

The fate of the Russian Revolution



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ORGANISER

The main enemy is at home

US threatens blitzkrieg: "suddenly, massively and decisively"

Troops out of the Gulf!



They now talk about peace, but still they continue to prepare for war. US Secretary of State Baker says publicly that if war comes it will be "sudden" and "annihilating" for Iraq.

They expect it to be annihilating for Americans too: 100,000 body bags have been shipped in with the American forces.

With the deadline ticking towards January 15 when the UN ultimatum to Iraq runs out, they are now giving Saddam Hussein the carrot-and-stick treatment.

They threaten annihilating war, and prepare for it, but then, having got UN endorsement for war, open negotiations with Iraq, backtracking on their declarations that there is nothing to talk about.

It is tempting to see the American about-face on talks with Iraq as a victory for the peace movement in the USA. So it is, on one level.

The spectre of a new Vietnam war has galvanised a large number of Americans to oppose Bush. The peace movement is now a force in the land, and a power in Congress

where the President's right to go to war without prior Congressional agreement is being challenged.

But the initiative lies not with the peace movement but with Bush and his friends. By negotiating Bush is trying to put the full responsibility for war on the Iraqis, to protect himself with the American electorate if things go badly wrong for the USA.

Talks with Iraq are not an alternative to war — they are part of the preparations for it.

There are 30,000 British soldiers in the Gulf now. But there is nothing in Britain to fuel the growth of a movement as it is fuelled in the US by the memory of Vietnam. Britain has had no recent Vietnam war.

The mid-November anti-war demonstration in London was a great step forward for the anti-war movement here. We have a long way to go before we have caught up with the Americans.

We must use the lull to build the anti-war movement.

Iraq out of Kuwait!

US and British troops out of the Gulf!

GATT talks break down:

The threat of a world trade war

Jack Cleary analyses the conflict between the EC and the USA.

For 40 years that part of the world loosely dominated by US capitalism, the main victor in World War 2, has been inching towards becoming one free market. Slowly, year after year, tariffs have been whittled away, tariff walls steadily if unevenly lowered.

That is what GATT is all about. There is, of course, a long way still to go to a free world market.

East Germany

More strikes on the way

By Bruce Robinson

Over 200,000 railway workers in what was East Germany struck last week bringing all passenger and freight-trains to a halt.

They demanded increases to bring their £500 a month wage up to 60% of western levels — at present they earn less than half.

The strike was also about demanding protection against sackings. The East German Reichsbahn — now under direct government ownership — is planning to sack nearly 10,000 workers over the next few years. An agreement protecting jobs against compulsory redundancies runs out in December and the strikers were trying to prevent redundancies once it expired.

Negotiations have begun again and it is unclear what their outcome will be. In the meantime passenger services have been restored but freight workers are still out.

Postal workers in the East are also threatening action on similar demands to the railworkers. A strike before Christmas appears likely.

In the West negotiations in the iron and steel industry

tion came from the USA which could, in the beginning, hope to dominate the free market by its great post-war economic strength — rather as Britain could in the mid-19th century. It broke up the old imperialist trade blocs.

But today a weakened USA is hard pressed by competitors such as Japan. Japan uses bureaucratic regulations to give itself a measure of tariff-style protection. There is a strong movement in the USA for the creation of a new tariff-clad USA.

Weak and declining bourgeoisies, and the US bourgeoisie is in that condition now, tend to seek refuge in tariffs and trade blocs. The US has just negotiated a free trade agreement with its northern neighbour Canada. It is trying for one

with Mexico. Thus you can see the beginnings, perhaps, of an emerging world of new trade blocs. The EC is such a bloc, and the opening up of Eastern Europe has greatly increased its scope.

The US bourgeoisie resist pressure for tariffs, because tariffs generate retaliatory tariffs, and would lead to a downward spiral into a trade war which would disrupt the world trade system on which post-war capitalist prosperity has been built.

The great importance of the current EC-US row (most of the other participants back the USA) at the GATT conference is that it may signal an inevitable drift towards a trade war between the US and the EC. The consequences would be incalculable. That is

why they have taken a break in the negotiations and will go back and try again for an agreement.

While GATT has, over decades, slowly pared away at world tariffs, West Europe has united economically and is now abolishing internal tariffs. EC agriculture is subsidised and protected through a Common Agricultural Policy, designed to keep the farmers producing at a profit even when their produce goes to construct butter and beef mountains and means unnecessarily high food prices.

American, Australian and other farmers resent competition on the world market from the subsidised farmers of the EC. The US is pushing hard for an end to these subsidies, demanding an

immediate 70% reduction. They have refused an EC offer to compromise at 30%, a tremendous concession from the Europeans. The tough-talking Americans say no. They say they will have things their own way — or else.

Perhaps encouraged by Bush's imperialist sabre-rattling, the Americans sound like they mean business in this.

This week negotiations broke down and were almost broken off. It is in both sides' interests to avoid that. They may not be able to.

If France and Germany and Ireland were to do what the US demand they would create tremendous social unrest at home. Thus the deadlock.

There must be a sizeable chance that they will not be able to break the deadlock when talks resume.



and Volkswagen may break down. Both the unions at IG Metall are demanding 10% wage rises and bringing forward the introduction of the 35 hour week.

The demands and concerns

of trade unionists in the two halves of Germany are very different, even though they now belong to the same unions. The unions should adopt a unifying campaign linking the fight for the 35

hour week to demands against unemployment in the East. Instead the DGB (German TUC) has offered to work 'constructively' with Kohl's new Christian Democrat government.

Notts county council backs down:

Strike threat saves homes

By Tim Cooper, Secretary, Notts NALGO

The lead taken by the largest trade union branch in Nottinghamshire — Nottinghamshire County NALGO, which has

nearly 6,000 members who work for the County Council — in voting for strike action near Christmas has helped convince the council to change its decision dramatically regarding the planned closures of 13 elderly people's homes.

After NALGO's vote for strike action on Thursday 29 November, NUPE quickly announced that they would be putting the same proposals to their members. This has led to a dramatic turn-around where the council are now saying that only three homes will be, after proper surveys and consultations, considered for closure.

Wandsworth: the classless borough

By Dion D'Silva, Wandsworth NALGO

Wandsworth Tories believe in a classless society — literally. They want to shut classrooms!

Up to four secondary schools are to close. However, they have been forced to backtrack on their proposal to close Chestnut Grove secondary school because of the

tremendous opposition of parents and teachers. As Eleanor Schooling, assistant secretary of NUT, said: "it shows we have got the power and we can win more."

Eleanor was speaking at a rally of public sector unions who were taking one-day strike action this week. NALGO, NUPE, NUT, NATFHE and GMB manual workers were all part of the joint action.

The scale of the cuts has meant the unions have no option but to fight together.

Islington council:

'If it moves, sack it; if it doesn't, sell it'

By Jo Thwaites

Islington Council, a one-time left-wing Labour council, now a sad broken shadow of its former self — is being streamlined for privatisation.

Management reorganisations have been carried out over the past two years, and have merged departments, and created yet another tier of senior management. Housing and Social Services are soon to be one department headed by a housing boss.

Architecture and Engineering are now one department under a Cleansing boss.

There are many official names for this process, but it all comes down to cuts.

Four Neighbourhood Offices are to be closed. Two Children's Day Centres are closing next month. Redundancies are being considered in the Architect's Department while the management is still handing work out to private consultants. Education Services are being cut by up to 20%.

Last month NALGO had a half-day strike against the proposed Neighbourhood Offices closures, and a ballot is being conducted this month on the next stage of industrial action to stop the cuts.

DSS strikers stand firm despite ballot setback

By Steve Hughes, Wallasey DSS

Last week we spent most of the time going around offices in the area, building for the ballot. The support looked very good, with no one speaking against the one-day strike called for 7 December.

The result of the ballot — 5,800 votes against striking, 3,100 in favour — was very disappointing. From what I can tell at the moment, the ballot was won across offices in England, but was overwhelmingly lost in Scotland: 26 voted against out of 30.

Now management can use the result against us.

I think we have to take time to think out a new strategy — but not consider returning to work.

• Despite this setback the DSS staffing crisis will continue and so will the need to launch an effective national fightback. NUCPS and CPSA activists should push for recall DSS section conferences to hammer out an effective national strategy.

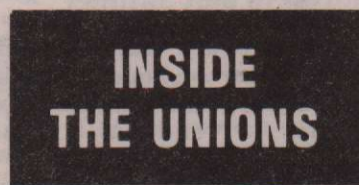
A year of slow, uneven recovery

At this time of year it is customary to look back over the preceding twelve months and draw out the lessons, the trends and the overall state of affairs as far as the class struggle is concerned. That's what I've been told to do, anyway.

The trouble is that there aren't any very obvious trends, common threads, etc., that I can put my finger on. 1990 has been characterised by a slow, uneven revival in industrial militancy and shop-floor self-confidence, set against a backdrop of deepening economic recession.

Significant victories have been won over pay and hours in the private sector (motors and engineering, especially) while workers in the public sector have lagged behind due to an unofficial government pay norm (presently 7%) and often unbelievably gutless union leaderships.

The contrast is best illustrated by the two biggest struggles of the year, the ambulance dispute and the Confed "35 hours" campaign. It seems a long while ago now, but you may remember that the ambulance workers achieved unprecedented levels of public support (80%-plus in the opinion polls) for their dispute over pay. What they didn't achieve was any significant improvement on the government's original offer, when the dispute was finally settled in March.



By Sleeper

This dispute is worth remembering because it was, probably, the first major industrial battle to be consciously organised along *Marxism Today* "post-Fordist" lines. All the emphasis was on PR, opinion polls, smooth presentation, etc. The union leaders understood that the ambulance workers did not possess the industrial muscle to win in a straightforward confrontation with the employers/government. But they did not draw the obvious conclusion — that solidarity action was the only way to achieve victory in that situation. That would have been too much like the old fashioned class solidarity and definitely

untrendily "Fordist". Result: Mr Roger Poole became a national TV star and the ambulance workers ended up with Sweet FA.

By way of contrast, the Confed's 35 hours campaign has been remarkably successful, despite the right-wing leadership of the main union involved (AEU) and the early blunder of Bill Jordan in offering the employers 37 hours on a plate. By September a third of a million engineering workers had won a cut of 2 hours, making 37 hours the "norm" in the industry.

Early victories at NEI Parsons, Rolls Royce and Smiths were followed up by victories at Ferranti, Lucas Aerospace, and Lucas Automotive. And the later settlements have usually involved far fewer "strings" than the early deals. In the last month, the AEU general secretary Gavin Laird has effectively undermined the campaign by suggesting that it will now be run down due to the recession. But even so, 37 hours is now the "norm" in engineering and the movement for shorter hours is probably unstoppable.

Over pay it has been a similar story, with some very significant victories above the rate of inflation (notably Vauxhall, Austin-Rover and Ford — none of which involved industrial action) while other sections have languished well behind.

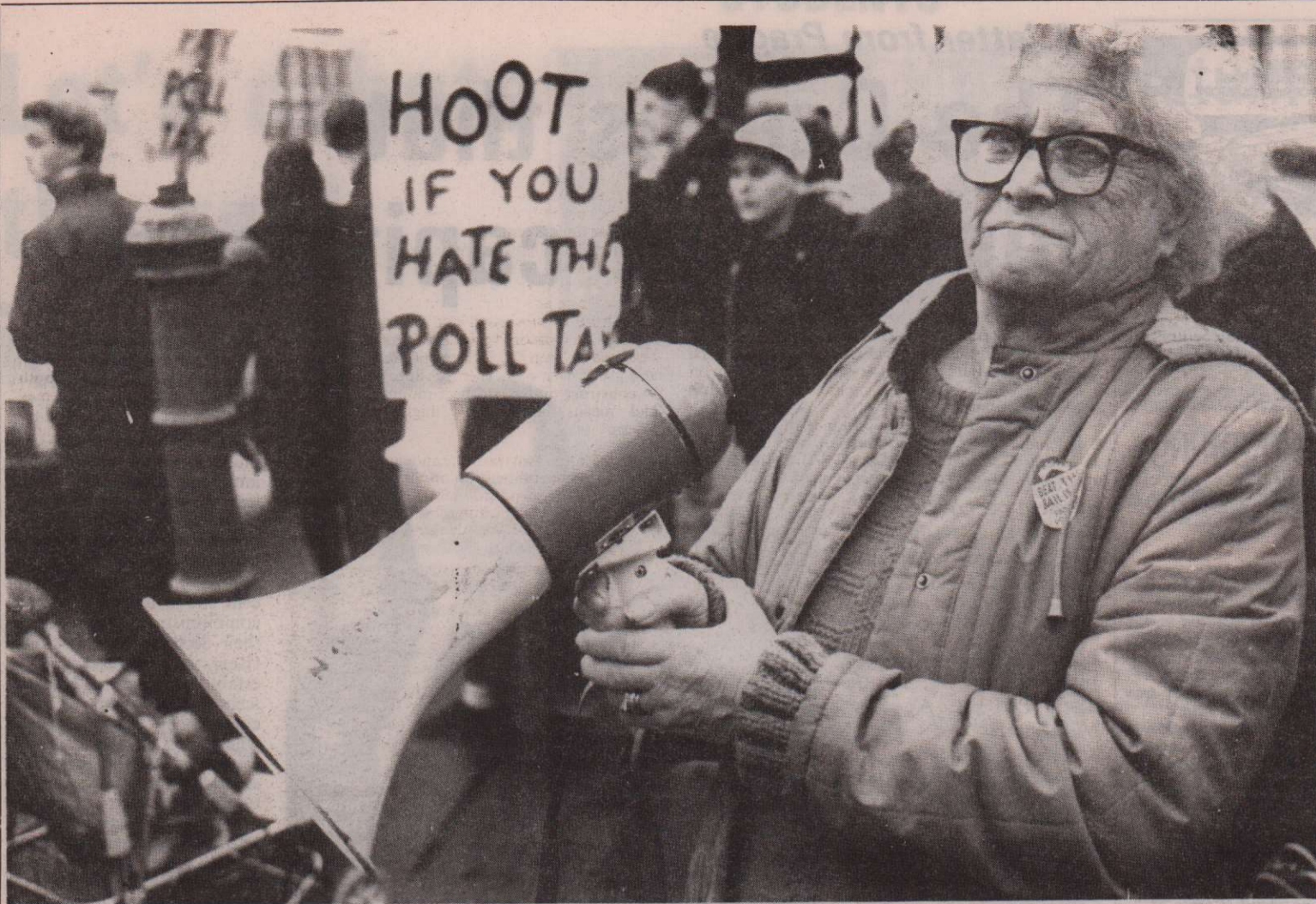
Incomes Data Services predict that the range in the level of settlements is likely to continue to increase, noting "the announcement of an unchanged

inflation rate of 10.9% for October and the Chancellor's admission that the economy is in recession are not a good backdrop for January negotiations."

