement and certainly does not favour any further splitting in it. The CPSU is, Cooper reported, looking to loosen its links with the world communist movement and seeking cooperation with greens, social democrats and Labourites. Where now the NCP and the soon to be formed CCG party?

It is only to be expected that our comrades took not a little pleasure in watching the embarrassment, the dropping jaws, and the subsequent ideological contortions of those CCG factional leaders who deigned to be present at Cooper’s lecture. They are hell bent on splitting from the ‘official’ CPGB and at the same time desperately trying to square their support for Stalin and Brezhnev with the circle of supporting Gorbachev.

Let centrism continue its disintegration, its splitting and rush to oblivion. Genuine communists will rally to the banner of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism raised by The Leninist. Frankly we, unlike the Straight Leftists, CCGers, NCPers and Proletarian centrists, have no problems explaining Gorbachev’s reforms. We have no circle to square. We agree with many of the factual criticisms Gorbachev makes about the Soviet Union of yesterday and today. We have made many of these criticisms ourselves and been attacked for doing so. But, and its a big but, while we broadly agree with many of Gorbachev’s criticisms of the past, we do not concur with his cure.

Gorbachev calls for a political revolution, yet under glasnost and perestroika he is offering less socialism for the USSR and all along the line attacks on the working class. We say that the Soviet Union needs a genuine political revolution. This can only be led by the working class and only this class can realise socialist democracy for the USSR.
Gorbachev and his supporters are not leading a political revolution. His ‘revolution’ against Stalin’s *Short Course* history of the CPSU is a cosmetic job. In fact his political antecedents can be traced back directly to Stalin. The crimes of Stalin were not merely those of one man and his immediate entourage - as Gorbachev claimed in his October Revolution speech - they were the crimes of the social stratum Stalin personified, the Soviet bureaucracy which has parasitically governed the USSR since the mid-1920s.

That does not mean there is nothing happening in the USSR, as the myopic writers in the petty bourgeois revolutionary left tell their readers. The USSR is at an historic crossroads. The old bureaucratic methods of running the Soviet economy can now only produce stagnation and crisis. This opens up all sorts of dangers, but also great possibilities.

What we are seeing today is a struggle within the bureaucracy, not a struggle against the bureaucracy. Gorbachev rails against bureaucracy’s inefficiency and *unearned* privileges. But because he is the leader of technocratic wing he can only offer technocratic solutions. Against his phoney political revolution the Soviet working class will turn to the programme of Marx, Engels, Lenin and international communism.

Wages and bureaucratic privileges. Gorbachev says wage differentials between various sections of the working class are too narrow. They will have to grow, and even then workers will have to work harder for relatively less. We agree that wage differentials under socialism are necessary, but we are against campaigns to widen them. We are certainly against cuts in working class living standards. Gorbachev wants to cut the social wage and increase prices. We say let Gorbachev talk about wage cuts when he and all state and party functionaries in the USSR only receive the average pay of a skilled worker. This was the practice originated in the Paris Commune of 1871 and carried on by Lenin after 1917. In those days there were no fat cat salaries for Party functionaries, no caviar and western luxury goods at give away prices in special Kremlin shops. It was Stalin who championed privilege. From the mid-1920s the bureaucracy became a parasitic stratum and gradually accustomed itself to obscene opulence. If Gorbachev was only getting 250 roubles a month maybe he would be less enthusiastic about widening differentials. Abolish all open and concealed bureaucratic privileges!

Economy. Gorbachev says the economy in the USSR is over centralised. It Is
true that the bureaucracy has become a fetter: it has always acted as a brake on what could have been. The bureaucracy was never progressive. True, in 1928 it initiated a drive for industrialisation. This was done, though, in a ham-fisted, enormously wasteful fashion. Although this was a step forward, the Soviet Union is still paying the cost. The bureaucratic methods of the 1930s were not totally out of step with laying the basis of industry - Soviet growth rates in that period testify to that. Today, on the other hand, bureaucratic planning has become a block on the development of the productive forces. Growth rates have steadily slid downwards and the rate of return on investment has done likewise. Gorbachev says he will introduce a Soviet version of market socialism to change this. Inefficient enterprises will be allowed to go bust, prices will rise and wages will be tied to profit or loss. This could mean unemployment. Would Gorbachev be so

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ready to talk about making workers unemployed if all state functionaries in the USSR were subject to instant recall? Gorbachev’s New Economic Mechanism will certainly mean the strengthening of the forces of capitalism in the USSR. Gorbachev’s technocratic answers will temporarily increase growth - market socialism certainly did in China and Hungary. But, as these countries have shown, the advance is short-lived. While NEM will mean the peasants and the petty capitalist Nemmen enriching themselves, the working class will suffer a growing gap between higher prices and their social and monetary wages. Socialism is not a specific mode of production. It is a transitionary form of society between capitalism and communism. NEM will increase the danger of capitalist restorationism - not from below, but from above. The triumph of communism will only be ensured by the forces of communism in socialism - not least the law of planning - overcoming the forces of capitalism: commodity production and the law of value. What the USSR needs today is not less centralism, as Gorbachev maintains. What is needed is democratic centralism in the economy - democratic, not bureaucratic, planning. No to the market: yes to the democratic socialist plan!

\textit{Democracy.} Gorbachev says he is leading a political revolution to allow the full flowering of socialist democracy. This is not true. His glasnost comes from the top. It is not the result of working class initiative. It is not without
guns and bullets. The bureaucracy controls plenty of guns and bullets. Make the workers’ militia real: arm them with the most advanced weaponry! With or without Gorbachev, the working class does not rule the USSR directly. Bureaucratic initiative, not working class initiative, rules. Political opponents of the CPSU can still find themselves landing up in jail or even mental asylums. The works of Bukharin, Stalin, Trotsky and Zinoviev remain banned. The CPSU enjoys a political monopoly. This is not socialist democracy - it is bureaucratic authoritarianism. Genuine socialist democracy cannot be handed down from a technocratic elite. It will have to be won by the class struggle of the working class, up to and including a real political revolution. Bureaucracy under socialism - especially in its early stages - is unavoidable. But the socialist state’s bureaucracy must be under the control of the working class: it must be its servant. In the Soviet Union the bureaucracy has criminally and murderously advanced its sectional interests against the interests of the working class as

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a whole. The USSR’s problems can only be overcome through the introduction of real socialist democracy. Only then can the forces of production be liberated. Only then can the bureaucratic fetter be removed. The key to opening up the struggle for socialist democracy is the ending of the one-party system. There are various classes and strata in the USSR, all with differing - if not antagonistic - interests. These interests should be brought out into the open. For a plurality of parties! The CPSU is fused with the state. This must be ended. The CPSU should compete, along with other parties, for governmental power through winning a majority of delegates to the soviets. Not the soviets we see today, but genuine soviets which are not rubber stamp bodies, but the real institutions of working class state power. Internationalism. The leadership of the CPSU has abandoned proletarian internationalism, not only in word, but deed. Vanessa Redgrave, Marxism Today, The Economist and The Guardian might like Gorbachev - we do not. His new version of the CPSU’s programme does not even refer to the concept of world revolution: it is certainly not guided by it. The leadership of the CPSU now thinks of the interests of the USSR above the interests of the world working class. The USSR was originally intended to be the voluntary union of all socialist states. Instead it has been limited more or less to the frontiers of the old Tsarist empire. For Lenin, the Soviet Union’s fate was bound up with the interests of the world revolution. Lenin never put the interests of the Soviet Union above the interests of the world revolution - the
part above the whole. Yet, at the 27th Congress of the CPSU, Gorbachev offered to do a deal with the USA in countries he called ‘international hotspots’. This, like appeasing the warmongering US over missile cuts, might gain temporary advantage. But it can only damage the long-term interests of the USSR and the world revolution.

We must not be blinded to the truth by Gorbachev’s popularity in the liberal bourgeois media. Of course, we cannot solve the USSR’s problems for it. Only the working class in the USSR can do that. But we have a duty to understand developments in the USSR and support the Soviet workers’ struggle for communism by struggling for socialist revolution in our country.

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4.3. 19th Conference and the Ten Theses

Article, *The Leninist* No 65, June 20 1988

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union holds its 19th Conference - the first for 47 years - starting on June 28. The issues facing the conference are “of vital significance for the party and the country” says its Central Committee in its introduction to its Ten Theses on perestroika, published as a “discussion document”.

There can be no doubt that the 19th Conference is an important event in the political life of the USSR. It would, of course, be pointless to speculate on its outcome. We do not pretend to know whether or not Gorbachev will get everything he wants, or whether those around Yegor Ligachev will succeed in staging some sort of palace coup’.

The Ten Theses contain compromises. They are not pure Gorbachevism. Nevertheless, they represent an attempt to consolidate and advance the political platform of the technocratic wing of the CPSU. It is therefore crucial for genuine communists, those who oppose the revisionism of Gorbachev, to critically study developments in the CPSU and examine what is at stake at the conference and its possible consequences. This can be best done if we deal with the theses one by one.

*Thesis 1. Ideology.* Perestroika has radically changed the ideological and
political situation - a revolution in people’s thinking is taking place and a real pluralism of opinions, open comparison of ideas and interests is appearing”, says Thesis 1. “The most Important result of the first three years of perestroika is the uniting of all social forces under its banner. But survivals of the conservative and bureaucratic mentality have been tenacious and adherents of dogmatic concepts of socialism are slow to yield. They must be overcome if perestroika is to succeed.”

True the Soviet Union is a different place today than under Brezhnev. In the last few years there have been dramatic changes. But opposition does not only come from survivals of the conservative and bureaucratic mentality”. A large section of the Soviet population - not least the working class - is wary of what perestroika will bring, and quite rightly.

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This has yet to find coherent ideological expression, popular opposition to perestroika is not the main political feature of political life in the USSR. Yet pressure from below has been used by a section of the labour bureaucracy in the USSR to oppose Gorbachev, or at least oppose the ‘excesses’ of perestroika.

It is clear that “survivals of the conservative and bureaucratic mentality” is a reference to both the middle layers of the bureaucracy - which is one of the prime targets of Gorbachev’s reforms, attacks on waste, corruption etc - and also the split that has opened up at the top of the CPSU.

The ‘Ligachev group’ - which according to The Economist includes at least four members of the Politburo: Lev Zaikov, a member of the Secretariat, Viktor Chebrikov head of the KGB, Mikhail Solomentsev and President Andrei Gromyko - is said to have been behind the ‘conservative manifesto’ which appeared in Sovetskaya Rossiya in March. In a sense this marked the beginning of the 19th Conference.

The ‘Ligachev group’ fears that Gorbachev has gone too far. They fear that he has opened a Pandora’s box of political and social forces which cannot be controlled.

In the ideological field this group is not in favour of an open admission of the crimes of the past. If all those “who paid an unjust and illegal price in the past” are rehabilitated, will not the legitimacy of the entire regime be brought into question? And if official Soviet history is to be rejected as being merely a collection of lies, half truths and evasions, what is to be put in its place? If the bureaucracy is to remain the master of society, it can only be a new set of lies, half truths and evasions; whatever Gorbachev says, it has no interest in
The ‘Ligachev group’ is certainly correct in its claim that glasnost has set in motion political forces which have led to unprecedented convulsions in Soviet society. Gorbachev’s “revolution from above”, his “revolution without shots” has unleashed previously pent up socio-political forces which will not easily be reined in: a CPSU dominated by the bureaucracy is incapable of achieving ideological hegemony through democratic means.

The fact that differences exist at the top has provided fissures through which popular discontent has found expression, and no amount of Central Committee calls that “discussions” should not lead to “political confrontation”, to “disunity of social forces”, and

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for them to be “on the basis and in the name of socialism”, will close the floodgates.

**Thesis 2. Economics.** It is claimed that “the country has stepped back from the economic crisis that has faced it after years of stagnation”. Frankly, the improvement in the economy is marginal. Growth rates remain sluggish and the rate of return has shown no discernible improvement. This shows that bureaucratic socialism has exhausted all the possibilities inherent in it.

The Central Committee’s main answer to this endemic tendency of bureaucratic socialism towards stagnation - which has seen growth rates slide from 20% in the 1930s to 3% today - is to strengthen the forces of capitalism. That the bureaucracy is looking to the market, not the plan, as the way forward shows that its rule has become reactionary. Bureaucratic management, bureaucratic rule, was never progressive, but now it has become an absolute fetter on the development of the productive forces.

This contradiction between the social production and ownership of the means of production and bureaucratic rule cannot be resolved through Gorbachev’s perestroika and the so-called New Economic Mechanism.

The ‘Ligachev group’ does not seem to have a different economic platform, but in response to pressure from below it has insisted that the Soviet version of ‘market socialism’ must develop “without detriment to the living standards of the population”. On the evidence of Yugoslavia, China and Hungary, the reverse will happen. **Thesis 3. Science and Technology.** “Socialism cannot develop successfully without advancement in science and technology” says the Central Committee. Yet it is clear that while Soviet scientists are among the world’s best, and while the Soviet Union has scientists and technologists in large numbers, bureaucratic rule has meant
that Soviet industry and agriculture remain, in world terms, backward.

The fundamental problem in the USSR is not to be found in a failure to advance science and technology, but the bureaucracy’s inability to apply it to production. The truth is that advances in science and technology cannot be applied and socialism advanced while the bureaucracy remains the master and not the servant of society.

_Thesis 4. Democracy._ Developments so far are only “a prelude” to the “profound and all-round democratisation of the party and society.” What is being proposed are measures like having two carefully selected candidates in elections instead of one, creating full time parliamentarians and abolishing open censorship. This non-class democracy’ is reminiscent of bourgeois democracy; it is bureaucratic ‘democracy’.

Such ‘democracy’ has been used by Gorbachev to win the support of the intelligentsia. This does not alter our view that Gorbachev’s ‘democracy’ is little more than a sop. Genuine socialist democracy - as outlined in Lenin’s _State and Revolution_ - would mean subjecting all officials (including Communist Party state functionaries) to recall, paying them no more than the average skilled wage, arming the working people and taking measures to replace the permanent bureaucracy with the self rule of the population. Above all, today it means abolishing the one-party system. Without the plurality of parties there can be no ‘socialist pluralism’. This is because under socialism there are different classes and strata; there are social contradictions which should find political expression in the form of parties.

Gorbachev could never stand on such a platform because it would undermine both wings of the bureaucracy. His vision of democracy is classic revisionism. In Thesis 3 democracy is not treated as a class question - in fact the proletariat’s class struggle for communism under socialism is not mentioned.

Gorbachev is betraying communism, not introducing socialist democracy. Socialist democracy cannot be handed down by a bureaucratic technocracy - and that is what Gorbachev represents - it can only come from below. Nevertheless although the ‘democracy’ being advocated by the Gorbachevites is like democracy under capitalism - a sham - it cannot be denied that there is a yearning for democracy from the masses.

At this stage it is bound to be the case that politics from below have
negative as well as positive features. Even positive developments often bear the marks of having recently emerged from the bureaucratic womb.

As to the negative features, it has been strongly rumoured that the Great Russian chauvinist Pamyat has powerful backers in the bureaucracy. Likewise it is highly unlikely that demonstrations of a million strong in Armenia over Nagorno Karabakh could have been organised without leading sections of the bureaucracy turning a blind eye or even giving behind the scenes help.

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But whatever the case it is clear that such manifestations from below have developed their own momentum, have gone beyond the bounds of being pawns in the inner-bureaucratic struggle. That the new Party leader in Armenia has said he favours the reincorporation of Nagorno Karabakh shows that splits in the bureaucracy are being intensified by pressure from below.

Thesis 5. The Party. This Thesis contains proposals for shaking up the CPSU and Gorbachevising it. For example, when choosing candidates, Party members should be elected on the basis of “one’s political authority and one’s active stance in advancing perestroika.”

Thesis 6. The soviets. Gorbachev is determined to strengthen the powers of local soviets. This will facilitate the decentralisation of day to day decision making. Rules are being proposed to limit the tenure of office holders to two terms and it Is being suggested that the Supreme Soviet should become more like a parliament than a rubber stamp body. We say soviet power can never be real until the working population is free to elect whatever soviet Party it chooses into power.

Thesis 7. Nationalities. “The brilliant results of the Leninist nationalities policy over the 70 Soviet years are evident to all” says Thesis 7. “Inter-ethnic issues must be settled on the basis of genuine democracy, in the spirit of perestroika”.

It is clear that events in Armenia are the tip of an iceberg. Bureaucratic rule has not solved the problems of national antagonism. If anything, the bureaucracy acts with the arrogance of Great Russian chauvinism In Its handling of differences. We say nationalism can only be overcome through allowing the full flowering of national culture. We are not against the redrawing of boundaries, nor the free movement of people. National rights, including the right to secede, must be respected.
Thesis 8. The law. The principle the Central Committee is advocating is: “Everything is permissible unless prohibited by the law.” Bureaucratic arbitrariness is not in the interests of the technocracy.

Thesis 9. Public organisations. The Central Committee wants to see existing public organisations, such as the trade unions and the Young Communist League, to be joined by new organisations in order to strengthen the forces supporting perestroika.

Thesis 10. Peace and foreign policy. The question of peace is now officially a non-class question. Soviet foreign policy with its ‘New

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Political Thinking’ is designed to preserve the status quo in the world and make peaceful co-existence permanent. For those who see the future in the World Union of Socialist States, this is treachery.

Gorbachev’s internal reforms have nothing to do with fighting for communism. As can be seen by his willingness to do a deal with imperialism over ‘hotspots’ like Nicaragua, South Africa, Angola, Kampuchea and of course Afghanistan, he is prepared to betray the gains of socialism. The domination of opportunism in the USSR - the world’s revolutionary centre - faces the socialist world with the danger of disintegration from within and also at its weakest links, at its periphery.

We are living through a period full of dangers but also great possibilities. History poses two great alternatives: capitalism and war or revolution and communism. It is either one or the other. There is no permanent peaceful co-existence middle course. This is not immediately apparent. We have, after all, recently seen Gorbachev and Reagan sign the finalised INF treaty in Moscow. This has been greeted by many as a ‘historic step towards peace’. Those trained in the school of Marxism-Leninism are not deceived by all the media hype. While imperialism exists, there exists the danger of war.

Thesis 10 says the Central Committee has not cast “aside the militaristic danger which lurks in the essence of imperialism”…but it suggests that “law, human morality and fulfilment of international obligations” is becoming of more importance than the arms, let alone the (unmentioned) class struggles of the working class. This is pacifist sophistry.

4.4. The dialectics of Gorbachevism
The decisions of the 19th All Union Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union have been greeted around the world as a major step forward for democracy for the Soviet people. From *The Sun*, *The Economist* and other apostles of Thatcherism, from the BBC to *Marxism Today*: all have lauded Gorbachev and the 19th CPSU Conference to the sky.

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When our enemies praise us we must ask ourselves what is wrong. This is hardly something the ‘official’ world communist movement, let alone the CPSU, has done. Indeed, they have revelled in Gorbachev’s popularity with the bourgeois establishment and used it as their cue to take further steps to the right.

The 19th Conference came up with no real answers to the crisis that has come to grip socialism in the USSR, all it offers is ‘market socialism’ and a strengthening of the forces of capitalism. For communists there is nothing to celebrate in this ... but it comes as no surprise that our enemies are praising Gorbachev.

Genuine communists will not submit to what the US media calls Gorbymania. Like Lenin when he stood out against the chauvinist tidal wave that swept over the workers’ movement in 1914, we will swim against the Gorbachev stream and accept temporary isolation in order to stay true to the ideals of the revolution.

Gorbachevism is a passing phenomenon. There can be no question that Gorbachev is not a conscious agent of history. He is no proletarian revolutionary using the scientific theory of Marxism-Leninism in the struggle for communism. Gorbachev is a technocrat who will soon be left behind by the forward march of history. Of this we are sure.

As a man, Gorbachev is most likely perfectly sincere in his belief that his reforms will regalvanise Soviet society. But the fact is that the bureaucracy as a ruling caste - of which Gorbachev is the chief representative - can no longer play any sort of progressive role. To paraphrase Marx’s famous introduction to the *Critique of Political Economy*, by the late 1960s the material productive forces of Soviet society came into conflict with the existing bureaucratic relations of production. Bureaucratic socialism had exhausted its possibilities.

In other words, the bureaucracy has become a fetter on the further
development of the productive forces and, as Gorbachev is quickly illustrating, this fetter is absolute; the Soviet economy is reported to have grown by less than 1% last year, compared to over 20% in the ‘period of the personality cult’ (ie under Stalin), and 4-5% in the ‘period of stagnation’ (ie under Brezhnev). So much for perestroika overcoming the “pre-crisis” situation.

The failure of perestroika is inevitable and will have profound political consequences. Again as Marx pointed out, when the forms of development of the productive forces turn into a fetter, revolution becomes a necessity. The further development of the economy demands that the whole bureaucratic superstructure of Soviet society be transformed through what communists call a political revolution, ie a revolution which forcibly transforms the bureaucracy from the master of society into its servant. This will create the conditions for the discarding of the worst lumber of the state, its eventual withering away and the emergence of a society of abundance.

There is no other way forward for Soviet society. Unless this road is taken, unless the bureaucratic fetter is removed, disaster threatens: socialism will either disintegrate from within or fall via some sort of external intervention. The Soviet working class - now the biggest and most powerful in the world - will then have to begin again.

Of course, Gorbachev claims in his book Perestroika, and in a number of other books and speeches, to be leading a revolution - variously described as the USSR’s second revolution, a revolution without guns, a revolution from above and yes, a political revolution. Those who have even the most elementary grasp of politics will recognise that Gorbachev is trying to carry out a programme of reform, not a revolution. Yet the very fact that Gorbachev uses such language shows that Soviet society is confronted with revolutionary tasks, a political revolution is on the agenda in the USSR.

The fact that Gorbachev - a representative of what is old, decaying and reactionary - has attempted to steal this slogan is of immense significance. Whether it is a result of cynicism or naivety, it points to the future of a genuine political revolution. Nevertheless, while social progress demands a political revolution in the USSR in order to free the forces of production and facilitate the triumph of communism, as we have said above, the reactionary
nature of the bureaucracy poses great dangers.

The bureaucracy, in whatever manifestation or guise, has never possessed a coherent ideology simply because it has a parasitic existence; it is not a ruling class but a ruling stratum. Because of this it has never pursued in reality (as opposed to rhetoric) the goal of communism. To do that would mean to abolish itself and it is neither interested nor capable of doing that.

Instead it has attempted to preserve the status quo. This is illusory and full of perils. In a world which, by the very nature of matter, is in a process of constant change, attempts to stay still are always doomed. Gorbachev’s alternative to this is not to go forward but backwards. Given the contradictory nature of the Soviet bureaucracy - the fact that it owes its existence to a socialist revolution but cannot carry out its programme - we see attempts to return to the past using the language of the future. Such are the laws of dialectics.

As a consequence, as well as presiding over the USSR’s transformation economically, many of the socio-political gains of the October revolution have been undermined or simply abolished by the bureaucracy. Hence, now that the bureaucracy has itself become an absolute fetter on further development of the productive forces, the technocratic wing puts forward solutions to society’s crisis which transparently point in the direction of capitalism using the slogan of political revolution. The capitalist road is not necessarily pursued consciously, nevertheless this is the content we find in Gorbachevism.

However harshly history will judge Stalin, compared to him Gorbachev is an epigone, like Louis Bonaparte was compared to Napoleon Bonaparte. Where Stalin laid hold of Preobrazhensky’s plan for industrialisation and used it for his own purposes, all Gorbachev is capable of resurrecting is Bukharin’s version of NEP, which in today’s world means following in the footsteps of proven failures like Hungary and Yugoslavia. This will not bring dynamic sustained growth. It will bring inflation, unemployment, growing class differences along with share ownership and “plans to establish a stock exchange”.

This is not because of Gorbachev’s personal failings but is a direct consequence of historical development. Today the social position and interests of the bureaucracy provide only capitalist answers to the USSR’s problems, ie, no answers at all.

For all Gorbachev’s claims (and the claims of the bourgeois media) the 19th Conference of the CPSU was devoid of revolutionary ideas; it is now
after all a bureaucratic party of the working class, not the revolutionary vanguard. It was under Lenin. Certainly there has been no flowering of Leninist democracy in the CPSU. Differences were expressed openly for the first time in many years, yes: but the content of the differences were far from Leninist. In fact the 19th Conference was a travesty of Leninism, the essence of which is the fight for world revolution.

Gorbachev is not introducing proletarian democracy into the

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USSR, he is merely offering a sop; the delineation of Party and state responsibilities, the creation of a Duma-like parliament, two carefully chosen candidates instead of one and a two term presidential system have nothing to do with genuine socialist democracy.

What would a genuine socialist democracy be like? Briefly we can sum up a genuine socialist democracy under the following three headings:
1. Workers and collective farmers must have the right to form soviet parties. There must be free elections to the soviets, not two or three candidates chosen by the CPSU, but unlimited candidates. Electors must have the right to recall their delegates at any time and no official should be paid more than the average skilled worker.
2. Workers must have the right to bear arms. The standing army must be balanced with a workers’ militia equipped with the most advanced weaponry.
3. Democracy must be extended to the workplace. Workers’ control must be extended over every sphere of production, not only the election and replacement of managers.

The fact that the Gorbachev leadership is incapable of delivering such a package (outlined in Lenin’s *State and Revolution*) does not mean we do not welcome the disintegration of bureaucratic monolithism. This process can only but help reveal the class and sectional contradictions which exist in the USSR and thus help in the transformation of the working class from a class in itself to a class for itself.

The crisis of bureaucratic socialism has not only created mass discontent but splits within the ruling stratum (not shown by the 200 dissenting votes at the 19th Conference but by the fudge of its six final resolutions). Through the splits in the bureaucracy, mass activity can find expression; because of this it is essential neither to dismiss differences in the CPSU Central Committee (as certain leftists do) nor to see them as pivotal for the coming struggles.
Naturally a loosening of the bureaucratic straitjacket will lead to the emergence of political activity of all types. But the formation of the Democratic Union, the nationalist outburst in Nagorno Karabakh and the emergence of sinister groups like Pamyat do not demand a state clampdown, the return to a supposed monolithic golden age; rather it demands the decisive entry of the working class onto centre stage.

The working class struggle for socialist democracy is the key to removing the fetter of bureaucratic rule and winning the battle for communism.

Firstly, democracy will create a wider, freer and more open form of the class struggle. This is in the interests of the working class. Reactionary ideas are best fought in the open and a plurality of parties will allow the working class to clearly differentiate itself from other strata and classes.

Secondly, as democracy develops not only will the bureaucracy be made into the servant of society (instead of its master), it will begin to wither away as socialism begins to look less like capitalism indirectly ruled by the working class and more like classless communism.

This will not happen spontaneously. What it requires is working class consciousness, working class struggle and independent working class organisation. Such a development is a vital necessity. Without such a step it is impossible to accomplish the tasks with which Soviet society is confronted.

A USSR with an economy which has been released from the fetters of bureaucratic rule, a USSR with an active mass proletarian democracy and a profound commitment to proletarian internationalism will not - as is Gorbachev - be loved by the bourgeoisie and its hangers on. It will instead act, as it did in October 1917, as a beacon for the partisans of the working class the world over. That is the only future worthy of the world’s revolutionary centre.

4.5. Gorbachev in history

Speech, *The Leninist* No72, November 28 1988 (extract)

It is pretty obvious that Gorbachev’s reforms’ will do the Soviet Union no
good at all. In fact they will do great harm. Given this, some will simply conclude that Gorbachev is stupid. Obviously this is not the case. Gorbachev is a highly educated, politically experienced and relatively cultured technocrat.

So why is he doing what he is doing? The answer to this can only be found in what has been called the role of the individual in history. We, of course, understand full well that the masses make history. But, as Plekhanov in particular showed, outstanding individuals make a vital contribution, particularly at decisive moments.

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Take Stalin. Even though his leadership of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union led to a qualitative break with the politics and practices of Leninism, this did not stop him from playing to some degree a progressive, if contradictory, role. For all his faults, his mistakes, his championing of bureaucratic socialism, nothing should be allowed to detract from the positive developments in the Soviet Union during the years when Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin led the USSR.

Certainly without the first five year plan and the four years taken, without the determined drive for collectivisation and industrialisation in the 1930s, the Soviet Union would have gone down to Nazi Germany. Instead - as a result of Stalin’s far-sightedness and the resulting economic powerhouse behind the Red Army - the guts were ripped out of the Nazi war machine. Because of this the conditions were established for a string of socialist states in Eastern Europe and the emergence of the Soviet Union as the second most powerful country on earth. To say the least, this achievement owed not a little to Stalin.

Likewise in comparison with the genuinely great - and often ruthless and bloody - leaders of Britain and the United States in the past, such as Oliver Cromwell and George Washington, the supposed great leaders of Britain and the USA today, Thatcher and Reagan, are pygmies. They have no revolutionary culture, no ability to make bold, decisive and original political moves. The difference is not to be found in the upbringing and life experience of individuals. Neither is it to be found in class.

Cromwell and Washington, Thatcher and Reagan come from the same bourgeois stable. The difference is that this class which was once revolutionary has now become irretrievably reactionary. Whereas the bourgeoisie once represented a force to free the forces of production, now it stands as a block on development. In the last analysis this is what prevents the leaders of the bourgeoisie from playing any sort of progressive role in society.
There are lessons to be learnt here about the Soviet Union. Compared with Stalin, Gorbachev is a pygmy. Like the representatives of moribund capitalism, Gorbachev has no progressive role. His reforms’ will not liberate the forces of production. They will further hold them back. His attacks on Stalin are a cover for attacks on socialism itself.

In this context, against Gorbachev we obviously defend the

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Stalin of the five year plans, the Stalin of collectivisation, the Stalin of industrialisation, the Stalin of World War II and the Stalin of the spread of socialism into Eastern Europe. We proudly and unhesitatingly defend the forward march of socialism over which Stalin presided. Gorbachev uses Stalin’s mistakes and yes, crimes, to slander and undermine his achievements and the achievements of socialism itself. We will not be party to such anti-Sovietism.

The reactionary role of Gorbachev is, of course, not merely the result of personal attributes. As we have said before, it is the result of the bureaucracy running out of all progressive possibilities. Because it cannot and will not abolish itself, this stratum now stands as a block to the further development of productive forces. Gorbachev proves that today the bureaucracy has no answers for the Soviet Union except capitalistic ones.

It is therefore no surprise to us whatsoever that Gorbachev has had praise heaped upon him from almost every strand of bourgeois opinion. Where this causes us to ask the most searching questions, official communism’ has been swept along by what the western media calls Gorbymania, a passing phenomenon that will go the same way as Bernsteinism, Kautskyism, Eurocommunism and other opportunist fads.

There can be no question of Gorbachev being a conscious agent of history. He is no proletarian revolutionary using the forces of capitalism in the short term to strengthen socialism in the long term, like Lenin.

As a man Gorbachev might believe his reforms’ will save the USSR. This is not the point though. The technocratic wing of the bureaucracy which he heads objectively stands as a threat to the survival of the USSR. That is what is important.

The further development of the economy demands that the whole bureaucratic superstructure of Soviet society is transformed through a political revolution. That is a revolution which will, as Engels said, forcibly
transform the bureaucracy from the master of society to its servant. Only this will create the conditions for discarding the worst lumber of the state and bring a dramatic upturn in economic growth rates.

It is our duty as proletarian internationalists and communists to speak openly against Gorbachevism. The working class movement has no need for those who are only wise after events, those who now denounce the likes of Stalin and Brezhnev, yet never did so while they were alive. The fate of the USSR hangs on Soviet workers making a political revolution. Unless there is a successful political revolution, the only alternative is a return to capitalism via an Internal counterrevolution or, as a consequence of permanent stagnation, a counterrevolutionary external Intervention.

4.6. Counterrevolution begins: peaceful and democratic

Socialism in the socialist countries - which are “the embodiment of the victory over capitalism on an international scale” - is being corroded from within and eroded from without. We are living through a drawn out 1914 (when the parties of the Second International went over to their ‘Own’ ruling classes), drawn out because our 1914 involves not only parties, but states.

On the periphery of the socialist world, Kampuchea is now Cambodia again. It no longer calls itself socialist. Nor does Afghanistan. Deserted by Gorbachev, it is now living on borrowed time because of the bungling of the Mujahed in counterrevolutionaries. The situation in the heartland of socialism points in the same direction.

So confident have the leaders of the top imperialist countries - the G7, group of seven - become that they openly talk of the death of communism. Gorbachev’s letter to their Paris meeting pleading for “complete participation” in the “world economy” and promising great benefits from the “opening up of a market as big as the Soviet Union” has only reinforced the arrogant confidence of the imperialists.” His message was greeted with a mixture of contempt and joy. Contempt for his grovelling. Joy because it was seen as an admission that the Soviet Union had finally surrendered and
admitted it had lost the Cold War. What is crucial for the imperialists is a step by step managed dismantling of socialism. They do not want a sudden collapse or a drift into a power vacuum. After squeezing the Soviet Army out of Afghanistan they are turning their attention to Eastern Europe - and in particular Hungary and Poland, which undoubtedly constitute today’s weak links in the socialist system. At the Paris summit

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the imperialists reached the stage of laying down initial plans to aid the restoration of capitalism.

Bush returned from his trip to Poland and Hungary in triumph. To Bush, developments in these countries are the first signs in realising Kennedy’s dream of a free Europe’, ie a Europe free of communism. No wonder. In Hungary ‘communist’ leaders praise the 1956 counterrevolution, advocate leaving the Warsaw Pact and talk about forming a new governing social democratic party, which would rule in alliance with openly pro-capitalist liberals. But Poland is just ahead of Hungary at the moment in the drive towards redefining itself as a pluralistic Central European nation as opposed to an authoritarian Eastern European nation. Such a redefinition is a geopolitical cover for a social redefinition.

The counterrevolutionary Solidarnosc, relegalised in April, won in June a landslide in elections to the senate (99 out of 100 seats). Bush’s Poland trip was not only designed to praise Solidarnosc. He also praised the leadership of the Polish United Workers Party. President Jaruzelski is Bush’s type of communist, just as Lech Walesa is his type of trade unionist. After all, they are both committed to burying the planned economy and restoring the dominance of the capitalist market.

Moves are already afoot to sell off state owned enterprises to investors at “home and abroad” and integrate Poland into the capitalist section of the world economy, through making the zloty convertible. As we have said in The Leninist, this would amount to a peaceful democratic counterrevolution”.

Peaceful, because the restoration of capitalism will not mean the smashing of the state; the Polish socialist’ police and army will defend the new capitalist property relations. Democratic because, as shown by the elections, the masses will not lift a finger to defend the old order.

Of course, western government leaders tell the Poles that capitalism will produce Swedish type social democracy and Swedish type living standards.
Again, as we have pointed out, this is nonsense. Even *The Economist*, the most fervent advocate of Thatcherite capitalism, admits that the “first effects” of restoring capitalism “will be to make things worse”.\textsuperscript{112} There will be austerity, mass unemployment and perhaps hyperinflation. This is bound to provoke resistance. There is every reason to think that any post peaceful counterrevolution regime will eventually be replaced by

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one of blood and iron

Not surprisingly, Solidarnosc does not want to take government positions at the moment. It rightly fears a “social explosion”, which it admits it could not control. Solidarnosc is made up of peasants and rip-off middle men, workers and capitalists, liberal intellectuals and priestly bigots - a highly unstable formation, liable to shatter the moment it puts a toe into the corridors of power.

That is why we do not think that capitalism will lead to democratic stability in Poland (even the sham democratic sort), only a return to a new form of church-backed, Pilsudskiite, semi-fascist, military regime which ran the country in the 1920s and 30s. Capitalism, in other words, will bring the jackboot, bans on divorce and abortion, and poverty.

Recognising that talk of a “social explosion” is not doom-mongering, many media pundits, for example Edward Mortimer in the *Financial Times*, as well as some in the leading circles in France and Federal Germany, have insisted that a new Marshall Plan is needed in order to ensure that the “dismantling” of the “command economy” and the return to “fully fledged capitalism” proceeds without causing a complete breakdown.\textsuperscript{113}

There is a problem however. A new Marshall Plan could not be centred on US capital. The US is not the power it was in 1947. Today it has a massive deficit. It is Japan and Federal Germany which have come to rival the US and have the giant surpluses. A new Marshall Plan would thus, if it ever materialised, be a scramble for Eastern Europe which would heighten the maturing inter-imperialist antagonisms and increase the danger of a World War III as each power tries to gain advantage.

And, of course, a new Marshall Plan could never transform Poland, Hungary or any other East European country into a Japan or a Federal Germany. These countries were and are major imperialist powers. The recipients of a new Marshall Plan would become neo-colonies, most likely of a German led European Community. That would be their fate.
What about the USSR, the world’s revolutionary centre? Is it still a bulwark for the defence of socialism? Will it rescue Poland from the clutches of imperialist slavery? No. Addressing the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on July 7 Gorbachev in effect promised the imperialists that the Soviet Union would never again intervene in Eastern Europe as it did in 1956 and 1968. “Social and political

orders in one or another country changed in the past”, he said, “and may change in the future. But this change is the exclusive affair of the people of that country and is their choice. Any interference in domestic affairs and any attempt to restrict the sovereignty of states, both friends and allies or any others, are inadmissible”. Gorbachev is in effect washing his hands of Eastern Europe. He is actively encouraging accommodation with the counterrevolutionary forces in Poland and Hungary (a meeting with Lech Walesa is strongly rumoured to be on the cards) in the hope of currying favour with the imperialists.

Why should this be? Bureaucratic socialism in the USSR has run out of all progressive possibilities. In an attempt to preserve its privileges, the technocratic Gorbachevite wing of the bureaucracy has turned to ‘market socialism’ just as Poland and Hungary have.

Gorbachev lectured Soviet miners that their strike action was “plunging the country into social chaos”. What hypocrisy, it is his turn to capitalism which has made queues outside shops longer and helped the rise of nationalist movements in the Baltic republics, and Pamyat, the modern day Black Hundreds, in Russia. It is not the miners who have plunged the Soviet Union into chaos, it is Gorbachev and the pro-capitalist wing of the bureaucracy.

So while Gorbachev still basks in the popular acclaim he receives from bourgeois public opinion in the west, it is not surprising that in the Soviet Union itself his standing has been steadily eroded. Good!

The growing realisation that Gorbachev’s answers do not work has inevitably produced negative forms in the first place. Nonetheless there exists a gut level hatred of capitalism in the USSR. And as shown in strikes by miners in Siberia and the Ukraine, the working class - the class that made the Great October Revolution - is at last on the move.

Naturally, as the strikes are spontaneous the miners’ demands are full of contradictions. Yet it is clear that a relatively high level of consciousness
exists. They wanted political as well as economic changes. Miners established their own workers’ committees that took charge of negotiations with the government, prevented drunkenness by closing drink shops and generally policed the area. A splendid display of proletarian discipline.

Until Gorbachev issued his threats to the miners, the Gorbachevites had attempted to claim the strike as an example of perestroika

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“from below” (Sovietskaya Rossiya). But it is quite clear that the miners have no time for the Gorbachevite leadership, nor for capitalism. At their mass meetings they booed down Mikhail Shehadov, the minister for the coal industry, along with a spokesman for the openly pro-capitalist Democratic Union. Again good!

Developments in Poland and Hungary (and by implication the USSR) have caused deep misgivings in Romania, the GDR, Albania, Cuba and Czechoslovakia. Unfortunately the leaders here do not have any sort of worked out critique, let alone a programme of action. As we have argued, socialism cannot stand still. In the end it must either retreat back to capitalism a la Gorbachev, or it must move forward along the road towards communism, through extending mass proletarian democracy to the limits, to the point at which it negates itself. Centrist opposition to Gorbachevism is at best a holding operation; and if the truth be told, battening down the hatches on open debate only further alienates the masses and gives the forces of restorationism the banner of democracy free of charge.

What is needed in the Soviet Union is a political revolution. Not the sort of political revolution Gorbachev claims he is leading, but a political revolution against Gorbachev. Such a revolution would transform not only the USSR and the dire situation in Eastern Europe but would have the same world shaking impact October 1917 did. For this to happen the working class in the Soviet Union must go beyond spontaneity. It needs a genuine communist leadership.

