



Stalinism, the left, and beyond

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way..."

Dickens's picture of the atmosphere on the eve of the French Revolution sums up the atmosphere on the left now after the collapse of Stalinism in Europe neatly, perhaps too neatly.

The left is liberated. The left is bewildered. The left is vindicated. The left is historically refuted. Socialism is dead. Socialism is reborn. Which left? Which socialism?

The views of the editors of

Workers' Liberty will be found in the Editorial in this issue, and in the paper *Socialist Organiser*, our weekly sister publication.

We give over most of the space in this issue to a symposium on the fall of European Stalinism and the consequences for the socialist left. Our contributors cover a very wide spectrum, ranging from, say, Neal Ascherson on the right, to people like, say, Michel Warshawsky on the left, whose revolutionary socialism is pretty much identical to our own.

The texts in this magazine are transcripts of interviews conducted by Mark Osborn in the three weeks up to 14 February.

Crisis was shaped in the mid-'20s

By Neville Alexander

Neville Alexander is a South African socialist and former Robben Island prisoner. Associated with the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action, he is the author (under the pen-name No Sizwe) of the book *One Azania, one nation*.

We see the roots of the current crisis in the ex-USSR in the mid- to late-20s. The turning point was the victory of Stalinism and the victory of what was called 'Socialism in One Country'.

There were great economic and, particularly, political implications of this turn. The Russian working class and the Bolshevik Party were destroyed.

Secondly, we would trace the failure back not only to the suppression of the freedom of the Soviet working class, but to the lack of production of consumer goods. The technological revolution was not extended to that sector of production.

These two factors, taken together, explain why the Soviet Union fell behind. Therefore, the crisis we see now was inevitable.

We have been accused of being agnostic on the question of the nature of Soviet society. Frankly, we do not know. We know Stalinism is not capitalism. But in a sense the question: is this a deformed workers' state? is anachronistic.

Even though it may be evasive, we have generally tended to accept the formulation that these are transitional societies. Of course, this means they can fall back towards capitalism but also have the potential, depending on the international situation, of moving into a socialist stage.

The point here is that nothing is irrevocable in history. If we describe these societies as transitional we are implicitly saying they are post-capitalist. I accept the logic. But this does not mean they can not revert to capitalism. A lot depends on international developments.

I think we have seen that. The reversion to capitalism has become possible.

Nevertheless, for us, there is no question about the centrality of the Russian Revolution. We believe the October Revolution continues to be the most important event in world history.

In building a new international socialist movement, there is no doubt that we have to go back to the period of 1917-1924 to see where our starting points should be.

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Crisis shaped in the mid-'20s

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Our view is that in the advanced capitalist countries the so-called actually existing socialist societies *have* discredited socialism. In the minds of most workers — in fact, most people — those societies were equated with what socialism was supposed to be. This was a real setback.

In countries like South Africa, socialism continues to be not just relevant but popular. But we have no doubt at all that because of the hegemony of the black nationalists, the socialist movement continues to be a minority current.

But it is there, and it is important. Socialism is an important pole of attraction in the mass movement.

So you have the two sides: the position in the advanced capitalist countries and the situation in the ex-colonial world.

Although our organisation has not got a finished position — it is an ongoing

“In a way we have to get back to the First International where workers’ organisations the world over got together on the basis of their experience, on a bare empirical reality of the experience of capitalist exploitation, begin to put together a cohesive strategy against the world capitalist system.”

debate — I can give you an analogy for the way forward. In a way we have to get back to the First International where workers’ organisations the world over got together on the basis of their experience, on a bare empirical reality of the experience of capitalist exploitation, begin to put together a cohesive strategy against the world capitalist system.

This is where we have to start. What implements we have to use to do that, whether we join, for example, this or that socialist international are in part tactical issues.

We need a non-sectarian approach to international socialist currents. We feel people are wandering around with a schema for the solution of the world’s problems.

We have to start from the point where each national socialist formation has got peculiar problems — even though there are obviously general principles arising from the capitalist mode of production which are common to all.