The union movement has still not recovered from the terrible hammering it took in the 1980s; the TUC is still dominated by "new realism" and terrified of falling foul of the anti-union laws; Norman Willis and John Edmonds still hanker after a Social Contract-type of incomes policy — even with the Tories. But on the shopfloor union organisation and "density" of membership has proved remarkably resilient. More battles over wages and hours can be expected in the new year, whatever Norman Willis, John Edmonds and Gavin Laird may say. In the public sector, there are even signs that NALGO leaders are realising that they've got to actually lead a fight if the union is to remain recognised by the local authority employers.

There've been no famous victories over the last year but we've held our own — maybe even started clawing back some lost ground. And have you noticed that you don't hear very much about "post-Fordism" and the "end of the working class" these days? The departure of Mrs T may not quite represent the end of Thatcherism per se, but, clearly, the worst is now behind us.

And on that cheery note, the Somnolent One wishes you all a cool yule and a stimulating 1991. Sorry I didn't come up with anything much in the way of trends, common threads, etc. Maybe next year.



Labour ranks must decide on a new policy

From Labour Party Socialists

The destruction of Thatcher by the internal coup mounted by Heseltine and Major, and the subsequent Tory leap in the opinion poll ratings, have effectively undermined Labour's strategy for winning the election.

This strategy was simple. Say as little as possible, make very few pledges on policy, and rely on the fact that Mr Kinnoch was not Mrs Thatcher in order to pull the votes in.

This approach was seriously flawed — but it is now dead: the veritable dead parrot. The Conservatives now have a popular young leader who has committed himself to change the negative images brought about by eleven years of Thatcherite policy. They have engineered the biggest movement in opinion poll ratings over a period of three weeks since polling began in Britain before the Second World War.

Labour now needs to reassess its policy and approach if it is to win. The way to do this is not to have secret cabals of shadow cabinet members meeting with a few trade union bosses in order to change the policy.

What is needed is a special Labour Party conference, with a new statement from the NEC and the opportunity for CLPs and affiliated organisations to amend by resolution.

Unless this happens, the leadership will dribble out policy statements which have never been discussed by the NEC, let alone by the party as a whole. And a special party conference would enable us to review whether the present leadership of the party is the one most likely to win an election.

What the Party needs is a new strategy and clear, detailed plans for implementation after the next general election — and only a new conference mandate can ensure this.

"The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of sex or race."

Karl Marx

Socialist Organiser
PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA
Newsdesk: 071 639 7965
Latest date for reports: Monday

Editor: John O'Mahony
Published by WL Publications Ltd, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA
Printed by Portobello CP
Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office

Articles do not necessarily reflect the views of Socialist Organiser and are in a personal capacity unless otherwise stated

Finish off the poll tax!

The poll tax is a lame duck. The Tories say they will reform it, abolish it, or reform it so much as in effect to abolish it.

They thus admit that the tax is unworkable and unjust.

About half of all those due to pay poll tax are behind with their payments, and many millions have paid *nothing at all*. There is no way now that all those non-payers are going to be brought to book.

The question is not whether the poll tax will go, but how and when. Will it be finished off now by a working-class offensive, or will it die slowly, painfully, lingering for several years while thousands of people are dragged through courts and harassed by bailiffs?

The main support now for the dy-

ing tax comes from Labour councils! Labour councils are sending threatening letters, court summonses, bailiffs, and court orders against their people, in a frantic effort to work this unworkable tax.

To people who protest, the municipal poll-tax-pushers have one answer: non-payment means cuts.

They denounce non-payers as shirkers and freeloaders. Anyone who could pay their poll tax without starving or going barefoot, but refuses, is guilty of robbery from the homeless, the single parents, the hard-pressed who suffer most from council cuts. £1 less paid in poll tax equals £1 less income for the council equals £1 more cuts.

But only about 25 per cent of council income comes from poll tax, the rest from or through central

government. And the amount councils can raise in poll tax is limited by government "capping".

If everyone took the advice of the Labour poll-tax-prosecutors and paid their poll tax on the dot, then the record of this Tory government leaves no doubt that it would immediately cut central government money correspondingly, and push through cuts in services that way.

Paying poll tax does not stop cuts. On the contrary, the whole poll tax system is a further step in the Tories' campaign for cuts.

Conversely, mass non-payment has forced the Tories to talk about increasing money for councils next year. They can be forced to increase it further — on condition that Labour councils start campaigning against the government and not against their own people!

A fight against the Tories could

not guarantee success, but it would be no kamikaze leap. It would be the most realistic policy. In impoverished big-city districts with Labour councils, mass non-payment is and will be a fact *whatever* the councils do. The Labour councillors' alternative is to join the resistance — or to lash themselves to the dying poll tax, and go down in discredit together with it.

Labour parties should urge their councillors to go to the local community with a programme of action:

- The council declares it will stop prosecuting non-payers;
- If the council's senior permanent officials proceed with prosecutions nonetheless — as legally they can — the council advises Town Hall workers that they will be supported in non-cooperation.
- People who wish to continue paying tax to avoid any risk of running up debts will be advised that the council will hold the money on account against what's due under a new, fairer system of local taxes to be introduced after the poll tax is abolished.
- Tenants, community groups, council unions and other unions are advised that the government may stop payments to the council. If it does, then the council will stop tax payments to the government, and interest payments to the banks. It may be forced into financial crisis: in that eventuality it calls for workers' strikes and tenants' rent strikes, with the demand that the government restores the money it has robbed from local services over the last 11 years.

The Tories have swung opinion-poll support behind them on the promise of a "return to normal" after Thatcherism. That support is still unstable — but it could become solid, because for years now the Labour leadership has made its appeal on no more radical promise than that same one of a return to "normal".

The Tories are not strong, but they could become strong. Now is the time to get them on the run; and the poll tax is the issue to do it on.

New sales bring results

This week's *Socialist Organiser* is unusual because it will have a longer

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life than the average issue: the paper will have a break over the Christmas/New Year period, and no.470 will be out on 10 January. We have given over several pages to a fundamental issue for socialists now — the lessons for our movement of the collapse of so-called "actually existing socialism" in Eastern Europe, and the headlong rush there back to private-profit economies — and consequently cut the space available for reports which will be quickly out of date and for some other features.

Weekday evening sales at rail and bus stations with the new 16-page *Socialist Organiser* are often proving more productive than the traditional Saturday shopping-centre sales. They are easier to keep regular, too — less disrupted by weekend demonstrations and conferences.

Manchester supporters have started a sale round local pubs, and report good results.

The other prong of our sales drive now is the *cheap subs* offer. Before 31 December you can subscribe to *SO* at £16 for a year — a saving of 26% on the cover price.

We're also pushing ahead with our

£25,000 fund drive. A donation of £75 from a reader in Glossop brings our running total to £13,306. London supporters are organising a fund-raising raffle at their Christmas social on 15 December.

The winner of the £100 prize from the December draw of our '200 Club' is *Chris Hickey* from West London. Donations to, and standing order and subscription forms from, *SO*, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

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GRAFFITI

A letter from Prague

The Czechs that don't want capitalism

Adam Novak reports from Prague

The Czech press is still full of the recent visit of US President George Bush and his domination of the 17 November commemoration on Wenceslas Square, scene of the demonstrations a year ago that forced the Stalinist bureaucracy to share power with Civic Forum and Public Against Violence.

Large sections of the population, however, continue to feel that the promises of a year ago have not been fulfilled. An open letter by student leaders of last year's events called on people not to celebrate November 17, saying that the revolution has been blocked by bureaucrats still in place. The only critical demonstrations held were called by small groups, under an effective press black-out on their activity.

The far right Assembly for the Republic organised their demonstration in the middle of the crowds come to hear Havel and Bush. They tried to polarise those present by forcing their way to the front barrier in a 3,000-strong crowd, calling on Havel to resign, and carrying banners equating Civic Forum to the Communist Party, and condemning the "puppet show democracy of the Communist-dissident elite."

The danger is that the Republicans remain the largest group openly criticising the monetarist, neo-liberal reform programme of Federal Finance Minister Vaclav Klaus. They condemn the old-new bureaucracy in clear, militant language.

The most successful left counter-demonstration was called by two Prague anarchist groups. About 250 people, overwhelmingly high school students and apprentices, marched through the side streets of Prague, defying confused and unprepared police and Civic Forum officials to stop them, before marching through the crowd on Wenceslas Square waving black flags and chanting "Yankee go home". They handed out leaflets condemning the new political elite as a group of bureaucrats concerned mainly with transforming themselves into capitalists, on the basis of connections and wealth built up under the old regime.

A very small, poorly organised demonstration was staged on National Boulevard by Left Alternative, an intellectual left coalition of about 100 people inside Civic Forum, including MP Petr Uhl and Egon Bondy, a dissident poet popular among young workers. Apart from issuing a fortnightly journal, *Polarita*, with a circulation of several thousand, this group is not very active.

Left Alternative reached public attention only recently, when Vaclav Klaus attempted to secure his position in Civic Forum by (unsuccessfully) trying to expel



Bush offers Vaclav Havel the future: you too can have mass unemployment, poverty and homelessness.

them. Their journal remains, however, the only left forum open to all non-Stalinist left currents to the left of the social democrats, to those unable to accept the domination of ex- (and not so ex-) members of the Communist Party in most of the left opposition groups. *Polarita* has recently agreed to carry regular articles from the Club for Popular Self-Management, in an attempt to develop a discussion on alternative forms of economic management.

The newly formed Campaign for the Rights of Youth, a militant anti-Stalinist anti-capitalist youth campaign, started by high school students close to Left Alternative, launched an 11 point charter for the rights of youth at an open air meeting (about 70 strong) addressed by Petr Uhl, who spoke about his involvement in revolutionary youth politics as a young teacher in 1968-9.

The Campaign's charter demands basic rights — a job, education, somewhere to live, an end to racism, sexual discrimination and anti-homosexual discrimination, and links a rejection of the market reforms with a call for popular control over the economy.

"Why should the workers and youth pay for the economic mistakes of the old regime, and make industrial capacity more attractive for foreign capital through unemployment and price rises...?"

Government promises that every citizen will have the same chance in the privatisa-

The largest group on the non-Communist left, the Social Democratic Party (CSSD), played no role in the anniversary events. The CSSD had, until recently, made its name as the most anti-communist party of the left, some branches even refusing to accept as individual members those who had once been in the Communist Party. The CSSD's recent move away from anti-communism may be due to their declining fortunes, and their difficulties in establishing themselves as the 'centre party with a social conscience' in a country where most parties claim the centre, and where there also exist the Socialist and National Social Parties, struggling for the same centre-reformist position.

CSSD has already agreed to merge with Obroda, a group claiming the heritage of the Prague Spring Communist Party leadership, and ideologically close to Alexander Dubcek, the leading figure of the Communist Party in 1968.

Given the depths of the economic crisis, however, the CSSD and Obroda have found it difficult to explain exactly how they would pursue a less harsh path than the government. They continue to pursue their goal of a Swedish/Austrian-style society, but their political proposals are exceedingly moderate. They seem to face the same internal problems of disillusionment and lack of vision of all the left groups, and have failed to regain Social Democracy's traditional support among the skilled workers. They seem to have no more than a few thousand active members.

The left demonstrations received little strong positive support, and little outright hostility.

Left groups opposing the market reforms and the old bureaucracy clearly have a place in Czech politics, and an audience, if only they can get their message across better, and make some proposals tying together a coalition of those adversely affected by the government's reforms. November 17 1990 was a step in the right direction.



More on Eastern Europe. 60p plus 32p postage from SO, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA



Why we don't like shopping as much as 'Marxism Today'

GRAFFITI

Who says shoppers put the widest range of choice as their first requirement from retailers?

A survey carried out by the University of Ulster (based on a survey of 300 Belfast shoppers) identified working women as by far the most important group of customers.

But they said the most important thing for them was ease of access — together with good parking facilities and flexible opening hours.

They'll be lucky. Supermarkets are deliberately organised so that the staples most people come to buy are way back in the store, furthest from the entry point. No, not capitalist bloody-mindedness, capitalist cunning: that way people go all through the store and, often, they buy the things they had not come there to buy.

made by people willing to give their lives for real freedom and equality: it resulted in our bourgeois society with its grotesque inequalities erected on the mass wage slavery of the majority of the legally free and equal citizens. And it follows from this that often it falls to others to achieve long-thwarted and half-forgotten objectives.

The great late 19th century English socialist William Morris, who was a Marxist, put it poignantly: "I pondered...how men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name."

Many people think there was an element of this in Mrs Thatcher's reign. Certainly Thatcher did adopt — in the interests of capitalism — a far more radical posture towards the British civil service and old boy network establishment than any Labour Prime Minister had ever done. Thatcher was, in this view a legatee of British radicalism.

And now, we are told, comes classless, one-nation John Major, beneficiary of "Thatcher's Revolution". That's the official propaganda line anyway. And what a lot of balderdash it is, as was shown in last Sunday's independent. They investigated the background of the chief members of the Major gang and found a cluster of well off former presidents of the Cambridge University union — even that other showpiece Thatcherite plebian Kenneth Clarke!

Still, we will be hearing a lot in the months to come about the classlessness of the galloping Major.

Camden library, 4 December. Tariq Ali is giving a reading from his first novel 'Redemption', a book that identifies Trotskyism with religion.

Tariq, of course, has spent much of his life in and around would-be Trotskyist groups, mainly the IMG. The book's author claims that he "holds up a mirror to the far left", but what is reflected there is just his own confused past, with its absurd central belief that Stalinist tyranny was incipiently socialist and politically criminal stupidities like Ali and his friends standing as joke "Socialist Unity" candidates against Labour in the watershed 1979 general election.

When asked by a rather mild-mannered SO reader if he saw this irony in his "satirical" work, Tariq Ali said he refused to answer this question "because it was asked by a Trotskyite".

His book, you see, is "an elegy for a movement the time of which has come." (sic); this movement is not only Trotskyism but the entire tradition of the 1917 Russian Revolution. He got very angry when asked if he was still a socialist and made a dire threat: he'd put the SO reader in the next edition of his novel.

Second edition? The novel is a bit of a flop, it seems. Only 7 people turned out to hear him, and some of those seemed only to be escaping the cold night outside. Good!

What's going on here? department. Two leading NUT activists

were spotted on a train last weekend reading Socialist Organiser's review of Mr Tariq Ali's "novel" 'Redemption', spluttering in anger.

"This is workerism," said one of them loudly. "Yes," replied the other, "I'd just love to have been born into Tariq Ali's class." "This is character assassination," the first one rejoined.

What makes this scene interesting is that one of them is a supporter of Socialist Outlook and the other is, believe it or not, the SWP's leading teacher!

Someone should tell them that the attitude you take to renegades says a great deal about what you yourself are. Usually it also tells you something about where you are going...

Human beings make history — but usually not as they intend, said Karl Marx.