We will support the revolutionary struggle of the Soviet proletariat in any way we can, not least by fighting to make revolution in our own country. Above all though, because we recognise that the world revolution is indivisible, and that due to the traitor Gorbachev, the gains for the world revolution won in October 1917, and those won in the wake of the Red Army’s defeat of the German Wehrmacht in 1945, are in imminent danger,
we raise the slogan of the unconditional defence of the socialist countries.

It seems that in Britain we are almost unique in this. Given the still very limited weight our organisation carries within the workers movement, this is more than a pity. Defence of socialism needs class action.

So we must use the sword of polemic against those who, although they say they will make a revolution in Britain, refuse to

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defend revolutions that exist in concrete reality. In taking on these petty bourgeois revolutionaries and defeating them, we clear the ground for the reforged Communist Party of Great Britain, which can really defend the socialist countries (yes, even those with the most monstrous bureaucratic deformations) in deed as well as in word.

4.7. Nationalism fills the vacuum Editorial, *The Leninist* No86, February 5 1990

After losing Eastern Europe, the bumbling Gorbachev, lionised by bourgeois politicians and ‘official communists’ as a brilliant politician (the *Morning Starts* Tony Chater even stupidly called him “today’s Lenin” on the BBC), is now presiding over another ‘master stroke’ - the break up of the USSR.

Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia are firmly set on independence. Nationalist movements are rapidly gaining strength in the Ukraine and Byelorussia and are already dominant in Moldavia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, where the intervention of the Soviet armed forces will only give an anti-Soviet twist to its virtual civil war with equally nationalist dominated Armenia.

With the USSR dismembered, antagonistic inter-imperialist rivalries, which have already cost 75 million lives this century, will come to the fore. The possibility of a World War III greatly increases as rival imperialist blocs begin their scramble for the east.

But as well as opening the door to clashes between a German dominated Europe, a Japanese dominated Eastern Asia and the USA, there is a great danger that the disintegration of the Soviet Union will not only produce a checkerboard of rival states, but a checkerboard of rival Lebanons with internal ethnic conflicts that will put the recent Azerbaijani anti-Armenian pogrom into the shade.
Each of the present fifteen Soviet Republics is made up of a rich mixture of peoples: 33% of Latvia’s population is Russian, 30% of Tadzhikistan’s Uzbeki, 14% of Moldavia’s Ukrainian, etc, etc. In fact, according to Soviet sources, there are 118 different nationalities in the USSR. The proto bourgeois popular fronts will come to power by fuelling nationalist sentiments and nationalistic hatreds.

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between these peoples. The result will be slaughter on a massive scale.

The main responsibility for this lies firmly and squarely with the parasitic Soviet bureaucracy. Whatever the undoubted advantages membership of the USSR has meant for small nations in terms of economic advancement, language rights, top positions in the state etc, the bureaucracy has, in spite of itself, fuelled nationalism.

Through an inability to win the moral argument, it has time and time again resorted to crude administrative measures. Like a Great Russian bully it has ignored and crushed national rights; whole peoples have been branded traitors and moved thousands of miles from their natural homelands; others were forcibly incorporated into the USSR and told to be grateful.

And in a utopian effort to create a homogeneous USSR and a new Soviet ‘man’ (sic), with no contradictions resulting from social position, nationality or gender, the bureaucracy pretended that class politics, which made the formation of the USSR in 1923 possible, were outdated. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union was no longer described as a working class vanguard organisation in its statutes, but a party of the whole people”.

Nationalism was bound to fill the vacuum. In conditions of an authoritarian one party state, where even the formal class politics of official communism’ were denied, the working class could not even operate as a class in itself, let alone as a class for itself. As a result, especially with the abysmal failure of perestroika, the working class, along with a bureaucracy desperate for some sort of popular base, has increasingly divided along national lines.

We Leninists oppose the break up of the USSR. Its disintegration would strengthen imperialism and make it much harder to re-cement working class unity. It would do nothing to further the struggle for communism.

However, preserving the unity of the USSR will not be achieved through supporting the ever more panicky Gorbachev. It can only be achieved through the struggle against him and his bureaucratic ilk - through the struggle for a genuine political revolution and a USSR based on the
voluntary, not forced, union of peoples.

4.8. Article Six and Bonapartism

Editorial, *The Leninist* No87, February 20 1990

For Leninists it was always wrong that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had its “leading” role in society given the status of law through Article Six in the constitution. It was also wrong that it was the only legal party. The banning of other parties was an emergency measure forced upon Lenin during the Civil War. It was never intended to be a permanent state of affairs. Certainly Lenin never thought of securing his party’s standing through law.

Real communist parties win and re-win their leading rule day by day - win it in open struggle against wrong ideas, proving to the working class through practice that the Communist Party, not any other party, is their party. Of course, the CPSU’s Central Committee has not suddenly come round to our way of thinking. Its decision to repeal Article Six is not a step in the direction of Leninism. So what is the significance of the February Central Committee plenum?

On one level it is simply a recognition that there already exists a multitude of parties and proto parties: the Democratic Union, Pamyat, the Inter-regional group, a host of nationalistic popular fronts, etc. But there is far more to it than that.

Hand in hand with the decision to drop Article Six, Gorbachev announced that he would be seeking to vastly extend his already considerable powers as Soviet president. To legitimise and facilitate such a move he wants to transform the position from one elected by the Congress of Peoples Deputies to one directly elected by an atomised population, in the manner of the USA.

Gorbachev does not want to be too closely associated with the CPSU, which he fears will be given a drubbing in free elections. Given the lack of credible alternatives, he has every reason to feel confident that as a presidential candidate he would, for the moment at least, romp home.

Convincing his doubting Central Committee colleagues to agree to his proposals was relatively easy. All he had to do was give the nod to the
Inter-regional group to stage a mass demonstration (the time and place were broadcast on Soviet radio and TV) and plant a

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rumour in the western media to the effect that he was preparing to stand down as general secretary of the CPSU - in effect to Junk the party. Naturally he denied it later, but it had the desired effect.

Behind all these constitutional goings on lies the struggle between the old Party and state bureaucracy and the forces of capitalist restoration. As things stand today they are evenly balanced. The old bureaucracy is deeply entrenched but lacks any sort of popular mandate and no longer has any real belief in itself. The forces of capitalist restoration exist within the movement for democracy and have only just started to get their act together through the so-called ‘radical Inter-regional group.

As long as neither side is capable of delivering a decisive blow (and the mighty Soviet working class remains passive), conditions are perfect for the emergence of Bonapartism. A ‘strong man’ who ostensibly appears as a mediator, a force for stable change, seemingly above sectional interests and ‘petty’ party politics. Gorbachev clearly sees himself tailor made for such a role; and to achieve it he has been busily playing off one force against the other, all the while keeping one foot in each camp.

However, the present stalemate between the old bureaucracy and the proto bourgeoisie is a passing phenomenon. In the end either capitalist restoration or proletarian political revolution will triumph. So Gorbachevite Bonapartism has no long term possibilities. In the meantime, though, it is essential that partisans of the working class discard any illusions in Gorbachev which they might have entertained. He is a reactionary who richly deserves our contempt.

4.9. Official and unofficial trade unions: how not to help Soviet workers

Article, The Leninist No88, March 9 1990

Fronted by Labour MP Alice Mahon, left groups such as the SWP are busily campaigning for “material and financial assistance” for Sotsprof, a “new
independent socialist trade union movement in the USSR”. According to Socialist Worker, “the kind of independent socialist trade union organisation being built by Sotsprof has never been so urgent”.\textsuperscript{115}

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Already over £700 has been raised from trade union organisations such as Jaguar’s Coventry Joint Shop Stewards Committee, Nalgo Manchester Health branch, Sogat CMS HQ chapel and Bradford Teachers Association. And during the course of this month a Sotsprof representative will be touring “all” major towns in Britain to raise more.

So what should be our attitude towards Sotsprof? Obviously we support its right to exist. But should we advocate that partisans of the working class in Britain give financial aid to Sotsprof’s work in the name of bringing to “life the best tradition of internationalism in our movement”? Frankly, no! But not because we question the sincerity of Sotsprof members or have illusions in the existing trade unions.

Before presenting our arguments about Sotsprof, let us cast our minds back to 1980-81. In those days the likes of the SWP were doing their best to persuade British workers what a wonderful development Solidarnosc, the independent trade union in Poland, was.

Today SWPers, Trotskyites, social democrats and Euros need a new cause. Solidarnosc is now in government; capitalism is being restored, unemployment and inflation is spiralling. Polish workers have understandably not flocked back into Solidarnosc. From its peak membership of 11 million it is now down to two million, the old official trade union is three times as big.

We do not want to tar Sotsprof with the same brush as Solidarnosc, we simply want to show them what false friends of the working class they have in Britain, and jog a few memories. Our objection to Sotsprof, however, is not its self appointed publicists in Britain. We oppose the whole Sotsprof project; it is wrong from beginning to end.

In the real spirit of proletarian internationalism, we say to those supporters of Sotsprof who want to defend and advance socialism that they should carefully reconsider their course.

There can be no doubt that it is the working class which will bear the brunt of Gorbachev’s pro-market perestroika. Along with empty shops they now face a growing danger of capitalist restoration. What this demands is the building of a genuine Communist Party with a programme of political
revolution to stem the tide of counterrevolution and, through proletarian
democracy, open up the road to communism. Calls for a “new, independent socialist

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trade union movement in the USSR” are a diversion from this necessity. Sotsprof smacks of syndicalism, and can only end in disappointment.

Let us explain why. Trade unions cannot substitute for political parties; they should include within their ranks all workers, no matter what their views. We are for the trade union unity of all workers, not their organisation along religious or political lines, as in France and Italy.

The All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions in the Soviet Union has nearly 130 million members, that is 98% of the working population, who incidentally join not because they are forced to, or any such nonsense, but because of generous welfare and other benefits.

Its affiliated trade unions are organised along industrial lines, membership is determined by the production principle - manual and non manual workers in an enterprise belong to the same trade union. That means for example that an electrician working in a car plant belongs to the carworkers’ union. This is something we advocate for Britain. and we are hardly unique: the SWP would agree with us. So why does it support Sotsprof, which advocates splitting up the AUCCTU and its potentially mighty industrial unions? What advantage would there be in that?

Trade unions under capitalism - and to some extent under socialism - bargain over the price of the workers’ only commodity, labour power. That is their essential function. They are not revolutionary parties organised for the overthrow of the wages system and should not be thought of as such. This does not mean that communists should ignore trade unions. Quite the reverse, we take them very seriously.

We want to turn trade unions into mass schools for communism. We therefore emphatically oppose the slogan that trade unions should be independent of communist influence. That is the time honoured slogan of Cold War reactionaries. We will operate within them and win positions of leadership through the correctness of our practice, not as in the AUCCTU by writing in the leading role of communists into its statutes.

What of the independence from the state? That was the subject of fierce debate at the 10th Congress of the Soviet Party in March 1921. Trotsky and Bukharin wanted to see the trade unions treated much in the same way as the
army, they wanted them to be made

into state institutions. Lenin knew that this carried enormous dangers. He successfully argued that under socialism, especially bureaucratic socialism, they should continue to protect workers, this time from their own state. That demands their independence from the state. Officially this is the position of the Soviet Union today.

Of course, as Sotsprof will know only too well, that is not the practice. Party and state tended to merge during the 1920s, till by the 1930s they had, to all intents and purposes, become fused. As a result the Party-led trade unions developed a cosy relationship with management over many years and in effect came to operate under state control.

However, that does not mean that under today’s conditions genuine communists should support tiny ‘socialist’ break-aways from the AUCCTU. Communists should guard the unity of the trade union movement in the USSR and seek to make it truly independent of the state in order to mobilise the broad mass of the workers in defence of socialism and against the bureaucracy, in a political revolution.

Some will say this is impossible. But not genuine communists. In Spain and Italy communists operated within the fascist trade unions, and to a very large degree succeeded in turning them on their heads. Communists in Turkey have the same aim in their work in Turk-Is, the yellow trade union centre originally set up with the help of the CIA. The AUCCTU presents essentially the same challenge. So does our TUC!

Revealingly, those in Britain promoting Sotsprof do not advocate splits from the TU, though it is led by a bureaucratic caste renowned for its treachery and its reactionary, pro-imperialist politics. Even when it came to the EETPU, organisations such as the SWP correctly argued that although it had been expelled from the TUC and although it was led by Hammond, an open scab, it was wrong for militants to split and thus separate themselves off from the majority. Stay in and fight, we all said. We recommend the same principle to the Sotsprof comrades.
4.10. 500 Days

Editorial, *The Leninist* No95, October 5 1990

We have long argued that bureaucratic socialism has run out of all progressive possibilities, that it faced the prospect of either political revolution or a return to capitalism. Events in Eastern Europe have proved us only too right, and surely all honest observers will admit that a similar process is now well advanced in the world’s revolutionary centre itself, the Soviet Union.

It is far more than just symbolic that there are moves afoot to change the name of the country: to either drop the word ‘soviet’ or the word ‘socialist, or both, from its title. Demands from those in the highest positions - such as professor Stanislav Shatalin, a member of Gorbachev’s presidential council - for the *speediest* transition to capitalism, are now *almost* official policy.

Whether or not his 500 day crash programme “to convert the Soviet Union into a market economy” is ever made operational remains to be seen. Shatalin told the *Financial Times* correspondent in Moscow that he is “convinced” it will be “put into effect” by Gorbachev in the “very near future”. Whatever doubts we have about this, it is clear that in spite of all their well publicised differences, the Soviet Union’s leading politicians are hell bent on counterrevolution.

What passes for debate in their circles is about which way to achieve the restoration of capitalism. Should it be “very cruel” but effective (Shatalin), or less cruel, but acceptable to a desperate population (Ryzhkov)?

The Soviet Union is certainly in profound crisis. Under the stagnation of Brezhnev, workers had to join long queues, even for basic necessities. Under the dynamic’ perestroika, workers no longer have to bother queuing. The shelves are bare. But as well as plunging deeper into economic chaos, the Soviet Union is being pulled apart politically. This has above all manifested itself in the form of nationalism, not least in the Russian core of the country.

Although Gorbachev has been granted sweeping presidential powers
(“tsarist” powers, admits Shatalin), the west’s statesman of the year has been exposed as the political pygmy he really is. It is
easy to give Imperialism Eastern Europe on a platter and agree to unequal arms treaties. It is another thing entirely to prevent the disintegration of the Soviet Union and its economy.

While Gorbachev dithers about the 500 day plan, tries to blend it with Ryzhkov’s “alternative plan” for a “centrally managed transition to a market system” (capitalism), Yeltsin has gone ahead with his own 500 day programme. As to the Baltic republics, they are determined on full capitalist independence, and want nothing to do with Moscow, whether it is headed by Gorbachev or Yeltsin.

As a result of centrifugal nationalism and economic chaos, Gorbachev issues his presidential decrees to the wind. If Yeltsin were to replace him, he would surely suffer the same fate. Counterrevolution is a blind and ungrateful god. Having used and discarded Gorbachev, it will then use Yeltsin, and then when he in turn has outlived his usefulness he too will face political extinction. The administrative stratum in the Soviet Union might be intent on transforming Itself into a full blown capitalist class, but, as the GDR has shown, at the end of the day what capitalism prefers to be served by, is not reformed ‘official communist’ populists.

Of course, if capitalism is restored it will be the masses who will really pay for it. Unemployment, already predicted to soar between 30 and 40 million, can only but be further exacerbated as world capitalism goes into another of its pre-general crisis downward oscillations. Soviet capitalism will hardly be stable; in fact it will be prone, very prone, to a new proletarian revolution.
5. Perestroika abroad

Gorbachev’s perestroika had its first counterrevolutionary effects, not in the Soviet Union, but abroad. In the name of “new political thinking” Gorbachev weakened the socialist world, undermined revolutionary struggles and increased the danger of a World War III.

5.1. Peace in our time?

Article, The Leninist No54, October 8 1987

The air is thick with talk of peace. Soon there will be a summit between Gorbachev and Reagan to conclude the much vaunted arms reduction treaty. It is said by some that the treaty will be a historic step forward for all humankind and even that it will be a first step towards a nuclear free world.

This is heady stuff and communists would do well not to be carried away with the idea that the US Imperialist beast has been tamed. No sooner had Shevardnadze left for Moscow, indeed only two hours after the announcement of the interim agreement, the US Defence Department announced to the world that it was speeding up research on key areas of the Star Wars programme.

Communists should therefore look at the proposed treaty without any pacifist illusions whatsoever. We must look at things as they are, not as we would like them to be.

Telling the truth does not weaken our movement. Our movement has had enough of those who can only echo the official line. There is no room for sycophancy towards the Soviet leadership. The Straight Leftist, NCP and CCG leaders praise Gorbachev every time he picks his nose. They insist his reforms are a revolution and the deal with US Imperialism will bring peace in our time.
Of course, before Gorbachev became general secretary these same opportunists would have denounced the call for revolutionary change in the Soviet Union as Trotskyism. They defended and praised every action and for that matter every crime of Brezhnev, Krushchev and Stalin. Of course, once they were denounced by their replacements, like the vicar of Bray, the centrists changed their denomination. These are yesterday’s men.

We say no adulation, no tailism of every twist and turn of Soviet foreign policy. We have seen where this leads, We at least have learned the lessons of the past, if others have not.

Friends speak openly. Where virtually every section of our Party is saying the Gorbachev-Reagan summit is a great victory for the forces of peace, where the Eurocommunists and Straight Leftists have united in elevating the tactic of peaceful co-existence to a principle, we warn of the dangers of appeasing imperialism.

Comrade Gorbachev has called for openness in politics. We have long advocated this. It is in this spirit and with a total and undeviating commitment to the defence of the USSR and the world socialist system that we make this solemn warning.

In spite of the rhetoric of peace the US Is still fronting a concerted anti-Soviet war drive. This is the truth. The source of the war drive comes from the very nature of imperialism itself, from the growing contradictions within the US dominated imperialist system. No treaty will change that. The US and its imperialist allies are out to destroy socialism, turn the socialist countries into docile neo-colonies and shore up imperialism’s domination of the world market - an aim inevitably pursued first peacefully but then, falling this, violently. War is after all only the pursuit and continuation of politics by other, violent, means.

We know that the survival of the world socialist system today depends almost entirely on the efforts and sacrifices of the socialist countries themselves, above all the Soviet Union. It has shouldered the main burden of enormous defence costs against the ever present imperialist threat. Its ICBMs have kept the peace.

The sacrifices of the Soviet Union have been made all the more onerous because of the ineffectiveness of the communist parties in the advanced capitalist countries. They have shunned revolutionary politics for the soggy delights of pacifism. The inability of these parties to build mass militant anti-imperialist movements has forced the Soviet Union to stand alone against imperialism.
From October to August

The Soviet Communist Party - because it is the most prestigious party in the world communist movement, the Communist Party in the world’s revolutionary centre - bears not a little of the blame for this situation. Nonetheless the communist parties in the west embraced pacifism with an enthusiasm of their own. As a result the link between the struggle for peace and the struggle for revolution is denied or reduced to a mere ritualistic incantation of dead dogma. Far from this helping the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries, as some claim, in the long term such politics have a poisonous logic.

At the end of the day all trace of genuine proletarian internationalism is killed, to be replaced by straightforward chauvinism - albeit covered with a radical veneer. Surely the French Communist Party’s wrapping of its country’s nuclear arsenal in the red flag and the tricolour, so it can be directed both east and west, is an example of this. So is the demand by the Communist Party of Italy for their country to stay in Nato, in order to facilitate social reform. Likewise our Euro’s plea for defence of the interests of British imperialism through non-nuclear means. Such political positions are implicitly chauvinistic and leave the Soviet Union isolated.

We say: unconditional defence of the socialist countries, not a penny, not a person for the defence of our imperialist country; the main enemy is at home; fight war with the fight for revolution.

Without communist parties in the imperialist countries winning masses of workers to the unconditional defence of the socialist world, without this proletarian internationalism, the Soviet Union has had to sacrifice its economy. Billions of roubles are syphoned off in order to keep pace with the US military juggernaut. This means the Soviet economy has grown at a slower pace than it could have and needs to. It also means Soviet workers have a lower standard of living than they could have and need to have.

With the ratcheting up of the stakes in the arms race by the US through its SDI (Star Wars) programme, pressures on the Soviet economy have been immensely increased. Gorbachev fears that if the Soviet Union does not construct its own version of Star Wars it will be exposed to a US World War III winning first strike. He also fears that, if it does match the US, at best the Soviet economy will sag under the strain and living standards will have to be pushed down, at worst this could result in a Polish-type scenario.

Diplomatic manoeuvring is seen as offering an escape route from
the slippery slope towards economic crisis or war. This is what the Soviet Union tried to do in 1939 when it signed a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany. While treaties, detente and the like might stay imperialism’s hand, this does not represent any lasting guarantee of peace. Indeed there is a danger that, in an effort to prevent imperialist aggression, too much will be given.

At the 27th Congress of the CPSU Gorbachev offered the US Soviet cooperation in dealing with what he called international hotspots. This sends a chill down our spines. We remember what happened in 1939. Exiled German communists were returned by Stalin to Nazi imprisonment and death. Poland was dismembered, the Polish Communist Party was liquidated and its leading cadres executed. Surely from the point of view of the world revolution, it is fortunate indeed, that thus far the US has not taken up the offer.

5.2. Splitters in tatters

Article, The Leninist No58, January 21 1988

All followers of ‘official’ communism have, over recent years, seen all their old certainties crumble. It is true to say that their idealist world outlook is in tatters. Take the Communist Campaign Group: speak to one supporter and you will get one view; speak to another and you will get an entirely different one. This is nowhere more true than when it comes to developments in the Soviet Union - and its relationship to the world as a whole.

The CCG is particularly vulnerable at the moment. It is in Ideological flux because of its move towards an open split from our Communist Party of Great Britain, and to this has been added the confusion created by the inelegant and hasty attempts by its leadership cabal to transform themselves from loyal Brezhnevites into loyal Gorbachevites.

At a rank and file level, some CCGers have declared themselves straight-down-the-line Gorbachevites; others cling to the old certainties of Brezhnev and Stalin; and, while still others dither between these two poles, certain elements are beginning to look for Leninist answers.

This complex, fluid and contradictory situation within the CCG was strikingly revealed at the last of the London CCG’s four
meetings on the so-called Second Revolution in the Soviet Union on December 14 1987. It went under the title Glasnost and Foreign Policy. A better title would have been Revisionism and Foreign Policy.

Frankly, comrade John Berryman, the speaker, presented yet another CCG apologia for today’s Soviet leadership. Although he tried to be honest and open, his politics prevented him from going beneath the surface of events and developments. His was no scientific analysis, beginning with the world revolution and the principles of proletarian internationalism - why the Soviet Union is at one and the same time the world’s revolutionary centre and a transitionary society between capitalism and communism. This absence of theoretical underpinning meant that Berryman’s approach was impressionistic at best.

Because he was methodically unable to locate the socio-economic source of what he correctly called departures from the principles of Marxism-Leninism in the theory and practice of Soviet foreign policy, he was, as it were, unable to see the wood for the trees. Stalin was to blame for this crime, Brezhnev for that. A wrong idea here, a wrong idea there. This is not the Marxist-Leninist method, which looks for material class and sectional interests. In the USSR Marxism demands that we confront the fact that since the mid- 1920s the bureaucracy of the proletarian state has governed the country in a parasitic and sectional way, and recognising that Gorbachev’s ‘New Political Thinking’ does not represent a return to Leninist principles, but the first ideological steps of the emerging technocracy.

Berryman refused to confront the existence and effect of a self-serving bureaucracy and the emergence from it of the technocracy. His approach was in many senses typically academic - well informed, but in essence consisting of a string of quotes. Yet despite this his opening and the following (restricted) discussion had some value. Let us start with John Berryman himself.

Using Soviet sources as his cue, he called for a truthful analysis of the world’s realities and demanded that old simplistic stereotypes be discarded. It is a pity that comrade Berryman was not able to practise what he preached. Aside from a very few ‘reassessments’ (all originating with Soviet academicians), he stuck to the old simplistic stereotypes to justify official optimism.

Nonetheless, the fact that Gorbachev has repackaged these old
simplistic stereotypes and *The Leninist* has begun to develop its critique of Soviet reality has caused more than a little trouble for the CCG. Certainly Berryman, like other leading CCGers, is aware of the Ideological challenge represented by Leninism.

Against this backdrop, Berryman sought to blacken the names of Gorbachev’s predecessors, presented his leadership as a long-overdue break from the past and again and again attacked warnings from *The Leninist* concerning the direction of the CPSU. In spite of this, and although our comrades made up a third of Berryman’s audience, the autocratic Photis Lysandrou (In the chair) cynically and undemocratically limited us to two speakers of his choosing. They were given a “generous” four minutes (*sic*) each to put our case!

We are sure our readers will not object if here we take a slight detour to comment on this. Oppositionist CCGers (and there will be many in the future), even those CCGers who claim, like comrade Berryman, to want an open and truthful debate between communists about changes taking place in the USSR, should take note of the refusal to give Leninists their democratic rights at a public meeting.

It is not a matter of apologies. We do not want any more of your sympathy. We are concerned for you CCGers. Consider the ‘democracy’ you will be allowed under the Lysandrou regime you are helping to create, comrades. By not defending our democratic rights, by turning a blind eye now, comrades, you are digging your own bureaucratic centralist graves.

Interestingly though, Lysandrou’s gerrymandering did not stop the questions we raised dominating the absurdly truncated discussion. This can be seen if we look at some of the major areas which were raised in both the introduction and discussion.

We have always questioned official claims coming from the Soviet Union about how the world balance of forces has decisively tilted towards socialism - that socialism accounts for 33% or even 40% of the world’s industrial production and hence we supposedly live in an epoch of socialism, and not the epoch of the transition from capitalism to socialism, the epoch of imperialist wars and revolution.

Such figures do not accord with the facts. According to the UN the Comecon countries between them produce no more than 20% of world industrial production. We have no reason to doubt the UN
figures. All the key economic indices confirm its estimate and cast doubt on official Soviet claims. Hence we have been forced to conclude that Soviet statistics are deliberately exaggerated. The reason for cooking the books is obvious. It enables the leadership of the CPSU to ideologically divorce the defence of the Soviet Union from the struggle for world revolution.

Both the original CPSU 3rd Programme of 1961 and its updated version finalised at the 27th Congress in 1986 suggest that the Soviet Union can reach communism by itself, independent of further revolution taking place in the rest of the world. One way of justifying this was to greatly exaggerate the speed with which the Soviet Union was developing. This reactionary method originated with Stalin and was crowned with Krushchev’s absurd claims (enshrined in the 3rd Programme) that the USSR would overtake the USA by 1970 and reach communism by 1980. Although Gorbachev’s revised version of the 3rd Programme, not surprisingly, ditches these dates, it still claims that the USSR can by itself reach communism.

Given the prestige of the CPSU, its power and influence, this could only but encourage the steady shift to the right in the world communist movement. Communist parties were reduced from revolutionary brothers in the same proletarian army to a diplomatic appendage, mere apologists for Soviet revisionism. No wonder the world communist movement is disintegrating. The big parties are becoming social democratised while the small ones are in danger of disappearing up their own irrelevance.

The go-it-alone politics of the CPSU reduces communism to a religion for groups like the CCG - a schizophrenic religion. On the one hand, like members of the more esoteric Christian sects, they feel strong, historically right, almost invincible because of the supposed power of their god. On the other hand we get the direst of gloom and doom mongering.

Photis Lysandrou, for example, told the London meeting (he allowed himself 10 minutes, by the way, where he limited everyone else, including CCG members, to four) that unless the Gorbachev line won, the Soviet Union would go under, With such shock tactics Lysandrou hoped to get the more militant CCGers to swallow Gorbachev’s appeasement of imperialism and his pro-market reforms. It does not seem to have worked.

Berryman himself did not go into the question of the world
balance of forces. It has not yet been put on the agenda for him by the CCG’s Soviet comrades. Nonetheless he told the meeting that the Soviet Union might be a first rate military power, but as an economic one it was second rate. This is certainly true, as is the danger of Soviet socialism disintegrating. But where Berryman and Lysandrou put all their eggs into the Gorbachev basket, we put our faith in the working class in the USSR and its ability to carry out a real political revolution which will firmly link the USSR’s future to completing the world revolution. Clearly, with Gorbachev this is not the case.

For the Gorbachev leadership of the CPSU the aim of world revolution has no practical significance. Everything Berryman said confirmed this. Preservation of the status quo has become the be all and end all. This is enshrined in the strategy of peaceful coexistence pursued by Gorbachev and praised by Berryman.

Our speakers explained that peaceful coexistence as a tactic is perfectly legitimate, but to elevate what should be a tactic to the level of a strategy is, at the end of the day, opportunist. Because of its opportunist version of peaceful coexistence, the CPSU is prepared to put on the negotiating table living revolutions. As we pointed out, while this gains the Soviet Union short term advantage, such an approach can only damage the long term interests of the Soviet Union, which are bound up with the progress of the world revolution.

Berryman himself quoted the ‘New Political Thinking’ in the Soviet Union, which is re-assessing supposed old certainties about the collapse of capitalism and the irreversible forward march of socialism. According to Berryman, the Soviet leadership now sees the so-called ‘socialist orientated’ countries as “unreliable allies and extremely unstable”. Moreover, capitalism has apparently proved far more adaptable than was previously thought. It will be around for some considerable time. Because of this, the Soviet Union should adapt to the realities of capitalism, rather than banking on the utopian promise of the spread of socialism.

Indeed, because of this, the destructive power of nuclear weapons and the need to peacefully co-exist with capitalism for the “indefinite future”, revolution should be approached with the greatest care and armed struggle should definitely be put on the back burner. What a betrayal of the Ideals of communism!

This hardly squares with proletarian internationalism, nor with
the theory and practice of world revolution. Some of the more militant elements in the CCG objected and rightly identified it as revisionism. When pressed, Berryman - to his credit - said he disagreed with what can only be called a further shift to the right by the CPSU.

To renounce the pre-emptive use of violence is to renounce revolution, and this is to renounce socialism itself. To renounce the use of arms is to court disaster. For serious revolutionaries this is obvious. Revolution cannot be put off. It is an objective fact, like gravity. Try jumping out of a plane at 10,000 feet and refusing to wear a parachute. Your death is almost certain. It is the same with revolutionary situations. With arms we can control the ‘effect of gravity’, we can land safely with a revolution.

Revolutionary situations come into existence independently of the will of human beings. Given a revolutionary situation, what is crucial is the determination of the proletarian revolutionary vanguard party to make revolution.

Parties which follow CPSU advice, parties which are not willing to make revolution because it might mess up projects for peaceful co-existence or provoke nuclear war, can only line the working class up for counter-revolution, and the Soviet Union for war. After all, unless a revolutionary situation is resolved positively through proletarian revolution, it will be resolved negatively through counter-revolutionary fascism. And ironically this can only heighten the danger of anti-Soviet war. Appeasement and acting as a brake on revolutions cannot stop capitalism’s war drive, quite the opposite.

Revolutions, whatever Soviet comrades may like to imagine, cannot be turned on and off like a water tap. They are a window of opportunity created by profound crises in the existing socio-economic order which affects all classes. The consequences of holding back in a revolutionary situation are horrendous. We only need cast our minds back to 1933 when Hitler came to power to understand this. Because the social democrats did their all to limit the German 1918-1919 revolution to establishing a bourgeois democracy, because the Communist Party of Germany lacked the strength and the revolutionary maturity needed, Germany’s revolutionary situation ended with Nazi terror, barbarity, murder and world war.

The suggestion that we should put off making revolution until the Soviet Union is overwhelmingly strong is therefore clearly
playing with fire. For all its pretensions of maturity, it is neither a mature nor a serious revolutionary strategy. Indeed it smacks of social democratic senility. Certainly such ideas are the product of an ideological trend which is doing its best to rob Marxism-Leninism of its revolutionary content. What has this got to do with proletarian internationalism, comrade Berryman? The advice your Soviet comrades are coming up with is clearly a case of cutting one’s nose to spite one’s face: in other words it is opportunist. That is why the Eurocommunists now like what they hear coming out of the Soviet Union.

Berryman himself mentioned the improved relations between the CPSU and the forces of Eurocommunism in general, and the Communist Party of Italy in particular. He thought this was a good thing. He also apparently thought it was a good thing that, in order to improve its relations with the PCI, the CPSU has finally ditched any suggestion of holding any more world conferences of communist parties like the ones in 1957, 1960 and 1969, with their final declarations. The future will be one of getting together with greens, social democrats and representatives of non-aligned countries. In other words, a downgrading of the importance of the world communist movement as far as the CPSU is concerned.

One of our comrades made the point that the PCI was openly pro Nato, pro-European Community and thoroughly reformist. It is certainly interesting to note, then, that the CCG is just about to split because the CPGB has softened its opposition to Nato and the EC. Berryman could only reply that there were some ‘good forces’ in the PCI. Surely there are ‘good forces’ in the CPGB, comrade Berryman! And surely you can think of a better, a more convincing, apology for Gorbachev’s new found friendship with the ultra-revisionist PCI.

With all this Berryman still claimed not only that the Gorbachev version of the CPSU’s programme does contain references to the concept of world revolution” but also that its practice is guided by it.

To ‘prove’ it he produced a single passing reference to the so called “world revolutionary process” - a concept which, as developed by our Soviet comrades, is a revisionist distortion of the Marxist-Leninist theory and practice of world revolution. This is easily verified ... and in his attempts to parry our criticisms of the CPSU, Berryman only exposed the CCG’s ideological heterogeneity.
The CPSU, we said in *The Leninist* No56, “has abandoned proletarian internationalism, not only in word but deed.” Berryman attempted to deny this. Yet his own comrade, Julian Cooper, (the first speaker in the CCG’s series of meetings on the Soviet Union) told us, using copious Soviet sources, how the term proletarian internationalism was being deliberately dropped by them. So our claim about the CPSU abandoning proletarian internationalism in word is not something we invented, but something we heard courtesy of the CCG.

More important, more important by far is, of course, the question of practice. Here Berryman well and truly destroyed his own case. While claiming that the Soviet Union had, in spite of “many mistakes”, always “provided assistance” to revolutionary movements, Berryman told us how under Stalin, and since, the Soviet version of proletarian, or socialist, internationalism has been used as a “code word for Soviet hegemony”.

Exactly, comrade Berryman! This is precisely the problem!

Is “Soviet hegemonism”, the fact that the leadership of the CPSU has acted in a bullying, narrow and domineering fashion towards other communist parties, not least ruling ones, an example of proletarian internationalism? Hardly!

Comrade Berryman himself produced a veritable shock wave among his CCG friends, not least London education organiser Mike Martin, when he informed them that he thought there was a “need to think again” about the Soviet-led intervention into Czechoslovakia in August 1968. This was no leap in the dark. He let it be known that the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow has already been given the task of concocting some ideologically suitable get out for the 1968 action - and with Husak now safely upstairs the path is certainly clear for this.

Certainly Dubcek’s claim, published in the PCI’s *l’Unita*, that there is a “profound connection” between perestroika and “what we tried 20 years ago” contains more than a grain of truth. Indeed, Dubcek’s contention that if the Soviet Union had been led by Gorbachev 20 years ago there would have been no armed intervention rings true. Considering that communist centrism diverged from communist right opportunism in country after country on the question of the Soviet led intervention, this is no small matter. The centrist parties in Australia, Finland, Greece, Sweden, Holland, Britain, Spain, Japan, all owe their political origin and physiognomy
to the schisms opened up by the events of August 1968.

Indeed, in many ways the CCG can be traced back to the divisions in the CPGB in the wake of the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia. For the centrists who constitute a majority of Its Steering Committee, the Soviet action was by definition proletarian internationalism. They stood and fought the rising forces of Euro-communism (then supported by Morning Star editor, Tony Chater) on the ins and outs of the Czech events.

What will Lysandrou and his centrist ilk say if the present Soviet leader decides that his predecessors’ intervention was wrong? Will they denounce this as ‘revisionism’? On past form these miserable sycophants are not capable of anything so principled ... let us wait and see.

As an illustration of the toadiness of the CCG, it was interesting that not one of them questioned the correctness of the Soviet intervention into Afghanistan in December 1979. Although Berry-man was glad to go along with recent Soviet ‘discoveries’ that many past ‘proletarian internationalist’ actions were little more than examples of crude big power hegemonism, he held up the Afghan intervention as a shining example of proletarian internationalism in practice. How can this be?

In Izvestia the Soviet leadership admitted that it went into Afghanistan because, as a great power, it could not tolerate a hostile regime on its borders. What is this, if not big power chauvinism? And what about Turkey and China? They are both on the Soviet border, and both hostile. Should the Red Army enter these countries? This is out of the question. Turkey and China would be no pushovers. Turkey is in Nato and China has a billion people and huge armed forces.

We support the presence of Soviet forces in Afghanistan. We are against any Soviet deal with imperialism which will Involve its withdrawal, let alone a withdrawal beginning in May, as Eduard Shevardnadze has suggested. Such appeasement of imperialism would be treachery. It could only lead to the collapse of the government in Kabul, the reverse of the gains of the April 1978 revolution (not least the ending of the enslavement of women) and the wholesale massacre of the PDPA’s membership.

This said, the intervention in December 1979 hardly strengthened the confidence of, and popular support for, the revolution in Afghanistan. Soviet aid was vital if the Afghan revolution was to
survive. Yet the Soviet Union acted in a way which smacked of a great power bully. In other words the action of the Soviet Union was contradictory. That is why we unreservedly condemn the way the Soviet Union intervened but demand the continuation of the presence of Soviet armed forces.

Its intervention was not to aid the existing revolutionary government in Afghanistan, but to defend the great power interests of the Soviet Union. The Khalq forces which organised the April 1978 revolution and led the revolutionary government were overthrown. Hafizullah Amin, the leader of the Afghan Party and state, was killed along with 97 of his comrades, and a new Parcham opportunist regime under Babrak Karmal installed.

Amin was branded an agent of imperialism in Soviet pamphlets like The Truth about Afghanistan and it was claimed that these charges could be proved with documentary evidence. This has not been done. In fact accusations that Amin was an agent have been quietly buried. None of this was mentioned when Berryman claimed the role of the Soviet Union had been one of exemplary proletarian internationalism.

The leaders of the CPSU have and do put the interests of the Soviet Union above the interests of the world revolution. And this not only includes ‘long term projects’ like the revolutions in Britain, Japan, the US and Federal Germany, but living revolutions.

Our comrades raised this with John Berryman. They quoted Gorbachev’s speech to the 27th Congress of the CPSU in which he offered US imperialism cooperation in dealing with what he called “hotspots”, presumably like Afghanistan, Kampuchea, Nicaragua, South Africa and Palestine.

The case of Nicaragua was also raised by concerned CCGers. Unfortunately, considering Gorbachev’s 27th Congress speech, comrade Berryman tried to dismiss the possibility of a deal over Nicaragua as a throwaway remark made during the Washington summit.

Surely this is a case of self delusion. The Soviet Union has made it as clear as it can to the US that in return for concessions on areas such as Star Wars it would use its considerable influence to persuade ‘revolutionaries’ in the so-called ‘hotspots’ to act with circumspection, ie stop being revolutionaries. Unless we want to kid ourselves, we have to recognise this. The key question CCGers, indeed all communists, have to face is the fact that the leadership
of the CPSU does not practise genuine proletarian internationalism and has not done so for many, many years.

Proletarian internationalism is one of the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism. It is an objective law reflecting the fact that: “The liberation of the working class is neither a local nor a national, but a social problem, embracing all countries” (Marx). So proletarian internationalism is no sentimental relic, no pious utopian wish for a brotherhood of humanity, but a necessity for the working class, a precondition for its liberation.

Although proletarian internationalism is an objective law, it does not develop spontaneously. Communists must determinedly and consistently cultivate it among the working class and keep its spirit alive through combating all manifestations of chauvinism and national narrowness wherever they come from. Such opportunist problems in the working class movement will remain a constant and latent danger in both capitalist and socialist countries as long as the proletariat operates in a world divided into states. In the interests of the world revolution, vigilance is essential, success vital.