Marx was wrong about class

By Neal Ascherson

Neal Ascherson is a journalist, and author of *The Polish August: the self-limiting revolution*, an account of the rise of Solidarnosc.

I do not think we will ever see Stalinism again.

As to what is currently happening — there is, in a way, a crisis of frustrated development. People are being mobilised in order to modernise. Behind this is a sense of backwardness and political dissolution. There is a powerful will to overcome and catch up.

Catching up is not always seen as joining and merging. The form in which Russians, when and if they talk about politics, still think that the ideal Russia would not be like a western society. If you say: what will it be like? Will it be capitalist or a new form of socialism? I can never seem to get a satisfactory answer.

All I ever seem to find is an affirmation that there are huge material and human resources that are unused; that Russia has become a backward nation sinking into the Third World and what is required is a leap forward.

I can see many reasons why this situation occurred. But the Bolshevik Revolution is over. The French Revolution is over. You can argue whether it ended in 1793 or 1815, then popping up again in 1830 and 1848. But it ended. There was a time when you could say: 1789 is over. Now we can say the Bolshevik Revolution and the experiment has ended.

Lenin thought that his revolution would last for ever. He was wrong — as was Marx about the development of class. Marx’s main predictions about class development are more of an analysis than a prophecy. Things, for reasons he could not have foreseen, have turned out differently.

Revolutions are always about the same things. They are about unjust



Neal Ascherson

distribution of property, about political tyranny. They are about a mass impatience with the way of governments. This will happen again. And when it does, there will be resemblances to the Bolshevik Revolution. Some of its principles are principles which will always be here, like the dream of absolute equality.

A lot of the conceptions are just too good to die. People will always strive for these things.

I am an old liberal progressist. As people become more intelligent and better educated, they do change. One thing is wonderfully clear: in the last ten years, people in Western Europe have become much more cowardly, especially soldiers. That is very good news! This comes out of the Gulf War and the Falklands War. People are much less gung-ho about risking their necks, or even killing others, except where it can be done mechanically, at the press of a button, covering thousands with sand.

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STALINISM

This trend is irreversible. It is a good sign. The human race advances two steps forward, one step back towards greater equality.

The great danger now in Eastern Europe is that these societies will fall back into a previous historical arrangement. You will get greatly developed Western Europe and beggarly Eastern Europe, whose role is to provide raw materials, cheap labour, and fruit and veg.

Will this happen? My feeling is that it probably will not. Firstly because the development of modern, multinational capitalism is able to move outside nation states and relocate itself. The heartlands of Western Europe are pricing themselves out of manufacture to such an extent that the East has a chance.

And, strangely, the posthumous victory of some Communist attitudes, in Eastern Europe will help. Insofar as people believed in Communism in Eastern Europe before the Second World War, it was as a means of development. The appeal was of an autarkic system where industrialisation was forced in order to catch up with the west. There would never be a situation in which a vast rural population would be dependent on a few industries.

I think that Trotsky and Lenin's ideas of socialism are over. However, the kind of analysis Marx made is as good now as it ever was. That way of looking at society is still the right way. You can remove the dialectic as an extremely antique way of

"The great danger now in Eastern Europe is that these societies will fall back into a previous historical arrangement. You will get greatly developed Western Europe and beggarly Eastern Europe whose role is to provide raw materials, cheap labour and fruit and veg."

saying things; remove the prophetic element in Marx which is plainly wrong.

But Marx's general analysis will plainly survive. What will always survive is the important part of Marx — that he was a revolutionary. He wanted the oppressed of the world to rise up and strike a blow.

We need a vision of society in which people will be more equal; where people combine in order to be stronger and improve their standards of living and make new institutions to preserve justice. This is all to do with socialism at a very basic level. This will continue as long as the human race exists.

The West deliberately bankrupted the USSR

By Tony Benn

Tony Benn is Labour MP for Chesterfield.

The collapse of the old Soviet regime is bringing anarchy to Russia. That anarchy is being used by the West to create an opening for the exploitation of the Soviet working class.

There is a potential market in the USSR, although not yet. And there is a cheap labour force.

A type of mafia is developing in some of the republics. Rouble millionaires are emerging from speculators.