Men and women act to achieve an objective: but they cannot see, still less foresee, and control, all the social factors in operation alongside their own will, and these warp and reshape their designs. Often the result is something radically different from that intended.

The French Revolution was



Classless Tories?

Let's debate the real issues

The conference of the National Union of Students this weekend (8-9 December) in Blackpool should be debating loans, top-up tuition fees, the Gulf crisis and the fight against the poll tax. But NUS bureaucrats have done their best to keep these issues off the agenda. Emma Colyer (NUS National Secretary, in personal capacity) reports.

NUS Conference is timetabled to discuss four issues — NUS Reform, Europe, Racism and Fascism, and Disabled Students. And the last two may fall off the agenda.

The ruling faction of Labour Students have pushed Reform because they are losing control of NUS. They have lost their support in the local Area NUS organisations to the left, and are losing their grip on the NEC. They now rely on a thin layer of university executives to defend them.

Indeed, they have entered in a pact to get their "reforms" through, which include smashing the Areas and cutting access to the NEC.

In the Europe debate, the left should unite around a policy to link up with students' struggles in other European countries, such as in France recently, and to demand levelling-up of educational provision and conditions across Europe. The alternatives are a limp do-nothing composite from the NUS leadership and the propagandism of *Militant* and

Socialist Worker.

The Racism and Fascism debate will address the rising tide of anti-semitism in Britain and Europe, the increase in racist attacks, and the need to build a movement that can drive the fascists off the streets. Again, the leadership propose little for students to actually do.

The least contentious issue will be a disabled students. Conference will pass a series of motions aimed at opening up NUS to disabled people and fighting prejudice in society, too.

Left Unity will fight to get the Gulf crisis on the agenda. NUS needs to come out with a clear anti-war position for the withdrawal of all Western troops.

A successful school

A hundred people attended 'Fighting for Workers' Liberty', the SO student school in Manchester last weekend. The school centred on the ideas needed to develop a socialist movement which can challenge both social democracy and Stalinism. Eleven people decided to start selling *SO*, proving that the discussions were a success.

WHAT'S ON

Saturday 8 December. NUS Conference Left Unity fringe meeting: "Troops out of the Gulf". Speakers: Campaign Against War in the Gulf and US anti-war movement. Winter Gardens, Victoria Bar, Blackpool. 11.30pm
Saturday 8 December. NUS Conference SO meeting: "No socialism without women's liberation". Victoria Bar, Winter Gardens, Blackpool. 12.30am



The 20,000-strong anti-war demo in mid-November showed that the British anti-war movement is growing. It still lags massively behind the US movement. Students in the USA are mobilising against a war which may send them to fight overseas in another 'Vietnam War'. Students have a key role to play building the anti-war movement in Britain.

Mark Sandell

Saturday 8 December. 11th anniversary of Greenham Common peace camp. Workshops and other activities all day. Take a tent.
Sunday 9 December. NUS Conference Left Unity fringe meeting. "Fighting for a Campaigning Union" with Janine Booth, NUS women's officer. Winter Gardens, Renaissance Room, Blackpool. 11.30pm
Sunday 9 December. "Stop Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men". Demonstration and rally called by Outrage. Assemble 12 noon, Horseguards Avenue, London SW1 (Embankment tube)

Monday 10 December. Southwark LPS meeting, Walworth Town Hall, 7.30pm
Monday 10 December. "Should the left support proportional representation?", discussion with Tony Benn, Richard Kuper and Caroline Ellis. Committee Room 10, House of Commons. 7.30pm. Ring 071-700 3853 to book a place
Tuesday 11 December. "Labour Must Fight! Kick out the Tories". Socialist Organiser London Forum. London School of Economics, Houghton St, London WC1. 7.30pm
Tuesday 11 December. "Clockwork

Return of the randy vicar

PRESS GANG

The Guardian
Daily Mirror
The Star

By Jim Denham

Now that all the excitement is over and Thatcherism has been reached and passed, it's back to normal for the press. Some perennial themes have already re-established themselves on the front pages, notably that old favourite, the Randy Vicar.

But some papers, like hounds who've tasted blood, have got the idea that readers can be kept interested in politics — so long as there is a leadership crisis taking place.

The *Independent* set the ball rolling last week, with a piece questioning the competence of Neil Kinnock (including the astonishing revelation that he's prone to 'waffling' and sometimes doesn't seem to know exactly what he's talking about). Suddenly, *The Mail*, *Express* and most of the Sundays are full of stories suggesting an imminent Labour leadership crisis and referring to (unnamed) Labour MPs who now want rid of Kinnock. The *Sun's* Richard Littlejohn provided some variety by concentrating his fire upon Roy Hattersley, noting that under existing party rules it is actually easier for the Tories to remove their leader than it is for Labour. Littlejohn also had the honesty to make it clear that his anti-Hattersley piece was based entirely upon personal dislike and not any unattributable whisperings from unnamed MPs. I

don't, I must confess, find any urge to rush to the defence of Neil Kinnock (or Roy Hattersley) just at the moment. But one does wonder — if Kinnock is so utterly hopeless why all these Tory papers are so keen to see him replaced by the allegedly more competent and attractive John Smith?

Thanks to Lynn 'Killer' Barber of the *Independent* on Sunday for drawing my attention to John Junor's recent outpourings in his column in the *Mail on Sunday*. Junor is too loathsome (even for my strong stomach) and the *MoS* too tedious for me to have caught, unprompted, his coverage of the Tory business. It seems that the pompous bigot now has a whole new set of targets for his admittedly colourful vituperation: pro-Heseltine Tories.

Edwina Currie is "that poisonous lady with the poisonous tongue"; Sir Peter Emery is "that fat wheezing failure"; Emma Nicholson and Tony Marlow are 'simpering' and 'an awful creep' respectively.

Best of all is the description of "that Bordes boudoir boy, the oleaginous editor of the *Sunday Times*, Mr Andrew Neil."

Regular 'Press Gang' readers will know that I do not subscribe to the perverse liking for Junor that seems to exist on the left. But I can't help warming to this kind of stuff — especially the Andrew Neil bit. I suppose it's too much to hope for a law suit and a re-run of the marvellous Neil vs Worsthorpe farce?

The self-abasement and cynicism of *Sun* editor Kelvin MacKenzie never ceases to fascinate. Last Friday's front page headline, "Hezza Is Mr Poll Tax" is a case in point: it was clearly a self-parody based upon *Private Eye's* frequent *Sun* spoofs. Especially shameful was the transformation of Heseltine from associate of Bunglers, Jokers and Adulterers, into "Hezza, the poll tax-busting super-hero."

The Peter Chippendale/Chris Horrie book, "Stick it up your Punter" tells what is, perhaps, the best *Sun* tale to date:

On the desk of news editor Tom Petrie is a Spitting Image Margaret Thatcher rubber doll: "the rubber Thatcher had found its role when a young showbiz hack who was a byword for dodgy stories rushed up to the desk gabbling details of his latest 'scoop'. When he finished by yelling breathlessly, 'and it's true!' MacKenzie grabbed the puppet, pressed it to make it squeak and bellowed: 'True story alert, folks! True story alert! We have a true story here!'"

East German women get organised

WOMEN'S EYE

Barbel Thurer, a member of the Unabhanger Frauenverband (Independent Women's Union) in Halle, East Germany, spoke to SO.

We are working on three main issues. Firstly, paragraph 218 (in the German constitution, limiting women's rights to abortion).

Secondly, paragraph 175 (defining different ages of consent for homosexuals and heterosexuals), as many members of the UFV here are lesbians.

Thirdly, violence against women. We are

attempting to set up refuges for women.

Then there are various women's projects. Here in Halle, for example, we are working on a gallery for women artists, with a cafe and library attached.

Two of our members have jobs running courses for the unemployed, and these women are now starting to run courses on our behalf for unemployed women.

Unfortunately the trade unions in the workplaces are very under-developed. And the fact that women are the first to lose their jobs is not regarded as an important issue by the trade unions. They say that there are more important things than women's unemployment.

The UFV is an umbrella organisation for different women's groups. Groups involved in the UFV include Lila Offensive, the Socialist Women's Initiative in Berlin, an autonomous women's group in Erfurt, the Dornrosa women's self-help group here in

Halle, and the Women's Initiative in Magdeburg.

At the moment it still exists only in the ex-GDR.

We do, however, have close ties with individual women's groups in the ex-FRG. They are keen to do joint work with us, even if they don't want to join the UFV. They have asked us for speakers for meetings, campaigned with us in opposition to paragraph 218, and printed our book, *No Woman — No State*. The co-operation has been quite intensive.

In the East German elections in March we were in an electoral alliance with the Greens that alliance was dissolved after the elections. For the later elections we joined a new alliance involving New Forum, the Greens, and the Alternative List in Berlin. The negotiations have been very difficult, especially because of the attitude of New Forum (which includes anti-abortion

groups), and therefore we often have difficulty in forcing through our demands.

For the UFV to be involved in the PDS/Left List coalition for the elections was simply tactically impossible. The PDS has a high standing amongst left wing groups in the ex-FRG because of Gregor Gysi being its leading figure. The groups think that there must be something worthwhile behind Gysi, but in fact there is nothing behind him.

Nothing has changed in the PDS at grassroots level, it is the same people who are still there, and there is just one scandal after another.

Unfortunately, the new left wing groups which have emerged in the ex-GDR say that they are against sexism, but as soon as women take up the issue they are ridiculed. None of the groups are immune to sexism. You can go through the groups from left to right but it is the same everywhere in relation to this issue.

The fate of the Russian Revolution

An introduction to Trotsky

By Sean Matgamna

The Stalinist system has fallen in Eastern Europe, and in the USSR it is, as I write, collapsing into chaos and maybe famine.

The erstwhile rulers of the Stalinist system — which they said was the realisation of socialism — are working openly for the restoration of capitalism. So are most of those they rule, and in the first place the working class.

The people trapped inside the Stalinist system have been kept for decades in political, economic and intellectual slavery to the bureaucratic state. Now the iron bands have been loosened, and they look to the bourgeois democracies of Western Europe with famished shining eyes, thinking they see here the ideal society of freedom and prosperity.

Not so very long ago, tens of millions of West European workers, like millions of workers throughout the world, looked to Stalin's and Khrushchev's USSR and thought they saw there the model of working-class freedom and prosperity. But it is capitalism which has survived and kept possession of the world's advanced economies. Stalinism has withered and is dying.

They tell us it is socialism and Marxism that is dying now, dying discredited, in a storm of curses from its victims interspersed with which can be heard the gleeful cackling of the triumphant bourgeoisie.

And if what existed in the Stalinist states was socialism — socialism in any shape or degree, socialism in its "first stage" or in any of its stages — then socialism is indeed dead, and it deserves to be dead. It should have died a long time ago!

The meaning of socialism

The question is: was it socialism? Part of the difficulty in answering that question is that the words are worn away. They have long ago lost their meaning.

What is socialism? Yes, on one level, Stalinism was "socialism". It has for decades been the "actually existing socialism". What Stalinism was, that is what "socialism" and "communism" have been. But word-juggling like that does not tell us very much. We need to go behind the words.

Our aim is the emancipation of the proletariat from wage-slavery and state tyranny by the creation of a democratically organised common property in the means of production, and by the destruction of the bureaucratic state which is typical of all modern class societies, including the bourgeois democracies like Britain. Such a society presupposes a high level of economic development and there being more than enough for everyone of the basics of life.

According to the reasoning we find in the classics of Marxism such a society can only be brought into existence by a victory of the working class over the bourgeoisie in the class struggle which is a normal and prominent part of capitalist society. (For the last decade in Britain, Margaret Thatcher has waged a bitter and unrelenting *class struggle*, using the state machine as her stronghold, on behalf of the bosses against the working class).

For Marx and Engels, the founders of modern socialism, and for all their followers, including those of them who led the Russian working class to power in 1917, this meant that socialism was *impossible* in a country as backward and underdeveloped as Russia was in 1917. *Socialism had to be the child of advanced capitalism, or it would never exist.*

Socialism could not come *before* advanced capitalism. The idea that socialists leading a tiny working class in a nation of peasants could seize power and then over decades develop a socialist economy in competition with advanced capitalism — that would have been dismissed as lunacy by all the classics, including Lenin and Trotsky in 1917 and after. They would have pigeon-holed it with utopian-socialist colony building and with the idea that the working class can displace the bourgeoisie by setting up cooperatives to compete with them.

The working class *had* to win state power in the most advanced capitalist countries, as well as in the less-developed world with which the advanced countries are economically entwined — that is,

Revolution



1918: The Red Army defends the revolution

The fate of the Russian Revolution



make an *international* revolution — or there would be no socialism.

Revolution in Russia

Yet, you may say, Lenin and Trotsky and their comrades did make a socialist working-class revolution in backward Russia! And so they plainly broke with the idea that socialism *had to be* the offspring of the most advanced capitalism.

No, they didn't! Lenin and Trotsky *never* believed Russia was ripe for socialism. They knew and repeatedly said the very opposite. They did believe, and prove in practice, that Russia was ripe for a *workers' revolution*. That is not the same thing.

Because of the collapse in World War I of the rotten old Tsarist order, the workers were able to seize power *despite* Russia's lack of ripeness for socialism. Russia did not become ripe for socialism by virtue of the working class seizing power. On the contrary, the civil war and foreign invasions which followed the revolution wrecked the Russian economy and dispersed the working class itself, and thus made Russia *less* ripe for socialism than when the Bolsheviks seized power.

Was then the Bolshevik revolution a crazy

kamikaze adventure by Lenin and Trotsky and their comrades, a foredoomed gesture? No. They believed that the seizure of power by the Russian workers would trigger workers' revolutions in the West, in the advanced countries such as Britain and Germany and France which *were* ripe for socialism. The Russian workers could begin: but the workers of the West would have to "finish". The Russians could only propose, the working class in the West would dispose.

In fact the workers in Germany, Italy, Austria and Hungary did rise. Either they were defeated, or, as in Germany, their leaders sold out to the bourgeoisie.

Having seized power, the small and depleted Russian working class was isolated in control of a vast country, large swathes of which were economically and socially pre-capitalist. From 1921, they were forced to allow a regrowth of small-scale capitalism, under the control of the workers' state. Having boldly proclaimed the need to destroy the bureaucratic state, they were forced in self defence (14 states, including Britain, invaded the workers' republic!) to create a vast bureaucratic-military state. It bulked all the larger in a backward society where the old ruling class had been swept away and the working class itself had been dispersed and uprooted by civil war, famine,

"The Trotskyists held on to the ideas on which the Bolsheviks had made the revolution."



Counter-revolution

Stalin: gravedigger of the revolution

and invasion.

Out of the state bureaucracy soon crystallised a layer, led by Stalin, which secured for itself ever-growing privileges. They allied with the newly regrown capitalist class against those, led by Leon Trotsky, who remained loyal to socialism. Because the working class itself had been pulverised, the Stalinists defeated those Bolsheviks who remained Bolsheviks, the Trotskyists.