Through a successful ideological struggle for proletarian internationalism, the working class is transformed from a class in itself - turned against itself by nation, its vision limited to narrow national interest - into a class for itself, which is fully conscious of its historic mission to do away with all national boundaries and antagonisms.

One of our comrades made the point that the Soviet Union is acting more like a state among states than the vanguard of the world revolution, that real proletarian internationalism requires the subordination of national interests to the interests of the world revolution. This produced contemptuous and theatrically loud laughter from Jeff Sawtell, a journalist on the Morning Star and a veritable CCG sage.

For Sawtell, the idea that national interests need to be subordinated to the interests of the world revolution is “banal”; there is apparently no contradiction between the interests of the USSR and those of the world revolution. In this he was backed by fellow Morning Star journalist and fellow CCG sage, John Haylett.

This is pathetic. For all their pomposity, these CCG time-servers do not even know the ABC of dialectics. There is always a contradiction between the whole and its parts. Take a Communist Party.
There is a contradiction between the Party and the short term interests of the individual member. There is a contradiction between members’ private lives and the interests of the Party. For the sake of the world revolution, individual communists have to be willing to sacrifice a great deal, sometimes everything. Likewise with countries.

Let us see what Lenin has to say on this question. A true internationalist, he insisted, “must not think only of one’s own nation, but place above it, the interests of all nations ... he must consider the whole and general, subordinate the particular to the general interest”, and again, “proletarian internationalism demands, first, that the interests of the proletarian struggle in any one country should be subordinated to the interests of that struggle on a worldwide scale”. Many national interests are in contradiction with the aim of world revolution. In Britain the call from certain sections of the workers’ movement for import or immigration controls are examples of putting narrow national interests above the interests of workers of all countries. This putting your own country first is just as possible for the leadership in a socialist country as it is for opportunists in the capitalist countries.

For instance, a big and relatively rich socialist country might be asked to provide large amounts of aid to a small and poor socialist country which finds itself cut off from its natural trading partners because of imperialist embargo. Some might say this is a bad investment, that the money would be better spent on much needed modernisation at home, which in profit and loss terms might well be true. In other words, there is a contradiction. If it is resolved in favour of narrow national interests, this is reactionary; if it is resolved in favour of the aim of world revolution, this is progressive.

Comrades Sawtell and Haylett, like all centrists in the ‘official’ communist movement, monstrously call their slavish tailism of CPSU ‘proletarian internationalism’. But it is this tailism which discredits proletarian internationalism in the eyes of advanced workers and reduces it to a mere apology for this or that action by this or that Soviet leadership.

The revolution will not be advanced one inch, one iota by those who agree with the (current) leadership of the USSR as a reflex reaction. What is needed is genuine proletarian internationalism which, as we have already stated, is brought to life through the medium of ideological struggle against chauvinism and the defeat.
of all forms of counterfeit internationalism ... and this brings us to the CCG itself.

It mixes its tailism of the CPSU with championing its Alternative Economic Strategy, import controls and all, and a call for ‘non-racist’ immigration controls. What is more, implicitly, through its commitment to the reformist *British Road to Socialism*, the CCG stands against the liberation movement in Ireland and fosters the reformist notion that British imperialism and its military bureaucratic state has a progressive role in the world today.

In other words, the CCG stands theoretically between classic pro-Soviet centrism and common or garden right opportunist social chauvinism. Naturally the CCG will not admit the truth about the eclectic platform it has painfully constructed in order to unite in the same organisation enthusiastic young militants and staid bureaucrats like Chater.

Indeed, the CCG claims to stand for Marxism-Leninism and to have fully embraced the concept of proletarian internationalism. Because of its supposed ideological orthodoxy, the CCG is able to act as a Judas goat and looks set to lead several hundred communists into an NCP Mark II split from the CPGB this Easter. That is why we are duty bound to cross swords with the CCG.

Its proletarian internationalism is doubly counterfeit. Firstly, it puts the interests of the workers in Britain above those of the working class of the world as a whole. Secondly, it tails the CPSU, a party which puts Soviet national interests above the interests of world revolution.

In the long term this is an oil and water mix. But while Gorbachev’s star is in the ascendancy with almost every trend in the bourgeois establishment, this presents the CCG with the possibility of leeching off its popularity. Such parasitism comes easy to the leaders of the CCG. For Leninists, though, the world revolution comes first. The CCG wants the Soviet Union to be praised by the boss class in Britain. It makes life so much easier. We want the Soviet Union to be loved by the working class in Britain and feared by our rulers.

The CCG wants the working class in the Soviet Union to accept Gorbachev’s market socialism, his appeasement of the US warmonger and his further downgrading of the importance attached to the world communist movement. This will be welcomed by everyone from Martin Jacques to Margaret Thatcher. We want the Soviet

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Union to be a true bastion of proletarian internationalism and we will unconditionally support the working class of the Soviet Union carrying out a real political revolution to make this a reality.

5.3. Southern Africa

Article, *The Leninist* No66, July 15 1988

Southern Africa is a region of wars and revolution at the hub of which lies the struggle against the apartheid state. A profound revolutionary situation has gripped South Africa now for over a decade. It has plunged the ruling class into crisis. Splits have constantly opened up in its ranks as the Nationalist Party has proved unable to rule in the old way. It constantly vacillates between the methods of compromise and the methods of oppression, but to no avail. The black masses refuse to abandon their struggle for the sake of Botha’s trifling reforms, they also refuse to be cowed by the state’s terrorism.

The ANC has found itself, because of its history, in the leadership of the masses, its authority is proven and its leaders - not least Nelson Mandela - enjoy unrivalled prestige. In spite of this and the fact that the black working class is now in the front ranks of the struggle, it is clear that the revolutionary wave has dipped, there is a retreat on the side of the oppressed. Mass activity has declined in quantity and in quality, the comrades network has suffered a serious setback and many popular organisations no longer operate openly.

It is against this backdrop that we must assess the US sponsored Cairo meeting on Angola and Namibia between representatives of Cuba, Angola and South Africa last month. Let us be quite clear. We are not against these meetings as such. In the revolutionary struggle no tactic should be ruled out, let alone the tactic of diplomatic manoeuvre. However, in the concrete situation as it appertains in Southern Africa and between the US and the Soviet Union, we smell a rat.

This is the third of such meetings, the first of which was in London in early May. For the South Africans a deal on Namibia which sees the departure of Cuban troops from Angola, a new government in Luanda which includes Unita, would be worth it.

It would take pressure off South Africa and - Botha hopes - leave Pretoria
a free hand to crush the black masses. This would in our view be a defeat for the democratic aspirations of the whole of Southern Africa, the apartheid regime would be given a new lease of life and the vulnerability and economic dependence of the frontline states would be reinforced and perpetuated. It is therefore vital to give the revolution in South Africa all the help and solidarity it requires. Deals with South Africa do not fall into this category.

South Africa has not been having everything its own way. Against its better judgement it has been openly drawn into the Angolan civil war. Because Unita forces were in danger of being routed in southern Angola, it has been forced to commit 6,000 of its own troops.

Things have not gone at all well for them. The myth of white superiority has suffered a body blow. Combined Cuban/Angolan! Swapo forces have given the apartheid army a bloody nose in the battle for the strategic centre of Cuito Cuanavale. Indeed the Cubans have shifted the whole balance in the region by their dramatic 125 mile drive south to the very border of Namibia itself. That the Cubans are equipped with advanced surface-to-air missiles and supported by sophisticated fighter aircraft has thrown the South Africans into a quandary.

It can no longer dominate the skies of southern Angola as it used to, its ageing Canberras, Mirages and Buccaneers are no match for Cuba’s Mig fighters and Sam missiles. South African military hegemony has been challenged. So it is crystal clear why South Africa’s foreign and defence ministers were in Cairo. But what about the Cubans and Angolans? Why were they there?

In our view it is because of the Gorbachev leadership in the Soviet Union. As The Economist put it: “the South Africans, the Americans, want the Cubans out of Africa altogether, and hope Mr Gorbachev will help”.119 He has. The Soviet Union was not formally represented at the Cairo talks. Nevertheless, through Valillin Vasev it made its influence felt.

It was because of his agreement that US covert supplies of arms to Unita from Zaire were not included on the agenda of the talks. The Cubans were also told by him to stop talking about ending apartheid to prevent a South African walkout.

This earned the praise of the South African Home Service. It approvingly reported that the intervention of Vasev “brought about

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a dramatic change from the confrontationalist tone at the outset.” For the
South Africans this “emphasised once again the key background played by
the Soviet Union.”

We say that this is not a principled position for the world’s revolutionary
centre. The leadership of the Soviet Union is pursuing a non-revolutionary
line. Instead of backing the international 1st line of Cuba, supporting the
struggle for revolution, it is attempting to come to some sort of modus
vivendi with the US and South Africa on the whole region. In line with this it
is reported that it might be considering ordering out Cuban troops - yes it can
do that - with or without a fully worked out settlement. This would be fully in
character with the politics of the Gorbachev leadership.

Mikhail Gorbachev has stated that Afghanistan should act as the model
for other so-called hotspots’, not least Southern Africa. In his report to the
27th Congress of the CPSU he stated that: “We are in favour of vitalising
collective quests for ways of defusing conflict situations in the Middle East,
Central Africa, Southern Africa, in the planet’s turbulent points. This is
imperatively demanded by the interests of general security.”

We have openly stated our opposition to the withdrawal of Cuban troops
from Angola and for that matter a Soviet inspired withdrawal of Vietnamese
troops from Kampuchea. Such betrayals internationally flow from the
non-socialist perestroika policy being pursued by Gorbachev in the Soviet
Union (foreign policy is after all merely the continuation of domestic
policy).

Selling revolutions is being done in the name of permanent peaceful
col-existence and overcoming the vestiges of ‘Stalinism’; in reality it is a
final abandonment of the vestiges of proletarian internationalism. Gorbachev
has completely deserted class politics. In true Eurocommunist style, for him
“saving civilisation from war” is actually counterposed to the class struggle.

Gorbachev has earned the praise of imperialism. He is someone they “can
do business with”. How different are his statements recognising the
“legitimate interests” of the imperialist states to the clarion call for world
revolution from Lenin’s Communist (Third) International.

Those who still stand by the principled and scientific positions of Marx.
Engels and Lenin as enshrined in the theses and resolutions of Lenin’s
Comintern understand full well that it is capitalism in general and apartheid
in particular in South Africa that is the

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source of the war. Unless capitalism is overthrown then it will plunge the
world into war and the sort of brutality we will see resulting from apartheid
throughout the whole Southern African region.

Our task is to support the revolutionary struggle throughout the world, to learn from the revolutionary experience of the working class from Petrograd 1917 to Soweto 1988, to purge the workers’ movement of the corroding admixture of Gorbachevite revisionism and reformist pro-imperialism, to unify the efforts of all genuinely revolutionary organisations of the world proletariat and thus, in the words of the founding manifesto of the Comintern, “hasten the victory of the communist revolution.”

It is quite possible that the Gorbachev leadership is pressing the ANC and the South African Communist Party to temper their struggle, to come to some sort of deal. There is certainly some evidence pointing to this. Despite this we do not think a deal is likely. The very minimum the black masses would accept would be the right to vote, which would mean an end to the present regime.

Because of the determination of the black masses, because of the emerging vanguard role of the working class, the revolutionary struggle in South Africa will continue - we are supremely confident of this. Under working class leadership its triumph will allow the whole of Southern Africa to take the road to socialism. This will be a blow against both the bourgeoisie and the opportunists.

5.4. Poland greets Thatcher

Speech, The Leninist No72, November 28 1988 (extract)

Our bourgeois media is gleefully reporting the words of Rakowski, the prime minister of socialist Poland. He has made a great song and dance about his admiration of Mrs Thatcher’s success in curbing the power of trade unions in Britain and has stated that he would very much like to be a pupil in her school”.

How is this for any sort of communist to speak? And why do official communists’, like the Morning Star, keep quiet on it? We say that they are duty bound to come out with their views in front of the working class.

For us, indeed for any genuine communist, Rakowski’s outrageous

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praising of Thatcher is proof positive that ‘official communism’ is morally bankrupt. Those who play dumb, refuse to report, let alone deal with
Rakowski’s statement also prove their bankruptcy.

The fact is that there is not a trace of proletarian internationalism in the leadership of the Polish state - the understanding that the workers of the world are engaged in the same struggle, that in the last analysis socialism in Poland can only survive through the active identification, solidarity and assistance of the world proletariat and the extension of the world revolution. Until the world revolution is completed, and we have a World Union of Socialist States, victories in this or that country can only be partial. In other words a factor in ensuring that the victory of socialism in Poland is made final, irreversible and complete is winning workers in Britain to see Poland as theirs.

In this light what are British workers to make of a ‘communist’ who wants to be a pupil of Thatcher? Militant workers in our country hate Thatcher in a way no British prime minister has been hated for many, many decades. We know her for the government’s anti-trade union laws, the banning of unions at GCHQ, the crushing of the miners’ Great Strike, her anti-Soviet warmongering, her poll tax, her massive handouts to the rich and the doubling of the number forced on to the dole. Workers in Britain who have been subjected to Thatcherism first hand have no wish to see it imposed on others. They can only be alienated from a government which calls itself socialist and yet wishes to import Thatcherism.

Likewise what are British workers to make of communists in a socialist state who have lost all support of the working class? If only all that the bourgeois media has been reporting of Thatcher’s visit to Poland were lies. Yet as we know Poles enthusiastically welcomed Thatcher as she went on her royal walkabouts. In fact the reception was rapturous.

Of course, what drew the Polish masses to Thatcher wasn’t so much details of her domestic policies in Britain. What the Poles loved about Thatcher was her notorious anti-communism. At the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk she was greeted by workers not with the ‘Maggie, Maggie. Maggie ... Out, Out, Out’ slogan she has got so used to hearing from workers in Britain, but Down with Communism’ and Commies out’. What a condemnation of the ‘official communist’ leadership in Poland!

It is no exaggeration to say that ‘official communism’ has not

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learnt from history. Indeed it is no exaggeration to say that ‘official communism’ cannot learn from history. For over 30 years now socialism in Poland has been suffering crisis after crisis. But 1970 was not simply a repeat
of 1956, and 1980 was not simply a repeat of 1976. Crises in Poland are occurring in a downward spiral. Each crisis has been worse than the one before.

In 1956 the workers were demanding socialist democracy; in 1980 they deserted the CRZZ, the official trade union, and flocked into Solidarnosc, an organisation whose leadership makes Labourites like Eric Hammond and Roy Lynk seem like raving leftists.

The reason Solidarnosc had between 8 to 10 million members and remains a powerful opposition force is not because workers in Poland are historically backward. Poland’s proletarian movement has a long and proud history, producing Rosa Luxemburg, Felix Dzerzhinsky and many other fine revolutionaries.

Poland’s workers have time and time again had their trust betrayed. They have been left angered and demoralised by the countless failures by the ‘official communists’ at the head of the Polish party and state to stand by their promise to democratise the country. Such promises, as the workers have learned from bitter experience, are worthless. They were made not to be put into practice but only to defuse discontent. Such an approach has nothing to do with genuine communism - but that does not matter in the minds of Polish workers. For them, communists are liars, their words are not to be believed. From such poisoned soil Solidarnosc grew.

We supported the banning of Solidarnosc in 1981 because of the imminent danger of counterrevolution. Solidarnosc, which came into existence due to legitimate working class grievances, had adopted a programme of capitalist restoration and things were unquestionably sliding into chaos. Emergency measures were required. Jaruzelski’s military government could, though, only be a short term solution. We emphasised in The Leninist No2 that the declaration of martial law and the use of coercion could only provide a breathing space. We went on to say that unless there was a break with bureaucratic methods, and a turn towards a genuinely communist programme, it would only be a matter of time before Poland again plunged into crisis.

Can it be said that there has been a break from bureaucratic methods since 1981? No it cannot. As a consequence Poland’s

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problems have become ever more deep, ever more dangerous.

After all, why did Jaruzelski invite Thatcher to visit Poland? Why did he give Solidarnosc the perfect opportunity to reassert its strength by agreeing
to her precondition for the visit that a meeting with Lech Walesa would be allowed?

Frankly it is because the Polish economy is in a worse mess than ever. Industry and agriculture are stagnant, as are the masses living standards. Jaruzelski and his prime minister Rakowski only have one remedy for this. It is to restructure the economy at the expense of the working class. The closing of the Lenin shipyards is only meant to be the first of many such steps. A Thatcher visit would, it was hoped, lend this de-industrialisation programme the legitimacy the Polish government could not give it. More than that, in return for letting Thatcher ‘interfere in the internal affairs of Poland’ it was apparently believed that she would see to it that the burden of debt owed to western countries would be lessened through the rescheduling of repayments.

Thatcher completely outmanoeuvred the Polish leadership. All she gave in return for boosting her standing as a world leader were her usual banal. philistine lectures on the marvels of capitalism and the market. She also implied that unless Poland took measures to further boost capitalism she would do nothing to help with the debt problem. Showing his gratitude for all this, Jaruzelski went beyond what diplomatic protocol demanded and personally went to the airport to see her off.

What all this shows is that ‘official communism’ in Poland is in profound crisis. That cannot be denied. Nor can it be denied that this crisis is not confined to Poland. All socialist countries based on the Soviet model face to a greater or lesser degree the same crisis. Living socialism is being eaten by cancer from within. Other than Poland this is most pronounced in Hungary and Yugoslavia.

But can it be said that the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Romania and the German Democratic Republic are immune from the Polish, Hungarian or Yugoslav ‘disease’? No it cannot.

Certainly, looking at the clashes in Armenia and the dramatic growth of nationalistic Popular Fronts in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania - which have the ‘blessing’ of the local communist leaderships - and demands for a similar set up in Byelorussia, it is clear that we are dealing with an epidemic.

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5.5. “New thinking” and war
Speech in memory of Bedir Aydemir, former secretary of the Turkish Peace Association: a great man, a great communist and a great teacher. *The Leninist* No74, January 23 1989

Peace seemed to be breaking out all over in 1988. The Iran-Iraq war ended, Vietnamese troops began leaving Kampuchea, Yasser Arafat denounced ‘terror’ and recognised Israel, South Africa agreed to Namibian independence in return for a Cuban pull-out from Angola and, of course, there was a remarkable sea change in US-Soviet relations.

Cold War talk has - for the moment - gone. The Soviet Union is no longer the ‘evil empire’ nor is it out to ‘bury the west’. It has done its utmost to be helpful in “easing the tensions in the world’s trouble spots”, its troops will be out of Afghanistan by February and the leaders of the PDPA will no doubt be evacuated. What is more it has signed the unequal INF agreement with the US and at the UN unilaterally announced its intention of reducing the Soviet army by 500,000 (Shevardnadze has now added all the Soviet Union’s chemical weapons to this unilateral disarmament drive).

If these were the olive branches, many see the roots of peace in the “new thinking” of Gorbachev. Because of Gorbachevism, we are assured, the threat of a World War III, which has haunted humanity since 1945, was removed in 1988. Looking at TV pictures of Reagan and Gorbachev embracing each other in Red Square very different sorts of people feel entitled to bask in the warm glow of self justification. For instance, hardline Tories say Nato’s insistence on deploying Pershing II and Cruise missiles in Europe to ‘counter’ Soviet SS20s has paid off: Gorbachev has agreed to zero-zero conditions Brezhnev dismissed out of hand. Even the pacifists, whose mass movement has had the wind taken from its sails by Gorbachev-Reagan summitry, are full of optimism.

Genuine communists urge caution. More, we say, in the light of Gorbachev’s UN speech and Soviet disarmament, the danger of a World War III far from receding has become greater. It does not surprise us that millions now think the future is rosy, so tranquillising has the superpower PR been.

There has been talk of everlasting peace many times before. We remember that a mere two decades after the ‘war to end wars Neville Chamberlain was waving a piece of paper saying that there would be peace in our time, and that in the following six years some 50 million people were slaughtered in a war that towered over World War I in destruction, barbarity and sheer hypocrisy. With this in mind, unlike Gorbachev we refuse to junk
the scientific truths about war and peace revealed by Marxism-Leninism and embrace pacifism.

A few years ago the perceived danger of a World War III galvanised millions into action. The streets and squares of almost every city rang to pacifist cries for peace and disarmament. Where banning CEC aerosol sprays is now the in thing, peace was all the rage. With the active assistance of the ‘official communists’, CND - which was all but dead, if not buried - rose like the proverbial phoenix. Federal Germany, the United States and the Netherlands all saw their equivalents attract huge numbers.

Gorbachev’s diplomacy has returned these movements to the ashes. His old pals act with Reagan seems to be bringing peace where mass demonstrations and peace camps failed. With the apparent rapprochement between the superpowers, the peace movements have lost members hand over fist ... and yet, for all the Soviet Union’s concessions, the Nato arms build up continues with spine chilling speed. There is no room for complacency.

Almost immediately after Gorbachev promised in New York to decommission thousands of tanks, artillery pieces and 500,000 men, Nato general secretary, Manfred Worner, flatly insisted that Gorbachev’s cuts would not be reciprocated. They have not been.

Within days of his UN speech the Thatcher government announced its intention of spending £1 billion on the new Challenger II battle tank. Not to be outdone the US publicly unveiled its B2 Stealth bomber - the most expensive aircraft ever built - which, because of its ultra high tech design and special component materials, can fly undetected by radar into Soviet airspace in order to deliver its deadly nuclear payload.

While Gorbachev disarms the Soviet Union, the US has put the final touches to its three pronged first strike capability: the B 1 and B2 bombers, the ground based MX ICBM and the submarine launched Trident missile. And nothing Gorbachev has said or done has stopped the US relentlessly pressing ahead with its militarisation of outer space with the multi billion dollar Strategic Defence Initiative, the so-called Star Wars programme - the vital final shield’ component in the US plan to be able to destroy the Soviet Union in a World War III and survive.

It would be a complete abrogation of our responsibilities to keep quiet on all this, to pretend that imperialism has changed its spots, and jump on the
Gorbachevite ‘universal human interests’ charabanc. To fall in line with this revisionism would be easy. But it is not for us. We will devote ourselves to making revolution.

The reason we are dedicated to something that appears to a philistine like Gorbachev as a “destructive” project full of dangers for international relations is straightforward. Unless we succeed in getting rid of imperialism/capitalism - sooner rather than later - it will plunge the world into a nuclear holocaust. Without revolution this is inevitable. Peace summits, unilateral disarmament and nonsense about nuclear weapons fundamentally changing the nature of war only help to foster pacifistic illusions in the working class - the one class that can save humanity. They do not bring peace.

5.5.1. What is war?

Before we can deal with the growing danger of a World War III we must touch upon some fundamental theoretical questions about war and where the war drive comes from. The seminal scientific definition of war was given to us by Karl von Clausewitz, the Prussian soldier-philosopher of the Napoleonic era. In his magnum opus, On War, Clausewitz defined it as: “an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will .... a duel on an extensive scale” and centrally a “continuation of policy by other means”.

This definition was fully accepted by the founders of scientific socialism. They deepened Clausewitz’s ideas by linking them to the existence and role of the state, classes and the class struggle. Thus Lenin declared: “All wars are inseparable from the political systems that engender them. The policy which a given state, a given class within a state, pursued for a long time before the war is inevitably continued by that same class during the war, the form of action alone being changed”. Marxists showed how war was a product of class society and would only be ended with the ending of class society. As Engels explained in his Origin of the family, private property and the state, primitive communist society experienced no war. Of course, individual acts of violence occurred, even the occasional tribal clash, but no organised, prolonged, extensive bloodbaths - society simply could not afford it.

However, as productive forces advanced with settled agriculture and a
surplus in production became a permanent feature, primitive communist society disintegrated and the private ownership of the means of production appeared. This brought with it a split in society and the emergence of a class of oppressed producers and a class of oppressing owners. To protect and advance their position and interests the owners created armed bodies of men - a state apparatus. Hand in hand with that went war. Through war the ruling class could suppress the dispossessed masses of its own country, they could also extend their domination over other peoples.

War was endemic in ancient, slave and feudal society. But with the triumph of capitalism as the dominant mode of production, wars expanded tremendously in scale and loss of life. In comparison, the campaigns of Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and Julius Caesar were skirmishes. With its huge productive potential, capitalism could mobilise armies of tens of millions to fight in wars in which tens of millions died. And now with the development of nuclear weaponry capitalist wars represent a threat to the very survival of our species.

For Gorbachev this is reason enough for humanity to see sense and renounce nuclear weapons. “Nuclear war” he says “cannot be a means of achieving political, economic, Ideological or any other goals”. This is now the declared position of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and is the “fundamental principle of the new political outlook”.

Gorbachev’s pacifism is not confined to nuclear war but all war. He insists: “Clausewitz’s dictum that war is the continuation of policy, only by other means, which was classical in his time, has grown hopelessly out of date. It now belongs to the libraries”.

In truth Gorbachev wants to consign not only Clausewitz to the “libraries” but Marx, Engels and Lenin too. Claiming the proud mantle of communism, this revisionist dares not say so openly. Like all revisionists, Gorbachev dishonestly covers his attacks on Marxism-Leninism with attacks on vague, undefined “old concepts” and “out of date thinking”.

Yet, as we shall see, far from being outdated, Marxism-Leninism remains the key to understanding the world we live in today, not least the source and danger of war. War - both nuclear and conventional - can only be understood as a continuation of policy, by other (ie violent) means. Maintaining this is not to stand by some ancient dogma. Defending Clausewitz’s definition of war is important because it is true. Abandoning it for Gorbachevism which
says that war is caused by “reckless and irresponsible power politics” is akin to casting aside the theory of relativity, evolution and quantum mechanics for the soft headed idealism of religion.

We hardly slander Gorbachev. In his own words, “basing international policies on moral and ethical norms that are common to all humankind” which were “a utopian dream” are now “a vital requirement”. As Marxism has shown, so-called universal “moral and ethical norms” about peace have to be seen in the context of class society. Such ideas are developed by the ruling class to fool the oppressed classes, to persuade them to accept their lot and not fight for their freedom. Gorbachev’s “new political thinking” is hardly new. It is a rehashed version of reactionary utopianism. Gorbachevism is the real “out of date thinking”, not Marxism-Leninism.

5.5.2. Just and unjust wars

Gorbachev claims that the world can achieve peace and plenty through permanent cooperation between the socialist and capitalist countries. This is effectively the formal abandonment by the leadership of the CPSU of the theory that foreign policy is a product of domestic policy and that the class struggle is the locomotive of history.

Gorbachev says: “Ideological differences should not be transferred to the sphere of interstate relations, nor should foreign policy be subordinate to them, for ideologies may be poles apart, whereas the interest of survival and prevention of war stand universal and supreme.” It is ABC that the foreign policy of a state - any state - is subordinate to the policy of the dominant class and its ideology domestically. Denying this is like denying that light travels at 186,282,3959 miles per second.

The reactionary implications of Gorbachev’s reasoning is clear.

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For him, pursuing the scientific ideology of the working class at an international level, ie encouraging revolutions, threatens the survival of humanity. Consequently working class interests must be subordinated to international class collaboration. Gorbachev thinks that the capitalist class has legitimate interests which, if respected, can through reasoned argument be won to join in the finding of a solution to “global problems ... of economic development and ecology, as an indispensable condition for a lasting peace.”
This is the anti-revolutionary logic of Gorbachevism. For us class politics are the key to the future. To achieve a world of peace and plenty requires fierce class struggle (up to and including armed struggle) against the capitalists who on all past experience are quite prepared to resort to the most bloody methods in order to hang onto their obscene privileges and their supposedly god given right to rule. Hence, unlike Gorbachev, we consider it essential to prepare workers for a civil war of liberation.

What is more, given that the liberation of the working class in one country can only be fully realised with the liberation of workers in all countries and the triumph of communism, the class struggle of the proletariat has always been, at the end of the day, International. So with the partial victories represented by the emergence of socialist states, this means that the class struggle can also take the form of revolutionary war. A couple of examples from the history of the Soviet Union itself will suffice to illustrate this point.

In 1920 the Red Army pursued the invading Polish forces across the Soviet border into Poland itself. The hope of Lenin and other leaders of the Soviet state was to reach Warsaw. Smashing the army of semi-fascist dictator and renowned social chauvinist Pilsudski would merge the forces of the Red Army with the Polish workers into one mighty river. This would drown reaction in Poland and would greatly enhance the chances of success of the German Revolution.

The Soviet Republic’s war against Poland, though on a smaller scale, was no different in essence from its war against Nazi Germany, except that the war against Poland failed and that against Nazi Germany succeeded. They were both revolutionary wars which from being defensive became offensive. Being an international continuation of the Soviet state’s policy by violent means, the victories of the Red Army of 1944 and 1945 created extremely favourable conditions for the creation of socialist states in Eastern Europe. This is as clear an example as one could want of the class struggle conducted on an International scale by the Soviet Union.

In contrast to Gorbachev’s pacifism, Marxists recognise just and unjust wars. We are not opposed to all war. In broad terms we differentiate between wars fought by the oppressed and those fought by oppressors: the violence of the oppressed is justified while the violence of the oppressor is not. We understand that wars by progressive classes, oppressed nations and socialist states have their origins in the desire to clear away the stifling old order, the desire for freedom and the drive for the new. Their wars are just and
revolutionary. They must be supported.

This is, of course, not the end of the matter. We also consider some wars conducted by oppressors just if they objectively advance the forces of production. This is the communist method to determine whether one of their wars is just or unjust.

Naturally a class can start off being progressive and thus fight just wars and then in time become a fetter on production and thus reactionary and fight unjust wars. By their very nature, however, many wars are not progressive. In fact, they are decidedly reactionary, and therefore unjust. This was the case with decadent slave and feudal society and it is most certainly the case with decaying, moribund and parasitic capitalism, ie capitalism at its imperialist stage.

Imperialism allowed capitalism to avoid revolution and enjoy a new lease of life in the metropolitan countries. On a world scale, however, through the subjugation of backward countries and parasitism it undoubtedly placed crippling fetters on the development of production. Production advanced, but to nowhere near the level which world socialism would have made possible. That is why imperialist capitalism is inherently reactionary.

Imperialism also held back the productive potential of the world because it greatly increased the number and scale of wars. Many of these resulted from conquest of backward peoples; the scramble for Africa, the turning of China into a semi-colony and the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. But the most bloody and damaging were those between the great powers resulting from capitalism’s law of uneven development. This law was greatly enhanced by the turn to imperialism, which immensely aggravated the contradictions inside capitalism.

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5.5.3. Imperialism and war

As we have said, for Lenin wars were inseparable from the “political systems that engender them” and war can only be understood in relationship to the policies pursued by classes. This is most definitely true of our epoch, the epoch of imperialism. With Gorbachev’s utopian vision of a lambs-and-lions-lying-together world of cooperation between socialism,
imperialism and the so-called ‘third world’ in mind, it is worthwhile spending a little time examining this.

In the late 19th century newly emergent imperialist powers such as Germany found themselves in the position where they were unable to obtain “a place in the sun” (Kaiser Wilhelm II); the world had already been divided by the likes of France, Belgium, the Netherlands and, above all, Britain.

The fact that from the 1880s Germany had outstripped Britain in heavy industry and technical efficiency meant that the existing division of the world became a barrier to further capital accumulation by German capitalists. As a result there arose an ever sharpening contradiction between the imperialist ‘have nots’ and the ‘haves’ - a contradiction epitomised by the rivalry between Germany and Great Britain.

Smaller powers organised themselves around the bigger ones and sought advantage. There resulted a web of secret treaties linking one power to another in contracts of joint robbery and plunder. From 1900 the world was visibly sliding towards the abyss. Peaceful solutions were considered, but all attempts to stave off the inevitable failed. Negotiations broke down and world war, which looked close in 1905 and in 1911, finally broke out in August 1914.

Although Germany was defeated by the combined might of Britain and the United States, the ‘war to end wars’ could not bring peace. The millions who had been butchered on the battlefields of Flanders, the Dardanelles, Tannenberg, Ypres, and Verdun died for profit, not for peace. Imperialism’s wars could only lay the basis for an imperialist peace and eventually a new imperialist war. The uneven rate of development characteristic of capitalism and the onerous nature of the peace of Versailles could only pave the way for another bloodbath between Germany and Britain.

As Lenin taught us, imperialist war is the continuation of the policies of imperialist peace; peace merely registers the changed relation of forces brought about as a result of military operations. Germany may have found itself militarily defeated in 1918, but its industries and technique remained superior to the other European imperialist powers, including Britain. As soon as Germany embarked on the road to recovery it again found its path blocked by the same obstacle that it had experienced before: the division of the world by the great colonial powers, especially the undynamic but very amply endowed British Empire.

The possession of an empire enabled British capitalists to top up their
domestic rates of profits and amass huge fortunes. It also provided a market from which its rivals could be excluded: where Britain found itself squeezed out of European markets it could always fall back on India, Africa and the dominions.

Having defeated Germany and still possessing its huge empire enabled Britain to ‘offload’ the full effect of the last general crisis of capitalism, which necessitated the most massive self-destruction of capital yet seen. Sluggish Britain was able to ride the precipitous 1929 crash and the economic dislocation and devastation of the early 1930s without plunging into turmoil. Dynamic German imperialism, in contrast, having brutally suppressed the proletariat’s revolutionary attempts of 1918-1919 and 1923, found itself again gripped by crisis in the wake of the 1929 crash, which saw its capital destroyed as opposed to Britain’s. The system in desperate self defence spawned the grotesque monster of Nazism as its agent of counterrevolution and redivisionism.

World War II started as simply inter-imperialist and hence unjust. Yet with the German attempt to violently reintroduce capitalism into the Soviet Union through its invasion in 1941, the war assumed a dual character. On the one hand it was still an imperialist war but on the other it was a revolutionary war.

The Soviet Union fought a just, revolutionary war. Stalin’s bureaucratic methods tended to cloud this, as did his talk of Mother Russia and encouragement of frankly chauvinist anti German propaganda. Nevertheless the fact that the Red Army successfully defended the Soviet Union and went on to victory after victory had tremendously progressive consequences. As much as we may criticise Stalin’s mistakes, these victories owed not a little

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to his singleminded leadership. Nothing Gorbachev says should take away from this.

In contrast to the USSR, its imperialist allies, in spite of all their rhetoric, pursued purely imperialist aims. They could do nothing else. To suggest, as Gorbachev does, that they fought an “antifascist war” in the “common interests of all peoples” is to confuse form with content and turn one’s back on objective reality.127

Naturally, anti-fascist propaganda was the order of the day. But no class conscious worker would take that at face value. Behind the veneer of an “anti-fascist” war, Britain was determined to preserve its empire, likewise France, while the US had grander ambitions - world domination. The entry of the USSR into the war could do nothing to change that. For Gorbachev to claim otherwise is not only wrong but revolting; he is flattering the
bloodstained imperialists with the lies, they used to get worker to kill worker.

5.5.4. Imperialism post-1945

As Gorbachev points out, with 1945 the world entered the nuclear era. For him this meant that there “appeared an objective limit for class confrontation in the international arena” and the emergence of “real, not speculative and remote, common human Interest - to save humanity”. So let us examine the post-1945 world and see if it is fundamentally different to the pre-1945 world.

The aftermath of World War II was very different from that of World War I. Although on the winning side, Britain, along with France and the other ‘haves’, failed to prevent redivision. This was in part due to the struggle by the colonial peoples for national independence and the greatly enhanced power of the Soviet Union. But more important was the power of the ‘Johnny come lately’ ally of Britain, the United States. It did everything to encourage a safe, ie non-revolutionary, decolonisation. Obviously the US had no concern whatsoever for the interests of the colonial peoples. What it wanted was the opening up of markets previously closed or at least partially closed through empire protectionism.

The dissolution of the great colonial empires hardly meant the ending of imperialism. Virtually the whole world had in effect fallen under the domination of the US because it was a ‘super’ imperialist power with by far the most dynamic capital. imperialism might find

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colonial domination “convenient” (Lenin) but imperialism and colonies do not in the least mean the same thing. Imperialism is in essence monopoly capital, not colonialism, let alone the “psychology and notions of colonial times” as Gorbachev implies.

Writing in his Imperialism, Lenin outlined three forms characteristic of the imperialism of his day: the British sort, which was colonialist; the French, which although it had an extensive empire was based on the usury of its banking monopolies; and the German sort, which had no empire to speak of. This German sort of imperialism has, after 1945, become the norm. It rested on giant finance capitalist monopolies possessing the power - through syndicates, deals and sheer size - to divide up the world market and suppress free competition.

In a real way this ‘German’ form is the most appropriate for capitalist imperialism. After all, unlike other types of class society, capitalist
exploitation is veiled, not obvious to common sense, and difficult to analyse. Colonial exploitation undeniably does not fall into this category. It is naked, there for all to see, and is subject to cross class nationalistic resentment and hatred. Neo-colonialism is a different matter altogether.

Under it there is formal political independence. The unequal exchange between the imperialist powers and the backward and medium developed countries seems to be as equal as the worker getting a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work; the extraction of surplus value is hidden. Whatever Gorbachev may believe, there can be no equality between nations while imperialism, ie monopoly capitalism, exists. Likewise there can be no equality between worker and capitalist. Gorbachev calls for non-exploitative relations, but this is pure utopianism. Surely he does not expect the USA to return to competitive capitalism and abolish Fords, IBM and the Chase Manhattan Bank. That is like calling upon a baby to return to the womb - it is impossible. The only way to abolish the inequality between nations is to go forward to the world revolution.

Having established that ending colonialism did not mean the end of imperialism, let us deal with US imperialism. It, like Germany, has long possessed very dynamic capital. Unlike Germany though, the US found no contorting fetters to accumulation in the latter part of the 19th and early years of the 20th centuries. Due to its big population, huge tracts of free land in the west and a massive internal market, US expansion proceeded relatively smoothly. Only in the 20th century did barriers to capital accumulation begin to make themselves felt.

The US did not force through a genuine redivision of the world following 1918. The old European empires remained; indeed they grew through gobbling up the few German possessions. The US was already the most powerful nation but it did not possess sufficiently greater strength compared to other powers (especially Britain) to refashion the world. It paid dearly for this inability. When the 1929 crash occurred, the US, like Germany, suffered far more acutely than empire cushioned Britain. Where Britain lost something approaching 14% of its industrial output, the figures for the US and Germany were nearer 50%.

1945 was very different from 1918. The US emerged from the carnage
with such overwhelming strength relative to its imperialist ‘friends’ that it could now safely call the tune. The US became a sort of ‘super’ imperialist power, its capital penetrating every corner of the capitalist world, all imperialist rivals bending to its will. The beginning of the 20 year ‘American century’ meant that the general crisis of capitalism, which had gripped the world since 1914, was resolved. A new bout of capital accumulation began, the rate of profit soared and the world economy expanded at an unprecedented rate for an unprecedented period.

This was used as a cover for all sorts of silly ideas (with a slight variation they are being reworked today by Marxism Today under very different conditions which make them even more stupid). Yet in spite of cocksure predictions by the intellectual whores of capital that the system would enjoy uninterrupted growth and prosperity, and the echo this found in leftist circles, the tendency for the rate of profit to fall and crisis eventually reasserted itself. From around 1968 boom gave way to pre-crisis.

Economic upturns became ever more fleeting, speculative and founded on credit. The dominant picture became one of stagnation and depression. Under capitalism it is a law that boom and crisis operate in inverse proportion. It is clear therefore that the height and length of the post-World War II boom and the fantastic stretching of the credit system in order to keep things going, means capitalism promises to produce a stupendous new general crisis that will dwarf that of 1914-48.

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5.5.5. The slide to a World War III

As we have shown, the nature of imperialism has not changed. The same laws operated after 1945 as did before. Understanding this we can see that the danger of a World War III comes from capitalism’s law of uneven development.

In 1955 the US ‘super’ imperialist, power accounted for a staggering 50% of the entire capitalist world’s total industrial production. Uneven development meant this could only be temporary. Japan and Germany rose again. There has been a slow but remorseless erosion of US hegemony. By 1970 the US share of OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and
Development - the great imperialist powers’ club) industrial production had declined to 43.3%. In 1975 this was down to 34.9%. And what was the world’s biggest creditor is now the biggest debtor.