"Socialism in one country"

At an early stage (1924 and '25) the struggle between Stalinists and Trotskyists had centred around political questions. At the heart of the ideological dispute was the question of the nature and perspectives of the Russian revolution.

The Trotskyists held to the ideas on which the Bolsheviks had made the revolution. Russia was not ripe for socialism, and socialism could not be built in such conditions. The Russian revolution would be destroyed and capitalism restored unless the international working-class revolution, begun in October 1917 in Russia, could be spread to the advanced countries. The fate of the Russian revolution itself would depend on the world revolution.

Those were no more than the elementary ideas of classical Marxism. They were now the property of a small, persecuted rearguard of those who called themselves Marxists and Leninists.

From 1924 the Stalinists proclaimed "Socialism in One Country" as the "realistic" approach. Not only could the Russian revolution survive indefinitely in isolation: socialism, they said, could be built there, in parallel to the vastly more advanced capitalist countries, which it would overtake and surpass. Without, of course, acknowledging it, they thus broke with all the basic ideas of Marxian socialism. For world revolution was substituted the task of developing the Soviet economy.

For the Communist Parties outside the USSR this would mean subordinating everything to helping Stalin's foreign policy secure the conditions for the peaceful development of the one and only socialist country. It led to such horrors as the peaceful surrender of the powerful German Communist Party to Hitler, and the Stalinists' bloody suppression and destruction of working-class socialism during the Spanish Civil War. But that is a different aspect of the story.

Paradoxically, in the mid '20s, while the Stalinists were still allying with the new bourgeoisie against the working class and the Trotskyists, it was Trotsky who made serious proposals for making the best of a temporary peace to build up the economy. The Stalinists, and their allies, Bukharin and his followers, scoffed.

In 1928-9 the Stalinist state broke with the bourgeoisie and forcibly collectivised the urban and rural economy, with enormous speed and brutality, and at a terrible cost in lost and ruined lives and in economic destruction. Agriculture has never to this day recovered. The bureaucracy was cutting out its bourgeois rival and making itself sole "master of

the surplus product". For the next sixty years the bureaucracy would lord it over the working class, having crushed the bourgeoisie.

Stalinism: the opposite of socialism

In what relationship did Stalin's social system — which would be replicated in Eastern Europe after the defeat of Hitler in 1945, and then in China, Vietnam, Cuba, etc. — stand to the perspectives and conceptions of Marxian socialism, of Bolshevism?

It was its radical opposite at every important point. The working class was not the ruling class. On the contrary, in the '30s and '40s it was reduced to something like slavery — and many millions of workers were brought to outright slavery, in the labour camps — by an all-powerful terroristic state.

This was no self-regulating society. It had neither the spontaneous self-regulation of the free market, nor the conscious and deliberate socialist self-regulation of free self-determining citizens. The political will of the bureaucracy regulated and ruled, limited only by material constraints and the passive resistance of its victims. The bureaucracy took to itself the privileges of old ruling classes, and administered society by crude planning enforced by indescribably savage police-state terror.

The Stalinist state was markedly autarkic, geared to economic development "in one country" — exceptionally so even in the 1930s' dislocated world of closed-off empires and economic blocs. At its core was the project of economic self-development from its own resources. The later, smaller, Stalinist states would ludicrously follow the example set by Stalin in the vastness of Russia.

The development of backward countries by way of an economic forced march organised by an all-powerful terrorist state now became the dominant core idea on a world scale of what was "socialism".

Collapse



1990: The once-great Imperial Army of the USSR forced to scavenge amongst the rubbish tips of Germany. The victors of 1945 vanquished.

It could neither have sufficient access to the fruits of the most advanced capitalist techniques — that is, build on the achievements of capitalism — nor develop its own advanced technique. The stifling bureaucratic system on which the ruling class depended worked against science and intellectual freedom.

Despite the economic achievements of Stalinism in crude industrialisation, the USSR and the rest remained cut off from the dynamic advanced sectors of the world economy which the bourgeoisie had created after World War 2 — those which, according to Marxism, had to be the take-off point for building socialism.

Stalinism versus capitalism

The USSR, and its duplicate societies, thus ceased to have anything to do with socialism or with working-class political power.

But whatever label you gave them — degenerated and deformed workers' states, bureaucratic collectivist, state-capitalist — the Stalinist societies continued to have the essential relationship to the world capitalist economy heralded by Stalin with his notion of building "socialism in one country". The totalitarian states were everywhere the creators of great barrier reefs to wall off their societies from the inevitable consequences of normal market relations between the advanced (capitalist) world and their own world.

Had capitalism continued in its free spiralling decline of the '30s, then the Stalinist systems might



"Regarded from the world-historical point of view, there would doubtlessly be no hope of the ultimate victory of our revolution if it were to remain alone... At all events, under all conceivable circumstances, if the German revolution does not come we are doomed." Lenin, March 1918

"Lenin and Trotsky never believed Russia was ripe for socialism... Russia was ripe for a workers' revolution. That is not the same thing."

have become a stable new form of society. That was what Trotsky feared was happening, and, later, people like Max Shachtman believed had happened. But capitalism, having reduced large areas of the globe to ruins in World War 2, revived and thrived. The Stalinist states became a backward appendage to the dynamic economies of the world, developing less fast, stifled by bureaucracy, and unable to create their own advanced technology. The ill-formed ruling classes sank into paralysis, without even the control of their societies given to Stalin by his unbridled terror.

The result, too long delayed, is the tremendous collapse we see unfolding now, with all its initial horrors and tragedy for the people of the Stalinist states.

The laws of history

It has nothing to do with socialism. The Stalinist phenomenon was a social mutation arising out of the defeat of the Russian working class in the 1920s by the Stalinist bureaucracy, allied then to the weak Russian bourgeoisie.

The very model of fully collectivised property came not from socialism but from Stalin's struggle after 1928 on behalf of the bureaucracy to stop the spontaneous growth of petty capitalists as competitors with the bureaucracy for the surplus product. Yet, in so far as the Stalinist states retained their typical peculiar relation to world capitalism, they fell under the self-same laws according to which Trotsky ruled out "socialism in one country".

You cannot overthrow or supersede advanced capitalism by developing a backward country in competition with it. The workers in power could not do that, and the Stalinist rulers who overthrew the workers couldn't, even with the most savage super-exploitation of the working class.

I repeat: this had nothing to do with socialism. Workers' power was destroyed in the USSR long ago. Immense confusion has been caused by the form of its destruction: not the restoration of the bourgeoisie but the rule of an exploiting class ensconced in the state apparatus and based on collectivised economy. Because they had political power, the bureaucrats warded off the pressures of world capitalism for decades, trying to build "their own" society. They seemed to defy the laws of history.

Now the laws of history which Stalin defied have caught up with Stalinism.

For socialists that is good. The underlying realities are stripped bare. The counterfeit "socialism" of the bureaucrats ("developmentalism") has truthfully declared itself bankrupt. The bureaucrats are trying to become capitalists.

Nothing socialist is lost, because in the USSR the possibility of socialism without a new workers' revolution was lost sixty years ago. Much is gained — the freeing of socialism from confusion and from horrible associations.

Right now there is a mass stampede away from discredited "socialism"; but the ground is being cleared for real socialism and unfalsified Marxism. The collapse of Stalinism vindicates Marxism — the Marxism proclaimed by the Bolsheviks when they insisted that the Russian revolution would live or die by the world revolution, the Marxism defended by Trotsky against the barbarous nonsense of "socialism in one country". Nothing socialist or Marxist is lost; much is gained.

The collapse of Stalinism vindicates the calculation and perspectives of Lenin and Trotsky and those who led the workers to power in 1917. It has taken a long time — after decades of the Stalinist cul-de-sac social system, walled off from the surrounding world by the Stalinist state power — for the fundamental world realities to make themselves felt. But History does not cheat itself.

Revolution in perspective

The essay by Trotsky printed here was written in 1940 and published as *Three Conceptions of the Russian Revolution*. In it Trotsky establishes plainly the thinking of the Bolsheviks, and the thinking of their opponents, the populists and the Mensheviks.

It sheds a tremendous light on what has happened in the USSR and Eastern Europe. From the point of view of bedrock Marxism it explains why the defeats of the perspective with which the Bolsheviks made the Russian revolution were not inevitable. The workers in the West could have won

Turn to centre pages

The fate of the Russian Revolution

The fate of the Russian Revolution

What the words mean

1905: strikes broke out in December 1904 and January 1905. On 9 January workers marching to the Tsar's palace to appeal for his help were shot down. The strike wave grew.

Strikes continued through the summer. Peasants withheld taxes. Sailors mutinied on the battleship 'Potemkin'.

In September a new strike wave exploded. A joint council of workers' delegates — a 'soviet' in Russian — was set up in St Petersburg (Leningrad).

In December the Tsar regained the initiative, arresting the Executive of the St Petersburg soviet. An armed workers' uprising in Moscow was put down.

Bourgeois revolution: by this term Marxists meant a revolution that would break the power of the Tsar (king) and the landed nobility, raising up a new ruling class from the industrialists, merchants and bankers. It would replace hereditary privilege as the keystone of society with profits made in the market place.

Populism, in Russia, meant revolutionary politics which looked to a revolution made by 'the people' in general (not the workers particularly). The populists usually argued that Russia need not (or could not) go through capitalist development, but could instead go straight from Tsarism to a sort of peasant-based socialism. Tactically the populists often favoured conspiracies to assassinate leading figures of the Tsarist regime as a way to arouse the people.

Menshevik: the less revolutionary wing in the split in the Russian socialist movement after 1903. Although the split was originally about obscure organisational issues, it quickly gained political substance. The Mensheviks' strategy was to push the bourgeoisie (the industrialists, merchants and bankers) into leading the bourgeois revolution — and this meant the workers must be careful not to frighten the bourgeoisie off.

Bolshevik: the more revolutionary wing in the split in the Russian socialist movement after 1903. In contrast to the Mensheviks (qv), the Bolsheviks argued for the workers to fight to take the lead and to drive the revolution forward as far as possible. Even though (before 1917) they calculated that it would be impossible for the workers to drive the revolution beyond the level of radical democratic measures within a society still based on private profit and private ownership of the means of production, they believed that if the workers did not lead the 'bourgeois revolution' the bourgeoisie would make no revolution at all.

Correspondingly, the Bolsheviks argued for a tighter, more clearly defined party organisation than the Mensheviks.

Social Democracy was the term used before 1917 to mean 'Marxian Socialist'. The Bolsheviks changed their name from Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks) to Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in 1917 to signal their disgust with the big 'Social Democratic' parties in other countries which had supported their own governments in World War I.

The German Revolution of 1918-19 started with rebellions in late 1918 as the German army went down to defeat in World War I. The Emperor was quickly kicked out, and a Provisional Government of Social Democrats took over.

But the German Social Democrats were not the revolutionary party they had been. Over the years they had become dominated by party and trade union bureaucrats who looked to piecemeal reform within the capitalist system. In World War I they supported the German government. And in 1918-19 they became the last prop of the capitalist order.

Workers' councils were set up all across Germany, but the Social Democrats were able to dominate them, attracting the support of newly-politicised workers for whom the Social Democrats were still the left. The revolutionaries led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were provoked into an ill-timed uprising (against Luxemburg's insistence) in January 1919, and bloodily suppressed. Liebknecht and Luxemburg were murdered by right-wing military detachments acting under the authority of the Social Democratic government.

Germany, however, remained in turmoil until 1933, when the Communist Party, misled by Moscow, botched a new revolutionary opportunity and allowed capitalism to re-establish itself.

Petty bourgeoisie, in Marxist analysis, means the class who are neither wage-workers nor capitalists exploiting substantial numbers of workers. It is the class of small shopkeepers, small business people employing only one or two workers, 'independent' professional people, doctors, lawyers, dentists, etc.

The 'Prussian Road' meant a transition from feudal or neo-feudal society (based on hereditary privilege) to capitalist society (based on market economics and free wage labour) by way of reform from above rather than revolution from below.

In Prussia (the largest of the cluster of states which were united in 1871 to form Germany), such a policy of reform from above was carried through by Otto von Bismarck. He helped the landlords (junkers) transform themselves into capitalist operators; he introduced limited forms of parliamentary democracy (under his own tight control).

Kulak was the term used in Russia for 'rich' peasants. They were rich only very relatively, but in contrast to other peasants they would own enough land to employ a few workers outside their family to work it. They might also own horses or ploughs which they hired out to poorer peasants. The Marxists saw them as the group from which a class of capitalist farmers might grow.

An introduction

From page 7

power and changed everything. Given the isolation of the Russian revolution, defeat *became* inevitable. Trotsky and Lenin always knew that.

Bourgeois triumphalism and the mass renegacy from even nominal socialism of the Stalinists and their fellow-travellers does of course exert a great pressure now on all socialists. It presses down even on the Trotskyists, although our version of Marxism is vin-

dicated — the Marxism defending which many thousands of our comrades have died, in a struggle to the death with the murderous Stalinist counterfeit in the Soviet Union, in China, in Spain, and elsewhere.

In the late 1930s C L R James talked to Trotsky. How, he asked, is it possible, comrade Trotsky, that you were right about the German revolution of 1923, the British general strike of 1926, the Chinese revolution in 1927, Hitler's rise to power, and the Spanish Civil War — and yet we are still a tiny, isolated, persecuted little group?

Trotsky replied that to be right is not enough. If your ideas do not prevail, and if as a result the German, Chinese, British, Spanish workers go

down to crushing defeat, then being not protect you from the *general* decline. The defeated movement declines go down with it. We cannot rise high class whose vigour, élan and combat central and irreplaceable and all-out for our politics. Worse: experience of working-class defeat strengthens bureaucracies and thus further is revolutionary.

Thus it is now. The reformists are ahead, though it was the reformists' treachery that led to the defeat of the Russian revolutionary workers and to the isolated and defeated the heroic Russian working class. The Trotskyists too share the



The Russian Revolution

The Revolution of 1905 came to be not only the "general rehearsal" of 1917 but also the laboratory in which all the fundamental groupings of Russian political life were worked out and all the tendencies and shadings inside Russian Marxism were projected. At the core of the arguments and divergences was, needless to say, the question concerning the historical nature of the Russian Revolution and its future course of development.

Russia's development is first of all notable for its backwardness. But historical backwardness does not mean a mere retracing of the course of the advanced countries a hundred or two hundred years late. Rather, it gives rise to an utterly different "combined" social formation, in which the most highly developed achievements of capitalist technique and structure are integrated into the social relations of feudal and pre-feudal barbarism, transforming and dominating them, fashioning a unique relationship of classes.

The same is true of ideas. Precisely because of its historical tardiness, Russia proved to be the only European country in which Marxism, as a doctrine, and the Social-Democracy, as a party, enjoyed a powerful development even prior to the bourgeois revolution — and naturally so, because the problem of the relation between the struggle for democracy and the struggle for socialism were subjected to the most profound theoretical examination in Russia.

The idealist democrats — for the most part, the Populists — superstitiously refused to recognise the advancing revolution as a bourgeois revolution. They called it "democratic", attempting to

hide under that neutral political label — not only from others, but from themselves as well — its social content. But Plekhanov, the founder of Russian Marxism, in his fight against Populism, showed as far back as the 'eighties of the past century that Russia had no reason whatsoever to rely on preferential ways of development; that, like the "profane" nations, it would have to go through the purgatory of capitalism; and that on this very path it would wrest political freedom, which was indispensable to the proletariat in its continuing fight for socialism.

Plekhanov not only segregated the bourgeois revolution, as the immediate task, from the socialist revolution, which he in turn relegated to the vague future, but he foresaw distinct combinations of forces for each of them. The proletariat would secure political freedom jointly with the liberal bourgeoisie; then, after many decades, on a high level of capitalist development, the proletariat would proceed with the socialist revolution in direct conflict against the bourgeoisie.

"To the Russian intellectual...", Lenin wrote towards the end of 1904, "it always seems that to recognise our revolution as bourgeois means to make it colourless, to humiliate it, to vulgarise it... The struggle for political freedom and the democratic republic in bourgeois society is to the proletariat merely one of the necessary stages in the struggle for the social revolution."

"The Marxists are thoroughly convinced," he wrote in 1905, "of the bourgeois character of the Russian Revolution. What does that mean? It means that those democratic transformations... which became indispensable for Russia, not only do not signify in themselves the undermining of

By Leon Trotsky



Lenin's brother Alexander Ulianov was hanged by the state in his youth for plotting to kill the Tsar

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of the general disillusionment and collapse now.
We have the advantage, however, now as in the past, that we can understand what is happening as Marxists; and because of that we can resist the disillusionment. We can prepare the future.
The future, like the past and the present, will be a world of class struggle, and in that struggle socialists will be able to convince the working class to fight for the programme and the perspective of genuine Marxism. Already in the Stalinist states, where the working class has great cause to hate "socialism", and does hate "socialism", the class struggle is rising. The workers will outgrow their confusion. On the ground scorched and polluted by Stalinism, the green shoots of new life are already visible.



George Plekhanov was the leader of the first Russian Marxist group, the 'Emancipation of Labour Group', formed in exile in 1883 after Plekhanov broke away from the populists (qv). He played a prominent role in the Russian Marxist movement for many years, but moved to the right in World War I, supporting Russia in the war and bitterly opposing the Bolsheviks in 1917.

Street barricade 1905

The two factions

This was the starting point for the fundamental divergence between the two factions. Bolshevism resolutely refused to acknowledge that the Russian bourgeoisie was capable of consummating its own revolution. With immeasurably greater force and consistency than Plekhanov, Lenin advanced the agrarian question as the central problem of the democratic revolution in Russia: "The crux of the Russian Revolution is the agrarian (the land) question. We must make up our minds about the defeat or victory of the revolution...on the basis of accounting for the condition of the masses in their struggle for land."

At one with Plekhanov, Lenin regarded the peasantry as a petty-bourgeois class and the peasant land programme as the programme of bourgeois progressivism. "Nationalisation is a bourgeois measure," he insisted at the Unification Congress. "It will give impetus to the development of capitalism by intensifying the class struggle, by strengthening the mobilisation of land and the investment of capital in agriculture, by lowering the prices on grain."

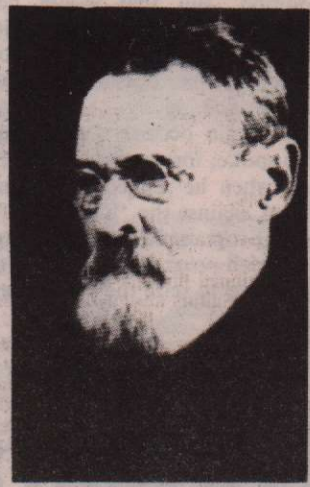
Notwithstanding the admitted bourgeois character of the agrarian revolution, the Russian bourgeoisie was nevertheless hostile to the expropriation of the land owned by the landed gentry, and precisely for that reason strove for a compromise with the monarchy on the basis of a constitution after the Prussian model. To the Plekhanovite idea of union between the proletariat and the liberal bourgeoisie, Lenin counterposed the idea of union between the proletariat and the peasantry.

He proclaimed the task of the revolutionary collaboration of these two classes to be the establishment of a "democratic dictatorship", as the only means for radically purging Russia of its feudal refuse, creating a free class of farmers and opening the way for the development of capitalism after the American rather than the Prussian model.

The victory of the revolution, he wrote, can be attained "only through dictatorship, because the realisation of the transformations immediately and unconditionally necessary for the proletariat and the peasantry will call forth the desperate resistance of the landlords, of the big bourgeoisie, and of Tsarism. Without dictatorship it would be impossible to break that resistance, it would be impossible to defeat counter-revolutionary efforts. That would be, needless to say, not a socialist, but a democratic dictatorship. It would not be able to dispose of (without a whole series of intermediary stages in revolutionary development) the foundations of capitalism. At best, it would be able to introduce a radical redistribution of land ownership for the benefit of the peasantry, carry out a consistent and complete democratisation, including a republic; uproot all the oppressive Asiatic characteristics in the life of the factory as well as the village; lay down the beginnings of important improvements in the condition of the workers; raise their standard of living; and finally, last but not least, carry the revolutionary conflagration into Europe."

Lenin's conception represented a tremendous step forward, proceeding as it did from the agrarian revolution rather than from constitutional reforms as the central task of the revolution, and indicating the only realistic combination of social forces that could fulfill that task. The weak point of Lenin's concept was its inherently contradictory notion, "the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry".

Lenin himself emphasised the basic limitations of that "dictatorship" when he openly called it *bourgeois*. He was thus implying that, for the sake of maintaining unity with the peasantry, the proletariat would be obliged to forego posing the socialist task directly during the impending



Pavel Axelrod was a member, with Plekhanov and Zasulich, of the first Russian Marxist group (in exile). After 1903 he supported the Mensheviks.



Julius Martov was Lenin's closest comrade when they were both young Marxists in the 1890s, but became the leader of the Mensheviks after 1903. In 1917 and after he led a left-wing faction of the Mensheviks which, though opposing the Revolution, subsequently gave critical support to the workers' state.



Vera Zasulich was a member, with Plekhanov and Axelrod, of the first Russian Marxist group (in exile). Before becoming a Marxist she had been a populist, famous for her part in the attempt to kill the notorious Tsarist General Trepov. After 1903 she supported the Mensheviks.



Trotsky and his first wife, Alexandra, in exile in Siberia. Alexandra won Trotsky to Marxism.

revolution

capitalism, the undermining of the domination of the bourgeoisie, but, on the contrary, they will be the first to really clear the ground for a widespread and rapid, a European rather than an Asiatic, development of capitalism; they will be the first to make possible the rule of the bourgeoisie as a class..."

"We cannot jump out of the bourgeois-democratic framework of the Russian Revolution," he insisted, "but we can considerably widen that framework" — that is, create within the bourgeois society more favourable conditions for the further struggle of the proletariat. To that Lenin followed in the footsteps of Plekhanov.

The bourgeois character of the revolution was the meeting of the crossroads for the two factions of the Russian Social-Democracy.

Under these circumstances it was quite natural that in his propaganda Koba [Stalin] should not have ventured beyond those popular formulae which formed the common heritage of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. "The Constituent Assembly, elected on the basis of universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage," wrote he in January, 1905, "is that we should now fight for! Only such an assembly will give us a democratic republic, extremely necessary to use in our struggle for socialism." The bourgeois republic as the arena of prolonged class struggle for the socialist objective — such was the perspective.

In 1907, that is, after countless discussions in the foreign and the Petersburg press, and after the closest verification of theoretical prognoses by the experience of the First Revolution, Stalin wrote: "That our Revolution is bourgeois, that it must end with the demolition of serfdom and not

of the capitalist order, that it can be crowned only by a democratic republic — on that, it seems, everybody in our Party is agreed." Stalin was not speaking of what the Revolution was to begin with, but of what it would end with, limiting it beforehand, and rather categorically, to "only a democratic republic".

In vain would we seek in his writings of those days for as much as a hint about the perspective of the socialist revolution in connection with the democratic insurrection. Such was to remain his position as late as the beginning of the February Revolution of 1917, until Lenin's very arrival in Petrograd.

For Plekhanov, Axelrod, and the leaders of Menshevism generally, the characterisation of the revolution as bourgeois had, above all, the political value of avoiding the premature taunting of the bourgeoisie with the red spectre of socialism and thus "frightening it away" into the camp of reaction. "The social relations of Russia have ripened only for a bourgeois revolution," said Axelrod, the chief tactician of Menshevism, at the Unification Congress. "While this general political lawlessness persists, we must not even so much as mention the direct fight of the proletariat against other classes for political power...It is fighting for the conditions of bourgeois development. Objective historical conditions doom our proletariat to an inevitable collaboration with the bourgeoisie in the struggle against our common enemy."

The content of the Russian Revolution was thus confined beforehand to changes that were compatible with the interests and the views of the liberal bourgeoisie.

The fate of the Russian Revolution

The fate of the Russian Revolution

revolution. But that would have meant the repudiation by the proletariat of its own dictatorship. The dictatorship was consequently, in essence, of the peasantry, although with the workers participating.

On certain occasions that was precisely how Lenin spoke; for example, at the Stockholm Congress, when he replied to Plekhanov, who had rebelled against the "utopia" of seizing power: "What programme are we talking about? About an agrarian programme. Who in that programme is supposed to seize the government? The revolu-

tionary peasantry. Is Lenin confounding the government of the proletariat with that of the peasantry?" No, he said with reference to himself: Lenin sharply differentiated between the socialist government of the proletariat and the bourgeois-democratic government of the peasantry. "And how is a victorious peasant revolution possible," he exclaimed again, "without seizure of power by the revolutionary peasantry?"

In that polemical formulation Lenin very clearly exposed the vulnerability of his position.

Workers and peasants in the revolution

The peasantry was dispersed over the surface of an immense country, with cities as points of contact. By itself the peasantry was incapable even of formulating its own interests, for in each region they were differently conceived. Economic contact between provinces was established by the market and by the railroads; but both the market and the railroads were in the city's hands. In trying to break through the confines of the village and pool their interests, the peasantry necessarily succumbed to political dependence on the city. Neither was the peasantry homogenous in its social relations: its *kulak* stratum naturally strove to unite with the city bourgeoisie, while the lower strata of the village pulled in the direction of the city workers.

Under these circumstances, the peasantry as a whole was utterly incapable of assuming the reins of government.

True, in ancient China revolutions brought the peasantry to power, or rather, the military leaders of peasant insurrections. That led each time to a redivision of the land and the establishment of a new "peasant" dynasty, after which history began all over again: new concentration of lands, a new aristocracy, new usury, new uprisings. So long as the revolution maintained its purely peasant character, society did not emerge from these hopeless rotations. Such was the basis of ancient Asiatic, including ancient Russian, history.

In Europe, beginning with the emergence of the Middle Ages, each victorious peasant uprising did not place a peasant government in power but a Leftist burgher party. More precisely, a peasant uprising proved victorious only to the extent that it managed to establish the position of the city population's revolutionary sector. Seizure of power by a revolutionary peasantry was out of the question in twentieth-century bourgeois Russia.

The attitude towards the liberal bourgeoisie thus became the touchstone in the divergence between revolutionists and opportunists among Social-Democrats. How far the Russian Revolution could venture, what character would be assumed by the future provisional revolutionary government, what tasks would confront it, and in what order it would dispose of them — these questions could be correctly posed in all their importance only in reference to the basic character

of the proletariat's politics, and that character was determined, above all, by its relation to the liberal bourgeoisie.

Plekhanov demonstratively and stubbornly shut his eyes to the fundamental object-lesson of nineteenth-century political history: wherever the proletariat appeared as an independent force, the bourgeoisie shifted to the camp of the counter-revolution. The bolder the struggle of the masses, the quicker the reactionary transformation of liberalism. No one has yet invented a way to paralyse the workings of the law of the class struggle.

"We must prize the support of the non-proletarian parties," Plekhanov was wont to repeat during the years of the First Revolution, "and not drive them away from us by tactless behaviour." With such monotonous moralising the sage of Marxism demonstrated that he was unable to grasp the living dynamics of society. "Tactlessness" might drive away an occasional oversensitive intellectual. But classes and parties are drawn or repelled by their social interests. "It may be safely said," Lenin retorted to Plekhanov, "that the liberals among the landed gentry will forgive you millions of 'tactless' acts, but they will never forgive incitements to take away their land."

And not only the landed gentry: the upper crust of the bourgeoisie, bound to the landowners by identity of property interests and even more closely by the banking system, as well as the upper crust of the petty-bourgeoisie and of the intellectuals, materially and morally dependent on the large and middling property owners, dreaded the independent movement of the masses.

Yet in order to overthrow Tsarism, it was necessary to arouse scores upon scores of millions of the oppressed for a heroic, self-sacrificing, reckless, supreme revolutionary onslaught. The masses could be aroused to this uprising only under the banner of their own interests; hence, in the spirit of unreconcilable hostility toward the exploiting classes, and first of all, the landlords. The "frightening away" of the oppositional bourgeoisie from the revolutionary peasants and workers was therefore the immanent law of the revolution itself and could not be forestalled by "tactfulness" or diplomacy.



The poverty of



Stalin as a young revolutionary: he started off fighting against injustice and privilege. But he confined himself to a narrow role as an organiser and 'committee man' without developing an independent intellectual role in the Bolsheviks' debates and discussions. That background helped to shape him for the role of spokesperson for the 'practical-minded' bureaucrats in the 1920s.

Each new month confirmed Lenin's estimate of liberalism. Notwithstanding the fondest hopes of the Mensheviks, the Kadets not only made no move to lead the "bourgeois" revolution but, on the contrary, more and more found their historic mission in fighting it. After the crushing defeat of the December Insurrection, the liberals, who, thanks to the ephemeral Duma, stepped out before the political footlights, strove with all their might to explain to the monarchy their insufficiently active counter-revolutionary behaviour in the autumn of 1905, when the holiest pillars of "culture" were in danger.

The leader of the liberals, Miliukov, who carried on *sub rosa* negotiations with the Winter Palace, argued quite properly in the press that by the end of 1905 the Kadets were unable even to appear before the masses. "Those who now blame the [Kadet] party," he wrote, "for not protesting then, by convoking meetings, against the revolutionary illusions of Trotskyism... simply do not understand or do not remember the moods then prevalent among the democratic public that attended these meetings."