Today Japan has a per capita production equivalent to the US. And even if this is more a reflection of the slide of the dollar and the strong yen than actual purchasing power, there can be no denying Japan’s or Federal Germany’s economic strength. Japan is now the capitalist world’s second most powerful economy (it might already have overtaken the Soviet Union in terms of industrial production) while Federal Germany is the world’s largest trading nation.

The fact that the US had created an open world market meant that its old adversaries in World War II also found expansion relatively easy. This did not create any real problems in the boom years. But in a pre-crisis period rivalries become more and more intense. The tendency for the rate of profit to fall asserts itself and contradictions are exacerbated and begin to fester.

A new general crisis can be put off but it cannot be avoided. The day of reckoning will come; and the longer it is put off, the deeper it will be and the more inter-imperialist contradictions will fuel the drive towards protectionism and war.

Naturally, all the imperialists want peace. Not only Takeshita who is prime minister of a country with a pacifist constitution, Kohl whose country refuses to arm itself with nuclear weapons and the socialist’ Mitterrand, but also Star Wars Bush and the Iron Lady Thatcher. The trouble is that every one of them wants the peace which suits their imperialism, their nation, as opposed to someone else’s. As a result of this their imperialist peace is in reality nothing more than the preparation for their imperialist war.

Hence at the present stage it is hardly surprising that we find those in possession of the most dynamic capital lie at the heart of embryonic trading/military blocs in the form a new co-prosperity sphere in East Asia with Japan and its ‘little dragons’, and a Federal German led European Community. These crystallising blocs slowly but inexorably find themselves diverging from the US, which terrifies the East Asian powers with its talk of protectionism, and is in turn terrified b what it sees as the ‘fortress Europe’ dangers that go along with the creation of a single EC market in 1992.

We are not about to witness a return to colonialism but the cracking up of the open world economy created by the US for itself in the post-1945 period. This, the end of the boom, the emergence of a pre-crisis situation and the divergence of interests between the major imperialist powers carry the seeds of a World War III - not, as Gorbachev would have us imagine, the
“irrationality” of the military industrial complex. This or that section of the monopoly capitalist class might be more or less warlike; nevertheless, in the event of war it is fought in the interests of capital as a whole. Gorbachev refuses to see this. For his own opportunist reasons he wants to put the blame for the potential horrors of a World War III on to the smallest possible section of the capitalist class. This will not wash. It is capitalism as a whole which carries responsibility for World Wars I and II, not the arms manufacturers in isolation. The same goes for the danger of a World War III.

In spite of the greater aggressiveness of the established imperialist powers compared with the relatively pacifistic Japan and Federal Germany, It is vital for the proletariat to maintain an independent position and to avoid the trap of supporting one category against another. To stop war we must kill all imperialist powers. Because they are imperialist, today’s ‘pacifistic’ powers are ultimately just as warlike as the armed to the eyeballs USA. This must be emphasised.

Obviously at the present time there can be no serious prospect of a full blown inter-imperialist world war (those, like the RCP, who suggest otherwise only expose their tenuous grasp of reality). Although US hegemony has been eroded, it still exists. In spite of its decline, the US’s 29% share of world GNP is ahead of all of East Asia with its 20% (even with Australia thrown in for good measure), and the 12 members of the European Community’s 28%.130

Certainly, in terms of military power, US superiority is overwhelming. In 1982-83 it spent $215.9 billion on its military machine compared with a combined total for all other Nato powers of $105.9 billion, and Japan’s miniscule $10.45 billion. If we take a look at the mighty US nuclear arsenal and the military integration and subordination of other imperialist powers to it, it is clear that although the drive for world war has its source in the crisis of capitalism and the growing rivalries and contradictions between the major imperialist powers, the US can control and direct all the major imperialist powers against the Soviet Union.

So while there are the first signs of the emergence of distinctive imperialist poles - the USA/Canada, Japanese dominated East Asia, and the EC - and while protectionism in various forms becomes more pervasive, the fact remains that the US still wields hegemony over the capitalist world. It was the conditions of growing contradictions between the major imperialist powers and the declining but sustained US hegemony which gave a new turn to the Cold War against the Soviet Union and the socialist community in the
A Cold War is in essence a period when the imperialists attempt to achieve their ends by sabre rattling rather than open war or the more subtle economic penetration and subversion. As hot war has not been feasible, what we have tended to see is zigzagging between the Cold War and economic penetration, ie detente.

As World War II cooperation gave way to tension over the shape of the post-war world, US policy towards the Soviet Union became bellicose. Even in the closing months of World War II the US ruling class was openly threatening Stalin with a World War III. Fortunately, because the Soviet Union was able to quickly follow the US in developing an atomic bomb, the top secret American Joint Chiefs of Staff ‘Pincher’ and other atomic battle plans, which envisaged the destruction of 20 or more Soviet cities and the conquest of the socialist countries between the summers of 1946 and 47, were kept in Cold War storage.

This Cold War lasted till the late 1960s. It was conducted under the rubric of ‘rolling back communism’, which due to the Red Army and the revolutionary turmoil following World War II was no longer isolated in one country (and yes, Mongolia) but now stretched from central Europe to the Pacific Ocean. The socialist world was the only thorn in the side of total US world domination.

These societies represented an area of the world in which the US could not operate freely (and at this time had no pressing need to do so). Perhaps more importantly they were products of revolution - yes, in some cases from above - which presented an ideological alternative for the neo-colonial peoples just as the Americans were doing their best to consolidate their domination over them.

Initially when capitalist boom gave way to stagnation, this Cold War tended to thaw and western policy zagged towards economic methods. Broadly this coincided with the USSR achieving something near strategic nuclear parity with the US and the certainty that it was only a matter of time before the liberation movement in Vietnam secured victory. With active Soviet encouragement western capital turned east.

What motivated the imperialists was the search for new markets in order to counteract their declining domestic rates of profit. But as trade with the
socialist world took place under the control of the socialist states, profit rates were squeezed and possibilities limited.

This, and the need to shore up US hegemony, was what lay behind Reagan’s B movie rhetoric about the ‘evil empire’; he was determined to force the Soviet Union to open up. In the military field the US outspent and technically left behind the Soviet Union with ultra accurate first strike missiles, Stealth aircraft and Star Wars. As proved by his unilateral cuts, selling out Afghanistan, capitulation over Angola and turn to market socialism, Gorbachev has given in where even Krushchev and Brezhnev stood firm.

It is this miserable treachery which has produced a new detente. Reagan officially buried his ‘evil empire’ talk in Moscow last year, and even Thatcher says the Cold War is over. For them Gorbachev’s UN speech in December 1988 promising arms cuts and cooperation in solving “regional conflicts” was a remarkable Christmas present. It was, but far from consolidating peace, as we were told by sharp suited Soviet officials and bourgeois propagandists alike, his unilateral concessions to imperialism can only but weaken socialism and bring the danger of war nearer.

It is no exaggeration to say that all that has stopped a World War III has been the armed strength of socialism. This can be seen in the non use of the countless strategic battle plans developed by the Pentagon. Launching an attack on the Soviet Union would have been too costly in terms of the inevitable retaliation. This has been

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the constant bugbear in all war plan feasibility studies carried out by US imperialism. If the US could have got away with ‘only’ 10 or 20 million dead, a war against the USSR would already have happened.

Of course, for the Soviet Union to develop a nuclear arsenal and to achieve something like parity in nuclear warheads with the US in the 1970s was a tremendous achievement, it was also tremendously costly, not only in absolute rouble terms but also in relative gross national product terms. The Soviet Union is a much less wealthy country than the US (something like 50% less). As can be imagined, to come anywhere near matching the US in military hardware imposed a massive burden on the Soviet economy.

This is something the US strategists have long recognised (Gorbachev pathetically calls this “immoral”). As a result they have constantly sought to up the stakes in the arms race, not only in the never ending struggle for superiority between offensive and defensive weapons, but to break the Soviet economy through deploying extremely expensive weaponry
incorporating the latest exotic technology. To be sure of keeping itself safe, the Soviet Union had to follow every US move. With Reagan’s almost war time levels of ‘defence’ spending, the US at last outbid the Soviet leadership. Gorbachev’s arms cuts are not only designed to appease US imperialism, they are, he says, “needed if the Soviet economy Is to be put on a firm footing”.

Under the mismanagement of the bureaucracy, Soviet economic growth - which was in double figures throughout the 1950s and much of the 1960s - ground to a halt in the late 1970s. Gorbachev’s perestroika has done nothing to alter this bleak picture. No wonder the Soviet working class has few illusions in Gorbachevism (according to recent reports only 17% of the Soviet population supports perestroika). Only the intelligentsia and technocracy support his programme.

A Soviet economy frozen by bureaucratic inertia and further endangered by Gorbachevite ‘market socialism’ is in no position to match the US in the arms race. Krushchev, the last Soviet leader before Gorbachev to speak at the UN back in 1960, told the west that “we will bury you”. Gorbachev has no such confidence.

Having taken the decision not to keep up with the US in the arms race, Gorbachev has gone all out to placate imperialism. He wants to persuade it that he can be trusted. Hence, along with sweeping

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unilateral cuts in the Soviet armed forces we see all vestigial rhetoric about the class struggle, the struggle of the oppressed and revolution being discarded by Gorbachev, to be replaced by the completely idealist concept of “the common interests of mankind.” (This puts the right centrists who write Morning Star editorials well to the left of the Soviet president simply because they throw in the occasional reference to the class struggle.)

What Gorbachev means by “common interests of mankind” is class collaboration on an international scale between the Soviet leadership and the imperialist powers. Together, apparently, they can remove the threat of “environmental catastrophe” and “regional conflicts”. This is nonsense worthy of the worst petty bourgeois utopians in the CND and Friends of the Earth.

Gorbachev’s programme is diametrically opposed to Marxist-Leninist truth and the struggle for it. As we have seen, what he means in practice by resolving “regional conflicts” is selling out living revolutions. Yet already imperialism is moving the goal posts.
Gorbachev’s retreat, his fawning, his social democratic language and programme, can only encourage the aggressiveness of the imperialists. Now they are asking for Kampuchea and Afghanistan, tomorrow it will be Nicaragua, the next day it could be Poland, eventually it is bound to be the Soviet Union - the world’s revolutionary centre - itself. The new detente can only be a passing phenomenon.

5.5.6. Have nuclear weapons changed the nature of war?

According to Gorbachev, imperialism is no longer what it was, because of nuclear weapons. To launch a new world war is considered to be tantamount to committing suicide. The task in these new conditions, we are told, is to get rid of “ideological intolerance” in international relations. If this is done the warmongers can be isolated and the world can step forth on the path of peace and cooperation.

The development of nuclear weapons did, of course, bring about important changes in military tactics and strategy. But this has not led to a fundamental change in the nature of imperialism. No matter how costly the result, they are there to be used. They are not there for show and neither can they be disinvented.

Nuclear weapons have already been used against Japan, and the US has threatened (sometimes openly, sometimes covertly) to use them against the Soviet Union. Those who suggest that a nuclear exchange would throw the world into a new barbarity are not wrong. But the way to avoid this fate is not to inveigh against inanimate weapons but to organise against those who are driven to use them.

People, not weapons, make history and change society. Nuclear weapons, however powerful, have not replaced class society and the class struggle. They must be seen as nothing more than a tool within class society in the same way as other major military developments, from the longbow to the tank. Weapons are tools of classes which create them and wield them. Thus, whether two sides in a war fight with the same weapons is for us a technical question, Irrelevant in determining whom we support. What matters is the policies of each side: who is progressive and who is reactionary. Thus US nuclear weapons are reactionary because they are a tool of a reactionary social system, while Soviet nuclear weapons, because they defend the gains
of the Great October Revolution, are a necessary evil - as were the swords of
the Red Cavalry in the civil war and the T-34s which smashed the German
war machine at the battle of Kursk in 1943.

As we have shown, imperialism represents the domination of finance
capital. It is no policy pursued by this or that government but a definite stage
of capitalism - its last. If we base ourselves firmly on this analysis we can see
that the warlike nature of imperialism cannot change simply because of
nuclear weapons. Its drive to war is embedded in and determined by the
capitalist economy itself.

Expecting capitalism to actually renounce war is not akin to expecting
human beings to renounce food - that is possible. No, it is more like calling
upon the earth to stop orbiting the sun. It is a matter of objective laws, not
subjective intentions, that drive capitalism to war. Its laws, especially those
of accumulation, necessitate the export of capital, necessitate the offloading
of crisis on to rivals, necessitate expansionism, and where this cannot be
done by peaceful methods it necessitates war as the only alternative.

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5.5.7. The world balance of forces

When writing on the question of war and peace back in 1984 I was obliged to
devote a considerable amount of space to dealing with the world balance of
forces. The reason I had to do that was simple. The main ‘orthodox’
excuse the ‘official communist’ movement used to get round the Leninist
analysis of imperialism and its inherent warlike nature was the claim that the
world balance of forces had decisively shifted in favour of socialism (nuclear
weapons and the military industrial complex came to the fore later).

Because of the new world balance, we were told, it was possible to avert
world war without the revolutionary overthrow of imperialism. With the
strength of the socialist camp, pressure from the international working class
and all who want peace, imperialism could be forced to renounce war. This
was the theoretical basis for the first and subsequent versions of the British
Road to Socialism programme, adopted by the CPGB in 1950. It also
maintained that socialism could come without revolution and through the bourgeois parliament; because of the supposed strength of the socialist camp imperialism could not resort to civil war.

To counter this I put forward two main arguments.
1. It is dangerous to believe that the bourgeoisie will not use violence to maintain its power, better be safe than sorry. War cannot be banished while imperialism survives, it is of necessity warlike, The drive to war Is as much a law of imperialism as the tendency for the rate of profit to fall and the need for capital accumulation etc.
2. The claim that the world balance of forces has decisively shifted in favour of socialism is in reality a myth.

To prove this second argument I reeled out a lot of figures which indicated that Soviet claims that the socialist world accounted for 43% of world industrial production and that the Comecon countries alone produced 33% were untrue and that the Soviet Union was only about half as rich as the USA. We hardly need to repeat this exercise. Life has proved us right. We will therefore confine ourselves instead to one quote this time, it is from Perestroika, where Gorbachev at last admits that:

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in the last fifteen years the national Income growth rates had declined by more than a half and by the beginning of the eighties had fallen close to economic stagnation. A country that was once quickly closing on the world’s advanced nations began to lose one position after another. Moreover, the gap in the efficiency of production, quality of products, scientific and technological development techniques began to widen and not to our advantage”.

This is hardly a description of a decisive shift in the world balance of forces in favour of socialism. Indeed since we touched upon this question in 1984 it is clear that the world balance of forces has shifted further against socialism. Even if we use the widest possible definition of the balance of world forces, this can be seen to be true.
1. The socialist countries are still way behind the advanced capitalist countries in terms of gross product and technology. This gap has got wider in recent years. This has aided the erosion of socialism at its edges and the corrosion we have seen emerge from within.
2. Related to this decline in the relative power of the socialist world, the so-called ‘socialist orientated countries’ are more and more orientated
towards the imperialist countries.

3. The ‘official’ world communist movement is disintegrating. It has moved further to the right and overwhelmingly where it retains any real influence in the workers’ movement it plays a typically reformist role.

All this does not lay us low. It merely confirms the profound truths of the doctrine of Marx, Engels and Lenin. There are no short cuts to communism, world revolution is the only road.

Even if imperialist encirclement and superiority was in fact replaced by socialist encirclement and superiority this would not lead us to the conclusion that our programme should commit us to a peaceful parliamentary road to socialism. The question of violence must always be faced. The capitalists are unlikely to have an aberration and decide not to resist us.

Those who inflated the power of living socialism placed all responsibility for defending the gains of the world revolution on a conservative bureaucracy which has now spawned Gorbachevism - hardly safe hands. If they were honest communists they would now admit their mistake. They would say that The Leninist was right all along and that talk of a peaceful road to socialism and getting imperialism to abandon war were wrong. We would gladly welcome such comrades into our ranks and let bygones be bygones.

Unfortunately we do not know of one prominent ‘official communist’ who has even asked questions about Gorbachev’s effective admission that past claims of a decisive shift were bunk. This is very significant. What it shows is that we are not dealing with intellectual mistakes by honest communists. As we have argued, the official communist movement is now deeply imbued with opportunism. It is committed to the parliamentary road because it is committed to reformism and, in the last analysis, to bourgeois society.

5.5.8. The question of peaceful coexistence

Although recognising the inevitability of war while imperialism existed, soon after the October Revolution Lenin became aware that Soviet Russia would have to attempt to survive for a considerable time in a world
dominated by capitalism. It was therefore vital to take advantage of the antagonisms and contradictions between the major imperialist powers to facilitate this.

Soviet Russia found itself a besieged detachment of the world revolution. The defeat of the revolutions in Europe, and especially the German revolution, meant that the days when Trotsky, the first People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs, could refer to his job as merely being one of issuing “a few revolutionary proclamations to the peoples of the world and then shut up shop” soon gave way to careful diplomacy and the tactics of peaceful coexistence as personified by Chicherin.

To facilitate survival, Lenin recognised that there had to be a division of labour between the diplomacy of the Soviet state in its dealings with capitalist countries and the principled position of communists in both socialist and capitalist countries. Communist parties should always adhere to a firm revolutionary line and never deviate from the struggle for world revolution, but the Soviet state, while making calls for revolution, could wheel and deal.

Thus, when speculating about the possibility of an inter-imperialist war between Japan and the United States, Lenin said that advocating propaganda for communism in these countries” is “correct, but it is not everything.” The US and Japan “want to fight and will fight for world supremacy. for the right to loot ... of course, defence of our country in such a war would be a heinous crime, a betrayal of socialism. Of course, to support one of these countries against another would be a crime against communism”. But then he added “we communists have to play one off against another. Are we not committing a crime against communism? No, because we are doing that as a socialist state which is carrying on communist propaganda and is obliged to take advantage of every hour granted it by circumstances in order to gain strength as rapidly as possible”.

These tactics of peaceful coexistence were employed to strengthen the Soviet state, not in the patriotic sense but in order to create the most advantageous conditions for world revolution. Peaceful coexistence was living with capitalism but only for as long as it took the workers in the capitalist countries to make revolution. The Soviet state had every interest in this and all Soviet communists had the duty to actively aid it.

It is crystal clear that the Leninist policy of peaceful coexistence was in no sense, shape or form class collaborationism or the renunciation of world revolution, as the Trotskyites blockheadedly claim. No, peaceful coexistence
is a continuation of the class struggle using other (diplomatic) means.

Recognising that peaceful coexistence between capitalist and socialist states can be a principled tactic does not blind us to the fact that the long term interests of the Soviet Union and world peace cannot be secured through peaceful coexistence, but only through world revolution. The victory of the proletariat in the Soviet Union, the emergence of a community of socialist states, are only partial victories. For socialism to be made irreversible requires the establishment of the World Union of Socialist Republics.

Socialism has not eliminated wars in general or the threat of a new world war. Nor could it. While the strength of the socialist countries, above all the Soviet Union, can restrain the imperialist war drive, it cannot stop it. Lenin declared in a speech to Party activists in Moscow in late 1920, that:

“While capitalism and socialism exist side by side, they cannot live in peace: one or the other will ultimately triumph - the last obsequies will be observed either for the Soviet Republic or for world capitalism”.

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It almost goes without saying that Gorbachev’s present line has nothing to do with the Leninist tactic of peaceful coexistence. The opportunism which has long existed in the CPSU elevated peaceful coexistence to a major strategic goal to which everything else was subordinate. This logically gave birth, at the April 1985 meeting of the CPSU Central Committee, to the declaration that peaceful coexistence should no longer be seen as a “specific form of the class struggle”. Naturally something which goes hand in hand with denying the link between war and revolution.

Marxists have long recognised that because wars coincided with socio-economic crises they often detonated revolutions. The Franco-Prussian war provoked the Paris Commune, the Russo-Japanese war set off the 1905 revolution in Russia and the October Revolution itself was in part the product of World War I. Gorbachev claims that war and the struggle for revolution must be “divorced”. It does not “correspond to the realities of the nuclear era” he says.

What Gorbachev puts in place of revolution is international class collaboration. To excuse this, Gorbachev comes out with the most idealist nonsense about letting every nation decide which “system and ideology is better” as if socialism was about shopping in a supermarket rather than the highest form of the class struggle.

Worse, so that the imperialists need not worry he actually states in black and white that the existence of capitalist countries is a good thing! It is hard
to believe, but it is true: “The states and the peoples of the earth” he writes “are very different, and it is actually good that they are so. Apparently this “incentive for competition fits into the concept of peaceful coexistence and the “dialectical unity of opposites”.

Gorbachev’s sleight of hand is another way of saying that the existence of capitalism with its unity of opposites in the form of exploited and exploiters is a good thing. Living in Thatcherite Britain, we can tell Gorbachev that it is not. Capitalism is a system of pauperisation, greed and war. We do not want to hear excuses for it, we want to do away with it before it does away with us all.

If this philistine knew anything about dialectics he would understand that socialism and capitalism are opposites, which makes it inescapable and necessary that there will be struggle between the two which, because we are dealing with an antagonistic contradiction, must be resolved through the forcible suppression of the capitalist class. The unity of opposites is conditional, temporary, transitory, relative. The struggle of opposites absolute.

5.5.9. Leninists and the struggle for peace

What distinguishes genuine communists from others who recognise the danger of war is that we see the need to retaliate against it not with pacifistic calls for disarmament, but with preparations and propaganda for the revolutionary overthrow of imperialism itself. For us it is only by completing the job started by our Russian comrades in October 1917 that war can be banished and peace guaranteed.

Fighting for revolution is the best possible service we can do for humanity. Putting peace first and subordinating the struggle for revolution to it is akin to saying you’ll only have sexual intercourse after you’ve had two children. A working class in Britain that has no illusions in imperialism, that is determined to go out and make revolution, is in the best possible position to defend living socialism and, in due course, add to the number of socialist countries, thus weakening the forces of war and hastening the dawn of permanent peace.

We must resolutely oppose those, like Gorbachev, claiming to be “guided by the theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism”, who paint a picture of a transformed world: prosperous, democratic, and of course peaceful but still dominated by capitalism. Not surprisingly this dream has been praised by all
the factions of official communism’ in Britain (as well as the bourgeoisie).

The opportunists comfort themselves by laughing at our insistence that socialism will only come through working class violence and the smashing of the existing state machine. They think this is utopian and imagine that we are wide eyed romantics who spend our time waiting around for the day when we can re-enact the storming of the Winter Palace in London. As an alternative the opportunists offer up one or another edition or version of the British Road to Socialism programme.

It charts a course to communism through the Labour Party transforming the bourgeois military/bureaucratic state. In reality this is the utopian dream. Not because parliament and the bourgeois state are a mirage - far from it - but because this very concrete reality will always serve the class that created it. Those who say it can be so transformed might start off as sincere socialists but the logic of their position means they are tied to the camp of the class enemy. Because they identify with the bourgeois state, they will end up defending it.

Unlike the opportunists, our politics are based on historical experience and are rigourously realistic. We do not expend our energies pleading to capitalism to disinvent nuclear war and to only spend the “minimum required for defence” (Tony Chater). We say not a penny, not a person, to the bourgeois armed forces. Instead we call for the arming of the working class. Obviously this is not something that the bourgeoisie will benignly consent to. But it must be done and, step by painful step, in the face of intransigent and determined opposition, it will be done.

The arming of the workers cannot be achieved by sloganising. The armed working class emerges from the class struggle: in the fight against the police on the picket lines, in the protection of our meetings and demonstrations against fascist attack and in the fight for revolution, ie from life itself. Calling for an armed working class does not mean importing AK47s from Libya and dishing them out to the first strikers we come across. Arming the working class is an organic result of the class struggle. The higher the level of class struggle, the more sophisticated the arms and organisation. It starts with fists and boots and goes to drilling and martial arts, goes from crash helmets and baseball bats to shotguns and home made bombs, goes from Workers’ Defence Corps to Red Guards.
When asked what socialism in Britain will look like and how it will come about, we Leninists say look at the miners’ Great Strike, look at Ireland, that is what the dictatorship of the proletariat will be like. Far from being dreamers we understand that the future proletarian state and the revolution are to be seen in embryonic form in the here and now.

Great struggles give us a glimpse of what is to come. The struggle in the Six Counties, the miners’ Great Strike, are worth a thousand editions of the BRS with its pathetic abstract scheme for peaceably transforming the bourgeois state into its opposite. Marxism tells us that the bourgeois state will be destroyed by its opposite. The 1984-5 strike and the 20 year struggle for national liberation in Ireland are life’s confirmation of this.

These struggles prove that the masses make history, not would be reformist legislators. In Ireland the republican population has armed itself and created the basis of an alternative state machine. In its own way, so did the miners’ Great Strike, with its nationwide network of Support Committees, the Women Against Pit Closures Movement and the hit squads. These were the seeds of workers’ soviets, a proletarian women’s movement and a British Red Army.

Faced with the interrelated militarisation of capitalism, its war drive against the Soviet Union, its growing economic difficulties and attacks on the most basic rights and conditions of the working class, we say we must fight to arm ourselves. Only then can we disarm the bourgeoisie and create a world without weapons of mass destruction. This is the only realistic course for our class to take. In the words of Lenin:

“Our slogan must be arming the proletariat to defeat, expropriate and disarm the bourgeoisie. These are the only tactics possible for a revolutionary class, tactics that follow logically from, and are dictated by the whole objective development of capitalist militarism. Only after the proletariat has disarmed the bourgeoisie will it be able, without betraying its world historic mission, to consign all armaments to the scrap heap. And the proletariat will undoubtedly do this, but only when this condition has been fulfilled, and certainly not before”. 143

Peace can never be guaranteed through taking the road of official
communism’. Peace will not come through the feminist women-only stunts at Greenham Common which Marxism Today’s Bea Campbell used to offer as the universal elixir; nor the puerile Labourite parliamentary hot air so dear to the heart and close to the spirit of the Morning Star; nor the pious prayers of Bruce Kent, applauded so enthusiastically by the New Communist Party; and certainly not the Gorbachevism which unites them all.

No, world peace and the saving of humanity from nuclear holocaust can only come through the elimination of capitalism from the planet. War, the exploitation of man by man, the subjugation of small nations, and the oppression of women will be ended with the triumph of communism. This will be the era of real freedom when peace will not merely be a pause between wars but the permanent state of things - as a result not only will the word ‘war’ gradually disappear from the vocabulary but eventually so will its opposite, the word ‘peace’.

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5.6. Solidarnosc in power

Editorial, The Leninist No81, August 23 1989

So Jaruzelski has confirmed that Tadeusz Mazowiezki is to form the next government in Poland. If proof were wanted, here it is:

there is a general crisis of socialism. What we are seeing played out in Poland could be repeated in other socialist countries - a peaceful democratic counterrevolution.

There are those ‘official communists’ and Trotskyites who will, of course, refuse to see what is in front of their eyes. That is their problem. The film is being run backwards and the leadership of the Polish United Workers Party is unlikely to do anything to stop it. Nor will Gorbachev.

Bureaucratic discipline in the PUWP has broken down. The party is faction ridden, with one wing openly arguing in favour of social democratisation. But whatever the factional differences, a whole swathe at the top of the PUWP is committed to Solidarnosc’s programme of restoring capitalism.

Far from having a material interest in maintaining the status quo of bureaucratic socialism, the PUWP government of Mieczyslaw Rakowski (now general secretary) devoted its time to “ensuring that senior functionaries took leading roles in the new joint stock companies”.

In
other words, bureaucrats have been transforming themselves into capitalists. Although resented in the lower ranks, this gives the top bureaucrats a very material stake in ending socialism.

So despite the fact that PUWP members are to be guaranteed the interior and defence ministries, there is every reason to believe that neither the army nor the police will be used to crush the emerging new capitalist class. Rather they will be used to defend the emerging capitalist property relations.

As to the Soviet Union, socialism can no longer expect any help from this quarter. Under Gorbachev, the labour bureaucracy is undergoing the same bourgeoisification process as in Poland and has, as a result, promised the west it will never again do a 1956 or 1968.

So what are the prospects for Poland? As we argued in the last edition of *The Leninist*, while Poland can experience a democratic peaceful counterrevolution, this would only be a first step. A consolidated post counterrevolutionary regime is unlikely to be able to rule democratically, and obviously violence remains the essence of any state, certainly an undemocratic capitalist one.

Poland’s economy is in a mess. Opening it up to the forces of the market might make a thin layer of bureaucrats, middle men and capitalists rich, but for the mass of the population it can only mean the threat of unemployment, wage cuts and general uncertainty. These are not the conditions for a stable bourgeois democracy.

The Mazowiecko government is clearly transitionary both in its all embracing composition, programme and methods. Being in government is bound to cause deep fissures in Solidarnosc. Its membership has slumped from the 10 million it enjoyed in its 1981 heyday. Now it is down to 2 million, who are divided between those who still see it as some sort of trade union and those who are bent on creating a western style Christian Democratic party.

The price increases and closures Mazowiecko must push through have the potential for causing a schism. No wonder Lech Walesa has stayed clear of getting directly involved in the business of government.

He is biding his time. In the event of chaos he can ‘heed the call of the nation’ and present himself as the reincarnation of his hero, the semi-fascist dictator Marshal Pilsudski, who ruled Poland throughout the 1920s and 30s with a combination of blood and iron.

There can be no deals with counterrevolution. It is essential that communists in Poland organise themselves, settle accounts with the
Jaruzeiskis, the Rakowskis and the Kiszcaks, and win the leadership of Poland’s working class in order to make a new social revolution, this time from below.

5.7. It’s counterrevolution

Article, *The Leninist* No56, February 5 1990

What is going on in Eastern Europe? Well, according to just about everyone from *The Sun* to the SWP, Eastern Europe has been swept by a series of awe inspiring revolutions which, in Romania, apparently

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had “shades of 1917”.145 If that were the case we too would join in the jubilation. But nothing could be further from the truth.

There has not been a revolutionary wave. Yes, we have seen the obscene Berlin Wall breached, millions take to the streets and corrupt governments fall. Yet, whatever the subjective intentions of the masses, objectively what is taking place is a process of counterrevolution through which the rule of capitalism is being restored.

We do not need to use up much space in order to prove our point. Poland can no longer be considered a socialist state in any sense of the word: nor for that matter can Czechoslovakia, Romania or Hungary ... and the GDR looks set to follow suit as this article is written. Even in the USSR itself Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are openly and unashamedly determined on the restorationist course, as is Yeltsin and the ‘radical’ Inter-regional group.

What leads us to this conclusion is not the dwindling percentage of Industry in state hands, seen as key by reformists and ‘official communists’, but the political programme and perspectives of those at the head of the state. It is ABC that nationalisation does not *per se* equal socialism. Likewise, suggestions from the likes of the Trotskyites, Spartacists and ‘hardline’ ‘official communists’ that because the army, the police, the civil service etc have remained largely intact they are therefore socialist, are sheer nonsense.

Given the reality of bureaucratic socialism and the purely formal nature of the rule of the proletariat, it is quite possible for a new bourgeoisie to peacefully take hold of the bureaucratic socialist state machine - which is anyway a carryover from bourgeois society - and use it for its own purposes. Not only has this proved to be the case, but
top state apparatchiks have set their sights on constituting themselves as part of the emerging capitalist class by transforming managers, bureaucrats and all sorts of other fatcat officials into owners of newly formed joint stock companies.

Some say that the ‘official communist’ parties of Eastern Europe are engaging in deft manoeuvring. Rubbish! They have lost all belief in themselves and, in the main, no longer even have the will to rule. Where they have not disintegrated, as in Romania, they are going over, 1914 fashion, to the politics of the bourgeoisie within the working class movement, ie social democracy.

Even before it became social democratised, the former ‘official communist’ party in Poland, the PUWP, supported the Solidarnosc government, a government of the proto-bourgeoisie. It has now split into two social democratic parties, equally committed to Solidarnosc’s marketisation programme - 80% of industry is up for sale to home grown or foreign capitalists.

Hungary is different only in detail. Its social democratised former official communist’ party is still in government but its leaders are, like their comrades in Poland, determined to sell off state industry, including to themselves. To facilitate the turn back towards capitalism it has dumped the old bureaucratic socialist constitution in favour of a bourgeois democratic one, banned political organisations from the workplaces and proposes to join the EC. The other former ruling parties of Eastern Europe are not far behind.

Surprisingly enough the concrete process of social democrratisation and counterrevolution explains why the capitalists and their press have been so enthusiastic, ecstatic indeed, about developments In Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. If there were real revolutions taking place it would be a different matter. Did they support the October 1917 revolution? Hardly. Would they support a new one? Of course not. In fact they would do everything in their power to crush genuine revolutions, just as they did after October 1917, when the armies of 13 capitalist powers intervened in an attempt to kill off the fledgling Soviet Republic.

What form then would a genuine revolution take? It would take the form of a communist led political revolution which would:
1. Remove the bureaucratic deformations which first held back and now cripple the development of the productive forces; open the door for a rational democratic plan, not the renewed domination of the anarchy of the market.

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2. Usher in direct soviet democracy, not the sham of parliamentary democracy. State positions would not be divided and re-divided, like the spoils of war, among the proto-bourgeois bureaucratic establishment and the proto-bourgeois ‘opposition’, but staffed from below and subject to recall. No elected official would receive more than the pay of the average skilled worker.

3. See the working class become fully the ruling class and conscious of its historical mission. The working class would see itself as an integral part of the world’s proletariat. It would not split into rival ethnic groups, line up behind nationalistic petty bourgeois democrats of the New and Civic Forum types, let alone vote en masse for the openly pro-church, pro-imperialist, pro-restorationist Solidarnosc.

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4. Inspire the world’s workers. It would be an act of proletarian internationalism and would have the capitalist class contemplating its mortality.

Obviously none of this has been the case. In spite of the instability which a united Germany and a German dominated Europe will cause in the relations between the imperialist powers, the joy of the bourgeoisie is real, not feigned. They have won the Cold War, and as a result their belief in their own immortality has been reinforced. This unfortunate truth has to be faced, as does the tremendous ideological boost which capitalism has been given in the minds of the ordinary workers.

Naturally, in order to bamboozle the population and further weaken the forces of communism, media pundits and establishment politicians alike find it useful to talk of revolution rather than counterrevolution. But the truth cannot be hidden. What we are seeing are democratic, largely peaceful counterrevolutions against bureaucratic socialism, which offer the imperialists the prospect of new markets and cheap labour. That is what makes the bourgeois mouth water and the gutter press hacks chatter on about the marvels’ of revolution and the ‘heroism’ of the masses.

The ~heroic’ masses of Eastern Europe have been fooled into thinking that, with the end of bureaucratic socialism, they will get Western European bourgeois democracy. They won’t, and their resulting discontent will grow and will be met with terror - not Swedish style social democracy and social welfare, nor Federal German wage levels.

The existing coalitions, fronts and forums are inherently unstable and are bound to fissure along class lines in the not too distant future. If present trends continue (and they will, unless the working class is organised behind a genuine communist vanguard) Eastern Europe will fall under the domination of German imperialism. The result will be a neo-colonial capitalism and a neo-colonial state of the South American sort, along with child labour,
concentration camps, death squads, red light districts, shanty towns, torture chambers and other wonders of western civilization.

It is not our intention here in this article to provide any sort of comprehensive analysis of the crisis and collapse of bureaucratic socialism. What we want to do is yet again ram home to our readers that we are seeing a counterrevolutionary process in the socialist countries and ask why we are almost alone on the left in our ability to see the truth.

One would have thought that when the bourgeoisie supports mass demonstrations and uprisings, fetes new popular leaders and offers massive financial aid, it would be universally recognised by those who consider themselves partisans of the working class that something untoward was going on - a Kronstadt on a giant scale, perhaps. But no. Instead, across the whole spectrum of the left there is a desperate clutching at straws. In both the revolutionary and the reformist left, seeing things as one would want them to be, rather than as they are, reigns.

Revolutionary left. In the manner of ‘official communism’ in the wake of Hitler’s assumption of power in 1933, the revolutionary left imagines its day is just about to come through tiny, ideologically amorphous groups like the Polish Socialist Party - Democratic Revolution, and the United Left in the GDR, which are officially committed to “the parliamentary system” and Yugoslav type “self management”.

Flying in the face of counterrevolutionary reality we are told “Gorbachev’s coming to power signified the beginning of the political revolution” and that we are entering the “red 90’s”, that the Eastern European mass actions in support of pro-marketeers represented in some way a “clash with capital”, and that the rising against Ceausescu - which was given the nod by the traitor Gorbachev, and in which the army generals emerged as key figures - was a “classic example of how determined fighting by workers can break an army”, that the “political revolution Trotsky struggled for until his death has begun” and “Romania’s revolution” has the imperialist leaders “worried”.

The RCP is less certain, in fact it is all at sixes and sevens. On the one hand it insists that there are only cosmetic changes taking place in Eastern
Europe and pooh-poohs fancies that Trotsky has at last been avenged. On the other hand it is “very pleased” with the “collapse” of bureaucratic socialism because people will stop telling its members to “get back to Russia”. 150 Apart from not daring to ask whether or not capitalism is being restored, it is plain as a pike staff that instead of people saying “get back to Russia” they will say “look what happened in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe”. That is something the bourgeoisie will ensure.

Reformist left. It basically sounds the same as the revolutionary left, even though it is loyal, in the last analysis, to the bourgeois

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state. “What is happening in Eastern Europe is not the end of socialism or communism, It is the political revolution long predicted by Trotsky and others”; 151 Tony Chater, editor of the falling Morning Star welcomed developments in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in three turgid January double page articles, in the naive hope that all that is taking place is a “restructuring” of socialism, offering a third way in between capitalism and bureaucratic socialism.

Another ‘official communist’ editor, Roger Foss, is also delighted by events. Frothing with anti-communist rhetoric worthy of Joseph McCarthy, he admits he “never felt much solidarity with any of the former European socialist regimes” and wonders if “redefining” communism has “come too late for all of us” - he wants to embrace social democracy along with other traitors, including his former ruling ‘official communist’ colleagues in Eastern Europe. 152

The triumph of reaction in Eastern Europe has clearly exposed the theoretical poverty of the left in Britain. Not so long ago Militant’s editor was assuring his readers that the idea of “capitalist restoration” was a “chimera”. 153 Now, although the left’s euphoria is giving way to foreboding, it still, as we have seen, indulges in all sorts of wishful thinking.

Hatred of the corruption and crimes of bureaucratic socialism has produced a farcical situation where the majority of left groups formally committed to unconditional defence of the socialist states automatically bow before anti- ‘Stalinist’ spontaneity, support any opposition, no matter what its explicit or implicit programme.

This was the case over Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia 1968. We were told that if the Soviet armed forces had not intervened, a healthy socialist democracy would have resulted. The notion that a spontaneous
rebellion can lead to communism has now been answered by life itself in the bourgeoisification of Eastern Europe.

We say the failure of the bureaucratic ‘official communist’ project of building communism in one country is also the failure of revolutionaries in the advanced capitalist countries to defend these deformed gains of the working class and, above all, to make revolution in their own countries. There was nothing inevitable, ie historically progressive, about the counterrevolutions in Eastern Europe, nor is it “mere foolishness”\textsuperscript{154} to think that a Marxist movement could develop against a

bureaucracy formally committed to Marxism. If communists had been able to make a revolution in any of the significant capitalist countries, the picture today would be very, very different.

However, our task is not to engage in ‘if onlys’. We must thoroughly analyse the demise of bureaucratic socialism in Eastern Europe and prepare to come back when reaction gives way to a new period of revolution. We will wipe the smirk off the smug collective bourgeois face. As it will discover to its cost, Leninism lives!

5.8. Poland, Hungary and the GDR: peaceful democratic counterrevolution - flesh on the theory

Editorial, \textit{The Leninist} No89, April 1 1990

Last year’s landslide for Solidarnosc in Poland and this month’s election of equally counterrevolutionary parties in Hungary and the GDR puts yet more flesh on to our theory of peaceful, democratic counterrevolution. It is obvious to those who are not wilfully blind that in these countries capitalism is being restored with the consent of the broad mass of the population and that for the full blown reintroduction of capitalism there exists no necessity for violently smashing the existing state.