By the "illusions of Trotskyism" the liberal leader meant the independent policy of the proletariat, which attracted to the Soviets the sympathies of the cities' lower classes, soldiers, peasants and of all the oppressed, thus alienating "cultivated" society. The evolution of the Mensheviks developed along parallel lines. Time and again they had to alibi themselves to the liberals for having found themselves in a bloc with Trotsky after October, 1905. The explanations of that talented publicist of the Mensheviks, Martov, came to this — that it was necessary to make concessions to the "revolutionary illusions" of the masses.

In Tiflis political groupings were formed on the same basis of principles as in Petersburg. "The smashing of reaction", wrote the leader of the Caucasian Mensheviks, Jordania, "the winning and attainment of the constitution — will come from the conscious unification and single-minded direction of all the forces of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie... True, the peasantry will be drawn into this movement and will invest it with the character of a natural force; nevertheless, it is these two classes that will play the decisive role,



The trial of the St Petersburg soviet 1906

tionist bourgeoisie, even a majority of the rank and file Mensheviks found themselves closer to Lenin than to Plekhanov. A disdainful attitude towards liberals was a literary tradition of intellectual radicalism. But it would be utterly useless to look for an independent contribution of Koba's on that question, be it an analysis of social relations in the Caucasus or new arguments, or even so much as a new formulation of old arguments.

Jordania, leader of the Caucasian Mensheviks, was incomparably more independent of Plekhanov than Stalin was of Lenin. "In vain do the Messieurs Liberals try," wrote Koba after Bloody Sunday, "to save the tottering throne of the Tsar. In vain do they proffer the hand of succour to the Tsar!...The agitated masses of people are getting ready for revolution, not for conciliation with the Tsar...Yes gentlemen, vain are your efforts! The Russian Revolution is unavoidable, as unavoidable as the sunrise! Can you stop the ris-

ing sun? — that is the question!" and so forth. Koba could not fly higher than that.

Two and a half years later, repeating Lenin's words almost literally, he wrote: "The Russian liberal bourgeoisie is anti-revolutionary; it cannot be the propeller, much less the leader, of the revolution; it is the sworn enemy of the revolution; and against it a persistent struggle must be waged."

It was on that fundamental issue that Stalin passed through a complete metamorphosis during the ensuing ten years, so that he greeted the February revolution of 1917 as a supporter of the bloc with the liberal bourgeoisie, and, in consonance with that, as the herald of fusion with the Mensheviks into one party. Only Lenin, upon arrival from abroad, sharply terminated Stalin's independent policy, which he called a mockery of Marxism.

Populism: old and new

Populists regarded all workers and peasants as simply "toilers" and "exploited ones", who were equally interested in socialism, while to Marxists a peasant was a petty-bourgeois, capable of becoming a socialist only to the extent that he materially or spiritually ceased being a peasant. With a sentimentality characteristic of them, Populists saw in that sociological characterisation a dire insult to the peasantry.

Along that line was fought for two generations the principal battle between the revolutionary tendencies of Russia.

In order to understand the subsequent conflict between Stalinism and Trotskyism, it is necessary to emphasise that, in consonance with all Marxist tradition, Lenin never regarded the peasant as a socialist ally of the proletariat; on the contrary, it was the overwhelming preponderance of the peasantry which had led Lenin to conclude that a socialist revolution was impossible in Russia. That idea recurs time and again in all his articles that directly or indirectly touch upon the agrarian question.

"We support the peasant movement", wrote Lenin in September, 1905, "in so far as it is revolutionary and democratic. We are preparing (at once, immediately preparing) to fight against it in so far as it asserts itself as a reactionary anti-proletarian movement. The whole essence of Marxism is in that twofold task..."

Lenin saw the Western proletariat and to some extent the semi-proletarians of the Russian village as socialist allies, but never the whole of the peasantry. "At first, we support to the very end, with all means, including confiscation," he repeated with persistence typical of him, "the peasant in general against the landed proprietor, but later (and not even later, but at the very same time) we support the proletariat against the peasant in general."

"The peasantry will win in a bourgeois democratic revolution," he wrote in March 1906, "and thereby will completely exhaust its revolutionism as a peasantry. The proletariat will win in a bourgeois democratic revolution and thereby will only begin really to unfold its true socialist revolutionism."

"The movement of the peasantry," he repeated in May of the same year, "is the movement of another class; it is a struggle not against the foundations of capitalism but for their purging of all the remnants of serfdom."

That view may be traced in Lenin from article to article, from year to year, from volume to volume. Expressions and illustrations vary, but the basic thought is unalterable. Nor could it have been otherwise.

Had Lenin seen a socialist ally in the peasantry he would not have had the slightest basis for insisting upon the bourgeois character of the revolution and limiting it to "the dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry", to purely democratic tasks. On the occasions when Lenin accused me of "underestimating" the peasantry, he did not have in mind my failure to recognise the socialist tendencies of the peasantry but rather my failure to realise sufficiently, from Lenin's point of view, the bourgeois-democratic independence of the peasantry, its capacity to create

its own power and through it impede the establishment of the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat.

The revaluation of that question commenced only during the years of the thermidorian reaction, the beginning of which coincided by and large with Lenin's illness and death. From then on the union of Russian workers and peasants was declared to be in itself sufficient guarantee against the dangers of restoration and a firm pledge that socialism would be achieved within the borders of the Soviet Union. Having substituted the theory of socialism in a separate country for the theory of international revolution, Stalin began to call the Marxist evaluation of the peasantry "Trotskyism", and moreover not only with reference to the present but retroactively to the entire past.

It is, of course, possible to ask whether the classical Marxist view of the peasantry had not proved erroneous. That theme would lead us far beyond the limits of this appendix. Suffice it to say for the nonce that Marxism never ascribed an absolute and immutable character to its estimation of the peasantry as a non-socialist class. Marx said long ago that the peasant is capable of judgement as well as prejudice. The very nature of the peasantry is altered under altered conditions. The regime of the dictatorship of the proletariat discovered very great possibilities for influencing the peasantry and for re-educating it. History has not yet plumbed to the bottom of the limits of these possibilities. But it is already clear that the growing role of state compulsion in the USSR, far from refuting, has basically confirmed the very view of the peasantry that distinguished Russian Marxists from Populists.

Yet, whatever the situation on that score today, after twenty-odd years of the new regime, the fact remains that prior to the October Revolution, or rather prior to the year 1924, no one in the Marxist camp, and least of all Lenin, had regarded the peasantry as a factor of socialist development. Without the aid of a proletarian revolution in the West, he reiterated time and again, restoration is unavoidable in Russia. He was not mistaken: the Stalinist bureaucracy is nothing else than the first stage of bourgeois restoration.



Sverdlov was the chief organiser of the Bolshevik Party in the years of revolution and civil war. He died young, from disease, during the civil war.

Father Gapon, a priest and a police agent, nevertheless led a workers' demonstration to the Tsar's palace in January 1905.

The shooting-down of the workers — who wanted to appeal to the 'good Tsar' against the bad employers and state officials — sparked off revolutionary upheavals.

The Tsarist regime had set up trade unions secretly controlled by the police (called "Zubatov unions" after their organiser), in an effort to divert workers becoming militant over wages and conditions away from the socialists. The tactic didn't work, however. The "Zubatov unions" were forced to support strikes, and the socialists worked within them to spread their ideas.



The fate of the Russian Revolution

The fate of the Russian Revolution

The theory of permanent revolution

Such were the divergent positions of the two main factions of the Russian Social-Democracy. But alongside them, as early as the dawn of the First Revolution, a third position was formulated, which met with practically no recognition in those days, but which we must explain — not only because it was confirmed by the events of 1917, but particularly because seven years after the Revolution, after being turned upside down, it began to play an utterly unforeseen role in the political evolution of Stalin and of the entire Soviet bureaucracy.

Early in 1905 I published in Geneva a pamphlet which analysed the political situation as it existed around the winter of 1904. I came to the conclusion that the independent campaign of liberal petitions and banquets had exhausted its possibilities; that the radical intellectuals, who had shifted their hopes to the liberals, had found themselves in a blind alley together with the latter; that the peasant movement was creating conditions favourable for victory yet incapable of assuring it; that the showdown could be brought about only through an armed insurrection of the proletariat; that the very next stage along that way must be the general strike. This pamphlet called "Until the Ninth of January", had been written prior to the Bloody Sunday in Petersburg. The powerful wave of strikes which began that day, together with the first armed clashes that supplemented it, was an unequivocal confirmation of the pamphlet's strategic prognosis.

The preface to my work was written by Parvus, a Russian emigré, who had already become by then a prominent German writer. Parvus's was an extraordinarily creative personality, capable of becoming infected with the ideas of others as well as enriching others with his ideas. He lacked the inward balance and application necessary to contribute anything worthy of his talents as a thinker and writer to the labour movement. There is no doubt that he exerted considerable influence on my personal development, especially with respect to the social-revolutionary understanding of our epoch.

A few years before our first meeting Parvus passionately defended the idea of a general strike in Germany; but the country was passing through prolonged industrial prosperity, the Social-Democracy was adjusting itself to the Hohenzollern regime, and a foreigner's revolutionary propaganda met nothing but ironical indifference.

Having read my pamphlet in manuscript, the very next day after the bloody events in Petersburg, Parvus was overwhelmed with the thought of the exceptional role which the proletariat of backward Russia was called upon to play. Several days spent jointly in Munich were filled with conversations that clarified much to both of us and brought us personally close together. The preface Parvus then wrote to the pamphlet entered permanently into the history of the Russian Revolution.

In a few pages he shed light on those social peculiarities of backward Russia which, true enough, were already well known, but from which no one before him had drawn all the necessary inferences.

"Political radicalism throughout Western Europe," wrote Parvus, "as everybody knows, depended primarily upon the petty bourgeoisie. These were artisans and generally all of that part of the bourgeoisie which was caught up by the industrial development but which at the same time was superseded by the class of capitalists..."

"In Russia of the pre-capitalist period cities developed on the Chinese rather than on the European model. These were administrative centres, purely official and bureaucratic in character, devoid of any political significance, while in the economic sense they were trade bazaars for the landlord and peasant milieu of its environs. Their development was still rather inconsiderable, when it was terminated by the capitalist process, which



Revolutionary workers in 1917

began to establish large cities in its own image, that is, factory towns and centres of world trade...

"That which had hindered the development of petty bourgeois democracy came to benefit the class consciousness of the proletariat in Russia — the weak development of the artisan form of production. The proletariat was immediately concentrated in the factories..."

"Greater and greater masses of peasants will be drawn into the movement. But all they can do is to aggravate the political anarchy already rampant in the country and thus weaken the government; they cannot become a compact revolutionary army. Hence, as the revolution develops, an ever greater portion of political work will fall to the lot of the proletariat. At the same time its political awareness will be enhanced and its political energy will grow apace..."

"The Social-Democracy will be confronted with this dilemma: to assume responsibility for the provisional government or to stand aloof from the labour movement. The workers will regard that government as their own, no matter what the attitude of the Social-Democracy... In Russia only workers can accomplish a revolutionary insurrection. In Russia the revolutionary provisional government will be a government of the workers' democracy. That government will be Social-Democratic, should the Social-Democracy be at the head of the revolutionary movement of the Russian proletariat..."

"The Social-Democratic provisional government cannot accomplish a socialist insurrection in Russia, but the very process of liquidating the autocracy and establishing a democratic republic will provide it with fertile ground for political activity..."

In the heyday of revolutionary events, in the autumn of 1905, I met Parvus again, this time in Petersburg. Remaining organisationally independent of both factions, we jointly edited *Russkoye Slovo* (*The Russian Word*), a newspaper for the working class masses, and in coalition with the Mensheviks, the important political newspaper, *Nachalo* (*The Beginning*).



'Parvus' (Alexander Helfand) was the pioneer, with Trotsky, of the idea that a workers' government could take power in backward Russia. He was a maverick left-winger, active mainly in the German Socialist movement, who became a war profiteer in World War I.

Revolution in the West

The theory of permanent revolution was usually associated with the names of "Parvus and Trotsky". That was only partially correct.

Parvus attained revolutionary maturity at the end of the preceding century, when he marched at the head of the forces that fought so-called "Revisionism", i.e. the opportunistic distortions of Marx's theory. But his optimism was undermined by the failure of all his efforts to push the German Social-Democracy in the direction of a more resolute policy. Parvus grew increasingly more reserved about the perspectives of a socialist revolution in the West.

At the same time he felt that "the Social-Democratic provisional government cannot accomplish a socialist insurrection in Russia." Hence, his prognosis indicated, instead of the transformation of the democratic into the socialist revolution, merely the establishment in Russia of a regime of workers' democracy, more or less as in Australia, where the first labour government, resting on a farmerist foundation, did not venture beyond the limits of the bourgeois regime.

I did not share that conclusion. Australian democracy, maturing organically on the virgin soil of a new continent, immediately assumed a conservative character and dominated the youthful yet rather privileged proletariat. Russian democracy, on the contrary, could come about only in consequence of a large-scale revolutionary insurrection, the dynamics of which would never



The Soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies in session, 1917

Rosa Luxemburg on the Russian revolution

Does the historical fate of the Russian workers' revolution endorse in retrospect the verdict of those scholastic Marxists like Karl Kautsky who condemned Lenin and the Bolsheviks as adventurists — people who took a leap in the dark?

It is best to let the splendid revolutionary Marxist Rosa Luxemburg answer that question. Luxemburg was an ardent supporter of the Russian Revolution, but also a sharp critic of the policy of the Bolsheviks. She differed with them on their land policy and on their national policy. She criticised the Red Terror and argued that the Bolshevik Revolution could and should have been won with less repression and more democracy than the Bolsheviks felt they could foster after the outbreak of civil war in mid-1918. She wrote against Kautsky:

"That the Bolsheviks have based their policy entirely upon the world proletarian revolution is the clearest proof of their political far-sightedness and firmness of principle and of the bold scope of their policies... Surely nothing can be further from [Lenin's and Trotsky's] thoughts than to believe that all the things they have done or left undone under the conditions of bitter compulsion and necessity in the midst of the roaring whirlpool of event, should be regarded by the International as a shining example of socialist policy towards which only uncritical admiration and zealous imitation are in order."

But:
"Whatever a party could offer of courage, revolutionary far-sightedness and consistency in a historic hour, Lenin, Trotsky and the other comrades have given in good measure. All the revolutionary honour and capacity which western social democracy lacked were represented by the Bolsheviks. Their October uprising was not only the actual salvation of the Russian Revolution, it was also the salvation of the honour of international socialism."



Rosa Luxemburg

permit the labour government to maintain itself within the framework of bourgeois democracy.

Our differences of opinion, which began soon after the Revolution of 1905, led to a complete break at the beginning of the war, when Parvus, in whom the sceptic had completely killed the revolutionist, proved to be on the side of German imperialism and subsequently became the counsellor and inspirer of the First President of the German Republic, Ebert.

After writing my pamphlet, "Until the Ninth of January", I repeatedly returned to the development and the grounding of the theory of permanent revolution. It is necessary to present it here in the form of exact quotations from my works of the years 1905 and 1906.