However, there are bound to be dogmatists. As well as silly Trotskyites, a number of friends have accused us of being confused or even reformist! In general the argument runs as follows: the capitalist state has to be violently smashed in order to establish socialism. Hence, for a reversal to take place the same must apply.
This is not true. Therefore it is not a tenet of Marxism. Marxism is not a dogma, providing universal truths. It is a method which revolutionaries are able to use to guide their practice. The world is far more complex and rich than dogmatists care to imagine. There is nothing fixed or mechanical about it. That is why we do not take ready made formulas as our starting point, rather the world as it is.

Marx, Engels and Lenin took exactly the same approach. For example in certain, definite circumstances they considered a peaceful socialist revolution possible. Marx and Engels cited America and Britain, because in these two countries until the last quarter of the 19th century the capitalist military-bureaucratic state, if not non-existent, was extremely weak. Lenin too spoke of a peaceful transition in Russia in the immediate aftermath of the February Revolution.

What Marxism demands is concrete analysis of concrete situations. That is exactly what we have done with developments in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. At the risk of oversimplification let us make two crucial points.

1. Socialism is a transitional society between capitalism and communism “which must combine the features of both” (Lenin). In essence socialism is monopoly capitalism without the capitalists and a bourgeois state without the bourgeoisie. Therefore socialism is not a distinct socio-economic formation, a distinct mode of production.

2. There is nothing automatic about the transition to communism. What is primary is not state property but correct communist leadership and mass proletarian democracy which allows full scope to the development of the productive forces.

Socialism emerged in countries which were in general backward; the result was that its bourgeois features were very strong. In fact, because of ‘official communist’ leadership, the socialist state was not the servant of society, but remained its master. Hence the unity between the working class and the state was purely formal. Living socialism was in reality bureaucratic socialism.

The narrow, conservative, sectional interests of the bureaucracy meant that these masters of society eventually went from being a relative to an absolute fetter on the development of the productive forces. When this happened the resulting crisis in bureaucratic socialism saw both top sections of the state machine and an alienated population, including the working class, propelled into the arms of democratic counterrevolution.

There was nothing inevitable about this. A political revolution was needed, but the subjective factor lagged far, far behind. The forces of communism lacked a genuine communist programme. In the absence of any
sort of serious opposition, the socialist states have become bourgeoisified. This might confound dogmatists, but not us. We live and organise to fight another day.

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5.9. Gorbachev’s reward

Editorial, The Leninist No96, October 26 1990

Gorbachev is the first leader of a socialist state to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. If only it was because he was really advancing the cause of peace - a cause which, as Lenin insisted, is inextricably linked to the fight to kill capitalism.

Gorbachev is not fighting capitalism, nor is he any longer just appeasing it. He and the radical’ wing of the bureaucracy are doing their best to join it. Have no doubt about it, the £363,500 prize, named after the millionaire Swedish inventor of dynamite, is for services rendered ... to capitalism and imperialism.

Gorbachev, with the modesty expected of a great statesman’, wanted it to be known that the award was not a “personal prize”, and cited perestroika as the true recipient. This is not far off the mark. The Nobel Committee wanted to reward Gorbachev’s perestroika reintroduction of the market mechanism - which has, incidentally, just led to the opening of the USSR’s first commodity exchange in the Comecon building in Moscow (showing the extent of social regression gripping the USSR, it was blessed, as in Tsarist times, by a Russian Orthodox priest chanting “pray to the Lord”).

The Nobel Committee also wanted to reward Gorbachev’s international perestroika. The overseeing of a worldwide retreat of Soviet power - specifically, allowing Eastern European states to regain their “freedom” - and his role in resolving “regional conflicts” - code words for the restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe and the selling out of revolutions in South
Africa, Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Cambodia, etc.

Not surprisingly, for ‘official communists’ like the Morning Star all this is slightly embarrassing. After all, even such addled brains just about recognise that there is something untoward about the likes of the Nobel Committee saying of a ‘communist’ that they “hope that the prize will strengthen him in his continued work to create a new world order”. Yes, something stinks. But rather than say this openly, the cowards who edit the Morning Star prefer to keep their heads down. News of Gorbachev’s award was tucked away on page two in a tiny news article.\textsuperscript{155}

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In contrast, of course, the capitalist press, radio and TV gave Gorbachev’s award headline treatment. It also reported the rush of congratulations that poured in from the leaders of world reaction.

Margaret Thatcher: “This is terrific. It is a richly deserved reward”. George Bush: likewise congratulated Gorbachev and said that he had “brought historically significant political and economic reforms to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe”. Helmut Kohl: “We Germans” share the “joy of all your citizens at the award”. Francois Mitterand: “The good news is fully merited”. Toshiki Kaifu: “The award is in recognition of his serious efforts towards improving east-west relations”.\textsuperscript{156}

In the Soviet Union the response was somewhat different. Gorbachev’s Nobel prize has been greeted with disdain if not downright hostility. One official wag made the telling point that this was not the Nobel prize for economics”. Soviet shops, even in Moscow, are now nearly always empty and this winter many will undoubtedly go hungry. In fact economic decomposition is reaching the stage of social putrefaction.

As the Soviet Union spirals into hyper-inflation and mass unemployment under Gorbachev’s \textit{Basic guidelines for stabilisation of the economy and transition to market economy} - a marriage of Ryzhkov’s bureaucratic plan for capitalist restoration and Shatalin’s very cruel” free market restoration - economic chaos looks like producing political disintegration. This creates the conditions where the Soviet Union could be turned into a giant version of the Lebanon.

Already its 15 republics have declared their sovereignty. Some now want their own armies as well as flags and currencies; and within these republics themselves Russian, Ukrainian, Turkic and other minorities are beginning to declare their sovereignty too. As things stand it is only a matter of time before this political meltdown produces an orgy of bloodshed.

Gorbachev’s perestroika threatens to produce uncontrollable pogroms within and between a patchwork of rival nationalism capitalist states and statelets, some of which will undoubtedly possess nuclear weapons. Millions
upon millions could die, sacrificed on the altar of capitalist restoration. Peace prize! Gorbachev deserves our hatred and scorn, if not a bullet in the back of the head.

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5.10. New World Order: the bloody fruit of perestroika


Our Party hasn’t debated and voted on a set of resolutions dealing with the Gulf War; we have, though, reached some important conclusions. This small, though bloody, war, reflects and will open up far reaching changes in world politics. It also marks a military watershed the consequences of which will continue into the next millenium. Let us see why.

Today the United States, Britain, Iraq, and the other former belligerent powers are pursuing their rival predatory aims, not through violent means, but through other, peaceful, means. That does not mean the working class can afford to relax. Our class must draw up a balance sheet on the war, critically examine the anti-war movement and prepare for the next war. The fact of the matter is that we can be certain of one thing if nothing else - there will be another war. The imperialist peace - details of which are now being worked out - which will be imposed on a humiliated Iraq, can only but be a preparation for a new war. In spite of what the beleaguered renegade Gorbachev stupidly claims, war is an organic feature of imperialism. War goes together with imperialism as death goes with mortification.

To understand the Gulf War and its consequences we must begin by examining the general context in which it was fought. The first and most important thing to say here is that it took place in conditions where the world is no longer dominated by the politics of what was popularly known as the Cold War, ie the politics resulting from the existence of the socialist bloc organised around the Soviet Union, which could counterbalance and rival imperialism.

The crisis of bureaucratic socialism in Eastern Europe has been resolved negatively, not positively. The fall of the communist governments in Berlin, Warsaw, Prague, Budapest and Bucharest might have been popular, but that does not stop them being counterrevolutions. They were; and the same
advanced stage in the crisis ridden USSR, where almost half the republics are set on becoming independent capitalist states. Furthermore, at the centre, now that Gorbachev has run out of all political momentum, Boris Yeltsin, president of the Russian Federation itself, is moving towards a dual power situation through winning widespread support for his own democratic counterrevolution.

It’s worth recalling that across the spectrum of working class politics in Britain we were alone in saying that 1989 saw a series of counterrevolutions. Naturally the new look’ Labour Party welcomed them as revolutions’; it is, after all, militantly pro-imperial1st. But the Euros and other official communists’, the Socialist Workers Party and the Trotskyites too joined in celebrating these glorious days’. The latter loudly trumpeted them as a vindication of Trotsky, a living example of his political revolution.

Because of their worship of anti-bureaucratic spontaneity the Trotskyites have always in practice been calling for counterrevolution in the socialist countries. Sincerely no doubt, despicably nonetheless, they insisted that if the Soviet Union had not intervened in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, healthy workers’ states would have resulted. It was with such dogmatic, unfounded certainty that counterrevolutionary developments in Eastern Europe were greeted. No one should forget the disgusting headlines of the various Trotskyite papers when they cheered the overthrow of Ceausescu. Whatever criticisms of Ceausescu one had, and we were always open in them, the NSF/army coup had nothing to do with proletarian political revolution. There was nothing to celebrate.

Of course, Romania wasn’t unique. A counterrevolutionary deluge swept all before it in Eastern Europe. While those who raised their voices in praise imagined the consequences could only be progressive, we urged more than caution - we trenchantly insisted that the counterrevolutionary developments in 1989 meant the world had entered a period of reaction.

Well, we can now see who was right and who was wrong. They were wrong. We were right. But we would have loved to have been wrong; we would have loved to have seen a higher form of socialism emerge out of the crisis of bureaucratic socialism through a genuine political revolution (which necessitated communist leadership). Instead, to the strains of Michael Jackson and Beethoven’s
Ode to Joy, there was a carnival of reaction. The crucial importance of this cannot be exaggerated.

It’s not that communists should now go round boastfully saying we told you so”. We have no need for arrogance. What is important is that there has been an enormous shift in the world balance of forces. Those leftists who cannot distinguish revolution from counterrevolution in 1989 obviously cannot see this (nor were they in much of a position to equip the working class with the politics needed to oppose and stop the 1991 Gulf War which resulted from it). However the capitalist class suffers no such confusion.

Gorbachevism and events in Eastern Europe seemed at long last to have exorcised Marx’s terrifying spectre. But while Thatcher tried to claim personal credit and Federal Germany, France and Japan began the scramble for the spoils, it is clear now that the main short term beneficiary will be the United States. Had the socialist bloc been intact it is unlikely that the US would have been able to amass its Desert Shield invasion force and then coolly proceed to surgically’ destroy the infrastructure of Iraq, before massacring its retreating army. Things would never have gone so far. That they did shows how the world has changed; it also shows that, for the moment at least, the US enjoys a window of unprecedented power. The reason for this is not the dynamism of the US. It is the crisis in the USSR and the history of the main capitalist rivals of the US which provide the answer.

5.10.1. US superimperialism

The mutual destruction of the European nations in World War II left a more or less intact US standing like a giant before the world. So strong was it that, to an extent which really has no parallel in modern history, it was able to impose its will over all the other imperialist powers. Britain, when it was the workshop of the world, could balance off one great power against another, and so rule the waves; but no more. In contrast, after 1945 the United States operated as a sort of superimperialist power.

It hardly needs saying that what we mean by superimperialism is very different from Kautsky’s rotten theory of ultra-imperialism - a theory which claimed that inter-capitalist antagonistic contradictions were being overcome as the world economy was becoming
more and more integrated. The superimperialism of the US could not do that. But it could temporarily suppress those contradictions. Its relationship to France, Italy, Federal Germany, Japan, Britain, and Canada was that of hegemon, and as such it could dominate them economically, organise them militarily and command them politically. However its world domination was far from complete.

Under the often erratic leadership of Stalin, through the skin of its teeth, the Soviet Union became a superpower after World War II. After heroically halting the Nazi war machine at Stalingrad the Red Army began its own advance which took it right to the heart of Germany. This set the stage for a massive extension of socialism; besides those areas of Eastern Europe liberated by the Red Army, this took in China, the world’s most populous nation. The resulting world socialist bloc was a tremendous step forward; it was also a constant frustration to US imperialist ambitions.

While anti-communism provided the US with the hegemonic ideology it needed to orchestrate the secondary imperialist powers, the Soviet threat was real. Not in the sense of CIA claims that it was just itching to launch an unprovoked conquest of the west. Rather that it was the only country capable of standing up to US nuclear blackmail and its awesome conventional military power - thereby, incidentally, allowing non-imperialist capitalist countries like Iraq the possibility of carving out a relatively independent foreign policy.

As we’ve said, how things have changed! Nowadays the Soviet Union might still possess a mass of nuclear weapons. But no way, in any serious sense, is it a challenger to the world position of the US (during the Gulf War it was an awkward diplomatic ally). Because of the 1989 counterrevolutions, ‘market socialism’ dislocation and the collapse of ‘official communism’ as a coherent ideology, perhaps it is true that the USSR can no longer be considered a world power. Certainly the Soviet Union is in headlong retreat, and as we’ve argued, it faces the danger of internal disintegration along the lines of Yugoslavia.
5.10.2. Superboom and supercrisis

When, in the wake of World War II, the US succeeded in redividing the capitalist world and reshaping it in its own image, the result was dramatic. Freed from its previous constraints, free to greedily exploit where it wished, the world’s most dynamic capital catapulted the world into 20 uninterrupted years of boom, a boom which dwarfed anything seen before, including the industrial revolution. In other words, a superboom.

Needless to say, like almost everything, it’s a relative question. We’re not saying that the US advanced the productive forces to the level possible if the world was organised along socialist lines. Nevertheless it has to be stressed that if the US hadn’t won World War II for itself if Britain had been able to put off the US drive for world redivision (as it had after World War I) then we wouldn’t have seen the 20 year boom. Instead the general crisis of the 1920s and 1930s would have continued, in the form of economic stagnation and the imminent danger of another inter-imperialist world war.

Yet, in spite of being the motor of the superboom, because of the law of uneven development the US is now, as is well known, a power in decline. Visibly since the 1960s other imperialist powers, in particular Japan and Germany, have relentlessly eroded its lead, to the point where in a whole set of different key technologies the US has fallen behind.

But there’s more to it than that. From the beginning of the century to the late 1940s the US represented that section of capitalism which stood against the protectionist fetters that held back capitalist world development, le the fetters of empire, centrally the British empire. Now the US is increasingly coming to constitute the main political barrier to the development of the world economy.

Today the capitalist world faces the looming prospect of a super general crisis, the price for its superboom. Economically and politically at the hub of this crisis lies a no longer dynamic US, something more than symbolised by its transition from the world’s biggest creditor to the world’s biggest debtor. In purely economic terms it is the least dynamic capital, eg US capital, which should suffer the main effects of an economic crash (all this was explained by Marx definitively in *Capital*, and has been elaborated by us in
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various issues of our central organ *The Leninist*). However, in the age of imperialism, because of global military and political power, crises can be partially *offloaded* (again something we’ve dealt with in *The Leninist*).

With the Soviet Union effectively sidelined, a still hegemonic US has the possibility of offloading some of its share of the super crisis on to others - not only on to proto-imperialist powers in the so-called ‘third world’, but above all its most important rivals, Japan and Germany (the latter being more dangerous to the US because it can organise around itself a European bloc capable of catching up with and then leaving behind the US, something Japan is unlikely to do).

Japan and Germany will not like the US offloading its crisis. That goes without saying. They will be forced to do something to try to stop it. Nevertheless, for major powers Japan and Germany are extraordinarily vulnerable. Decisively and comprehensively defeated in World War II, their countries were run by US generals and their pacifistic constitutions were written by US officials. Even today they have to pay huge sums for the privilege of having American troops stationed on their soil. In spite of being economically the number two and the number three imperialist powers, politically Japan and Germany have the status of the Congo, Brazil or Turkey in that they are not *permanent* members of the UN security council, a privilege reserved for the victorious powers of World War II.

Behind the imperialist united front during the Gulf War we can detect the growth of US efforts to offload its crisis. Germany and Japan were forced to pay what can only amount to Danegeld\(^\text{158}\) to finance a US war in which they had no interest. Japan’s humiliation was complete when its own government told its extremely competitive industrialists to refrain from tendering for reconstruction contracts in Kuwait - not because the Kuwaitis wouldn’t want them there, but because of US objections.

Quite clearly, *Tokyo* is acutely conscious of the anti-Japanese sentiment building up in the US congress and among the US population in general. If you conducted a survey of US public opinion, it would show that Japan has long ago taken over *from* what Ronald Reagan used to call the Evil Empire as the biggest threat to apple pie and the American way.

The idea of a Japanese industrial conspiracy, instead of a
Russian political conspiracy, obviously has a deep cultural resonance. The Japanese have a great advantage over the Germans or Russians, they are seen as being very un-American to a popular mind clouded by the fog of racism. The Japanese not only have yellow skins and slanty eyes, they had the nerve to launch a sneak attack on the US fleet at Pearl Harbour and then the grace to lose. Hence, given their over-exporting to the US and US over-importing from Japan, they make a perfect object of hate and fear, the perfect target for chauvinistic campaigns and import control legislation.

There is little that Japan can do. It relies on the US market, and the lowly political status of Japan (and Germany) is reflected militarily. Neither Japan nor Germany possess nuclear weapons or a rounded arms industry which can equip them with the hardware necessary to stand up to the US, let alone break its hold. This is not something that is going to change overnight. If Japan and Germany were to decide now to catch up with the US in terms of military might it would take at least ten years to develop the necessary technology and begin to deploy it (we hear that Japan has declared its intention to become the third power to land a lunar probe - the military ramifications of this in technological terms should be noted).

Marxism is no crystal ball. It does not claim to make exact predictions about what will happen politically in two, five or ten years time, in the way astronomers can with the movement of the spheres. Marxism does however have the virtue of allowing us to locate the main lines of social development and the laws that operate through the kaleidoscope of events. It is therefore with this understanding and a recognition of how long it will take Japan and Germany to become serious military, as well as economic, powers that we can with a degree of self confessed overneatness predict a US dominated ten year world interregnum opening up before us; an interregnum in the sense that the politics of the Cold War has gone and the politics of open inter-imperialist conflict and the formation of rival imperialist blocs has yet to arrive.

The results of the interregnum will be profound: above all because a US, increasingly characterised by relative economic decline, is in a position where it can, as we’ve said, offload the consequences of decline. The euphemism under which this will be done has already been coined. Hitler used his call for a New European Order as a cover for German conquest and genocide;
Bush’s New World Order will not be fundamentally different.

Part and parcel of Bush’s New World Order is the *reimposition* of neo-colonialism on former neo-colonies *against* its main rivals - that was what the Gulf War was really about - not oil, let alone democracy and the rights of small nations. Although a re-neo-colonisation will cushion the US, it will force monopoly capital in other countries - especially Japan and Germany - *to turn inwards* to a significant degree, to ratchet up the rate of exploitation of their own working class in an effort to survive.

That means the steady increase in levels of subsistence that has come to be expected by the masses in Germany and Japan could be undermined and thrown into reverse. The much hyped social peace engineered *from* without and sustained *from* within by the dynamism of their capital will be threatened with decomposition and the return of the politics of class war. In other words, for the working class of Japan and Germany, the long sleep is coming to an end. When these giants begin to stir, have no doubt that the whole world will shake.
6. Socialist democracy is class democracy

Speech, *The Leninist* No68, September 3 1988 (extract)

We have made our views clear on bureaucratic socialism in the past. In short we say that given the isolation of the revolution, its limitation within the borders of the old Tsarist empire, the growth of a bureaucracy was unavoidable. There would always have been a contradiction between the proletariat and its bureaucracy, but in the concrete circumstances that have historically evolved, this contradiction has become antagonistic. The bureaucracy was from the first a necessary evil, not a social layer that was desirable in itself. In the Soviet Union the proletariat was not able to act in the full sense of the word as a ruling class, it had to rule through the agency of a bureaucracy - a bureaucracy which, unlike the bureaucracy in the capitalist countries, became socially distinct and alienated from those it was meant to serve. Running the state remained a sphere for experts not the masses. Saying this is simply stating what is true, something no genuine communist should fear to do. Of course, that doesn’t mean that we say what exists in the Soviet Union, China and Eastern Europe isn’t socialism, that it is no different from capitalism or some sort of historical aberration. Nevertheless there can be no question that the labour bureaucracy in these countries has come to see its interests as separate to the proletariat. Yes, it is a proletarian bureaucracy but its vision is limited and national. It does not fight for the victory of communism - which by definition is international - but the preservation of its bureaucratic privileges. What has made the contradiction between the working class and its bureaucracy antagonistic though is the fact that bureaucratic socialism has exhausted its possibilities. The bureaucratic form now stands as an absolute fetter on the further development of the productive forces and is becoming a
force for capitalist restoration. Obviously you can’t put a precise date on when this happened, neither can we say that all socialist countries have reached this point, let alone simultaneously. Yet in broad terms It is clear that since the 1960s bureaucratic socialism has been experiencing ever greater difficulties in achieving sustained economic growth. This has been well documented, as has the failure of countermeasures.

The cause of this failure is to be found in the very nature of bureaucratic socialism itself. It is not due to the failure of this or that individual. Bureaucratic socialism has not only become a block on what could be, but now represents a threat to what is. The bureaucracy has now become reactionary. It cannot administer the introduction of more socialism, it cannot develop the plan. Why? Because at this point in history to do so would require full unrestricted proletarian democracy and that would firstly undermine the social position of the bureaucracy, its parasitic existence, and secondly in time lead to its very extinction. No privileged stratum has yet given up its power and privileges voluntarily, let alone committed an act of social suicide.

The bureaucracy can close its eyes to the relative decline of the socialist world and the growing gulf that exists between reality and its promise of paradise. But this only leads to cynicism and further decline. The only other answer the bureaucracy can come up with is a bourgeois-type answer. That is a turn to the mechanisms of capitalism and the opening up to capitalist influences and imperialist exploitation in an attempt to shake out what is Inefficient and overcome bureaucratic stupor. This is the only way the bureaucracy can now see to avoid being left far behind by the economies of the imperialist states in the vital fields of computers, microelectronics and robotisation (i.e. what underpins the arms industry and will certainly form the basis for economic development into the 21st century).

There is nothing in principle wrong with integrating the socialist economy into the Imperialist dominated world economy. The idea that socialism can advance in isolation is not a Leninist one. We favour the most rapid catching up of what were imperialism’s weak links to what is most advanced in the world. This can provide a vital breathing space. But it must be done in the light of and in the interests of the world revolution. Sooner or later either capitalism or socialism will win. One or the other will be destroyed.
cooperation and integration, as with peaceful co-existence, must not be considered aims in themselves, but means to an end. If this is not the case, if the means themselves become the ends, what we have is not merely a failure to fight for what is necessary, but the endangering of the ends themselves.

It cannot be said that Gorbachev is guided by the long term aim of world revolution. His main concern is the preservation of the privileges and power of the governing stratum - the bureaucracy. This is what Gorbachevism represents, not a breathing space in order to strengthen the forces for world revolution.

There are a number of different ideas about what is going on in the Soviet Union on the left. It is suggested, for example, that Gorbachev is no different from Brezhnev. This is not true. There is a continuity but it is essential to grasp the fact that the Gorbachev line represents a qualitative development in the bureaucracy, namely its transformation into a technocracy and a strengthening of the forces of capitalist restorationism.

Many in the official’ communist movement - like our Straight Leftists and NCPers - would like to believe that nothing qualitative is taking place in the Soviet Union, that all the talk of democracy, a second revolution, a political revolution without shots and all that is a sign of maturity; the inevitable outcome of the growing strength, world standing and power of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev himself denies it. He says that the Soviet Union should have embarked on his course 20 years ago. He speaks of the Soviet Union being in a “pre-crisis situation”. Given the fawning sycophancy of the centrists to Gorbachev’s predecessors it is hardly surprising that they have such problems today.

On the other hand we have no problems in stating our views on Gorbachev. He is a revisionist and a reactionary who stands at the head of a moribund bureaucratic stratum. What this poses for the working class in the Soviet Union is the historically necessary task of carrying out a political revolution. We are sure that the Soviet proletariat will in the near future come to stand independently from the bureaucracy and transform it from the master of society into its servant. This is the essence of a political revolution in the USSR. Only by taking this road can the Soviet Union advance. We are now in a period when both capitalism and bureaucratic socialism have reached the end of their road. The choice facing humanity is not bureaucratic socialism or market socialism, but
war or communism. The fact that Gorbachev is advocating market socialism and deals with imperialism shows that the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union is taking a path which leads to war. Historical necessity demands a decisive change. We are indeed in a revolutionary epoch.

The fact that everything around us seems pregnant with crisis should not surprise anyone who calls themself a Marxist. The technological revolution in the forces of production can only proceed unfettered under advanced socialism where the plan and democracy have flowered. Capitalism and bureaucratic socialism stand in the way of the forward march of humanity. Everything is building up to a qualitative break with the past.

We communists must fully take on board the lessons of August 1914. When capitalism plunged into world war and general crisis, it took the official workers’ movement with it. This was no accident. Likewise with Gorbachev revisionism and the disintegration of the ‘official’ communist parties of the west. Such developments are a direct product of the movement of history itself and the drift of capitalism towards a new general crisis. This is something we must fully grasp. The tasks of the future allow no illusions in Gorbachev and the ‘official’ communist movement.

6.1. What is needed

I would like now to turn to what is needed in the socialist countries. Briefly, what social progress demands is the end of the one party state, the plurality of parties and a flowering of socialist democracy.

As we have stated many times before, socialist democracy is no luxury in the socialist countries: it is a burning necessity. History teaches us that the working class advances its interests through struggle. The working class in the socialist countries are no exception. Socialist democracy will not come about via the bureaucracy; it will not come from above but from below, and yes, through struggle. Only in this way can the bureaucracy be transformed from master into servant of society.

To carry through this struggle it is essential that the working class organises itself as a class for itself. In other words the working class needs to organise independently of all other classes and strata. In the long term this is impossible in a one party system.
We communists start from the principle that there should be no bar on the plurality of parties. Likewise we start from the principle that there should be no censorship, that ideas should circulate freely. Without such conditions proletarian democracy cannot flourish. And if you prevent the non-proletarian classes finding political expression through their own parties, disallow the free flow of ideas, even with the most healthy and most vigilant leadership it is certain that they will worm their way into the Communist Party. This can only but strengthen the forces of opportunism that exist in a Communist Party even under socialism.

Now on hearing our call for the plurality of parties and a political revolution in the Soviet Union, some people are shocked. We point out that Gorbachev himself calls his capitalist road a political revolution. He also talks about introducing what he calls “socialist pluralism”. Of course, this is all bunk, as false as Neil Kinnock’s claim to be a socialist. Nevertheless, all sorts of accusations have been thrown at us. Why should this be? Simple! It is instinctively recognised that we mean what we say and Gorbachev - like Kinnock and all opportunists - does not.

Let us first deal with our call for a political revolution. Some object to this call because they fear that a genuine political revolution in the Soviet Union will lead to Internal disorder at least, chaos at worst. Under such conditions it is suggested that the imperialists would take advantage of the situation and launch a military adventure. In other words a real political revolution increases the danger of war. This is false logic.

The fact of the matter is that unless the Soviet Union has a political revolution, unless the bureaucratic fetter on the economy is removed, unless the bureaucratic strengthening of the forces of capitalism is scuppered, socialism will continue its relative decline and, in a world characterised by imperialism’s drift towards a new general crisis, war will be inevitable.

We do not deny for one moment that a genuine political revolution will cause a certain amount of disruption - the extent of that disruption depends on the balance of forces between the working class and the bureaucracy and the degree of bureaucratic resistance - but it must be understood that the question of whether there should be a political revolution in the Soviet Union is not an academic one. Life demands it.
If the working class in the USSR falls to carry out its historically necessary task then socialism will disintegrate and the danger of war will greatly increase. On the other hand, if it succeeds socialism will be immensely strengthened: the Soviet Union is after all the world’s revolutionary centre. Not only will growth rates and economic efficiency take a qualitative leap forward but the moral standing of living socialism in the eyes of the world’s working class - not least those in the imperialist countries - will be immeasurably improved. This will have a profound impact on the class struggle in the advanced capitalist countries.

A political revolution will by its very nature not only raise the banner of socialist democracy: it will also raise the banner of proletarian internationalism. Lenin’s Soviet Republic was made strong by the powerful combination of the Red Army and the love that the working class of every country had for the first land of socialism.

Its revolution stayed alive because it became politically impossible to make war on it due to the work of such campaigns as Hands Off Russia! This is something Lenin fully understood. It was at the very heart of his world political outlook and understanding of the international significance of the October Revolution.

For all the claims to the contrary, Gorbachev’s course does not offer safety. His appeasement of imperialism, his turn to ‘market socialism’ offers the safety of the grave. In contrast, a political revolution - as with life itself - will carry certain dangers, true, but the promise of a bright future.

6.2. Democracy from below

What about the argument against the plurality of parties? Our call for the plurality of parties in the USSR must be seen in the context of the struggle for a political revolution. In order for that to be successfully carried out it is vital that the working class be organised as a class for itself. In other words it is vital that the working class is organised by its communist vanguard party. Does the Communist Party of the Soviet Union play the role of a communist vanguard party in the USSR today? Frankly comrades, we must say that it does not. The working class in the Soviet Union will not be able to organise a political revolution through the existing CPSU. It is the bureaucratic party of the working class, not its
communist vanguard.
There can be no doubt that there are contradictions between the various classes that exist in the USSR, but also there can be no doubt there exist contradictions within the working class itself, not least between the working class as a whole and its bureaucracy.

The struggle to advance socialism along the road towards communism is bound up with and, at the present time, is dependent on the struggle for democracy. We can truly say that the struggle for communism is today the struggle for socialist democracy. It is in the interests of the working class to allow the fullest and most open debate between different ideas and it is only natural that this should take the form of a struggle between parties. We are confident that genuine communist ideas will win the day. They are strong, they are true.

The bourgeoisie can be represented by more than one party because it has no historic mission. This is not the case with the working class: its aim is communism. To achieve this the working class must have its Communist Party. But the Communist Party does not achieve hegemony over the working class, lead it in the fight for communism through banning other trends and organisations in the working class.

The way to overcome backward ideas is not through banning them, driving them underground. Those who suggest this have no confidence in the working masses nor in communism. It is one thing to impose censorship in such emergency situations as civil war - this is perfectly correct - it is another to institutionalise such measures. No, the most effective way of overcoming such ideas is to force them into the open in order to subject them to polemic and other forms of political attack. Now some say that it is okay to have more than one working class political party, but it's quite another thing to countenance the formation of non-working class political parties, like the Democratic Union. The fear is expressed that if such parties were allowed to stand in elections they would actually win the day. Such a suggestion shows an extraordinary low estimation of the standing of socialism in the eyes of the people of the Soviet Union. It also exposes an understanding of democracy which is limited to the sham of western parliamentarianism.

The sort of democracy we stand for, the sort of democracy that is

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most suited to socialism and the transition to communism, is the democracy that emerges from the highest level of the class struggle of the working class, le revolution. This is not a Westminster style democracy where the adult population votes merely as atomised individuals, but a mass active form of democracy, ie a soviet democracy.

Soviet democracy is a democracy of producers, a dynamic form of democracy which reflects the fact that the majority of the population constitutes the ruling class. That is the democracy that is necessary if socialism is to further develop.

If we understand democracy as a class question then we will also understand that organisations such as the Democratic Union will find no place with in soviet democracy. Not because it has been the subject of a ban, but precisely for the same reason that we don’t find many representatives of the Tory Party on workers’ strike committees.

Let us develop this point by examining two concrete examples of working class democracy. The first is not obvious, the second instantly springs to mind. My first example is the miners’ Great Strike of 1984-5. My second is, of course, the period up to and immediately after the October Revolution.

The miners’ Great Strike is of immense political significance for us in Britain and also for all of Western Europe. Very few if any other forces on the left in our country have any appreciation of this whatsoever. The left in Britain suffers from a philistine lack of vision. The class struggle has a dynamic. And what starts off as a strike committee can in the right conditions end up being an organ of working class struggle, not only challenging but taking state power. Those who do not understand that are trapped in a purely formal, hopelessly abstract understanding of the class struggle.

We do not merely look upon the miners’ Great Strike as being great because it lasted a year. It was great because it contained within it the seeds of the future. Every working class action has within it what we could call the DNA of working class state power; every genuine working class organisation has the potential within it of transcending capitalism: organs of working class struggle are embryonic organs of working class power. The more intense the class struggle becomes, the more this potential takes concrete form.

There can be no doubt that the Miners’ Support Committees and

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Groups had within them not only the possibility of becoming the 1980s version of the 1920s Councils of Action - which Lenin called embryonic soviets (le embryonic organs of working class power) - they were the 1980s equivalent. It is in this that lies the historic importance of the miners’ Great Strike.

Many Miners’ Support Committees went way beyond the ‘money and baked beans’ collecting centres first derided and then worshipped by the likes of the SWP. The role of the leading Miners’ Support Committees went beyond narrow solidarity work and there was a growing recognition that what was necessary if the miners were to win was generalised strike action. And given the nature of the Miners’ Support Committees, they were the natural organs of working class struggle to organise and coordinate such an action, not only at a local level but through the creation of a united delegate body at a national level.

So what was the democracy like on the Miners’ Support Committees - the organs of working class struggle which in Britain are the nearest thing we have seen to socialist democracy? Well there were all sorts of different arrangements. Some consisted of merely those who bothered to turn up on the night. Some were dominated by stick-in-the-mud trades council functionaries. But in general what we saw were representative committees consisting of delegates from trade unions and working class political organisations.

How many members of the Liberal Party were members of Miners’ Support Committees? Very few, I think we would all agree. How many members of the Social Democratic Party? Again very few. Did we see Tories and the like flocking into the Miners’ Support Committees, our embryonic organs of working class state power? Of course not. What about National Front members? None that I know of.

Why did we see such purity? Was it because non-working class organisations were banned? Hardly. There was no need to. The Miners’ Support Committees were implicitly recognised as operating in the interests of the militant section of the working class. Anti-socialists would hardly rally to organs of working class struggle which were engaged in a head on confrontation with the government. They wouldn’t touch them with a barge pole. And the same would happen if the Miners’ Support Committees had developed into organs of dual power or even organs of proletarian revolution.

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The more important they become, the more they would have been feared and
hated by anti-socialists. But also their democracy would have become more
developed, fuller and eventually formalised in an institutional form: to the
extent that to have a vote one would have had to be a recallable delegate. A
recallable delegate from what? From the local Tory Party or SDP? No, the
local trades council, trade unions, unemployed organisations or working
class political organisations.

And if it was found that a delegate from a certain trade union branch
turned out to be a member of the Tory Party or, say, the National Front, what
would happen? This might come as a complete surprise. Presumably on the
other hand an insistence that this delegate was the one they wanted, a failure
to replace them with someone sympathetic and in tune with the overall aims
of the working class, would without doubt mean that such a union branch
would find itself temporarily barred.

It is this sort of democracy that we see as laying the basis for the
democracy of the socialist state in Britain and for that matter emerging in the
existing socialist countries. Those who look at things undialectically, those
who sit in the ivory towers of doctrinaire socialism with no understanding of
the real class struggle will look upon real life as being too messy, as being
impure. What they want is things fully formed from the word go. Something
cut and dried with no rough corners. They approach the class struggle from
the point of view of the academic, not the revolutionary communist leader.
We who understand the class struggle understand that real life is always full
of contradictions, shortcomings and ambiguities. But we also understand
that the class struggle itself will provide the answers for the future better than
any theoretician ever could. Hence when we are asked what proletarian
democracy will be like we say look at the Miners’ Support Committees and,
of course, our second example of the working class democracy, the soviets in
1917.

How many delegates were elected to them from the Democratic Union of its
day, the Cadets - the equivalent of our Tory or Social and Liberal
Democrats? I think we can agree that it was very few. Why? The soviets of
workers’ peasants’ and army delegates did not emerge ready made, out of
some constitutional lawyer’s head. They came to life as an organised
expression of the developing revolutionary

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struggle of Russia’s workers, peasants and soldiers against such forces as the Cadets.

So who sat in the soviets? It was the representatives of the revolution. On its Central Executive Committee there were the Right and Left Socialist Revolutionaries, the United Social Democratic Internationalists, the Mensheviks and of course the Bolsheviks. And when the revolution was taken to its logical conclusion under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party in October, and the soviets became the power of the land, did this automatically produce a one party system? Even after the Constitutional Assembly - Russia’s House of Commons - was abolished, did it become a principle that there should only be one party? No, It did not.

The reason that other parties were banned was because they sided - in one way or another - with the forces of counterrevolution during the civil war that followed on the heels of the revolution. Under conditions of civil war that is more than understandable. It was correct that such parties were suppressed. But there is a big difference between banning opposition during a civil war and turning this emergency measure into some sort of principle.

6.3. Objections to socialist democracy

We look to the rebirth of the soviet democracy that briefly flowered in revolutionary Russia - a soviet democracy which, this time round, will become fully institutionalised. This could well mean the emergence of a number of socialist parties, ie parties based on the proletarian and collective farm masses. It could also mean the emergence of a number of non-socialist parties.

That doesn’t mean for a moment though that we stand for institutionalising non-socialist parties in the system of socialist democracy. The institutions of socialist democracy will emerge firstly as organs of struggle for the political revolution. Of this we can be sure. It is therefore a diversion to suggest - as do an odd assortment of centrists and Trotskyists - that Leninists are proposing some sort of bourgeois democracy in the USSR. Nothing could be further from the truth. We stand for the proletarian democracy that will usher in the communist world order.

The Soviet Union is now at a crossroads: there is a choice between either the Gorbachev line and an increasing danger of

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capitalist restoration, or the struggle for political revolution and a genuine
socialist democracy. Given the lag between reality and consciousness, it is not surprising that we find around us certain readers of our paper, and indeed certain leftist organisations, wringing their hands about the manifestations of backward ideas in the USSR like the Democratic Union, Pamyat and the nationalist upsurges in the Baltic and Caucasian republics.

The general feeling seems to be that the best thing to do with such manifestations is to ban them. Such an approach reveals a deep conservatism, a lack of faith in the power and future of the proletarian struggle. These people do not really believe that the working class can form itself into a class for itself and build a communist society.

History does not stand still. It cannot stand still. Hence, if we examine the argument of our critics, it is clear that life is leaving them far behind: such is the fate of conservatism. They say the Democratic Union should not be allowed - it is allowed. They say Pamyat should not be allowed - it is. Likewise the nationalist organisations. The task for communists is not to act like some King Canute ordering the tide of social development to stay still. As materialists our task is to harness social development, not stand against it.

So when we look at current developments in the Soviet Union, not least the emergence of political organisations outside the umbrella of the CPSU, we do not and will not call for the return to the Brezhnev period, however preferable this was compared with the danger to the very existence of socialism that Gorbachev represents. Communists seek the liberation of humanity by going forward, not in attempts to return to the past. The fact of the matter is that the reactionary organisations which are now operating openly existed while Brezhnev was general secretary of the CPSU, only under the surface. It is not our aim to drive them back underground - if that were possible - but to actually defeat them and that is best done in the open.

Our attitude to the reactionary unofficial organisations is in essence no different from our attitude to the Tory Party or the National Front. We aim to destroy such organisations by destroying the basis of their support. That will not be achieved if we centre our struggle on the demand that the state bans them. There is no way in present conditions that the state would ever ban the Tory Party ... the National Front, though, is another matter. It is quite possible for the bourgeois state to ban the National Front. There
would need to be definite and, yes, dramatic political developments for this to happen, but it is, I’m sure we all agree, not beyond the realms of possibility. If such a development were to occur it would not be greeted with joy and approbation by us. Let us be perfectly clear. We are not in favour of the bourgeoisie state banning the National Front. This is not because we are besotted with a liberalistic love of free speech but because we have no faith whatsoever in the bourgeoisie state. Our aim is clear, we aim to smash it, not sow further illusions in it.

When the bourgeoisie state introduced restrictions on the activities of Mosley and his British Union of Fascists in the 1930s, the left saw it as a victory. It was not. The sword struck both ways. Legislation which was supposed to have been directed against the blackshirts was turned on the left and the Communist Party. Likewise the use of the Public Order Act to ban National Front marches - which was actually campaigned for by a broad spectrum of the left - is used today to ban anti-fascist, pro-Irish and other progressive demonstrations.

The fact that the left in Britain has actually agitated for the state to deal with the National Front, rather than looking to its own devices and mobilising the strength of the working class, means that the left has proved itself incapable of fighting for socialism, which requires the overthrow of the bourgeoisie state. In other words, the left has played directly into the hands of the state. It has handed the state a weapon which has been used against it.