"The nucleus of population in a contemporary city — at least, in a city of economic and political significance — is the sharply differentiated class of hired labour. It is this class, essentially unknown to the Great French Revolution, which is fated to play the decisive role in our revolution... In an economically more backward country the proletariat may come to power sooner than in a country more advanced capitalistically. The conception of a kind of automatic dependence of the proletarian dictatorship on a country's technical forces and means is a prejudice of extremely simplified 'economic' materialism. Such a view has nothing in common with Marxism... Notwithstanding the fact that the productive forces of the United States industry are ten times greater than ours, the political role of the Russian proletariat, its influence on the politics of its own country and the possibility that it may soon influence world politics are incomparably greater than the role and significance of the American proletariat..."

"It seems to me that the Russian Revolution will create such conditions that the power may (in the event of victory, *must*) pass into the hands of the proletariat before the politicians of bourgeois liberalism will find it possible fully to unfold their genius for statecraft... The Russian bourgeoisie will surrender all the revolutionary positions to the proletariat. It will also have to surrender revolutionary hegemony over the peasantry. The proletariat in power will come to the peasantry as the class liberator... The proletariat, leaning on the peasantry, will bring into motion all the forces for raising the cultural level of the village and for developing political consciousness in the peasantry..."

"But will not perhaps the peasantry itself drive the proletariat away and supersede it? That is impossible. All historic experience repudiates that supposition. It shows that the peasantry is utterly incapable of an *independent* political role... From the aforesaid it is clear how I look upon the idea of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry'. The point is not whether I deem it admissible in principle, whether I 'want' or 'do not want' such a form of political co-operation. I deem it unrealisable — at least, in the direct and immediate sense..."

The foregoing already shows how incorrect is the assertion that the conception here expounded "jumped over the bourgeois revolution", as has been subsequently reiterated without end. "The struggle for the democratic renovation of Russia..." I wrote at the same time, "is in its entirety derived from capitalism, is being conducted by forces formed on the basis of capitalism, and immediately, in the first place, is directed against the feudal and vassal obstacles that stand in the way of developing a capitalist society."

But the substance of the question was with what forces and by which methods could these obstacles be overcome. "The framework of all the questions of the revolution may be limited by the assertion that our revolution is *bourgeois* in its objective goals and consequently, in all its inevitable results, and it is possible at the same time to close one's eyes to the fact that the principal active force of that bourgeois revolution is the proletariat, which is pushing itself toward power with all the impact of the revolution..."

"One may comfort himself with the thought that Russia's social conditions have not yet ripened for a socialist economy — and at the same time overlook the thought that, upon coming to power, the proletariat would inevitably, with all the logic of its situation, push itself toward the management of the economy at the expense of the state..."

"Coming into the government not as helpless

hostages but as the leading force, the representatives of the proletariat will by virtue of that alone smash the demarcation between the minimal and maximal programme, i.e. *place collectivism on the order of the day*. At what point in that tendency the proletariat would be stopped will depend on the inter-relation of forces, but certainly not on the initial intentions of the proletariat's party..."

"But we may already ask ourselves: must the dictatorship of the proletariat inevitably smash itself against the framework of the bourgeois revolution or can it, on the basis of the existing historical situation of the *world* look forward to the perspective of victory, after smashing this limiting framework?..."

"One thing may be said with certainty: without the direct governmental support of the European proletariat, the working class of Russia will not be able to maintain itself in power and transform its temporary reign into an enduring socialist dictatorship..."

But this does not necessarily lead to a pessimistic prognosis: "the political liberation, led by the working class of Russia, will raise the leader to a

height unprecedented in history, transmit to him colossal forces and means, and make him the initiator of the worldwide liquidation of capitalism, for which history has created all the objective prerequisites..."

As to the extent to which international Social-Democracy will prove capable of fulfilling its revolutionary task, I wrote in 1906: "The European Socialist parties — and in the first place, the mightiest of them, the German party — have developed their conservatism, which grows stronger in proportion to the size of the masses embraced by socialism and the effectiveness of the organisation and the discipline of these masses. Because of that, the Social-Democracy, as the organisation that embodies the political experience of the proletariat, may at a given moment become the immediate obstacle on the path of an open clash between the workers and the bourgeois reaction..."

Yet I concluded my analysis by expressing the assurance that "the Eastern revolution will infect the Western proletariat with revolutionary idealism and arouse in it the desire to start talking 'Russian' with its enemy..."

The Stalinist dogma

To sum up. Populism, like Slavophilism, proceeded from illusions that Russia's course of development would be utterly unique, escaping capitalism and the bourgeois republic. Plekhanov's Marxism concentrated on proving the identity in principle of Russia's historical course with that of the West. The programme that grew out of that ignored the very real and far from mystical peculiarities of Russia's social structure and revolutionary development.

The Menshevik view of the revolution, purged of its episodic stratifications and individual deviations, was tantamount to the following: the victory of the Russian bourgeois revolution was possible only under the leadership of the liberal bourgeoisie and must put the latter in power. Later the democratic regime would let the Russian proletariat, with incomparably greater success than heretofore, catch up with its elder Western brothers on the road of the struggle for Socialism.

Lenin's perspective may be briefly expressed in the following words: the backward Russian bourgeoisie is incapable of completing its own revolution! The complete victory of the revolution, through the intermediary of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry", would purge the land of medievalism, invest the development of Russian capitalism with American tempo, strengthen the proletariat in city and village and make really possible the struggle for socialism.

On the other hand, the victory of the Russian revolution would give tremendous impetus to the socialist revolution in the West, while the latter would not only protect Russia from the dangers of restoration but would also enable the Russian proletariat to come to the conquest of power in a comparatively brief historical period.

The perspective of permanent revolution may be summarised in the following way: the complete victory of the democratic revolution in Russia is conceivable only in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, leaning on the peasantry. The dictatorship of the proletariat, which would inevitably place on the order of the day not only democratic but socialist tasks as well, would at the same time give a powerful impetus to the international socialist revolution. Only the victory of the proletariat in the West could protect Russia from bourgeois restoration and assure it the possibility of rounding out the establishment of socialism.

That compact formula discloses with equal distinctness the similarity of the latter two concepts in their irreconcilable differentiation from

the liberal Menshevik perspective, as well as their extremely essential distinction from each other on the question of the social character and the tasks of the "dictatorship" which must grow out of the revolution.

The not infrequent complaint in the writings of the present Moscow theoreticians that the programme of the dictatorship of the proletariat was "premature" in 1905, is beside the point. In an empirical sense the programme of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry proved equally "premature".

The unfavourable combination of forces at the time of the First Revolution did not so much preclude the dictatorship of the proletariat as the victory of the revolution in general. Yet all the revolutionary groups were based on the hope of complete victory; the supreme revolutionary struggle would have been impossible without such a hope.

The differences of opinion dealt with the general perspective of the revolution and the strategy arising from that. The perspective of Menshevism was false to the core: it pointed out the wrong road to the proletariat. The perspective of Bolshevism was not complete: it correctly pointed out the general direction of the struggle, but characterised its stages incorrectly. The insufficiency in the perspective of Bolshevism did not become apparent in 1905 only because the revolution itself did not undergo further development. But then at the beginning of 1917 Lenin was obliged to alter his perspective, in direct conflict with the old cadres of his party.

No political prognosis can pretend to be mathematically exact; suffice it, if it correctly indicates the general line of development and helps to orient the actual course of events, which inevitably bends the main line right and left. In that sense it is impossible not to see that the concept of permanent revolution has completely passed the test of history. During the initial years of the Soviet regime no one denied that; on the contrary, that fact found acknowledgement in a number of official publications. But when the bureaucratic reaction against October opened up in the calmed and cooled upper crust of Soviet society, it was at once directed against the theory which reflected the first proletarian revolution more completely than anything else while at the same time openly exposing its unfinished, limited, and partial character. Thus, by way of repulsion, originated the theory of socialism in a separate country, the basic dogma of Stalinism.

The fate of the Russian Revolution

Township violence explodes; regime on the offensive; opposition divided:

Glasnost South African style

Robert Fine, author of the recently published book, 'Beyond Apartheid', surveys developments in South Africa since the release of Mandela and the unbanning of the African National Congress in February this year. Reform from above holds no less dangers to the rulers in South Africa as it does in the USSR.

In Eastern Europe and in South Africa despotic regimes have found themselves confronted by the consequences of their own forms of misrule, as they led to economic stagnation, social misery and political revolt.

In both situations the forces for change have been parallel: first, a nationalist intelligentsia dedicated to the achievement of democracy and national independence; second, a 'modernising' reformist wing of the existing government and bureaucracy; third, external pressures from 'western' capital and a hands-off policy from the Soviet Union; and lastly, mass protest movements among the people. In both contexts these pressures mounted dramatically in the 1980s.

In South Africa the initiative came from the government nine months ago, when it released Mandela, legalised the ANC and other political opposition groups, agreed to release political prisoners and allow political exiles to return, entered into talks with ANC representatives and proffered negotiations over a new constitution. For the ANC, this marked the end of the period of armed struggle which had lasted since the mid-1960s and in which any form of 'official' negotiations or participation had been ruled out by the nationalist politicians.

Democratisation from above has been closely linked to 'marketisation'. In South Africa, this has taken a number of related forms: a government programme of privatisation and/or deregulation of the huge nationalised and parastatal sector; the de-nationalisation of ISCOR, the iron and steel combine, being the first case in point; government efforts to persuade the

ANC and its allies in the Communist Party and the trade union federation, COSATU, to drop its prior demands for the nationalisation of the mines and major monopolies; government and business policies favouring the growth of a black bourgeoisie, and an ideological offensive designed to dissociate capitalism from apartheid. From the Soviet Union a number of statements have been made indicating that the Soviet government considered South Africa to be 'unripe for socialism' and a legitimate part of the 'western' bloc.

The prospects of democracy are better than they have been, but remain precarious in the face of huge economic problems, entrenched authoritarian tendencies in both government and opposition movements and the channelling of popular discontents into nationalist, ethnic and racialist forms.

In South Africa the violence between the Zulu-nationalist Inkatha movement and the African-nationalist ANC has only been the visible symptom of the fragmentation of identities (like the 'African nation' or the 'people') and intolerance of political differences. The sharper the conflicts within civil society, the more likely it becomes that the new state, however composed, will use its authority to impose order from above.

The working class is weak as an independent political force. In South Africa 'social movement' trade unions have played a leading role in organising workers, fighting for economic demands and mobilising opposition to the old regimes. At present the trade unions are the most representative body in South African society.

However, the leadership of COSATU has come under the sway of nationalist politicians, so that the union has found it difficult to combine organisational with political independence. In South Africa COSATU is for the time being firmly attached to the ANC-Communist Party nexus, in spite of opposition from the Pan African Congress, Black Consciousness groups and a few independent socialists.

Some previously independent socialists and trade unionists like Moses Mayekiso have been drawn to the Communist Party in spite of its Stalinist heritage, out of conviction that the SACP has now abandoned its old ideas and methods, or out of a belief that the SACP can be turned into a democratic mass



Can the deal hold?

workers' party or out of fear of the consequences of not supporting the SACP, or simply out of the wish to be 'in' rather than 'out' of the new order they have so long fought for.

Communism is less discredited in South Africa than in Eastern Europe for reasons not hard to fathom: the SACP had been banned for 40 years, the Soviet Union gave political, financial and military support to the movement, the SACP is closely allied to the ANC, it is the only apparent socialist party in South Africa.

The relative lack of success of the SACP has been in part a function of a lack of viable socialist alternatives. One major problem in Trotskyist circles has been the identification of Stalinism with a 'right wing' deviation, especially 'two-stage theory' and the postponement of socialism, and conversely the identification of anti-Stalinism with a yet more revolutionary form of nationalism.

Not only does this paint a one-sided picture of the history of the SACP, which has shown itself capable of swinging from 'right' to 'left' and back again — as its 'left' turn in the mid-1980s witnesses — but it turns 'anti-Stalinism' into little more than the extreme 'left' face of that which it opposes. In the current period, this attitude has led the 'anti-Stalinist' groups into the dangerous 'revolutionary nationalism' shown by the Pan African Congress and Azapo or the dead-end of opposing negotiations in toto.

Both with the trade union movement and in left public opinion more generally, there are important attempts to instil an

"Violence between the Zulu-nationalist Inkatha movement and the African-nationalist ANC has only been the visible symptom of the fragmentation of identities (like the 'African nation' or the 'people') and intolerance of political differences"

independent workers' voice into both the form and content of negotiations.

For example, the Clothing and Textiles Workers Union have put forward a draft workers charter for adoption by COSATU which it wants introduced into the negotiations between the ANC and government and then into any new constitution. The charter contains important clauses on union rights (including the right to strike), industrial democracy (including the right of union representatives to sit on boards of management) and workers rights (like those against unfair dismissal).

It is a superior document to the SACP's draft workers charter which does not seem to be aimed at inclusion in the new constitution. The SACP document also contains dangerous clauses about institutionalising in law the principles of 'one industry — one union' and 'one country — one federation'. If this were done, it could make a mockery of the right of workers to join a union of their own choice, and buttress the hold of the SACP or any other union bosses over their members.

In other areas of political life — like in the radical journal 'Work in Progress' — there are to be found criticisms not of the principle of negotiations but of how they are being conducted. The issues being taken up include: the new membership entering the ANC (in some

areas homelands bureaucrats, chiefs, entrepreneurs, and 'securocrats'); the appeals of the ANC to business for funds (or in one case for a fleet of BMWs); the inability of the ANC to protect their supporters from the terrible violence in the townships (particularly in the recent killings in the Transvaal); problems of internal democracy within the ANC (the national conference has been postponed from December 1990 to June 1991); the appointment of Winnie Mandela to head the department of social welfare (while she is on trial for her part in the murder of Stompie Moeketsi and the kidnapping and beatings of other youths, and while leading sections of the mass democratic movement have condemned the 'reign of terror' of her 'football team' bodyguards); lack of communication between the ANC and people in the townships; the two hats worn by ANC leaders who are also SACP; and so forth.

Equally important are the economic and constitutional ideas with which the ANC and its allies are going to enter negotiations. There is a lot of confusion over the role of planning and nationalisation, since South Africa already has a highly nationalised and planned economy, and most people are talking in terms of some kind of mixed economy and a constitution which protects the rights of minorities.

The most important item on the left agenda is to limit the power and scope of the new bureaucracy likely to emerge in post-apartheid South Africa. The state bureaucracy is already huge and powerful but the growth of social programmes, Africanisation, the construction of new career ladders, the protection of old white jobs — all these factors are capable of creating a monster that could suck the country dry. Critical voices on the left are widely to be heard but they have not been able or willing to form any cohesive opposition.

The new situation offers space to build a socialist political voice for workers, but this is bound to be a rocky road. There is a fine socialist tradition in South Africa, but it has long been overshadowed by the combined forces of nationalism and Stalinism.