We would urge the same approach to the problem of Pamyat. If Gorbachev banned it, the legislation would be drafted in such a way as to allow a ‘broad interpretation’ which could with ease be turned against independent working class activity. That is something we can guarantee. The call for Gorbachev to ban Pamyat is to sow illusions in the bureaucracy, the illusion that the bureaucracy will carry out the task of fighting reactionaries, anti-semites and the poison that is Pamyat. Only the working class can do that.

Proof of the bureaucracy’s unwillingness and inability to deal with Pamyat is to be found in *7 Days*, the paper of the left’ Eurocommunists. Recently it carried a Monty Johnstone interview with Vadim Zagladin, the first deputy head of the CPSU’s international department.¹⁵⁹ Johnstone raised the question of Pamyat and

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seemed quite reassured by the answers provided ... we weren’t.

This CPSU official admitted that there were some “bad elements” in Pamyat ... but he insisted there were also a lot of “good people”. And in the
leadership of Pamyat there were some “bad elements” and yes, you’ve guessed it, there are also “good people”. The Soviet government will apparently not support the “bad elements”. They are, after all, only going round “preserving monuments of old times and keeping alive national traditions” (like Jew baiting? - JC). Johnstone asked about Pamyat people circulating the so-called *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* which purports to expose a worldwide Jewish/Masonic conspiracy to take over the world.

Zagladin told Johnstone that the Soviet press had carried a lot of articles reporting anti-semitic outbursts, “two or three cases have been reported where Pamyat members have been punished for anti-semitic graffiti and desecration of graves”. There is no way that this represents a serious attempt to undermine support for Pamyat.

Indeed, what the Zagladin interview exposes is the nonchalant, tolerant, indifferent attitude the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union takes to the rise of Pamyat. It also shows that the bureaucracy is incapable of undermining the social base Pamyat undoubtedly has.

Only with the triumph of communism is the material basis for backward and reactionary Ideas removed. This is something to which the bureaucracy can only pay up service. Indeed the fact that it has now become an absolute fetter on the further development of society goes to show that it is part of the problem when it comes to anti-semitism and national chauvinism: it is certainly not the solution.

In broad terms, and taking into account the different conditions prevailing in Britain and the USSR, our attitude towards Pamyat is similar to the attitude we take to the National Front. Not, as it is today, a bunch of junkheads, but when it was a serious organisation winning 100,000 votes in London alone.

So how would Leninists fight Pamyat? If it marches, how would we respond? We would not take the benign view of the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, which allowed Pamyat to march through Red Square. We would agitate among the working class. We would tell the workers that these people are led by fascistic scum, that Pamyat is a force for counterrevolution. We would mobilise the

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working class, we would build barricades and we would give the Pamyat marchers a beating they would never forget.
But we would not leave it there. It is necessary to take away the social base that Pamyat enjoys. This would not be done through finding out the addresses of Pamyat members and kicking their heads in. Terror has its place, but in the main we would seek out Pamyat members in order to argue with them. Many people who voted for the National Front in Britain did not understand its true nature, they were fooled. The same will be true of those who have joined Pamyat.

As an organised form we would fight fascism using whatever measures we have at our disposal, using whatever methods are necessary. We certainly do not look to Gorbachev to carry through such a campaign. Backward ideas are best fought out in the open and are best fought by a mobilised and self-confident working class. Force has a role, but the battle of ideas is the key. We understand that force only has a limited effectiveness.

Socialist democracy is not a system of paternalism. We don’t aim to smash the sham of bourgeois democracy in order to further restrict the masses. Socialist democracy doesn’t mean that workers can’t publish this, can’t read that. Communism is not built through a paternalistic elite. It is built through the active involvement of the overwhelming majority of the population.

- Indeed the transition to it, as Lenin made clear - means that every cook also governs. If we don’t trust the cooks, if we don’t allow them to form their own parties, how can they be expected to govern? Communists trust the working class and the working people. This means that open debate is an integral part of day-to-day life. We do not consider the working class to be like a five year old child whose reading, listening and viewing has to be monitored in case it corrupts. We do not fear the open clash of ideas, the existence of non-working class parties. Nor do we fear the formation of rival socialist parties.

Our understanding of proletarian dictatorship is that it represents the continuation of the class struggle carried out under capitalism. It has a coercive side as well as a democratic side. But as socialism advances, the coercive side is increasingly eclipsed by the democratic side. After all, its essence is the active participation of the masses in the struggle for communism.

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With the failure of perestroika to revive the economy, with the disintegration of economic life, the Soviet Union was visibly sliding towards the counterrevolutionary abyss.

7.1. Taking up the banner

Speech, *The Leninist* No97, December 6 1990 (extract)

Looking around the world, what does the rank and file member of any of the official communist’ organisations see? Everything they regarded as certain and safe, everything that gave them a feeling of strength in their weakness in Britain, has turned to dust.

In their different ways, the leaders of ‘official communism’ have, in spite of their intentions to the contrary, only compounded the problem. Like the bourgeoisie, the Euros would have us believe that communism has failed. In that case, members will come to the same conclusion as the leaders: there is no reason to exist as any sort of organisation.

The CPB tops refuse to admit that anything fundamental is wrong, and have tried to embrace market socialism’, perestroika and the so-called New Political Thinking. Yet even this sorry organisation has found the spiralling unemployment. Gorbachev’s Alternative Capitalist Economic Strategy, and the Soviet media’s open admiration of capitalist values, hard to swallow. There is another, bigger problem for them, though: the *Morning Star* is financially dependent on the Soviet Union. The CPB has thus sought to give Gorbachevism a left face, in spite of the fact that this counterrevolutionary ideology stands in fiat contradiction to the class politics’ on which the CPB first established itself.
An unstable and eclectic muddle must result - something epitomised by its version of the British *Road to Socialism* programme published last year. It confidently tells us that the world balance has decisively shifted in favour of socialism, and it is this, not their pacifism, legalism and reformism, that leads them to advocate a peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism.

As to the NCP, having decided “no longer to be mealy-mouthed”, it now has the virtue of admitting, albeit reluctantly, that Gorbachevism means “the future of socialism and working class state power in the Soviet Union is now in Jeopardy”. Yet, far from going back and analysing the role of the bureaucratic caste and why, under the leadership of Gorbachev, it has embraced Euro-style revisionism, the NCP’s General Secretary seeks refuge in a claimed lack of “data to make a correct assessment”. Because of this bankruptcy he is forced to turn to a crude and silly ‘great men make history’ theory.

Everything in the Soviet Union was more or less okay under Stalin, Krushchev, Brezhnev and Andropov, Eric Trevett reassures his members. Indeed, everything was more or less okay until “three years ago”, because Gorbachev was “still part of the leadership collective which had a Marxist approach to historical analysis.” According to his version of events, things have gone wrong in the Soviet Union because Gorbachev “lacked the ability” to stick to this “analysis”.161

But the result in the NCP is more than such silliness. Because the NCP has been forced to abandon its congenital tailism of the existing leadership of the Soviet Union, it is ideologically adrift and heading into dangerous waters. Desperate to make up funds lost with the counterrevolution in Czechoslovakia, the NCP is hawking itself around the world in search of new paymasters for its posse of full timers and its weekly paper. This is surely what has led it to a sudden admiration for Kim Il Sung and his Juche system, and defence of the overtly reactionary and fascistic Ba’athist regime of “the great revolutionary” Saddam Hussein in “non-capitalist” Iraq.162

How can there be communist unity through the proposed fusion of these organisations? There is nothing honest or principled in the talk of unity coming from the ‘official communist’ rumps. What concerns them all is their narrow careerist interests. As a result their unity mongering is bound to come to nothing, bound in its own way to speed up the disintegration of ‘official communism’.

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We in contrast have every reason to be confident.
Only our organisation advanced a Leninist critique of bureaucratic socialism that meant that we were equally correct and prompt in our analysis of the peaceful democratic counterrevolutions in Eastern Europe and the danger of the same process unfolding in the Soviet Union. Where the NCP refused to see any problems, then refused to defend socialism in Romania, and the CPB welcomed the first stage of counterrevolution in the GDR, Poland, Hungary, etc, we called for proletarian democracy through a proletarian political revolution.

Only our organisation maintained its political independence and refused to sell its soul to bureaucratic socialism. Only our organisation has not been thrown into crisis by its collapse. Only our organisation has won new communists through systematic propaganda work, not least around vital issues such as Ireland, unemployment and the Gulf War.

In contrast, the NCP and CPB have a record of inactivity and tailism of the Labour Party second to none. That’s why our organisation has grown and their organisations have shrunk. What made us correct then, and what makes us correct now, is no accident. It is our solid foundation on, and development of, Marxist-Leninist theory. That theory will also enable us to be correct in the future.

‘Official communism’ is going through a 1914 type crisis, though on an even higher level, involving, as it does, states as well as parties. The involvement of states meant that the collapse of the ‘official’ world communist movement was slow - a death by a thousand cuts. Nevertheless, whatever the dynamics, we must be clear that what remains of ‘official communism’ is collapsing to the right, into the camp of the bourgeoisie.

Many of the ‘official communist’ parties now denounce ‘the Brezhnev period’, ‘lack of worker’s democracy’, ‘bureaucratic socialism’ and ‘bureaucratic centralism’, etc. This is not an 11th hour conversion to Leninism. We can see the truth of this in the response to the counterrevolutions in Eastern Europe. They haven’t turned round and said: ‘comrades of The Leninist, yes, you were right all the way along, you warned us of the danger of counterrevolution in the socialist countries, not least when you warned about the danger coming from above and below’. No, they’ve adopted the titles and terminology of social democracy.

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This has nothing to do with some sort of return to the honourable tradition of the parties of the Second International before 1914. No, the new politics of what were the parties of ‘official communism’ are the dishonourable, pro-imperialist, pro-capitalist politics of social democracy post 1914.

Thus, when the former ‘official communists’ in Poland rename themselves the Social Democracy of Poland, what they have in mind is not the party of Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches. They have in mind the present day social democracy of Sweden, Germany and France. The same in what used to be the GDR, with the Party of Democratic Socialism, and the socialist parties of Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. We know that the name changes of ‘official communism’ are real: 1989 proves that ‘official communist’ opportunism can change its spots and become a new form of social democratic opportunism.

In Britain the social democraisation of ‘official communism’ was bound to take the form of organisational as well as political liquidation. Here the communist movement has always been small - even if, on occasion, highly influential - and the Labour Party (the social democratic party), big. In terms of social weight it does not bear comparison with the former Communist Party of Italy nor communist parties that used to exercise state power. So in Britain it is hardly surprising that the debate that has exercised the Euros was bound to be more than a name change and a change of terminology.

The Euro camp is rent by a debate between those who want to embrace Labourism, Scottish nationalism, eco-feminism and the social market in a new federal organisation, and those who simply want to shut up shop. The latter obviously have their minds on higher things, like picking up fat cheques from the BBC, ITV and the publications of Rupert Murdoch.

As we have argued, the collapse of bureaucratic socialism and the social democratisation of ‘official communism’ goes hand in hand with a worldwide period of reaction. The liquidation of ‘official communism’ is not the result of some private argument. It is not something that only affects communists. Communism as an ideology was always the mortal enemy of the bourgeoisie. Bureaucratic socialism was seen as its deadly manifestation. No wonder, then, that the capitalist class imagines its ideas and values have been vindicated and are destined to re-conquer the world.

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The spectre that haunted the bourgeoisie with every step forward it took against feudal backwardness, that took material form in 1871, and then again
in 1905, 1917 and 1918, that seemed to threaten from all sides during the 1920’s - that spectre has been exorcised. We are now, apparently, at the ‘end of history’, the end of the class struggle.

Such triumphal theorising is easy to dismiss as throw away milleniumism. But that would be to miss its significance. The idea that communism has failed might warm the hearts of the bourgeoisie; undoubtedly, though, it also affects the minds of the working class, rebellious youth and anybody who looks at this rotten system and wants to change it.

The bourgeoisie is today able to turn around, seemingly without fear of being contradicted, and say, ‘Look what happened last time! Millions died! It ended in disappointment, disarray, in belated recognition that capitalism is the natural order of things. Don’t try again!’ This is what makes the period we have entered different from other periods of reaction. Indeed, it makes it a period of reaction of a special type.

The renewed confidence of the bourgeoisie and the collapse of working class organisations in Britain, Europe and around the world, are not the direct result of the powers of the bourgeoisie in terms of its armed might. The most prominent feature of this period is the seeming triumph of bourgeois ideas. Of course, this has a material base, it’s not that we’ve been pitted against the bourgeoisie in some sort of Mastermind contest and they’ve come out on top. Quite frankly, their ideas are rather pathetic and shop-soiled.

The material origins of this period of reaction of a special type lie in the isolation of the world revolution in the Soviet Union, and now its resulting collapse. However special it is, though, this period of reaction can only be a passing phase. Capitalism hasn’t got answers to humanity’s problems.

The sort of capitalism that is being restored in Eastern Europe and the USSR will quickly dispel the illusions the masses there currently have. If there is hunger and mass homelessness in the cities of the United States, which is the richest country on the planet, what’s going to happen in the former socialist countries? Surely we are going to see this crime against humanity in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, but writ a hundred times larger.

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Poland shows the way things are going. People are already sleeping en masse on railway platforms, unemployment is spiralling upwards, the shops
are full but few can afford what’s in them, anti-semitism is becoming rife and Lech Walesa is running for presidency on a platform of open admiration of Marshal Pilsudski, the fascistic dictator who ran Poland in the 1920s and 30s.

Throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union the forces of darkness are on the march. In lockstep with capitalism, irrationality has returned in a wide variety of forms; the Iron Guard and Pamyat, Jew baiting and ethnic violence, bans on abortion and religious superstition (Moscow’s first post-1917 commodity exchange was opened in the old Comecon building by a Russian Orthodox priest praying to the god of profit).

Sooner, rather than later, the working class will organise and strike back - firstly, as a class in itself, recognising its own basic economic interests, its need for employment, for housing, for food. Then, after ruthlessly criticising its own first efforts - their paltriness, their meanness, their halfheartedness - it will return to the task of socialism and its historic mission of human liberation,

7.2. 20th and 21st century socialism

Speech, June 2 1991. Published in The Leninist No 104, June 28 1991

From the dawn of the 20th century, from 1905 to be precise, Russia, what we still call the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, has been the world’s revolutionary centre, that is, the country where the class struggle finds its highest expression. Today, in the twilight of the century, what is going on in the USSR remains of supreme importance.

That there was a Gulf War, that US imperialism is enjoying a bloody new lease of life, that the communist governments of Eastern Europe fell like dominoes, that ‘official communism’ has metamorphosed into social democracy, that all ideas of social progress now stand discredited and the world has plunged into a period of reaction all this cannot be understood without reference to what is going on in the USSR, namely the crisis of bureaucratic socialism and the process of peaceful, democratic counterrevolution.

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In the minds of the Soviet masses, their once shining and inspiring socialist state born of the October Revolution, has been turned into its opposite. Experience of being on the wrong end of corruption, bureaucracy,
shortages and gross inefficiency means that the grandsons and granddaughters of the workers who in 1917 seized the factories and ushered in Soviet power regard the state and the Communist Party with undisguised contempt and hatred.

The politics of class have been overlaid and smothered by the politics of demagogy, nation and religion. In the name of the future, the past has reasserted itself with a vengeance. It is more than the return of old street and city names. Across the board, reaction and the forces of darkness have the initiative and relentlessly, step by step, press on to their goal of restoring capitalism. What remains of socialism now hangs by a thread.

Why has all this happened? Is counterrevolution in the USSR inevitable? We, like others, lack detailed information. The political picture in the USSR is confused, still opaque, extremely complex and constantly changing. Despite this, it is possible, indeed it is vital, given the world importance of events in the USSR, that we come forward with answers to these questions.

We can usefully make a start here by briefly examining some wrong answers. At the risk of oversimplification, on the opportunistic left there were three approaches to Gorbachev and the crisis in the USSR.

First, those who more or less uncritically welcomed Gorbachev. Around this view rallied a very broad body of opinion. Not only Benn. ‘official communism’, the Euros, what has become the Communist Party of Britain and the Revolutionary Communist Group, but some of the major figures and groups of Trotskyism (for example Tariq Ali, Gerry Healy and his WRP). There are of course some who have subsequently decided, in the revealing words of Eric Trevett, general secretary of the crisis-ridden New Communist Party, to stop being “mealy-mouthed” and reverse their support for Gorbachev. Nevertheless, while some might have backtracked, pro-Gorbachevism remains the dominant view in British society, including the ruling class, headed not so long ago by Margaret Thatcher. She took the lead in winning the imperialist world to see Gorbachev as their man in the USSR. Thatcher and Co were quick to boast that Gorbachev’s programme had to lead to the restoration of capitalism. However, in spite of this and the evidence of what is actually going on in the USSR, the pro-Gorbachev left refused to hear, see or believe
any evil about Gorbachev. Because of ideological weakness they wanted (and most still want) to believe that perestroika really was about a second revolution fully in the spirit of October, a peaceful revolution from above that would restructure the Soviet Union, enable democracy to flower and at last give socialism a human face.

The other two approaches had the virtue of being opposed to Gorbachev. Beyond that though they had nothing positive to offer. The second trend was that of classic Trotskyism. They opposed Gorbachev but welcomed Gorbachev. Why? Because he was supposed to have set the stage for the carrying through of Trotsky’s political revolution. Unfortunately this trend criminally dismissed our warning that political revolution was not the only possibility, that there were other possibilities, not least counterrevolution. Unlike the Trotskyites, we argued that socialism was by definition reversible, and that a concrete examination of the concrete world situation showed that counterrevolution had the initiative. As a matter of dogma, they denied that counterrevolution could be peaceful, that it could leave the state intact. Militants editor declared that the danger of capitalist restoration was a “chimera”, that countries such as Poland remained workers’ states even after the restoration of capitalism, because the state - what Lenin called a carryover from capitalism - had not been smashed!

Now to the third trend, which was perhaps even more blind than the other two. It couldn’t see what all the fuss was about. Most prominent in this trend were the Socialist Workers Party (which while greeting counterrevolution as revolution, thought that all that had happened was that capitalism was reorganising itself) and the Revolutionary Communist Party (which in all seriousness told its supporters that there was no possibility of the market being restored in the USSR).

Transparently, all these trends now stand totally discredited. As I speak, Gorbachev is awaiting permission to visit London in order to plead before the high priests of capitalism, the imperialist Group of Seven. Although he’s unlikely to get it, he wants $30 billion every year for five years, in order, he says, to enable him to smoothly, or at least relatively smoothly, complete his perestroika. He will not

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get it, though he will no doubt get something; and the imperialists will get something as well. They will demand their pound of flesh in the shape of sweeping political and economic reforms which specifically benefit them, with perhaps Cuba thrown in for good measure.
Those who dismissed our warning that Gorbachev was opening the door to counterrevolution now have before them the grim reality of Eastern Europe to chew on. Defying the Trotskyite dogma that whatever the colour and make-up of a government there could be no counterrevolution unless the state had been smashed, capitalism has been restored.

Far from the state being smashed, almost everywhere the state was peacefully transformed. As we feared, the socialist state did go from defending one set of property relations to defending another. Leading bureaucrats and functionaries did their best to join the proto-capitalist class and in certain countries they actually took the lead in the counterrevolutionary process. Life also disproved the notion that the USSR had reached some sort of final stage of capitalist development, as the SWP had theorised from its origins; or that it was inherently undynamic, as the RCP, its wayward child, insisted in opposition. The USSR is in danger of returning to capitalism. No wonder it is a ferment of debate, demonstration, strike, movement and crisis. As Marx said all that was solid is melting into thin air.

So how has the USSR reached the point where it’s threatened by counterrevolution and disintegration? The crisis in the USSR is at root an expression of the contradiction between the conservative socio-political superstructure and the never stopping revolutionisation of the means of production: a revolutionisation epitomised today by the massive growth in computers and micro, robotic and bio technology. Socialism, because it was victorious in mainly backward countries, always had before it the task of catching up with the west. For many decades there was much, indeed brilliant, success here. No longer. For the last decade the gap stopped narrowing, instead it widened. As we predicted, something had to give. Either the working class would carry through a democratic reorganisation of society, or, because capitalism remained the dominant mode of production on the planet, the forces of reaction would restore the old order in the name of advancement.

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How do things stand now? Our assessment is, as I think we’ve made clear, that the forces of counterrevolution continue to advance. Yet how can this be when there exists the undefeated Soviet working class, the class that
made the October Revolution?

The working class in the Soviet Union is, objectively speaking, incomparably stronger than it was in 1917. That is a fact. Its numbers are ten, fifteen times greater than when it brought down the Tsar, Kerensky and capitalism. However, far from acting as a class for itself - possible in 1917 because of Bolshevik leadership - it exists merely as a class in itself.

To illustrate this we can do no better than take the Soviet miners. As we know, last year some of their new leaders were invited to Britain by our Trotskyites. Much to the glee of the bourgeois media they went on to establish links with fascists, join the anti-Scargill witch-hunt and support the yellow UDM.

Back in the USSR such false consciousness had similar results. In Siberia the miners look to Yeltsin for salvation. They stopped their anti-Gorbachev strike because of his pleas. In the Ukraine the miners are turning towards the ultra pro-capitalist nationalists. All this gives us a glimpse of the wider picture. It shows us the extent of the disorientation of the working class caused by bureaucratic socialism. It certainly shows that the working class does not operate in any sense in Soviet society as a class for itself.

What about the forces of capitalist restoration? All along the line they have the initiative and dominate political debate. That does not mean that counterrevolution exists as a monolithic bloc. Indeed, the very nature of counterrevolution in the USSR means it cannot operate as a monolithic bloc.

Broadly, the main contending counterrevolutionary forces in the USSR can be considered under the following headings.

Firstly, the forces of nationalism - not only in Georgia, the Baltics, the Ukraine, etc. but also in Russia around renegade Communist Party careerists like Yeltsin; ie the most openly counterrevolutionary forces. These so-called democrats are far from homogeneous. Each proto-capitalist class is seeking to carve out a home market for itself. This is what lies behind the politics of nationalism. Contradictions must result. Not only now, but above all in the future. Victory for the nationalists can only lead to the emergence of dominant and subordinate nations and thus conflict, clashes and wars. Nevertheless, even with their inherent divisions at the

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moment, these forces have the advantage. Yeltsin is running way out in front in the Russian presidential race and his almost certain success can only exacerbate the drift towards dual power and disintegration in the USSR. No wonder Gorbachev is prepared to consider the possibility of Yeltsin and the other nationalist leaders having places in some sort of a grand coalition
The second category we can locate is the Gorbachevites themselves. Essentially, they are technocrats around the state. They differ from the nationalists, but not on means or ends. Speed is where they differ: not the desirability of restoring a normal’ market economy, but how quickly. They do, however, have an interest in the unity of the USSR, but have an extremely narrow social base. This has forced them into what we could call a centrist role. Gorbachev more and more resembles a Kerensky in reverse.

Finally there are the conservatives. They’re made up of sections of the army, the Communist Party leadership, the all-union bureaucracy, and the Soyuz group in parliament. Deliberately, the bourgeois media has thoroughly mixed up the terms left and right. Yeltsin is championed and labelled a radical leftist by a Daily Telegraph which here champions the Tories and correctly labels them right wing. Yet the fact of the matter is that the conservatives in the USSR can genuinely be called conservative. They are not against capitalist restoration, only its disruptive effects. They have no separate programme from the Gorbachevites or, for that matter, from the nationalists.

Gorbachev and the nationalists differ on speed. Where Gorbachev wants to take five years to restore capitalism with the help of the G7 and $150 billion in loans from the imperialists, the nationalists want to take 500 days to carry out the same programme. Quantitative differences also divide the conservatives from the Gorbachevites. The conservatives want to carefully control and manage the restoration of capitalism, they propose to march in front of the process ... with a red flag. We say this in both meanings in which that metaphor is commonly used. They want to be like the man who had to walk in front of the early motor cars: they want to be in front of the counterrevolutionary process with a red flag to make sure it only goes ahead at walking pace. But secondly, they want to march in front of the restoration of capitalism with a red flag In order to give it a red coloration, make it reliant on the apparatchiks of the old order and thus safeguard - they hope - their power,

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patronage and privilege.

Because they try to give the process of counterrevolution a communist cover, we must say that in a real sense the conservatives represent the force most dangerous to the working class. Obviously working class militants who
remain attached and loyal to communism are far more likely to follow this group than the Gorbachevites or the Yeltsinites. That is what makes them so dangerous, not that they are the most counterrevolutionary or most reactionary trend in the Soviet Union. That ‘honour’ undoubtedly goes to the various nationalists.

7.2.1. Role of the conservatives

It is natural that some communists, both inside and outside the USSR, will wrongly decipher the often cryptic pronouncements of the conservatives and clutch at the straw of their pseudo-communist rhetoric. It is natural to want to detect a glimmer of light in the midst of a period of reaction, support some big force that is willing to fight back. Yet all the evidence before us shows that they won’t fight back. Never forget Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and how easily counterrevolution triumphed. Despite the existence of long established socialist property relations, powerful secret police and armies, and the well organised and entrenched conservative official communists’, socialism ignominiously collapsed just as we feared it would.

Also we cannot but recall the honest communists in this country who were keen, to say the least, to cast the GDR in the role of exception. Honecker and his comrades in the Socialist Unity Party did say that they weren’t going to change the wallpaper merely because their neighbours had. But the wallpaper was never the problem. The wall was! People voted with their Trabants and 1989 saw the GDR predictably join the others. Honecker and the wall came crashing down.

Do the political methods, programme, psychology and social base of the conservatives in the USSR differ fundamentally from Honecker and his type throughout Eastern Europe? In other words is the USSR an exception? To this we have to say no. Let us explain why.

Bureaucratic socialism in Eastern Europe was an export version

On the edge of the abyss 209

In textbook fashion the general crisis of bureaucratic socialism progressively found expression from the weakest links of socialism to the centre. First Kampuchea and Afghanistan, then Poland and Hungary, then Czechoslovakia and the GDR, then Romania and Bulgaria, then Yugoslavia
and Albania. Now we find the crisis devouring the world’s revolutionary centre itself.

Everything we know about the countries that have gone down to counterrevolution - their history, their social and political structure - tells us that there is nothing fundamentally unique about them. That is why we fear the same counterrevolutionary danger faces not only the Soviet Union, but China, Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea as well.

There are those who, while formally accepting all this, still think that the USSR is different. Their argument rests on the undeniable fact that the socialist revolution in the USSR was made by the working class of the city and big factory, that it momentarily produced a Commune-like state and that its leaders were deeply committed to and well versed in the science of Marxism. In contrast, the core of Eastern European socialism experienced revolution from above via the Soviet Army, while the revolutions from below in Albania, Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam, Korea and Cuba in essence took place on the basis of rural insurrections.

The origins of the Soviet Union and the other examples of socialism may have been different. However, as soon as it was born, the Soviet state quickly found itself subject to the deforming atavistic pull of the country’s staggering backwardness. The bureaucratic form of socialism that resulted began to choke the revolutionary spirit of October even while Lenin was alive. But where Lenin fought back with all his strength, Stalin justified it, accommodated to it, and then unconsciously fronted it.

Tragically, in this way, because of a combination of isolation and (connected) wrong political leadership, the bureaucratic deformation of the revolution became institutionalised, presented in theory as the norm and even the realisation of some sort of heaven on earth. Not surprisingly, the passivity and alienation of the masses that was already evident in the early 1920s was compounded many times over.

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that it was exactly this form of socialism that was exported to Eastern Europe and used as a model elsewhere. Not the bright red socialism of 1917 but the soiled bureaucratic socialism that consolidated itself in the 1930s. That is why Eastern Europe should act as a one minute to midnight warning to communists in the Soviet Union and throughout the world.
The Soviet Union of 1917 is like the Paris Commune of 1871. While it is a model for the future, it is also a thing of the past. However, the bureaucratic socialism that grew out of it now shows all the signs of the political disintegration that undermined socialism in Eastern Europe: bourgeois pundits who call it a Yugoslavia with nuclear weapon 3 are not far off the mark.

Not only is the working class confused, but throughout the top echelons of Soviet society there has been a turn to what we in the west would call white collar crime’ on a grand scale. It is not only every republic for itself. It is every bureaucrat and manager for themselves as well. From union ministry to mine, from republic to plant, from collective farm to retail outlet there is a systematic and massive plundering of state funds and state goods.

These funds and goods are being syphoned off into the Russki maflosa, into the so-called cooperative sector, into the new private companies being set up by friends and relatives of the administrative stratum. This more than Just exacerbates the already chronic shortages and economic dislocation. It is a classic example of the primitive capital accumulation which is necessary if a new capital 1st class is to emerge.

As a final refuge, some might simply dismiss all we say as doom-mongering pessimism. Such attempts say everything about our accusers, nothing about us. Our analysis is sober, scientific and completely partisan; ie, it is Marxist. Communists are by definition optimistic. However, we can afford no illusions. Our optimism is based on facts, not wishful thinking. That Is why we don’t fear the truth. On the contrary, we seek out the truth and when we find it we look it straight in the face.

This means that while as a matter of principle we unconditionally defend living socialism, we also warn of the dangers it faces and argue for the practice that is needed to advance it. We do this today, we did it yesterday.

Thus, when others refused to see anything fundamentally wrong with Gorbachevism, we came to the conclusion that there was a crisis of bureaucratic socialism and it could only be positively resolved through some sort of a political revolution. Again, where
continuation and completion of the world revolution.

There is nothing pessimistic here. In fact our optimism knows no limits. For we were and remain absolutely convinced of the victory of our class and the cause of communism.

7.2.2. Remarkable socialism

World revolution moves forward according to a very complicated, chaotic route. In the short term it behaves in a completely unpredictable fashion. By its very nature therefore it can never proceed along a Euclidean straight line. There will be dramatic advances, but there will also be twists and turns, lulls, retreats and even defeats. Today we are undoubtedly living through a period of defeats, a period of reaction. But what is being defeated is more than this or that state; what is being defeated, it is claimed, is an idea. The bosses’ media never loses an opportunity to tell us - and most of the world’s population believes it - that socialism as any sort of superior alternative to capitalism has failed. If only it was all shallow propaganda and braggadocio. But it isn’t.

It would appear that the world has fallen back behind its point of departure. Certainly, if we compare the despondency of nowadays with the high hopes exuded by late 19th century socialism, this would seem to be the case. Then there was a growing and widespread belief that capitalism had become an anachronism and that Marxism was the only theory capable of guiding humanity to real freedom.

Nowadays what remains of socialism is either in deep crisis or is deeply unattractive. The official communist’ parties are making their final transformation into social democracy. Related to this, the working class has lost its sense of historical mission. Now at best it fights to better its slave position within existing society. As a result bourgeois ideology has gained a new confidence. The postmodernists of bourgeois academia have pronounced the death of all meta-theory’, sub-atomic physics is meant to prove the Impossibility of economic planning, and now that green politics rules, woe to those who dare tamper with the natural’ (capitalist) order of things.

But has socialism failed? Is the future one of uninterrupted capitalism? 212 From October to August
No, socialism hasn’t failed, neither as an alternative to capitalism nor as an idea. And no, the future is not one of uninterrupted capitalism. Why are we so confident?

For Marxists, socialism was never a utopian dream or a universal elixir that could work no matter what the conditions or circumstances. Socialism is the product of capitalism. It comes on to the historical agenda because capitalism has created the conditions for it by creating a world market, a world economy and a world working class. The working class, as capitalism’s victim, gravedigger and successor, is the only force capable of taking hold of the baton of progress. As a world class with no interest in fettering the productive forces, only the working class can rationally organise the world economy, negate capitalism’s contradictions and begin the transition to a classless society, communism.

Armed with this basic theoretical understanding, it is clear that socialism, if it is really to be socialism, i.e. a society in transition to communism, takes as its starting point the most advanced capitalist countries. But life is dialectical, not mechanical.

As it turned out, necessity flowed along the easiest, but most unexpected, course. The last general crisis of capitalism, which began in 1914, almost straight away produced revolution in a rash of countries, including advanced Germany. Yet it was only in backward Russia, where capitalism was the weakest, that proletarian power survived. Hence, where historically the task of socialism is to move human society from advanced capitalism to communist abundance, living socialism was actually faced with the task of catching up with advanced capitalism.

That the Russian revolution was left and survived in isolation is not a failure of socialism as such. Rather it was an unexpected historical accident which came about due to the lack of experience in the revolutionary movement in other countries, the treachery of social democracy and the unevenness of the revolutionary impulse. That the Soviet Union survived over 70 years in any form at all is remarkable. That it is in crisis today is not proof of socialism’s failure but of its resilience, tenacity and ability to stand up against overwhelming odds.

The remarkable nature of socialism can be appreciated even more if we remember just how backward pre-revolutionary Russia really was; how even its miserable levels of production were thrown back by the triple disasters of World War I. civil war and epidemic. One writer has estimated that as a result of all that, Lenin’s Russia had a productive level
roughly on a par with Cromwell’s England. This one statistic tells us more about Gorbachev’s turn to the market than all the bourgeois triumphalism, end of history’ theorising, and claims that communism has collapsed, put together.

In 1917 neither Lenin nor any of his co-leaders of the Bolshevik Party entertained any idea whatsoever about Russia becoming a fully rounded socialist society through its own efforts. For Lenin, Russia was the spark that would ignite the world revolution. Once the flame took hold elsewhere Russia would assume a role more fitting to its economic level, it would go from the vanguard to the rearguard of the world revolution.

Of course it didn’t happen. The Soviet republic was left isolated and unaided in its desperate efforts to rebuild and then develop itself. When the world revolution regained momentum towards the end of World War II it did not lessen the burden carried by the Soviet Union. The burden increased. The revolutions that succeeded did so mainly in equally backward or even more backward countries.

Taking all this into account, when we quote Marx on the need to criticise with “unmerciful thoroughness, the inadequacies, the weaknesses and paltriness of our first efforts” we have every reason to expect our second efforts to be far less weak and paltry.

Ironically, it is because of capitalism’s very successes that we can say this. Through its dynamism, capitalism gives birth to the conditions and forces of its own destruction. At the heart of this lies the contradiction within capitalism between the social nature of production and the private nature of appropriation. The daily tally of ‘giant fish eats not-quite-so giant fish’ takeovers shows this has now reached unheard of heights.

While monopoly capitalism might still be producing more and more commodities, might still be bringing forth all sorts of new technologies, all sorts of advances in the productive forces, it finds it harder and harder to contain the forces that it itself creates. Monopoly capitalism means fewer capitalists and more workers; monopoly capitalism means the over-production of commodities amidst the growth of pauperisation; monopoly capitalism means the growth of inter-imperialist contradictions; monopoly capitalism means the certainty of the most devastating new general crisis. Such a general crisis would not only send production reeling backwards as we saw in 1929, when 40-60% of the GNPs of the most advanced capitalist countries
were wiped out almost overnight. It would, through the resulting danger of an inter-imperialist World War III, threaten to destroy 7,000 years of human civilisation.

The only alternative is socialism.

Our task is to win the masses to fight for this alternative. It is a future worth fighting for, worth dying for. The socialism of the 21st century has nothing grey or bureaucratic about it. Given the proletarianisation of the world, the modern levels of production and technique, we can be sure that the new revolutions and socialism of the 21st century will have a very different appearance and form to the crippled socialism of the 20th century.

Socialism of the 21st century will be democratic, rational, humane and advanced. With computers and the microelectronic revolution the working day can be dramatically cut. This is the material basis for abundance; where real mass participatory democracy can work, where the culture of the future can grow, and an ever increasing living standard - the central aim of socialism - can be guaranteed.

This is the future that necessarily and inevitably emerges from the womb of capitalism. It is to this vision that we must win the working class masses. We must lift eyes trapped on the past. We must expose as a lie the criminal idea that the Soviet Union represented some sort of developed socialism’. We must show what sort of future the workers can have if they fight in a communist way, if they organise themselves as the alternative ruling class. This is the biggest service we in Britain can do to what remains of socialism in the world today. This is the biggest tribute we can pay to the great October Revolution.

7.3. Seven plus one

Editorial, *The Leninist* No 107, July 30 1991

The London meeting of the Group of Seven has come and gone. As it turned out the leaders of the seven major imperialist powers - USA, Japan, Germany, France, Britain, Canada and Italy - came up with little in the way of concrete measures to paper over the cracks that are beginning to open up in their facade of international unity. That does not mean that the G7 circus was without significance.
What we still call the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is being incorporated into the imperialist system of states. The Soviet Union is now an associate member of the G7. The next get together will be seven plus one.

There is a price to pay. Bush and the other imperialist politicians are demanding Castro’s head\textsuperscript{166} and the opening up of the Soviet market to gang rape by the dollar, mark, pound and yen. The traitor Gorbachev will willingly oblige.

Soviet economic assistance to Cuba has all but ceased; this brave front line of the world revolution is under siege and subject to all sorts of threats. Now Gorbachev wants to formally transform the Communist Party of the Soviet Union into a social democratic organisation - there is even talk that he will stand for president under the banner of Shevardnadze’s openly capitalist Democratic Movement. As The Economist noted he is now committed not only to the “reform of the Soviet economy but to transform it into something different - a capitalist economy with private companies, convertible rouble and all.”\textsuperscript{167}

Nevertheless the G7 meeting exposed the deep problems faced by both the seven and the one. As is well known Gorbachev went to the London meeting cap in hand. He wanted $30 billion for each year of his five year plan to restore capitalism. Where he wanted billions he only got millions - this means that the restoration of capitalism in the USSR will be a very rough ride indeed. There will be tens of millions unemployed, there will be further economic collapse and dislocation, and inflation will undoubtedly become hyper.

None of the G7 imperialist powers are in any position, not collectively and certainly not individually, to treat the USSR as Federal Germany has treated the former GDR, ie there will be no massive transfer of capital, no crash programme of Industrial and infrastructural equalisation. All of them are experiencing severe economic difficulties as a result of the latest pre-general crisis downward oscillation in the world economy.

Britain has falling industrial production and nearly 3 million unemployed (that is after nearly 30 alterations of the method of calculation). Anyway it is now a second rate imperialist power with

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\end{quote}

little room for manoeuvre or ‘generosity’. Certainly it has more in common with Italy and Canada than the US, Germany and Japan. But these core imperialist powers have their own difficulties: which taken together make a new Marshall Plan an impossibility.

Although the US still determines the world’s economic metabolism, it has
piled up an historically unprecedented national debt and is in sharp relative decline. It is not the power it was. Germany too has seen its surplus capital dry up. In spite of Kohl’s promises to the contrary the cost of merging in the GDR has proved to be massively expensive. What surplus capital it once had has long gone. As for the over-exporting reliant Japan it is pumping its capital into Western Europe on a massive scale in a desperate attempt not to be crippled by a post-1992 EC creating a fortress Europe.

The imperialists might have won the Cold War. But this has not as the *Sunday Times* imagined in the heady “end of history” days of October 1989 paved the way for a “sustained boom in the world economy similar to the golden age of the 1950s and 1960s.” Because of debt, because it is of less and less importance to the imperialists, Africa is experiencing absolute decline; de-industrialisation, starvation and social decomposition are the inevitable results. South America and India look set to follow suit.

What the victory for the imperialists in the Cold War has paved the way for, though, is ironically the break up of the ‘west’. Three rival blocs are already in the process of crystallisation - centrally a fortress Europe, dominated by Germany and in response a defensive US dominated North American Free Trade Association and an equally defensive Japanese dominated Western Pacific alliance of it and its little dragons. The battle lines for trade war leading to imperialist war are drawn. Humanity faces a stark choice: either world socialism or world war!

8. August

The August 19 State Emergency Committee coup collapsed within three days. The door was now open for counterrevolution.
8.1. Gorbachev’s return

Article, The Leninist No 108, August 24 1991

Gorbachev’s return to Moscow was due primarily to the depth and breadth of popular resistance and secondarily the effect this had on exacerbating divisions within the conservative bureaucracy: it was the divisions that resulted in the dislocation and fissuring of the Soviet Union’s armed bodies of men. However it would be wrong to simply regard the failure of the pathetic State Emergency Committee as a wonderful and inspiring triumph of democracy. Democracy does not exist in a vacuum. It has to be evaluated in terms of classes and class interests. Democracy is either revolutionary or reactionary.

The collapse of the State Emergency Committee and the return of Gorbachev has nothing to do with proletarian democracy or revolutionary mass action. It is a victory for the forces of reaction, imperialism, capitalism and counterrevolution. True, as in Eastern Europe, this victory has taken a democratic form. Nevertheless that should not lead us for one moment to lose sight of the fact that what we are dealing with is democratic counterrevolution.

That explains why those who in Britain brutally imposed the universally hated poll tax, crushed the miners and run down the NHS - Thatcher and her chosen successor Major - called for mass action on the streets of Moscow and Leningrad. That is why Bush, the world’s number one imperialist butcher, supported strikes in Siberia; why the Financial Times urged Yeltsin to appeal directly to the class interests of Soviet workers; why the BBC welcomed splits in the army - hardly the sort of thing they do at home.

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Our position is equally clear, equally partisan and completely different. With us the long term interests of the working class are the beginning and end of our politics. And what leads us to champion the working class and oppose the ruling class here in Britain leads us to oppose Gorbachev in the
USSR. We do not celebrate his return. He is a class traitor. Gorbachev’s perestroika had nothing to do with strengthening socialism. Perestroika was a transparent cover for the restoration of capitalism. Its progress in the USSR paved the way for a worldwide period of reaction and capitalist triumphalism.

Whatever they believe now, for the Soviet masses the restoration of capitalism can only mean misery, massive unemployment and a political system that owes more to South America than Western Europe. That is why at no point did we join in the chorus demanding the restoration of Gorbachev, why we opposed all imperialist financial, diplomatic and military threats against the Soviet Union during the 60 hour reign of the State Emergency Committee.

That did not lead us to politically support the State Emergency Committee coup. Our position was clear: The August 19 coup created an opportunity to make political revolution against both the conservative bureaucracy and the most counterrevolutionary forces fronted by the Yeltsinites.

Clearly the conservative section of the bureaucracy behind the ousting of Gorbachev no longer believed in itself. As a section of society that faces social extinction it was fitting that its coup was as desperate as it was pathetic. It was badly timed and badly executed.

Disobeying the first law of the military art, the putschists were half hearted, acted with a complete lack of decisiveness - and thus fatally gave away the Initiative. Gorbachev was placed under house arrest, that is true. But Yeltsin was allowed to operate with hardly any restrictions. The ‘White House’, the Russian parliament in the heart of Moscow, was left to grow into a Versailles-like counterrevolutionary centre. No attempt was made to even cut off its phone lines. It was a gift. Yeltsin made sure he had numerous well reported (on the BBC World Service, Radio Liberty etc) chats with Bush, Major and other western leaders.

If the eight men of the State Emergency Committee bungled militarily, they fell flat on their faces politically. They began badly, and over the three days in which they formally exercised power, got

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steadily worse. Showing not the slightest glimmer of Imagination, these perfect representatives of the historically exhausted bureaucratic caste claimed that Gorbachev had not been overthrown - he was ill. The same bureaucratic mind-set dictated the insistence of the State Emergency Committee that it remained committed to and would carry through
Gorbachev’s perestroika - hardly an inspiration to those millions already facing unemployment, price hikes and fearing the prospect of economic meltdown as a result of this counterrevolutionary programme.

Quite rightly the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB therefore argued from day one of the State Emergency Committee coup that it might have temporarily stayed the hand of counterrevolution but defence of the USSR “more than ever necessitates intransigent criticism of its leadership” (see Appendix II). The State Emergency Committee coup was in the spirit of Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968 and Poland 1981. It was, in other words, classically bureaucratic, sectional and, given the general crisis of bureaucratic socialism, even more contradictory.

The State Emergency Committee takeover and its ragged humiliating collapse has paradoxically immediately facilitated the restoration of capitalism. The binary stars of counterrevolution, Gorbachev and Yeltsin, both say that there can be no holding back on the transition to capitalism. It will be full steam ahead. Moreover, although Gorbachev’s star remains dim, Yeltsin’s star burns brighter than ever. Yeltsin now demands yet more powers under the Union Treaty, his own army, KGB and control over all industry.

Crucially, through its conservatism, inability to mobilise any social base, negative attitude towards democracy and lack of any alternative programme, the masses were handed over into the arms of Yeltsin - unhappy is the land that needs such a ‘hero’. Russian president Yeltsin, the chief counterrevolutionary personality in the USSR, has been greatly strengthened as have his alter egos in Georgia, Moldavia, the Baltics and the other republics. Already Georgia, Moldavia, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia have announced their independence as capitalist powers.

There can also be no doubt that as well as broadening the base of democratic counterrevolution, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has been further marginalised. The State Emergency Committee did not see the need to involve it. Nor was it quick to state its own attitude. Its passivity will cost it dearly. The CPSU now faces disintegration, and what remains will face eventual persecution. If it is to be saved, the genuine communists must act fast, cleanse their party of careerists and rights and raise the Leninist flag of socialist democracy and mass action.

The State Emergency Committee debacle must be seen against the background of the worldwide period of reaction. The fall and return of

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Gorbachev, the rise of Yeltsin and counterrevolution can only deepen that reaction and fuel the capitalist ideological offensive. What is seen as communism will be branded as totally discredited, as will all ideas of social progress.

This moment in history, like the blackest periods in the past, requires communist steadfastness. We must steel ourselves to withstand the reactionary floodtide that will result from recent developments in the USSR. Both those who joined the imperialists in demanding Gorbachev’s “reinstatement” or in “welcoming” the State Emergency Committee coup are in no position to do so. They will be torn apart and swept away.

Only those who fought for working class political independence and a programme of political revolution will survive to fight another day ... and whatever our class enemy might say or think, have no fear, that day will come.

8.2. Yeltsin’s counter-coup counterrevolution


As we said two years ago, what was frozen in history has melted. All the certainties of the Cold War have gone. Events are moving like a tidal wave. Frankly, it’s not the direction that surprises us, but the speed. Where the bourgeoisie thought in terms of change happening over years, we thought in months. But on consideration, when it came to August 19, passing as it did beyond the parameters of all previous Soviet history, we should have thought in hours.

What has happened is clear. There was a conservative political coup. But there has also been a Yeltsinite counter-coup, which amounts to a social counterrevolution.

Comrades, we can no longer talk of the USSR in any real sense.

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How can we talk about the ‘union’ of any republics? There is no union. Not only the Baltics, Moldavia and Georgia have declared for Independence, but so too has the Ukraine.

What about socialist’ republics? There is no longer any socialism. In spite of the statements of Yeltsin and Gorbachev, and the fact that bourgeois jubilation Is In full swing, some cannot see it. For these hopeless dogmatists,
socialism equals nationalised property and capitalism equals the free market. As most industry and agriculture remains nationalised, there can be no capitalism, they argue. Taking the mechanical approach to Its logical conclusion, they reason that as states are nothing but a superstructure on top of the socio-economic base, the Soviet state must remain socialist.

So why do we say there is no longer socialism? Well, it’s not only that the symbols of the old regime have come crashing down - the statues of Dzerzhinsky, Sverdlov and Lenin; it’s not just the return of the old symbols - the flag of Russia, the Incense and chants of the Orthodox church on every public occasion, new national anthems and new names for towns and cities. It isn’t just Yeltsin’s ban on Pravda, the suspension of activity of the Russian Communist Party." It’s not just that the rats are deserting the CPSU ship. It’s not just the resurfacing of old hatreds, nationalism, anti-semitism.

No, it’s the nature and programme of the state itself. That leaves us in no doubt that there has been a social counterrevolution.

The government of what Is still called the USSR will be chosen by Boris Yeltsin. The president of the Soviet Union is no longer a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. And after initial dilly-dallying, in order to save himself, Gorbachev has ordered the confiscation of all the property of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and demanded that the Central Committee liquidates itself, and therefore, effectively, liquidates the Party itself.

That is counterrevolution. Peaceful and democratic, but counterrevolution nevertheless.

Naturally, there will be those who can’t or won’t distinguish between revolution and counterrevolution. Some, such as The Sun, the Daily Mirror, the BBC and bourgeois academia will call counterrevolution revolution, simply to create ideological confusion in the minds of the masses. Others do so for reasons of leftist or reformist dogma, or simply an opportunist wish to join in the general celebrations.

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For the sake of clarity, let us define revolution and counterrevolution. Revolution is progressive. It is the new overthrowing the old. A counterrevolution is a reversal of a previous revolution and its results, a turning back to the past. Who can doubt what we have in the former USSR? Both Gorbachev and Yeltsin say It’s full speed back to private property, back to capitalist property, and back to capitalist social relations.

So what is the state In the USSR now, in class terms? Is there anything for
communists, for progressives, for partisans of the working class to defend in it? We would say no.

If we penetrate beneath the swirl of events, the day by day dramatic changes and the transitional forms, it is clear that the bourgeoisie is back; the states within what was the USSR are now theirs. Of course, many, looking at what existed before August 22 - or, for that matter, looking at what has existed for past decades - will say that the Soviet state was authoritarian, bureaucratic and indefensible. We think this approach is understandable but very, very wrong.

Let’s put it like this. What would we do if, in the midst of a long drawn out bitter strike, the bureaucrats began using authoritarian measures to maintain the strike, continued to live a privileged lifestyle and some of them began taking bribes from the bosses? Would we abandon the strike? No! We would defend the strike against the bosses and against its misleaders.

What would we do if, under these conditions, a steady trickle of workers began returning to work complaining of hunger and bureaucratic methods. We would still defend the strike, wouldn’t we? Well, we would! And if, at a critical moment, the strike collapsed because of betrayal from the top and a mass return from below, would we join the bosses in welcoming the end of the strike? No, we wouldn’t - not even if this made us unpopular among workers and bureaucrats alike.

In broad terms, comrades, that is what has happened. In the USSR the strike has been broken. Its bureaucratic strike’ against capitalism and imperialism has been broken, betrayed from above and exhausted from below. That is why the bourgeoisie is celebrating, why genuine communists should briefly mourn before getting on with the job of organising on the basis of the lessons our defeat in the USSR teaches.

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8.2.1. What now?
In spite of the lightning fall of socialism in Eastern Europe in 1989 and 1990, the bourgeoisie cannot quite believe its luck when it comes to the USSR. Now the Soviet Union is a satellite locked in orbit around the imperialist sun. Albeit in a shattered form - potentially a giant Yugoslavia with a nuclear sting in its tail - it has fallen into their laps. What they expected was a slow spiralling in of the Soviet Union, a controlled process of capitalist restoration, not a sudden collapse.

As I said, they did not expect it. On the day of Gorbachev’s return the BBC spoke for the whole bourgeoisie. It went something like this:

*BBC anchorman:* Is the Soviet Union finished?
*Their man in Moscow:* No, it still remains a powerful force in the world.
*BBC anchorman:* What about Gorbachev?
*Their man in Moscow:* His prestige has somewhat dimmed. Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin are now equals.
*BBC anchorman:* Has the Communist Party of the Soviet Union any future?
*Their man in Moscow:* It remains central to Soviet society. It isn’t going to disappear quickly. Yes, it will change: maybe in November it will become some sort of socialist party.

How things move when quantity produces quality! When it comes to society, the modern bourgeoisie is incapable of grasping such an elementary fact. When the counterrevolutionary process reached a certain quantitative stage, change was going to be exceptionally rapid by definition.

Comrades, the consequences of counterrevolution cannot be predicted in detail, but we can and must talk in broad terms. Certainly there is nothing to “celebrate”. Those who are doing so are either stupid, misguided, self interested, or they are opportunist scum.

Let’s begin with the national question. There hasn’t been any national liberation in the Soviet Union. What there has been is a reactionary breakup. The prospect this holds before us is not 15

stable bourgeois republics, but rather ethnic war. For those who imagine that this cannot happen in the Soviet Union, just look at the obscenity that still calls itself the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

In each of the former Soviet republics there is a rich intermixing of peoples which goes back way before the 1917 revolution. National hatred in what was the USSR is the class politics of reaction. The proto-bourgeoisie
will use nationalism, discrimination, pogroms and ethnic wars to further its ambitions. In the potentially nuclear clash of Great Russian chauvinism, pan-Islamism and the myriad petty nationalisms, thousands, tens of thousands, perhaps millions will die.

If, thank heaven, this does not happen, the masses will still pay a high price for the break up of the USSR. Estonia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and the other former republics of the Soviet Union were never simply internal colonies, were never held in backward servitude by the Russian bear. In many ways these republics flowered because of Soviet power. Economically they invariably advanced more rapidly than Russia itself. Thus, in the midst of the nationalist lie that they were robbed by Moscow, we hear the nationalist complaint, certainly in the Baltics and Georgia, that backward uncouth Russia is not a fit partner for them. With the break up of what actually was once a solidly integrated and unified economy there will be terrible dislocation, ruination and collapse. However, even if things are somehow kept together and a unified economy is returned to capitalism smoothly and gently, bourgeois experts tell us that 40 million people would be thrown on to the dole. We can also say, looking at the thousands sleeping rough on the streets of the big cities of rich advanced capitalist countries like Britain and the USA, that along with private property will come massive homelessness.

Citizens of the USSR quite rightly complained about the poky size of their flats and houses. With capitalism will come houses, for some, that will put the luxury enjoyed by the nomenklatura into the shade. But the capitalist states that will emerge from what was the USSR will not be advanced. That is what leads us to believe that there will be homelessness of Brazilian, Peruvian or Mexican proportions.

Politically, too, the new capitalist states will owe more to South America than to Western Europe or the USA. Whatever Yeltsin and August 225

other bourgeois demagogues claim, the masses will not get German living standards, nor will they get Swedish social democracy. What they’ll get is the punctuated and corrupt democracy of the South American sort, hand in hand with death squads and the persecution of working class parties.

Have no doubts, the banning of Pravda, the ‘suspension’ of the
Communist Party and the persecution of communists has nothing to do with preventing another State Emergency Committee coup. It is a taste of things to come.

8.2.2. Effects on the world

Turning aside from Internal developments in the Soviet Union for the moment, let us deal with the effects counterrevolution in the USSR will have on the world. The world as a whole will face great dangers because of the August counterrevolution.

Anyone who thinks that China can stand up to imperialism because it has a quarter of the world’s population within its borders, is profoundly mistaken. Anyone who imagines that the Chinese bureaucracy has put down any possibility of counterrevolution through the so-called Tiananmen Square massacre is again profoundly mistaken. And what applies to China applies to the three other remaining socialist states - North Korea, Vietnam and above all Cuba.

In more honest moments the bourgeoisie admits that if there were free elections in Cuba tomorrow, Castro and the Communist Party would get some 70% or 80% of the vote. Yet, after the August counterrevolution, how does its propaganda machine present Cuba? It talks about the dictator, the monster in Havana. Castro is portrayed as the butcher of the Cuban masses, not the leader of their liberation. This is all part of the Imperialist game plan.

Will the US now simply watch from its Guantanamo naval base while matters run their course? Now that the Soviet nuclear umbrella has been removed, what is to stop the US organising another Bay of Pigs invasion force? After Grenada, Panama and Nicaragua, the Yankee Imperialists chillingly boast “three down, one to go”.

So the remaining socialist countries are in danger. But more than that, we will also say that war in general is more likely. We

always said that the danger of war never came from the existence of any socialist country, never came from the fact that people liberated themselves. It comes from imperialism.

Already, with the decline of Soviet power, the United States has baptised its fledgling new world order with the blood of 100,000 Iraqi conscripts. Its new world order has nothing to do with a new age of peace. It is a new age of barbarism, a new age of capitalist wars and capitalist destruction. That is what the collapse of the Soviet Union will mean.
Of course, we’re not talking about regional wars. It isn’t simply that the United States will attempt to re-impose the chains of neo-colonialism. The danger of a world war has increased. Again, for those who refuse to recognise this fundamental fact of the modern world, World War I and II owe nothing in their origins to the existence of the Soviet Union. Believe it or not, comrades, the Soviet Union didn’t even exist in 1914, but capitalist imperialism did. It was the cause of not one but two world wars in which tens of millions died. The existence of socialism was not.

With the capitulation of Moscow to imperialism, inter-imperialist contradictions have moved centre stage in world politics. The antagonisms between the relatively declining United States and the relatively rising Japan and Germany are, at the moment, tensions over trade. But these will become arguments over spheres of influence and struggles for survival. The ‘what do we need them for’ criticism of weapons we have today will give way to awesome new weapons of mass destruction and war tomorrow. Whatever Bush, Major et al say, the reason why there hasn’t been a World War III yet has everything to do with Soviet nuclear weapons, not US ones. There is abundant evidence that the US would have launched an all out assault on the Soviet Union in 1945 or 46 if it had had sufficient nuclear weapons available. It didn’t. Since then the imperialists have issued numerous nuclear blackmail threats and, with each year, new plans for extermination in the Soviet Union, dismembering it and “de-communising” it, were developed: Broiler, Sissler, Bushwhacker and SIOP-6, culminating in Reagan’s SDI Star Wars plans.

Well, the Soviet Union has now fallen - not in quite the way that most American generals had imagined, but even though it has not cost the life of a single GI, it has fallen. For the moment Russia and many of the other bourgeois republics which were the Soviet Union

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might possess masses of nuclear weapons. However, they are in crisis, destined to collapse economically, and no longer in a position to renew them or update them. Nor are they separately or collectively in any position to take a leading role in the world. In world political terms we see it return to pre-1914 status.
8.2.3. British left

Given all we’ve said, the left in Britain has played a thoroughly negative role. Just like trade unions, socialism, even bureaucratic socialism, should have been defended against the bosses *unconditionally*. Did the left in Britain do that? Well, as we know, it did not. Because the left in Britain is dominated by opportunism, it either morally dissociated itself from living socialism, like Pontius Pilate, or pathetically tried to sell itself to those who were taking socialism to ruin, like Judas Iscariot.

However, there are those opportunists who have learned something from history - but not much. In 1989 and 1990 the Trotskyites were cock-a-hoop. In Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria, Trotsky’s political revolution had come. This time, they said, it will be different; Soviet tanks won’t come in. Now, with Gorbachev’s Sinatra doctrine, the ‘political revolution’ decapitated in Hungary 1956 and Czechoslovakia 1968, will triumph. Well comrades, we have seen where their so-called political revolution has ended up. Their so-called great workers’ leader is in power in Poland, as is their NSF in Romania; the wall is down in Berlin and *capitalism* has been restored across the board.

They’ve learned something from this; but, as I said, not much. In August 1991 the Trotskyites at last changed their tune. No longer do we find them rejoicing over the supposed reality of political revolution in the headlines of their papers. Having cast my eye over the Trotskyite press in the last few days I cannot find a single claim that a political revolution of Leon Trotsky’s sort has begun. After all, they have the living reality of Eastern Europe to show them what is in store for the Soviet Union.

On that basis, given that more or less everyone recognises that Eastern Europe today is the mirror of the Soviet Union tomorrow, Trotskyite triumphalism has given way to a *conscious* Trotskyite attempt to paint counterrevolution in proletarian colours.

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That means what was stupid in Trotskyite politics - a naive belief that *all* spontaneous movements from below were political revolutions - has become, in 1991, contemptible. Now that they *know* that it is counterrevolution on the agenda, there is no excuse for their rotten politics. What goes for the Trotskyites goes also for the rest of the left in Britain. Let’s briefly cast our eye over the spectrum. *Revolutionary Communist*
Party: It says the Soviet Union is falling under the jackboot of imperialism. With the rise of Yeltsin It will join the Third World’, claims its version of Marxism Today. Here’s an organisation, I remind you, which was insisting - in its one major theoretical book - that the Soviet Union is incapable of self movement, that if any change came in the Soviet Union it was going to be from outside. It was other countries that were going to cause the Soviet Union to move, according to the RCP’s Frank Ferudi. This logic was applied to all the socialist countries. Thus, when it came to counterrevolution in Eastern Europe in 1989, the RCP couldn’t see what the “fuss” was about. This organisation was quite prepared to defend finance capital in Iraq, parade with placards bearing the portrait of Gadaffi and call for the victory of the Argentinian forces in the South Atlantic; but It could not bring itself to defend socialism in Eastern Europe - and cannot do so in the Soviet Union, even though it has discovered what all the fuss is about now!

Other left organisations are no better.

Militant Tendency: Militant reports that workers are celebrating on the streets of Moscow and Leningrad because of the failure of the State Emergency Committee coup. Workers in Britain will be celebrating too, it says. But so will the bosses, these ‘revolutionary reformists admit. At last It has been forced to allow reality to interfere with its mechanical “red 1 990s” world view, which only allows developments one way - forwards. Not so long ago it argued that history could not be rolled back, and because of that the very idea of capitalist restoration in Poland was a “chimera”! Now that It has learned from life what we always insisted on in theory. did that galvanise it into issuing calls to defend the USSR in this last moment of truth? No, blind hatred of Stalinism’ has led it to equate the leadership of the socialist system with the system itself. Militant Tendency therefore says, with Olympian detachment, that workers in the Soviet Union will have to experience capitalism before they can be won to defend socialism!

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Workers Revolutionary Party (Workers Press). This organisation, founded by Gerry Healy, cut its political teeth by branding Stalinists’ as the most counterrevolutionary force in the workers’ movement, selling itself to Libya and Iran, and fingering communists for Saddam Hussein’s secret police. This political method led the post Healy WRP to go into raptures over the counterrevolutions of 1989 and 1990. Not surprisingly then, just like Militant, the Yeltsinite counter-coup and the resistance to the State
Emergency Committee are given a proletarian gloss. Everything is positive because all the WRP wants to see is workers doing this and workers doing that - as if the world exists on the basis of a working class moving in a one dimensional revolutionary direction. Thus anti-Stalinism’ also leads these people into the swamp of reaction when it comes to defending living socialism.

The same applies to the Socialist Workers Party. Its paper lauds Yeltsin for his “courage”. This is a man who is going to drown socialism, a man who will turn against the workers. Just as we warned in all certainty that their Lech Walesa would. “Neither Washington nor Moscow” leads the SWP even more surely than the orthodox Trotskyites to portray capitalist counterrevolution as a proletarian movement. Well there might have been workers on the streets of Moscow and Leningrad protesting against the State Emergency Committee in 1991. But then there were workers fighting to smash the ‘Stalinist’ state in 1941 - they wore the uniform of Hitler’s army! The workers who responded to Yeltsin’s “courageous” general strike call were not acting as a class for itself but as a class against itself. The working class is not just a sociological concept. It has to be judged politically. When workers follow reactionary politics this does not lead us to call for “victory” to their “resistance”, as does Socialist Worker. Of course, we must explain why workers in the Soviet Union follow a reactionary path, but there can be no playing “Neither Washington nor Moscow” games when it comes to counterrevolution. What the SWP indulges in is typical of most of the left in Britain - workerism and a worship of abstract democracy. The State Emergency Committee might have stood against democracy and Yeltsin might say he stands for it. But democracy does not exist in isolation from the state; democracy is a form of the state and in the last analysis it is the state that is vital, not its form. Frankly, we prefer bureaucratic authoritarianism over a deformed proletarian state to a capitalist state.

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bourgeois democracy. Wallowing in the useless theory of state capitalism, the SWP cannot see any of this when it comes to the real world.

But there are others - the Judases. New Communist Party. Some comrades have told me that its position isn’t too bad. I consider such a judgment monstrous. Well, you know what its position was, don’t you? Eric Trevett, NCP general secretary, issued a statement welcoming the State Emergency Committee coup. He thought his day had come. He might have lost Czechoslovakia, he might have lost...
Ethiopia, but what were they compared to the Soviet Union? After being one of the few organisations around to have welcomed the coup, he obviously thought that it wouldn’t be long before he was heading off to Moscow and returning to London with money in large amounts. Then he could afford to employ the posse of full time staff he would like to become accustomed to in his Falcon Road HQ. Of course, none of this has anything to do with political principle. It is political prostitution. Years ago we told the NCP that this would get them nowhere. It certainly doesn’t serve the working class. Political prostitution will not advance the cause of the working class in Britain or the world one centimetre. Some might say we are being unfair. No comrades, we are not. I’ll give you an example of the NCP’s principle from 1989-90. Remember when Ceausescu fell, through a violent democratic counterrevolution. What did the NCP say? “Ceausescu? Nothing to do with us! We denounced him long ago; look, our hands are clean!” was its line. The same thing happened over China, too. When the democracy movement was crushed, the NCP said it was nothing to do with them. We’ve called China a capitalist country” they said! The NCP’s leaders wouldn’t know a political principle if it hit them in the face. That is why the NCP tried to sell itself to the butcher Saddam Hussein and denounced the communists in Iraq who opposed him! Why it continued to allow its paper, The New Worker to be used as a press agency by the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia after it announced that it had given up all pretence at having anything to do with socialism!

‘Official communists’. There will always be worse. Perhaps, though, the other ‘official communists’ - the Euros, Morning Star and its Communist Party of Britain - are the bottom of the barrel. These people threw their liberal hands up in horror at the coup and, in the name of legality, called for Gorbachev’s return.

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Let us engage in a little exercise. This will tell us the story of the coup and the counterrevolution and tell us all about ‘official communist’ politics. As I said in my introductory remarks, history has speeded up. When we polemicised with the NCP over Poland back in 1980-81, events had speeded up to such an extent that every headline In The New Worker - its weekly paper - was made to appear ridiculous. Events had always moved on by the time the readership received It, in spite of its editor’s weekly attempt to pin them down at the moment of going to press. When Solidarnosc was legalised, the
editor came out with a “No new unions, but changes in the old ones” headline!’ When Poland was in the midst of economic chaos, the editor of The New Worker wrote about Poland’s problems being exaggerated. He said there were no economic problems in Poland except problems of overheating - and he didn’t mean the central heating. He was talking about a “boom” economy!172

In the Soviet Union events moved even faster. Now, in order to see opportunism visibly made ridiculous, we have to turn to a daily. In the Morning Star we have it.

August 20: “Gorbachev ousted”, it screamed; “military on the streets of Moscow”, ran its headline. Inside it reported the statement of the Communist Party of Britain’s general secretary Mike Hicks. Obviously he hadn’t taken too much time off work to write it. He demanded Gorbachev’s reinstatement and denounced the coup as unconstitutional, as did the editorial. This is in spite of the editor owning up to the fact that under Gorbachev capitalism was coming back, socialism was in danger and the country was disintegrating. “He could have been criticised for all this”~ said the brave Tony Chater. The problem was, of course, that his Morning Star never did, at least up until August 20, ie the day after Gorbachev was seemingly overthrown. No, instead Chater’s paper had produced theoretical justification for perestroika and ‘market socialism’ and defended a British Road to Socialism programme that states that the “reform of socialism” in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has nothing to do with the restoration of capitalism!

August 21: “Bring back Gorbachev - Bush”; and, with neither attack nor demur, the entire front page was given over to the words of the world’s number one Imperialist. A communist paper? A paper of the broad left? A paper of pro-imperialism! That’s the Morning Star!

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Bring back Gorbachev, says Imperialism; and ‘official communism’ and imperialism get their way.

August 22: “Gorbachev returns to Moscow”; he’s back and “in full control”. Good, said the Morning Star a “peoples victory” said its editorial.

August 23: “A great day for Perestroika!” ran the top headline and along the lower half of the same front page it ran: Yeltsin goes for the communist Jugular”! What about the editorial? “Danger signals!” was its title. But wait a minute; what do we read? ... “As with the A-level results, students, teachers
and parents can take encouragement from the GCSE results this year.” That tells us more than a little about the complacency of ‘official communism’.

August 24: Headline: “Russian party suspended - Yeltsin hammers the communists.” And what does the editorial say this time? “Stop the witch hunt”. Apparently this “hammering” isn’t right. Not all the communists took part in the coup. Some are very nice and don’t deserve such treatment.

Thus within five days we have the whole story of the coup and counter-coup. We also have all any genuine communist needs to know about the Morning Star/CPB brand of ‘official communism’ and where it leads. Such opportunism is not confined to one organisation. Opportunism has its social roots in capitalism. Thus opportunism has a logic. It might begin with great parties making little ‘mistakes’, but it ends in the camp of the bourgeoisie. That is the lesson that is taught by August 1914, when the mass parties of the Second International went over to the bourgeoisie (with one major exception, the Bolsheviks). The same thing has happened in our period of history with ‘official communism’.

Surely, taking into account the counterrevolution in what was the USSR, the CPB will draw some far reaching programmatic conclusions, won’t it? It surely must. Just read its British Road to Socialism. Apparently why we can get socialism peacefully in Britain is because of the world balance of forces. In the 1960s this shifted decisively, irreversibly, to socialism. Because of the strength of socialism in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China, all we in Britain need do is to put a cross every five years on a ballot paper and go on regular mass demonstrations in order to give our Labour MP’s the extra-parliamentary support they need to legislate in the first stage of communism - well that was how the CPB would have it.

So we are looking forward with keen expectation to another

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statement from their Mike Hicks. I know he doesn’t venture into print often - he has, after all, better things to do. But the occasion demands it and I’m confident that as an honest man he won’t leave us disappointed. In a few days he will announce that all that stuff about a peaceful road to socialism has been junked. There has been a decisive shift in the world balance of forces against socialism, and as a result Mike Hicks will declare that his organisation is returning to the road to socialism advocated by Lenin -
illegality, violence and proletarian revolution.

Comrades, I trust you detected the slight hint of irony in my voice. The CPB will do no such thing. It will remain committed body and soul to its miserable reformist utopia.

These people only ever used the so-called shift in the world balance of forces as a convenient excuse. It was never an honest position. The peaceful parliamentary road was always reformism dressed up as revolution, and as such it represented an advanced state of ‘official communist’ opportunism. To see where that leads, one only needs look at the putrefying Euros.

The Euros have just one purpose. The bosses’ media can wheel out Nina Temple whenever necessary for the purposes of anti-communist propaganda. “I never had anything to do with Marxism-Leninism” she bleats, “it is far too dogmatic”, etc. Having thus performed, she is sent away with a pat on the head ... and maybe a cheque In the hand.

‘Official communism’ - NCP, CPB and Euro - is on the edge of liquidation, on the verge of extinction. Frankly, it deserves to collapse and will collapse. Already there are forces in the CPB, not least at the top, that are putting the knife into any suggestion of unity with the NCP.

In aid of this the Morning Star, for the first time that I can remember, published a letter from the general secretary of the NCP. Trevett’s little missive in support of the coup was published late -that was to be expected. It was published after Gorbachev got back in; but it was published ... underneath an accompanying picture of one of the three people killed in Moscow during the coup. “Was it worth it?” ran the caption. This is cynical pseudo humanitarianism worthy of The Sun or the Daily Mirror. More people must have been killed in London traffic accidents that day. But it had its desired effect. The Morning Star began reporting meetings being cancelled between the CPB and the NCP. Our concern isn’t to save the unity

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moves of these opportunists; we’ve always said that these would come to grief when put to the test. Our concern is to bury opportunism of all varieties.

8.2.4. Russian backwardness

There is one question above all that demands an answer from genuine communists. The question is obvious. Why has the Soviet Union reached this point? To answer, we must begin with basics.
What is socialism? Well, for us socialism is the dictatorship of the proletariat. It’s the first stage of communism. In a genuine sense, it begins with the highest that capitalism has achieved. Yet, as we all know, socialism in Russia did not begin with high but backward capitalism. That did not mean it was the result of subjective whim. It was not some madcap Bolshevik experiment at social grafting, as was claimed by Kautsky.

We can only understand the Russian revolution in the context of imperialism, its contradictions, and the dialectics of world revolution. Russia was a weak link in the capitalist world chain. On that basis Lenin planned to make revolution, a peculiar sort of revolution, though: a democratic revolution that would be a Russian version of the French revolution, a Russian version of Cromwell’s revolution. Peculiar though, in the sense that it would be led by the proletariat, not the bourgeoisie. But Lenin’s revolution was not confined to the tasks of bourgeois revolution. His democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry would carry the revolution through uninterruptedly to the tasks of socialism and act as a spark that would ignite the world revolution, beginning in Europe.

If this were done, politically advanced Russia would receive the economic assistance necessary to smooth its way to a successful transition to socialism. And as the world revolution proceeded, politically Russia would go from its vanguard to its rearguard.

In 1914 capitalist general crisis broke out. It took the form of bloody inter-imperialist world war that was answered from below, by the masses.

What was unique about Russia wasn’t its revolution, but the fact that its revolution alone survived. That was unique and unexpected. There were revolutions in Germany and in Hungary, and a possibility of revolutions in other European capitalist countries.

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However, because of communist inexperience and social democratic treachery, they were crushed. If the German revolution in particular had succeeded, we would be living in a very different world. The twilight of the 20th century would surely have seen capitalism finally eclipsed and a socialism well advanced along the road to communism. Unfortunately it was not to be. The bright hopes of socialism in Germany gave way to the nightmare of Nazi fascism and a second imperialist world war.

The consequences for Russia were tragic. The flame of revolution found itself cut off from the internationalist oxygen necessary if it was to flourish.
Under these unexpected conditions, communists found themselves skating on theoretical thin ice. They tended to react to events, rather than have a clear vision of the road ahead.

In spite of this, Lenin was very clear about the need to defend the Soviet Union. Whatever the consequences, it was necessary to defend this gain of the working class. Because or it, imperialism’s world domination had been broken. As a bastion of revolution it could be a beacon, a centre from which to organise the world revolution. It was with this in mind that Lenin approached the economic and political problems that built up and threatened to overwhelm the new regime.

Lenin was fully conscious that in order to survive, many painful temporary retreats within Russia would be necessary. Where leftists flinched, Lenin acted, War communism gave way to NEP semi-capitalism.

Socialism in Russia was a form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but it was dictatorship over an almost feudal level or capitalism. Lenin made clear that there would be negative political consequences. Socialism in Russia existed in a peasant sea: moreover, the working class had been decimated by interventionist and civil war. By the early 1920s the dictatorship hung by’ a thread the Communist Party and, crucially, its 4,700 strong old guard.

The danger was that the governing stratum in Soviet society could become bourgeoisified. While Lenin tried all sorts of measures to combat this process, the backward conditions of Russia often meant that things turned into their opposites. Attempts to combat bureaucracy produced bureaucratic monsters like Stalin’s Workers’ and Peasants Inspectorate. Every official wound up with a bureaucrat looking over their shoulder making sure they weren’t being bureaucratic!

Despite, within Lenin’s desperation we see a singleminded determination to hold back bureaucracy. combat the effects of Russia’s economic backwardness on its political vanguard. He was only partially successful. We should not have any illusions about the sort of proletarian state that existed under Lenin. It’s all very well talking about proletarian and soviet democracy. Yes, it existed, but only momentarily. What existed under Lenin from 1918 onwards was socialism showing its dictatorial side in every respect.

However, after Lenin’s premature death in 1924, the Party joined the state in falling victim to Russia’s economic backwardness. The Communist Party
degenerated. Under Lenin’s leadership it was the vanguard of world communism, had a clear sighted vision of the world revolution, subordinated its national revolution to the world revolution.

Stalin reversed the formula. Everyone knows his famous pamphlet _Foundations of Leninism_ and how in the first edition he quite rightly wrote that the Russian revolution was _dependent_ on the world revolution. Everyone also knows that for the second edition Stalin and his secretaries had scoured the works of Lenin with a fine toothed comb in order to find the quotes needed to justify national opportunism. Ripped out of context, Lenin was used as a justification for breaking Russia from the world revolution.

This was not a foolish political mistake. It reflected the _conservative_ interests of what had become a _bureaucratic caste_. As in all forms of opportunism, there was a logic. What began in 1924 as plucking the odd quote from Lenin out of context ended with CPSU general secretary Gorbachev and former politburo member Yeltsin backing counterrevolution in 1991.

Things might have been different if Lenin had lived. But then, as Krupskaya, Lenin’s wife, said in 1926, “if Ilyich was alive today they would have him in Jail”. Maybe or maybe not; what we want to do, though, is to make clear that there was nothing inevitable about what happened in the Soviet Union. It wasn’t predetermined. Communists should have resisted and could have won.173

Of course, they didn’t win. Socialism took a bureaucratic form, with which the leadership fully identified itself. Indeed, the horror and backwardness of Russia was presented as the realisation of heaven on earth. The Soviet Union, to quote Stalin in 1936, was capable, by its own unaided efforts, of building communism in one country, a state that would need neither money nor armed bodies of men - except, that is, a few border guards. Idealist nonsense of course, but that is what he said, and what the world communist movement loyally parroted.

Under socialism there are essentially three strategic choices: it can go forwards, try to stay still or go backwards. While temperament and subjective outlook play a role here, in essence the choices before socialism reflect material, objective Interests. Those who claimed they could build communism in an isolated USSR obviously had a hidden bureaucratic agenda. Because both going back to capitalism or moving forward to communism would necessitate their abolition, they decided on the politics of keeping things as they were while saying everything was changing.

In the long term this middle road is illusory. It’s like saying we can have

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matter without movement. Socialism, by definition, has to move, just like everything else. At the end of the day it has to move forward to communism or back to capitalism. For base sectional reasons, those who defend sectional privilege will, whatever their Intentions, ultimately turn on socialism itself. The formal nature of socialism in the USSR meant that the bureaucracy wasn’t the servant of society; it was the master -obviously an inherent danger in socialism, a theoretical question which we have to tackle, not only in the light of what has happened in the Soviet Union, but in the light of our very understanding of socialism.

Socialism is a transitional society, where the ruling class - the working class - starts out not yet able to rule directly, and in many senses retains the features of an oppressed class. As with the oppressed sex, only communism can bring it full liberation. That isn’t a call for passive acceptance. No, it’s a call for action. Mass participatory socialist democracy was never a luxury. It is a necessity for socialism, not only to combat bureaucracy through regular elections, recallability and putting an average skilled worker’s pay ceiling on the salaries of all elected officials and Party members carrying out state functions. Socialist democracy is necessary if socialism is to show its real potential and superiority over capitalism.

Without socialist democracy the socialist plan becomes a mockery. It becomes at best a military style plan with all the wastage, sullen resentment, alienation and quiet sabotage which that entails - countless orders issued from the comfort of the officers’ mess, but in the real world they remain half or totally unfulfilled. That was living socialism In Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

The bureaucratic plan could, in its youth, throw caution to the wind and, like a daring general, storm targets. This method industrialised the Soviet Union and gave it the wherewithal to expand its power throughout Eastern Europe. But in the age of science, high tech electronics, the microchip and automation, this form of socialism went from being a relative fetter on the development of the productive forces to an absolute one.

Bureaucratic socialism, which in the 1930s could double Soviet GNP in the midst of world capitalist slump, which in the 1940s could withstand the Barbarossa body blow and then go onto rip the guts out of the Nazi war machine and outstrip the growth rates of capitalism over the two decades that
followed, went into its own general crisis. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, growth slipped year by year. In the 1990s Soviet ‘growth’ became negative. This crisis is obviously associated with broad changes in the world economy. Nevertheless it cannot be emphasised too strongly that what has happened in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is the result of bureaucratic socialism’s particular laws and self-movement.

Being a crisis of a bureaucratic form of socialism, this crisis was also a crisis of the bureaucracy. Either the working class had to organise under the leadership of genuine communists, and through a real political revolution turn this master of society into its servant, or the bureaucracy would attempt to save itself by turning to capitalism.

Ideological weakness among the communists, the masses association of communism with the bureaucracy in the socialist countries, the general passivity of the working class, in the capitalist countries, the continued world hegemony of capitalism, meant that history was flowing against us. Instead of political revolution, living socialism was swept away by mainly peaceful democratic counterrevolution - yes, in which sections of the bureaucracy took a leading role, hoping to transform themselves into capitalists.

The crisis of bureaucratic socialism was comprehensive. If there had only been a crisis below, the masters of society could have sent the tanks in; that is what happened in 1956 and 1968. Tony Chater, the editor of the Morning Star - whom the ignorant bourgeois media dubs a tankie’ - says tanks don’t solve anything. Well,

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that’s not true. Under certain circumstances tanks do solve things. Ask Stalin. He solved the problem of German invasion with tanks. However, you can only keep the masses passive with tanks if, after you have sent them onto the streets, you give the population steadily increasing living standards. Yes, that might have been a crude bureaucratic way to handle problems, but as long as bureaucratic socialism was only a relative fetter, it could do it. It did in Hungary after 1956 and in Czechoslovakia after 1968. Even in Poland, the chronically crisis-ridden regime was able to give the masses more money and sausages until the mid 1970s. With the general crisis of socialism there were no longer such possibilities. Jaruzelski’s December 1981 coup couldn’t offer the working class anything positive. All it could offer them was soaring price rises and harder work. The same applied in the other socialist countries, and it was this that made those
regimes untenable. Bureaucratic socialism’s point of general crisis had arrived. The working class bureaucracy recognised that its days were over. It could no longer justify itself in the name of society, it stopped believing in itself; a leading section began looking for sectional salvation in a return to capitalism.