A few years ago the trade unions offered a political alternative, but the more naive expectations concerning the potential of independent trade unionism was probably exaggerated on the left. The trade union left could perform this role in the future, but not apart from a renewed battle for socialist ideas.



Army mounts township roadblock

Turtles: ludicrous but lucrative!



A revolution against the revolutionaries?

Theatre

Colin Foster reviews David Edgar's new play, 'The Shape of the Table', now at the National Theatre in London

In this play about the East European revolutions of 1989, it turns out, paradoxically, that the only real revolutionary is the old Stalinist despot whom the revolution overthrows.

The script is closely modelled on events in Czechoslovakia. The character corresponding to Gustav Husak, the old CP leader, makes his entrance as a murderous thug.

Even then, though, he is allowed a dry intelligence. As the play unfolds, he becomes a tragic and sympathetic character.

A former working-class organiser, a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps, a man who helped organise the CP seizure of power after World War 2 with the highest hopes of building a new society, and a veteran of Stalinist prisons too (jailed in the 1950s as a Titoite), he ends up blaming himself for the abuses of Stalinism; but he goes to the prisons of the new post-Stalinist order with dignity.

The play makes vivid and finely-painted characters out of other leading figures of the old regime, too. In contrast, the anti-Stalinist

yet it is already a money maker of gargantuan proportions, preying on the easily-led. Twenty eight thousand young people a week (in Britain) now join the Turtles fan club.

Let the truth be told: TMNT is just a ludicrous story out of a 1950s horror comic, revived by clever people who breathed life into it with money, and good special effects (the only attraction of the film for me were the special effects), and lashings of hype.

The Turtle memorabilia industry is a lucrative part of the hype: pizzas, bed covers, T-shirts, video games, cartoons, comics, hats, bum bags, posters, teddy bears, toy figures — you name it, the shops have it.

But, I'm afraid, the movie doesn't 'have it'!

to one of the old comic-book crime fighters scenarios.

Anyway, after 15 years of prancing around in the sewers the turtles start fighting the crime wave that is supposedly engulfing the city of New York.

They foil the mugging of a top news reporter, April O'Neal, and she soon becomes the ally of the TMNT.

After a few confrontations, pizzas and corny jokes, and lots of violence, their great enemy becomes known: The Shredder.

He is a sort of martial arts Fagin, recruiting a gang of kids for his martial arts army, to rob New York. A masked knight in jagged armour, his real identity remains unknown until the end of the film.

The film doesn't get more stupid as it unravels, it is always ludicrous,

ancient Japanese martial arts warrior) finds four baby turtles in a sewer, and is mutated along with them by a flask of radioactive waste. They all develop a human level of intelligence.

Stop giggling! Here comes the really stupid bit: The rat (Splinter) teaches the four turtles the fighting art of the Ninja.

The explanation for the rat being able to do this is that he mimicked his master, watching him through the bars of his cage, until he himself became a Ninja...

The ludicrous (but lucrative) foursome, along with their master, spend 15 years training in their New York sewer headquarters. In that time they develop a passion for pizza! Their reason for training is never clearly told, you just have to imagine them fitting themselves in-

Cinema

We sent Thomas P Carlyle, SO's special investigator into Xmas movies for kids, to check out the Ninja Turtles film. This is his report

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles' (TMNT), which came out at the beginning of December, is the only new children's movie this Xmas.

It is a sad farce of a movie. The whole cult of TMNT is an enormous money-spinner, with no conscience at all.

The story is as follows. A rat once owned as a pet by a Ninja (an

Paris couldn't have been this boring

Cinema

Belinda Weaver reviews 'Henry and June'

'Henry and June' would only be excusable as a piss take. But this long (and I mean long) and squirmingly reverent look at the relationship between the writers Henry Miller and Anais Nin is played absolutely straight, as if every word from their lips was a pearl to be cherished.

Wrong on all counts! What the film can't help but show is a couple of shallow posers dramatising themselves and apeing great emotions. You feel Nin and Miller wouldn't bother doing anything they couldn't boast about later, and for all their supposed liberation, they're hopelessly shackled to their own egos and their burning desire for celebrity.

The film is utterly pretentious, treating its Americans-in-Paris-in-the-thirties milieu as if it were heaven itself. Perhaps it is to filmmaker Philip Kaufman, but it's hell for the audience. The only light relief in 'Henry and June' is provided by the piffingly ponderous dialogue (along the lines of "He made me a woman") which provoked whoops of (unintended) laughter from the audience.

The film is full of lines no actor



Left is Maria de Madeiros as Anais Nin, right is Uma Thurman as June Miller

could say and hope to keep his dignity; the whole thing is mortifyingly stupid. It treats these shallow people as gods.

At the beginning, Nin is bored by her dull banker husband; she longs to meet a "real man". When Miller turns up, rude, balding, grubby (and with a killer five o'clock shadow) he seems to fit her bill. She pursues him. One minute he's not interested; the next it's blissful rape (for her). Haven't we already seen one film too many where the heroine is overpowered by a man, tries to fight him off, then happily

surrenders? I know I have. And this happens not once, but twice!

Why any filmmaker would put up Fred Ward's Miller as the acme of male desirability is a question I wouldn't even try to answer. And why anyone would swoon over Maria de Madeiros's Anais Nin is also a puzzle; she's just a blank, a big gaping hole on the screen.

The only person in the film with any presence at all is Miller's wife June (played by Uma Thurman), who burns up the screen. But we get too much of her; she should be glimpsed, not feasted on the way

she is here. With her smudgy eyed beauty, and her great sensual presence, she's worth looking at, but in scene after scene, she's forced to come on like a silent movie vamp, all narrowed eyes and pouty lips, and her role becomes embarrassing.

Her best moment is when (after almost seducing Nin), she rejects her, saying that Nin has no real feelings, that all she wants is experience. After two hours of Nin's nonsense, this is a pretty welcome summing up.

June is outraged by the "cannibalism" of both Miller and Nin, who digest their friends and lovers and spit them out as thinly disguised fiction. June, who's no writer, but who has sold herself to keep Miller in pens and paper, feels cheated. She at least has lived, and now both Miller and Nin are using her to write about. She wouldn't mind so much if the writing was good. But it's not. She finds Nin's word "poetic, sorta", but she thinks Miller's is trash. "I thought I was getting Dostoevsky," she rails at him.

Nin and Miller come across as people who cannot feel, who only try emotions on, and thus have to substitute thrills for feeling. Their sexual experimentation is a cover for shallowness.

Despite its length, the film gives no sense of any connection at all between any of the characters: we can't see what attracts June to Nin, or Nin to Henry, or why Hugo remains devoted to Nin. No-one develops as a character. The film sees them only from the outside, even in their most intimate moments.

"With half its heart, it mourns some socialist hope or intention."

opposition leaders are pallid.

A washed-out Vaclav Havel figure proclaims that the aim of the revolution is to get the country back to "normal", ie. the model of Western capitalism. The radical in his camp is no more than a loutish student loudmouth and, as it turns out, a charlatan too.

There are no characters corresponding to the figures in the real Czechoslovakian opposition which most dramatised the dilemmas of the revolution. None corresponding to Vaclav Klaus, the architect of the new regime's free-market economics, who was not a persecuted oppositionist under the old regime but simply an economist who didn't get as much promotion as he might have done with other views; none corresponding to Petr Uhl, Trotskyist, founder of Charter 77, and founder of 'Left Alternative'.

The play is not Stalinist. It is clearly on the side of the revolution. But its politics vacillate between sentimental semi-Stalinism and anarchism. With half its heart, it mourns some socialist hope or intention which it divines beneath the brutal front of the old regime; with the other half, it believes that all power corrupts and the only real revolutionary programme is one of opposition to all and every authority.

Probably this vacillation corresponds to real impulses in the mind of the writer, David Edgar, a former libertarian socialist who in recent years has written for the CP's *Marxism Today*.

An oddity of the play is its women characters. They are all pointedly assigned subordinate roles (secretaries and so on) in their various political camps. From a Western leftist writer in 1990, this must be designed to make a point; but what, I don't know, unless it is just that the new post-Stalinist order promises no better for women than the old regime.

The rule of the rip-off

Books

Chris Reynolds reviews 'Liar's Poker', by Michael Lewis (Coronet, £4.50)

This is a sort of companion volume to 'Barbarians at the Gate', reviewed in SO a few weeks ago.

Like 'Barbarians', it strips away the myths about the fair and efficient free-market economy, and shows us what capitalists actually do. They spend their time and energy not on developing better products or streamlining work, but on ripping people off.

'Barbarians' showed us the sharks of Wall Street in action.

'Poker' shows us how relatively decent middle-class young men are turned into beasts by the financial markets.

"Life as a Salomon trainee [Salomons is the big Wall Street firm for which Lewis worked in New York and London] was like being beaten up every day by the neighbourhood bully. Eventually you grew mean and surly."

The atmosphere in the trading rooms is something between a raucous student boys' club and a tank full of fish-eating fish. Every other human aspiration is stamped underfoot in favour of money-making.

"Watching the faces of people as they emerged from their meetings [with management on their annual bonuses] was worth a thousand lectures on the meaning of money in our small society..."

"The look on their faces was always the same no matter what the size of their bonus: they looked sick to their stomachs. It was as if they had eaten too much chocolate pie."

What does this do to the traders' human relations with each other, let alone to their feelings for people outside their office? Lewis records the advice he was given by a sharp-witted trader.

"When you arrive at six thirty a.m., having had no sleep the night before, and having lost your best friend in a car accident, and some Big Swinging Dick walks over to your desk, slaps you on the back, and says, 'How the hell are you?', you don't say, 'I'm really tired and upset'. You say, 'I'm great, how the hell are you?'"

These are the people who control the wealth of society under this capitalist system.

Unite to beat the Tories!

Emma Colyer (National Union of Students national secretary, in personal capacity) previews the conference of the National Union of Students taking place in Blackpool on 8-9 December.

The Tories' attack on post-16 education has been substantial. From as early as 1981 they set about abolishing grants, slashing the education budget and forcing local government cuts.

They planned the introduction of loans for a long time, and despite opposition from students, parents and workers in education, loans were introduced earlier this year.

Not content with introducing loans in higher education, the Tories snatched away students' right to housing and other benefits. In Further Education (FEs) some of the most severe cuts ever are taking place. Virtually every Local Authority is making huge cuts as a direct result of the poll tax.

Sheffield Labour council is planning 4,000 job losses. The City's education service will be left in tatters, a mere shadow of its former self.

The Tories — Thatcher, Major, whoever, they're all the same to us — have been admirable fighters for their cause, tough, brutal and determined. They've started the process of privatisation of education.

It hasn't been plain sailing for the Tories. Students haven't just stood back and let the Tories walk all over them. Students the length and breadth of Britain took up the fight at various points over the last decade. 40,000 students demonstrated against loans in 1984.

Occupations, demonstrations, pickets and shutdowns have been organised by many students at local and area levels. Unfortunately, though, when it comes to nationally co-ordinated campaigns around democratically decided policy, students' own leaders have failed

abysmally to respond.

The National Union of Students (NUS) has for the last 8 years been controlled by the Kinnockite right-wing. Originally elected after organising a wave of occupations, they have since degenerated into snivelling, forelock-tugging toadies with their own personal career advancement at the forefront of their minds.

The student movement has seen them all come and go. From NUS they go off into trade union research jobs or Labour Party HQ, all safe in the knowledge that their radical days are over.

In short, our leaders in the NUS have been weak and pathetic, promising us everything will be sorted out when Neil is in No 10. They've coldly decided to let the Tories get

"A fighting NUS could play a useful, even central, role in further shaking the Tories".

on with it. They've lobbied MPs instead of demonstrating. They've refused to organise the membership. On more than one occasion, they've consciously dissipated action that under a better leadership could have forced the Tories to retreat.

This year will be remembered — loans introduced; benefits abolished; further education slashed; universities getting ever poorer; captains of industry running the show; students sleeping head to toe on gym and common room floors — none of it a pretty sight. Yet next year looks set to be even uglier.

The recent Commons announcement that NUS and individual student unions will be further investigated almost certainly means an attack on student union autonomy and collective rights. Tuition fees in higher education is already an issue, one that will grow and grow in 1991. Training credits or vouchers (TCs), at present a pilot scheme, is set to become a universal scheme in the near future.

Students in all sectors are feeling the pinch. The poll tax is a further

burden on the already ridiculously low financial support for students. The meagre £20 million access fund (for "students suffering hardship") is proving to be a joke; grossly inadequate, with few guidelines for its allocation.

At the beginning of this academic year Left Unity launched the Campaign for a Fighting Union. The campaign assessed the current situation, looking closely at the Tories' attacks and the Kinnockite leadership's responses. Arguing that the student movement, NUS and education cannot afford another year of failed strategies, Left Unity came up with the Campaign for a Fighting Union. It is a positive and realistic response to the situation.

NUS has a 'Don't Pay — Don't Collect' poll tax policy, proposed by Left Unity and passed by a substantial majority at National Conference. The right wing has refused to implement it. Rachel Taylor, VP Welfare and staunch Kinnockite, openly advises students to pay the poll tax arguing "It's only the price of a Big Mac a week".

As well as inactive, the national leadership is undemocratic. What it doesn't like it ignores, be that the Tories' attacks or implementing fighting policy.

The Campaign for a Fighting Union is for a fight against the poll tax; for a strong campaigning union (against tuition fees, TCs, loans and cuts); and for a democratic union where elected members implement conference policy.

Nothing could be more obvious than the crisis facing the Tories. The honeymoon period for Major and his cronies could soon be over, with a recession looming and expected poll tax increases, not to mention the time bomb fast ticking away on the Gulf.

A fighting NUS could play a useful, even central, role in further shaking the Tories. The will to do so is there in the colleges. So far this year there have been numerous occupations and rent strikes, and a fight against cuts in FEs is beginning to grow.

NUS has to link these issues. It has to show the Tories that we are just as prepared to organise for our members as they are for their supporters. Yet NUS's response to the



NUS women's officer, Left Unity and Socialist Organiser supporter, Janine Booth leads protest against student loans.

threat of voluntary membership has been to retreat and reform.

Left Unity's Campaign for a Fighting Union calls for NUS to increase the size and strength of the union by launching an affiliation drive and making NUS relevant to all students. We argue that all NUS services should be open to FE colleges and Sixth Formers; that NUS must take up the issues facing students and fight for a positive change. The membership will defend NUS if it becomes relevant to them.

The Kinnockite leadership prefers to impose yet another debate over NUS internal reform on

NUS conference. Rather than discuss and act on the kind of policies we need to beat the Tories, Stephen Twigg (NUS President) and his fellow travellers want to discuss how best we can neutralise ourselves to save the Tories a job.

This conference has to make a decision. Do we spend the whole of the weekend contemplating our navels? Or do we get on with it — making the most radical reform possible; reforming the National Union's orientation, making the political reform so desperately needed to take the Tories on.

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