8.2.5. Bureaucratic counterrevolution

The bureaucracy attempted to carry out a slow, controlled transition to capitalism, a non-risk transition that was bound to be more than risky; it was in fact bound to be suicidal. The general crisis of bureaucratic socialism means that palace coups turn into social counterrevolutions. In order finally to lay to rest all the Trotskyite nonsense about counterrevolution being political revolution and the bourgeois hype about a peoples’ revolt for capitalism, it’s worth noting the way socialism first began to unravel.

The Czechoslovak velvet revolution’ was triggered by the death of a student, killed at the hands of the riot police. In front of well placed press and TV cameras his lifeless limp body was covered with a standard issue blanket before being removed by an unmarked ambulance. The truth was, though, that this young man was never killed. He was never even injured. He was an agent of the Czech version of the KGB, the STB, planted in the opposition. The STB that staged his ‘death’ did so with Gorbachev’s full knowledge.

This ‘master politician’ believed that he could get rid of the ‘hardline’ Husak and his type and, with some extra-bureaucratic pressure, open the way for a Czech version of himself. Predictably, the whole thing backfired and developed its own unstoppable independent counterrevolutionary momentum.

A similar Gorbachev-inspired palace coup wrecked socialism in Romania. Ceausescu was overthrown easily because he was deeply despised by the mass of the population; but it was done by an army, working to a plan which Gorbachev knew all about and approved.

As in Czechoslovakia and Romania, across Eastern Europe similar attempts at Gorbachevite plastic surgery ended in the death of the socialist patient. Being head to toe a monochrome functionary, Gorbachev understood everything about the politics of bureaucratic power - all very well in ‘normal’ grey times - but nothing about the elemental politics of revolution, nor counterrevolution.

So let us turn to the nature of the August 19 coup. Stating the obvious, this
was a coup by a section of the bureaucracy. It was an attempt to save the regime, not socialism. As a coup by a socially doomed section of society, i.e., the bureaucracy, it was inevitably botched.

These people really could not face up to what they would have to do if they were to spike the forces of counterrevolution. They wanted to get rid of Gorbachev. But they imagined they could do it in the same way that Brezhnev, Kosygin and Podgorny got rid of Krushchev in October 1964. They imagined that all they needed to do was get a vote on the Central Committee, then it would all be plain sailing. Pathetic, absolutely pathetic.

Not surprisingly, these epigones of Brezhnev made a complete hash of their coup. The first law of the military art is decisiveness. When you strike, show no mercy. When you move, mean to win. Battles aren’t won by how many people are killed. They are won through terror. The last thing you want to do, therefore, is to let things drag out.

What did the State Emergency Committee do? They arrested Gorbachev in his isolated Crimean dacha - so far so good. They put tanks on the streets of Moscow, Leningrad, etc. But then they acted in the manner of the Grand Old Duke of York - they had the tanks tour around and around in a completely useless and demoralising fashion. The putschists did not even cut off the telephoned That’s August 241

the first thing any aspiring Third World’ dictator would do, but not the State Emergency Committee! Opposition papers continued to publish, reporters from Radio Liberty freely phoned out from the White House, the Russian parliament, which became a Versailles In the heart of Moscow ... Marx criticised the 1871 Paris Commune because it did not snuff out suburban Versailles.

We’re not giving advice to the conservative bureaucracy; we’re merely observing their abject failure in a purely technical sense and drawing political conclusions. Because this sub-caste did not believe in Itself, it botched things militarily ... and it also botched things politically.

Who would go to a population fearful that, with perestroika, capitalism is going to be restored - that millions, tens of millions, are going to be unemployed, hyper—-inflation will roar and the economy will collapse - and say that we’ve ousted the Initiator of this policy, but we are going to carry out the very same programme? Only a fool ... no, only the historically exhausted.
The masses were thus politically handed over to counterrevolution. If there is going to be inflation and unemployment, the masses reasoned, at least we want to be able to protest, at least we will be able to shout against it. That’s what Yeltsin was promising: real perestroika, but sweetened with glasnost. The State Emergency Committee was promising perestroika without glasnost.

No wonder their coup attempt failed. It was not, as the NCP’s Eric Trevett argued in his pathetic letter to the Morning Star, a coup attempt by genuine Marxist-Leninists. It wasn’t a coup attempt by people who wanted to restore the Soviet Union to socialism. The Emergency Committee promised to “support private enterprise”, fulfil Gorbachev’s treacherous deals with imperialism and did not even mention “socialism” let alone “Marxism-Leninism”. It was a desperate and doomed attempt to save the old bureaucratic regime - doomed because it could not mobilise any social base or produce any positive political programme.

Should we have designated the coup leaders, the eight man State Emergency Committee, the main counterrevolutionary force in the Soviet Union during its short reign? No, that would have been a mistake. Despite the ban on strikes and political activity, despite the tanks and the suspension of glasnost, it was quite clear that the main counterrevolutionary force remained Yeltsin and the proto-bourgeois forces around him. They were our main enemy. But does

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that mean that we should have given the coup leaders some sort of critical support? Again, we would say no. Even though they still presided over a socialist state, were attempting to salvage the regime, their actions, ‘programme’, etc, were purely sectional.

The August 19 coup presented a brief opportunity for Independent working class action against all factions of counterrevolution. That was the only thing positive in the coup. Unfortunately though, the effect of the coup was highly contradictory. Its attempt to slow down the pace of counterrevolution actually speeded it up. The window of last opportunity lasted 60 hours, where we needed at least six years.

8.2.6. Short reaction

Clearly reaction, not revolution, is the dominant feature of our day, but not
for long. In spite of the massive loss we have suffered with the collapse of the USSR - the world revolutionary centre - the period of reaction we are living through will, in historic terms, be brief. There are a number of reasons why we believe this to be the case.

Ironically, the August 19 coup itself pointed to the growing importance of democracy in advanced societies in general. We’ve already spoken about this in respect to socialist societies, but it also applies to capitalist societies. No one can run a sophisticated society on the basis of naked dictatorship and a hostile population. Argument, discussion, the flow of ideas, are socially necessary. Ask any scientist. However, this is not only a research question. It is a question that affects every sphere of life, not least the economy. That is why, in advanced capitalist countries, fascist counterrevolution needs a mass movement; and why, in our time, the Imperialist bourgeoisie has done everything to capture for itself the banner of democracy. While in the last analysis bourgeois rule relies on force, we would be very foolish to belittle the growing role of active consent.

This is a double edged sword, however. Capitalist democracy, even the most liberal and rational, is a facade. Who owns the means of production is always of far greater importance than any number of general elections or protest movements. Nevertheless democracy can be turned against those who imagine that it is their exclusive possession. The immediate or minimum programme of our reforged Communist Party will seek to push democracy within capitalism to its limits; we begin with a very simple demand, that workers must fight for what they need. Housing, work, a full life are, though, demands that even the most advanced capitalist countries can’t grant and certainly won’t guarantee. Any system that can’t guarantee such basic needs at this stage in human history deserves to go.

What makes us sure, though, that the present period of reaction will be shortlived, and that millions who identify with capitalism today will be fighting against it tomorrow, is that although bureaucratic socialism has collapsed, this coincides with capitalism’s drift towards a new general crisis. Yes, paradox abounds. Despite having vast new areas of the world suddenly opened up for capitalist exploitation, this very victory will expose its own self limitations and possibly speed up its momentum towards its own general crisis.
From the middle of the 19th century capitalism has managed to massively extend the time span between its periodic general crises. From every five years, the time span from boom to general crisis was stretched first to ten years and then, in our century to forty or fifty years. There is a price to pay. The crises are far more devastating, far more dangerous. Thus, where the comparatively sluggish industrial revolution produced tremors in the political system when every five years it went into crisis, the unprecedented great boom of the 1950s and 60s has laid in store the biggest socioeconomic explosion in the whole history of capitalism. As we know, capitalism is pregnant with crisis; its upturn oscillations are fleeting, speculative and unimpressive. Stagnation, decline and decay are more and more the dominant features. The crisis has been put off, plugged by an ever greater piling up of the credit system. In its turn, this only exacerbates the system’s contradictions and its need to resolve them through crisis. It can’t go on for ever. Sooner or later the whole edifice will blow.

With the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe suddenly falling into the imperialist sphere, the capitalist credit system will have to be taken to new, and even more unstable, heights. If an economic meltdown is to be avoided in these countries, huge amounts of credit will have to be conjured up. The resulting debt will dwarf anything we’ve seen in Latin America. But who’s going to pay for it? The USA is hardly awash with spare cash. It can’t organise a new Marshall Plan and the hundreds of billions of dollars needed by the former socialist states. The US is now the world’s biggest debtor.

What about Western Europe and the EC? Western Europe is in no position either. Its economic powerhouse, Germany, has got more than enough problems. Incorporating the former GDR and its relatively tiny 17 million population (and a few million others in Eastern Europe who’ve suddenly discovered they’ve got German blood coursing through their veins, thanks to a long forgotten grandparent).

What about Japan? We have been told that Japan is the economy of the 21st century. A joke. Japan is in mortal danger from the construction of fortress Europe. To avoid being squeezed out of the lucrative and vital EC market it is concentrating all its efforts on exporting capital as quickly as it can into Western Europe. That is why Japan, along with the United States, has been saying no massive loans, no massive credit, only ‘advice’ to the former socialist countries.
Japan fears for its own longterm survival. Its carefully engineered social stability has been purchased on the basis of over-exporting to Western Europe. A fortress Europe and perhaps now a Nafta fortress around the US would put paid to the Japanese miracle and bring the militant communist revolutionary tradition among its workers back to life.

So capitalism is not on the verge of a new golden age. What it offers humanity is a new age of horror, crisis and war.

As we’ve argued, the next capitalist general crisis will be unprecedented in its destructiveness. But more than that: as the history of the 20th century shows, capitalist crises now go hand in hand with war. Capitalism’s last general crisis began with World War I and ended with World War II. If capitalism is allowed to continue, a World War III is inevitable. That is the future capitalism holds for humanity.

8.2.7. Communist organisation

The idea that the Soviet Union could impose a permanent state of peaceful coexistence on capitalism is obviously no longer relevant. It was always wrong and, as can be seen by the counterrevolution, it played into the hands of the Imperialists. What was true of communist pacifism remains true of pacifism. This ideology must be ruthlessly exposed. The end of the Soviet Union does not mean that war is less likely. Quite the opposite. It really is a choice between communist civilisation and imperialist barbarism.

During this period of ‘official communist’ crisis, bureaucratic socialist collapse, capitalist reaction and drift towards a new general crisis, the need for communists to be organised, steadfast and prepared cannot be over emphasised. In Britain what that means is fighting to reforge the CPGB and accepting the discipline of the Provisional Central Committee.

Communists must be organised in a real communist organisation and prepared for combat at the shortest notice. One thing the counterrevolution in the Soviet Union should have taught, if it taught nothing else, is that when things change they change very quickly. So the fight for the Communist Party must not be put off until tomorrow. Communist discipline and building the Party begin in the here and now, because if we wait for the ‘ripe’
conditions of tomorrow it will be too late.
We can’t promise comrades an easy time. All we can promise is blood, sweat, toil, and tears - but it will be worth it. We have a communist vision of the future that is worth fighting for, worth dying for, worth living one’s life for. That is why, at a time when traitors all over the world are sneering, and cowards are flinching, we’ll keep the red flag flying.

Appendix I
Interview with R Yurukoglu, leading theorist of the Communist Party of Turkey, The Leninist No55, November 1 1987 (extract)

The Soviet Union has for a long time been in need of reorganisation and openness. How do you judge Gorbachev’s reforms? Are they a political revolution? Is he going too far, or not far enough? What does the Soviet Union need to strengthen itself?
What they criticise of the past, the Brezhnev years and so on, is good. It shows that, in spite of all the names they call us, what we were saying was correct. The criticism is good in this sense. Nevertheless the road they are on is still not the correct one.

It is definitely not a political revolution. It is definitely not democracy. It is definitely not involving the people in the running of the state and the economy. It is a fight in the bureaucracy. It is an expression of the bureaucracy turning into a technocracy. This is not democratisation. You cannot seriously expect democracy to result from an unchallenged ruling party allowing a secret vote on the Central Committee!

It is not a question of going too fast or too slow. It is again a question of
going in the wrong direction. What the Soviet Union needs is the following:

1. All the official and secret privileges of the Party and state must be abolished. The 27th Congress called for a widening of the differential between the wages of technicians and engineers and workers. Instead of that we say all top officials should be paid only the average of the skilled worker. This is very important in order to control the bureaucracy.

2. There must be a working week of only 35 hours.

3. There must be equal pay for equal work - women are still in

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practice paid less for the same work.

4. Male chauvinism is very widespread in the Soviet Union. This must be fought.

5. Instead of work collectives selecting the manager they must run the affairs of the workplace.

6. Piecework must be abolished.

7. The working class must have the right to strike.

8. When and if the interests of the state and the manager conflict with the working people, the trade unions must stand with the working people.

9. In educational institutions children of working class parents must have places according to their weight in society. Especially in higher educational institutions the children of the working class make up only a small percentage of students. The children of the bureaucracy get a higher education. So this bureaucracy becomes self perpetuating. This must change.

10. The one party system must be abolished. Plurality of parties must be allowed. Not only parties which will accept the leading role of the Communist Party and so on, but really independent parties. The opposition must have full facilities for meetings and propaganda.
11. Soviets must become the ultimate power in the land. There must be free and open elections to them. In this way the fusion of the state and the party can be abolished.
12. The concept of state secrets must be abolished.
13. Mental asylums and work camps must not be used for political ends. These measures would create socialist democracy as we understand it. This democracy with its freedom and the plurality of parties is not a bourgeois parliamentary system. It is replacing party dictatorship with an institutionalised proletarian dictatorship. It is the institutionalisation of the proletarian dictatorship.

What Gorbachev is doing is not a political revolution. But in the coming months and years all sorts of political activity to the right and left will appear in the Soviet Union. And there is every chance that the working class will utilise the situation to make a real political revolution in the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries. This will bring a renaissance in the world communist movement. A revolution in a relatively important country could really help developments in the Soviet Union.

How will a socialist Turkey avoid the political conservatism we have seen in so many socialist countries? Is a bureaucratic caste inevitable? Can it be controlled?
A true socialist democracy, the measures we advocate for the Soviet Union, would mean that the working class would have control over the bureaucracy. In capitalist society bureaucracy is the loyal servant of the ruling class. It is the capitalist class which has real power through the ownership and control of the means of production. This makes it easy to keep bureaucracy a loyal servant.

Under socialism it is more complex. The working class is not yet ready to rule totally and wholly - when it reaches the level that the state will disappear. The working class does not control the state, the means of production. The bureaucracy controls the state and the means of production. Only through socialist democracy and democratic initiative can the bureaucracy be made into a loyal servant.

Looking at the world communist movement today, how would you assess its future?
As communists we are totally optimistic about the future. Today has many, many similarities with the period of the collapse of the Second International.
In my personal opinion today we are living in the midst of the collapse of the
world communist movement.

This collapse has not come with a world war; that is why it is a prolonged,
disguised uneven and slow process. But the world communist movement is
in collapse! You cannot find any really revolutionary parties in that
movement.

We are optimistic, totally optimistic because yes, this movement
collapses, another movement rises and then yes, that one collapses. It does
not really matter. The world working class is here and fighting. As long as
the working class lives it will find its revolutionary answer.

As a final note I must say this collapse of the communist parties is the
collapse of opportunism, not the collapse or even crisis of communism. Marxismo-Leninismo still holds the key for human progress.

Appendix II: Defend the USSR

Statement of the Provisional Central Committee, Communist Party of Great
Britain, August 19 1991

The August 19 anti-Gorbachev coup came like a seismic shock to the whole
capitalist establishment - not least the stock market, which in London went
into a minus £15 billion free fall as soon as news flashed round the world that
its man was under house arrest in his Black Sea holiday dacha. In a single
electronic moment imperialist plans for getting hold of the Soviet Union’s
industrial and natural assets at bargain basement prices and hopes of a
smooth capitalist restoration were seemingly reduced to mere static.
Certainly the benign smile has been wiped from imperialist lips. In its place
is a plutonium tipped snarl. The representatives of the increasingly
antagonistic capitalist powers - Major, Kaifu, Mitterrand, Kohl and Bush -
united in mourning Gorbachev’s demise and issuing barely concealed
military threats to those who overthrew him.

We, in contrast, have no sympathy for the Soviet Union’s Nobel Prize
winning version of Alexander Dubcek. As an organisation which Intransigently stands against decadent capitalism in all its forms and guises, why should we do otherwise? Gorbachev’s perestroika had nothing to with strengthening socialism. Perestroika was a cover for the restoration of capitalism and Its introduction in the USSR paved the way for a worldwide period of reaction and capitalist triumphalism.

Gorbachev is a traitor - a traitor to the true interests of the Soviet Union and to the cause of the working class internationally.

Domestically his presidency took the Soviet Union to the brink of disintegration; the economy nosedived and mafia and bureaucratic capitalism stepped in to fill the vacuum. No wonder at home he was deeply unpopular!

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Abroad, in an effort to ingratiate himself with imperialism Gorbachev cynically put the knife into the back of socialism in Eastern Europe, ran down aid to revolutionary Cuba and lent support to the US-led 100,000 slaughter in the Gulf. No wonder with the imperialists he was ever popular!

The road to counterrevolution in the USSR will not after all be paved with Gorbachevite good intentions. The State Emergency Committee has seen to that. For communists, for all genuine partisans of the working class, anything that, even momentarily, stays the hand of counterrevolution is good! It gives us room for manoeuvre, room for independent action.

That is why the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB refuses to join the ‘official communist’ rumps, Kinnockites and Trotskyites in the bourgeois orchestrated chorus attacking the State Emergency Committee. We will unconditionally oppose all financial, diplomatic and military sanctions against the USSR.

But that is only half the story.

Marxism demands an all round analysis. What that concretely means as regards the USSR today is straightforward. Unconditional defence of the
USSR more than ever necessitates intransigent criticism of its leadership. The takeover by the State Emergency Committee relied on the army and the KGB, not the masses. This “defence of socialism” is in the spirit of Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968 and Poland 1981. It is, in other words, classically bureaucratic, sectional and highly contradictory. By definition therefore it is not motivated by, nor capable of ushering in the socialist democracy which is vital if socialism in the USSR is really to be defended and advanced.

Paradoxically the State Emergency Committee takeover could mean that the restoration of capitalism in the USSR, while delayed, will at the end of the day be facilitated.

In typical bureaucratic fashion the State Emergency Committee says it has not overthrown Gorbachev. This apparently is a real doctor’s coup. Gorbachev, it claims, stepped down for reasons of health. An old fashioned story and, in plain old-fashioned language, a lie, Gorbachev has been Dubceked.

But clearly the State Emergency Committee needs its article 127 (paragraph 7) legalistic excuses for a “state of emergency regime more than it needs truth.

This is no small matter. It is pivotal. Neither lying nor legalism are the chosen method of genuine communists. Such an approach is, though, the alpha and omega for the conservative section of a bureaucracy which has grown fat on bureaucratic socialism and the so-called nomenkiatura system, a caste which as a result of its parasitic social position relies on a false ideology, ie, prostituted Marxism-Leninism.

It has to be emphasised that the State Emergency Committee coup is of far more significance and far more risky than the ousting of Nikita Krushchev in October 1964. That was a palace coup par excellence - no tanks, no arrests, no counter-demonstrations, no counter-tanks. Then the Soviet Union was a bureaucratic monolith.

That monolith has long since shattered and what now remains faces, in the no doubt sincere words of the State Emergency Committee, a profound and comprehensive crisis, political, ethnic and civil strife, chaos and anarchy that threatens the lives and security of the Soviet Union’s citizens and its sovereignty, territorial integrity and freedom and independence”. That is why a politburo vote was not enough this time, why the KGB and soldiers were needed. But does that mean socialism is now, at last, safe?

A couple of months ago, in a keynote article, our organisation repeated its considered opinion that the conservatives in the USSR “are not against the

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restoration of capitalism, only its disruptive effects ... the conservatives want
to carefully control and manage the restoration of capitalism”. Unfortunately
we see no reason to reverse this judgement. Revealingly, on the day he took
over from Gorbachev, ‘loyal’ deputy, Gennady Yanayev, insisted that both
he and the State Emergency Committee remain committed to perestroika and
all Gorbachev’s unequal arms deals with the USA.

True, the State Emergency Committee has struck a blow against the most
counterrevolutionary and most reactionary trends in the Soviet Union. But it
is a contradictory blow!

The State Emergency Committee coup should not lead us to imagine that
the danger of counterrevolution no longer exists. It does.

Not only from without in the form of imperialism, not only from within in
the form of the temporarily weakened nationalists, Pamyats and bourgeois
democrats. The danger continues from above in the form of the State
Emergency Committee itself and from below in the form of the mass of the
population!

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They have been alienated by the failure of bureaucratic socialism and
perestroika. Now they have been further alienated by the anti-democratic
measures enacted in the wake of Gorbachev’s sudden “inability to perform
the duties of federal president”.

Although the State Emergency Committee has decreed that prices for certain
basic goods be reduced, this is clearly only a propaganda gesture. The
economic problems in the USSR are, by its own new leadership’s own
admission, of crisis proportions and organic.

Reducing prices of goods that are not on the shelves is not going to satisfy
anyone. Nor will censorship and placing a ban on all political activity and
strike action.

Such measures can only further the marginalisation and disintegration of
the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and broaden the social basis of
democratic counterrevolution.

The State Emergency Committee has no programme apart from ‘law and
order’. What is needed is a programme of political revolution, a return to the
world revolutionary line of Lenin, Sverdlov and Dzerzhinsky.

Ousting Gorbachev is not enough to stop the slide towards the
counterrevolutionary abyss.

Indeed, in discarding all democratic pretensions and legitimacy, in
bringing the army and KGB to the fore, the State Emergency Committee has enhanced the standing of the main counterrevolutionary personality, Boris Yeltsin - in a sickening parody of Lenin at the Finland station this CPSU renegade denounced the State Emergency Committee from on top of an armoured car. This scum has now in effect called for a counterrevolutionary civil war.

Clearly the closest parallel from the recent past is Poland 1981. There are important lessons here. Jaruzelski’s Military Council for National Salvation was, unlike Hungary 1956 and Czechoslovakia 1968, an act from within.

It put off the counterrevolution, but contradictorily it also made it easier when it came.

Not surprisingly Jaruzelski could do nothing to overcome the chronic economic crisis of Poland, produce a new communist politics nor end the alienation of the masses. In fact the masses were thrown into the arms of Solidarnosc while the Polish United Workers Party was reduced to total impotence. The same danger exists in the USSR.

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In light of this lesson, communists in the USSR must operate independently from the State Emergency Committee. They must struggle to remove it and the thick layer of bureaucrats and revisionists who now dominate their party, the CPSU.

Communists of the USSR, no matter what restrictions have been placed on you, fight to win the hearts and minds of the masses in order to begin a real defence of socialism.

It is either that or certain counterrevolution!
In Britain one by-product of the State Emergency Committee takeover will undoubtedly be the shattering of what remains of ‘official communism’. That at least is no bad thing.

The Euro organisation, which is itching to rename itself the Democratic Left, will find in the anti-Gorbachev coup the excuse it has been waiting for.

The Euros’ November congress will see them at last complete their drawn out transformation into fringe bourgeois politics. The Morning Star’s Communist Party of Britain will in contrast be torn apart, as will the New Communist Party of the ‘mealy mouthed’ Eric Trevett. The remaining non-party communists will be scattered to the four winds.

Such developments are as historically minor as they are inevitable.

What matters at the end of the day is that no genuine communist loses faith, loses willingness to fight for communism, loses determination to unite scientific theory with revolutionary practice.
That can only be done if all communist forces rally immediately to the bright unsullied banner of the Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB. Our organisation represents all the glorious hopes of the past, but above all the certainty of the future. Our organisation will not be thrown into crisis by the State Emergency Committee coup, nor will it buckle under the weight of the reactionary propaganda floodtide that will follow it. Our Communist Party will remain strong, remain committed to the world revolution, remain communist.

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References

Preface


Chapter Two

6. Quote from Harry Pollitt, Daily Worker June 16 1938.
10. Remember this was in the early 1980s. Since the mid-1950s Stalin was officially turned into a non-person in the Soviet Union. His books were not sold and not available in libraries - unless, that is, one was a trusted Party member.
11. Gorbachev’s version of the CPSU programme is no different. This is what it says about the Stalin period: “Relying on the enthusiasm of the masses, repulsing the attacks by right-wing and leftist opportunists, and strengthening its ideological, political and organisational unity, the Party undeviatingly pursued the Leninist general line aimed at building socialism” (Programme of the CPSU, 1986, p9).
12. The New Communist Party was formed in July 1977, when Sid French led 700 of his supporters out of the ‘official’ Communist Party, three months before the congress that was to debate the Party’s programme. Today, under Eric Trevett, it limps on with some 200 overwhelmingly aged members.
13. Straight Left purports to be a broad labour movement publication. In reality it is a front for the Fergus Nicholson faction, which operated as an ‘official communist’ Militant Tendency within the Euro organisation for some two decades.
14. Typical was ~Socialist democracy - some problems’, the broad title of the debate initiated by John Gollan in the mid-1970s. The contributions by the centrist chiefs, Sid French and Fergus Nicholson, side-stepped the whole issue (Marxism Today December 1976).
20. Bernstein was the original Eurocommunist. In a series of articles in Kautsky’s Die Neue Zeit from November 1896 to the summer of 1899 and in his book Evolutionary Socialism, he attacked the fundamentals of Marxism across the board. He dismissed the theory of capitalist general crisis, the idea of capital becoming ever more concentrated and centralised, and the necessity for revolution. Socialism, Bernstein argued, will come through parliament and “the conquest of democracy
21. The great respect in which Kautsky was held meant his buckling in the face of practice made him *more dangerous* than the open traitors. In the words of Lenin, “Kautsky now is *more harmful than anyone else* ... The opportunists are an obvious evil. The German ‘Centre’ headed by Kautsky is a concealed evil, diplomatically coloured over, contaminating the mind and the conscience of the workers, and more dangerous than anything else” (VI Lenin CWVol 21, 1977, p94).

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33. VI Lenin CWVol 33, 1977, p288.
35. Ibid Vol 33, p495.
40. For a useful study of Lenin’s final years, see Moshe Lewin *Lenin’s Lost Struggle*, 1975.
46. Soviet centrism was of a peculiar sort until middle age, when it then gave birth to a whole series of Asian and East European children. After this the power of the Soviet state, its domination of the world communist movement and its prestige, meant that Soviet centrism was generalised - albeit reworked to fit other national frames. It became the main form of centrism in the 20th century, and continues in orphan form in China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba.

47. The Workers’ Opposition was formed prior to the Party’s 10th Congress and banned after it. Based mainly in the trade union movement, the Workers’ Opposition concentrated its critique on the growth of party and state bureaucracy and the lack of popular democracy at the base of society, above all in the factories and workplaces. Lack of proletarian self activity was creating the possibility that “the Party will remain by itself” without the “foundation of the dictatorship”. While many Party members were inclined to dismiss these warnings, Zinoviev and Lenin accepted many of the criticisms. Measures were adopted at the 10th Congress that were meant to curb bureaucracy. The congress, however, did not go along with the utopian and syndicalistic programme of the Workers’ Opposition, which proposed to abolish money and wages and replace the “Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev and Bukharin” Soviet government with a trade union based All-Russian Congress of Producers (see Alexandra Kollontal *Selected Writings*, 1978, pp 159-99).

50. Ibid p83.
51. L. Trotsky *Our Tasks 1904*, no date, pp127,128.
55. Ibid p42.
57. Ibid Vol 11, p235.
58. Ibid Vol 12, p203.
61. Ibid p208.
62. The first major theorist to dub the Soviet Republic “state capitalist” was Karl Kautsky. His *Terrorism and Communism* maintained that the “pre-Marxist” Bolsheviks had acted undemocratically and prematurely in October 1917. Through their attempt to abolish capitalism when conditions were not ripe”, Kautsky considered that they were compelled, despite themselves, to preside over the

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resurrection” of a “more oppressive and harrowing” form of capitalism. This “state capitalism” constitutes “the most oppressive of all despotisms that Russia has ever had to suffer ... the replacement of democracy by the arbitrary rule of the workers’ councils which was used to expropriate the expropriators has now resulted in the arbitrary rule of the new bureaucracy” (K Kautsky *Selected political writings*, 1983, p146). The previously “orthodox” Trotskyite Cliff only came to his state capitalist theory in 1947. His, *The class nature of the Peoples’ Democracies* in 1950 marked his break from the Trotskyite International (T Cliff *Neither Washington nor Moscow*, 1982, pp40-85). This theory immediately led Cliff and his group to take a neutral position in the US-led 1950-53 war in Korea.

63. T Cliff *State capitalism in Russia*, 1974, p170,
64. Consciously or unconsciously, the weight of the rank and file in the trade unions was also reduced. In 1932 84.9% of the delegates at the All-Union Congress of Trade Unions were workers. By the next congress in 1949 this figure had slumped to 23.5%.
65. New regulations were enforced in 1932. They were meant to prevent workers moving to other parts of the country without permission. An internal passport (more restrictive than under the Tsar) was introduced, and later Labour Books were used to stop workers easily changing their Jobs.
66. Absenteeism, even for one day, without permission or good’ reason, became a sacking offence. In 1938 lateness, even extended meal breaks, also became reasons for dismissal (no great shakes when there
was an endemic labour shortage).

67. Figures from T Cliff *State capitalism in Russia*, 1974, pp30-34.


69. T Cliff quotes “official estimates for 1941” which put the value of gross output of enterprises controlled by the NKVD - now the KGB - at 1,969 million roubles, an increase of 500 times on the figure for 1926-7.

70. Abortion was only made legal again in 1955.

71. RW Davies *The Industrialisation of Soviet Russia*, Vol 1, 1980, p330

72. This was the argument of the Menshevik Boris Nicolaevsky, whose book *Letters of an Old Bolshevik* was purported to be a report on his conversations with Bukharin - they were brothers-in-law.


76. *Ibid* Vol 8, pp68, 70.

77. Lenin’s original suggestion was that the state should be titled the Union of Soviet Republics of Europe and Asia.

78. Stalin’s thesis that the class struggle in the USSR would intensify as socialism grew stronger was ‘theoretically’ aimed at foreigners and their agents in the USSR, not any component classes or strata.

79. JV Stalin *Leninism*, 1940, p662.

80. The Euros have made a great deal of fuss about how abundance is ecologically unsustainable. They claim that Marx never used the term. In fact in his *Critique of the Got ha Programme* he talks of how with communism cooperative wealth” will “flow more abundantly” -something Marx defined not in a narrow quantitative fashion but in terms of leaving behind “bourgeois right”, whereby goods are distributed according to work done, and realising a situation where society can “inscribe on its banners: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!”
83. The first call to revise the CPSU’s 1919 2nd Programme was made in 1930, when Molotov suggested that it be reformulated along the lines of Comintern’s programme. The 18th Congress, in 1939, elected a commission headed by Stalin to prepare a new draft, as did the 19th Congress in 1952. It was only in June 1961, under Krushchev, that a new draft finally appeared.

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92. JV Stalin *Leninism*, 1940, p662.

Chapter Three.

98. R Yurukoglu *Socialism will win*, 1980, p27.

Chapter Four

100. Yuri Churbanov, son-in-law of Brezhnev, was charged with taking bribes to the tune of 650,000 roubles (about £650,000). He was only the tip of the iceberg - corruption among the bureaucracy was endemic.

101. The grinding material and spiritual poverty of Tsarism, its lack of social vision and purpose, produced a massive alcohol problem which, through taxes, was very helpful for state revenues. At the beginning of World War I the sale of vodka was banned and the “productivity of workers rose by 7% to 10% immediately” (Zhores Medvedev Gorbachev, 1988, p186). However, where Lenin’s government never legalised the sale of vodka, Stalin reintroduced it, in his own words “as a necessary evil” in order to “obtain the necessary working capital for developing our industry” (JV Stalin Works, 1955, Vol 10, p237?). The positive results could only be short term. In direct correlation to bureaucratic socialist’s loss of dynamism, alcohol consumption steadily grew. By the mid-1980s sales of it reached 15% of the total trade turnover” (Zhores Medvedev Gorbachev, 1988, p187). Gorbachev enacted draconian measures which cut alcohol production by 30% to 35% they also gave birth to widespread social discontent, a million illegal stills and a whole new black market selling the output.


103. The danger of democratic counterrevolution was something Marx and Engels located during the Europe-wide insurrections of 1848. In 1862, Engels explicitly used the term “democratic counterrevolution” in reference to the movement for a “rotten peace” in the US Civil War (Engels to Marx, November 5 1862, Marx and Engels Selected Correspondence, 1965, p135). Later, with great foresight, Engels stated that “pure democracy” would be the “final sheet anchor of the whole bourgeois and even feudal economy” (Engels to A Bebel, December 11 1884, Ibid p381).

104. The Leninist No27 February 1986.

105. Krushchev’s programme, voted through unanimously at the 1961 22nd Congress of the CPSU, was obviously an embarrassment by the mid-1960s. By the 1970s, however, it had become a crime. At the “beginning of the 1970s” a group of workers from Sverdlosk “were arrested for having distributed copies of the then current Party Programme” (Stephen White Soviet communism programme and rules, 1989, p30).

106. The Leninist No27 February 1986.

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107. Ibid.
108. The CCG went on to call itself the Communist Party of Britain in April 1988.
109. The Morning Star had no such problems. “Its decisions will build on the breathtaking achievements of the Soviet people since the revolution of 1917, and point the way forward to radical changes of crucial importance for the whole of humanity” (June 28 1988).

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111. Ibid.
113. Financial Times July 111989.
115. Socialist Worker February 3 1990. As we learned later, Sotsprof - Socialist Trade Union Association - was linked with Boris Kagarlitsky’s Socialist Party, which together only had a membership counted in the hundreds. Kagarlistky is a left social democrat: “In my view” he writes In his Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize winning book The thinking reed, “Martov and Allende were right, not Lenin.” Thus it is hardly a surprise that in The dialectic of change he argued against attempts to smash the state machine, because “in the last analysis ‘opportunists’ have caused less damage than ‘extremists’.” Although the SWP placed great faith in Sotsprof back then, it quickly dropped it. In an attempt to distance itself, the SWP expressed disappointment with Kagarlitsky’s role in the August 1991 counterrevolution. He failed to make “any organised intervention” ... “alongside Yeltsin but without supporting Yeltsin”, even though he thinks “that the market plus some form of participatory democracy will be an advance on what he sees in Russia’s existing Asiatic despotism” (Socialist Review, September 1991).

Chapter Five
117. Our emphasis, VI Lenin *CW Vol* 22, p347.
120. M Gorbachev *Perestroika*, 1988, p172.
122. VI Lenin *CW Vol* 24, 1977, p400.
123. M Gorbachev *Perestroika*, 1988, p 140.
125. *Ibid* ppl41, 146.
126. *Ibid* p143.
127. *Ibid* p147.

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129. *Ibid* p177.
131. Which have now been made available for public inspection through the Freedom of Information Act - see the marvellous little book by Michio Kaku and Daniel Axelrod, *To win a nuclear war: the Pentagon’s secret war plans*, 1987.
135. *Ibid*.
136. M Gorbachev *Perestroika*, 1988, p143
146. See *Socialist Worker Review* January 1990 on these and other Eastern European petty bourgeois left groups.
152. 7 Days January 13 1990.
157. The CIA now admits that throughout the Cold War it systematically exaggerated the military strength and threat of the Soviet Union.
158. King Ethelred the Unready, who ruled England until 1013, vainly tried to prevent a Danish takeover by handing over a heavy tribute; to finance it the masses were forced to pay a special tax, Dane money or gelt.

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**Chapter Six**

159. 7 Days July 30 1988.

**Chapter Seven**

161. *Ibid*.
162. Quotes from Andy Brooks, NCP International Secretary.
163. *Militant* is typical. Attacking Guardian journalist Hugo Young for his claim that “not a single seer foresaw on January 1 1989” the “collapse of Stalinism”, editor Peter Taaffe claims that Trotsky had done just that, only “more than a half century ago”. Trotsky “predicted a mass movement to overthrow the bureaucratic usurpers controlling the state and replacing them with workers’ democracy” (January 19 1990). We do not expect a bunkered bourgeois Journalist like Hugo Young to read *The Leninist*, but we should expect Taaffe to see that it was not the workers who came to control the states in Eastern Europe, but a neo-bourgeoisie.
164. Actually although the RCPs *The Next Step* argued that the restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe “resembles a palace coup or a purge not a social revolution” (January 12 1990) this did not stop the editor of its more prestigious *Living Marxism* declaring himself “very pleased to see the collapse of the ‘communist’ regimes in the east”
165. In *The Soviet Union demystified* Frank Ferudi argued that the Soviet Union lacked “any internal impetus to develop”, that the “chronic weakness and instability of the capitalist world order provide what has become a permanent ‘breathing space’ for the Soviet Union” and that the “destiny of the Soviet Union will be largely decided by events in the international arena” (p250).

166. The Euros have now joined the anti-Castro crusade. Speaking on behalf of its Executive Committee at its September 1991 meeting, Euro hack Chris Myant, spoke of Cuba and Castro in terms indistinguishable from a Pentagon propagandist: “Cuba now faces its ‘Cambodian option’ as Castro and his colleagues try to batten down the economic hatches. His sneering at the drift and change in the Soviet Union now looks like what it always was, a silly attempt to delay the inevitable. Silly because the Cuban miracle, for all its elan, its hope and its sparkle could never have got off the ground had it not been for the massive and constant Soviet subsidy. The boast of a third world country that it had achieved first world infant mortality rates through its socialism was based on the backing of a supposedly developed country that had achieved third world infant mortality rates through its ‘socialism’” (*Changes* September 28 1991).

167. As a result even the sycophantic *Morning Star* began to distance itself from Gorbachev; after going along with everything Gorbachev said and justifying his restoration of the market its editor Tony Chater penned a mealy mouthed article questioning the existence of “universal human values” - the centre pin of Gorbachevite revisionist theory, (July 9-10 1991).

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168. The Euros lined up with Yeltsin in defending the ban on the Communist Party and dismissing the October revolution as “an historic error” (*Changes* September 28 1991). The Euros were far from alone. *Socialist Organiser*, a Labour entryist Trotskyoid sect, described Yeltsin’s counterrevolutionary Russian parliament, the
White House, as a “veritable revolutionary committee” and in the name of supporting a political revolution decided to support and cheer on the destruction of the CPSU” (Socialist Organiser October 3 1991).

169. The Financial Times reports that the people who “flocked immediately to Yeltsin’s banner” were what it calls the “middle class of the future”, the “biznismen and ko-operators” (Editorial, October 11 1991).

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170. Socialist Worker, which headlined the news” that communism has collapsed”. Itsself was later forced to admit that the pro-Yeltsin demonstrations were relatively small” and the number of workers who responded to Yeltsin’s strike call was “not massive (August 31 1991).

171. The New Worker September 5 1980
172. The New Worker August 19 1980
173. Though not according to the RCPs Living Marxism its editor reckons that only a fool could imagine that a Marxist movement would develop in opposition to states which committed crimes in the name of Marxism-Leninism (January 1990).

Appendix II

174. Changes. the then paper or the Euro organisation. reported that at the extended session of its Executive Committee over September 15-16 1991 the largest cause for concern was the Leninist press release supporting the coup issued in the name of the CPGB that was put out on the Press Association wire and one IRN bulletin before being stopped, and in some local papers” (September 28 1991).
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