The probability is that we will see military-type capitalism in the USSR. Then the question arises: how much socialist resistance will there be? After all, the old regime — no matter what you say about it — was built around public values and public services. People will see these services go.

Now there was nothing perfect about the old system. It was repressive and centralised, but it did improve working class living standards a lot.

I think that the underlying reasons for the crisis are a little more complex than are sometimes made out. The Russians spent between 30 and 70% of GDP on defence.

I think that the western strategy to destroy the Soviet regime was to bankrupt them.

This level of expenditure, no doubt, justified in their eyes by the threat of attack, forced them towards bankruptcy.

Now we see the problems of control of the army, navy and nuclear weapons. An angry, disenchanted, forcibly demobilised army can lead to gangsterism. These guys are trained to kill.

The question is: what will come out of the wreckage? The best guide at the moment is to look at Poland. I know *Socialist Organiser* supported Solidarnosc — an organisation I always had some doubts about — but Solidarnosc threw up Walesa and a right-wing government.

It does not follow that the old Communists, who have been dissolved in Poland and the Soviet Union, were all tainted with Stalinism. Lower down the Party there were some decent people who did not like what was happening. These people may well reappear as democratic socialists.

Resistance to the changes could come quite quickly, a type of counter-counter-revolution. I hope there is resistance — or the fate of the people will be appalling.

The association of socialism with Stalinism? I do not think that British workers assumed that socialism meant totalitarianism. The right would like to tell us that socialism is dead. That is not true. The most popular issue in Britain is defence of the socialist health service.

We should not allow ourselves to be demoralised.

At least the changes in the USSR mean that no-one can say: you are working for

the KGB. That helps us.

Objectively, this is a great period for socialism although, subjectively, it is difficult.

I think democracy scares people at the top. All systems hate democracy. In the Labour Party it is the same. When we raised the issue of democracy, a large part of the PLP split off and formed the SDP.

I think we should approach the whole socialist question through democracy. We need to spread power and encourage people to use it.

My Commonwealth of Britain Bill is being extended to include legislation for workers' rights, industrial democracy and broadcasting.

What should we say about the Russian Revolution and soviets? I have always

"I think people are suspicious of the Trotskyite vanguard party idea. They say: if you were at the top, you would be like the current leaders. In fact, it is true that power corrupts everyone. I have always been ready to go for the slower process of the dissolution of capitalism by democracy."

opposed the Trotskyite view that said that in Britain we had a situation comparable to that in Russia. I am not saying it *could not happen*, just that it *was not* happening.

I was always afraid that a vanguard party, in certain circumstances, could seize power. Since it had no democratic authority it could be easily toppled. It would have no base of support.

I think people are suspicious of the Trotskyite vanguard party idea. They say: if you were at the top, you would be like the current leaders. In fact, it is true that power corrupts everyone.

I have always been ready to go for the slower process of the dissolution of capitalism by democracy.

I have also never been strongly for great state corporations. There was a parallel between the nationalisations in Russia and the social democratic programmes in the west. They were both centralised and secretive. Ian McGregor was a product of nationalisation just as the rulers in Russia were a product of their revolution. The Russians were not the only people who tried to do it all from the top.

Not so pessimistic about China

By Greg Benton

Greg Benton is a lecturer at Leeds University, editor of *Wild Lilies, Poisonous Weeds: dissident voices from People's China* and of the *Memoirs* of veteran Chinese Trotskyist Wang Fanxi. He has been associated with the journal *International Viewpoint*.

There were some progressive elements in the Soviet economy despite its Stalinist political system. While I'm happy to see the destruction of Stalinism as a system of political rule, I do regret that capitalism and market forces are determining the way in which the Soviet Union is developing. Now in the Soviet Union you have the prospect of a marriage of the worst features of Stalinism and capitalism, in other words a political dictatorship and an economic rat-race. The main beneficiaries of the reversion to the market economy in the Soviet Union are the mafiosi who controlled the state until 1989.

China isn't Russia, and the Chinese revolution happened in a different way from the Russian Revolution. The CCP started off in 1921 as a party committed to democracy and science. Its main leader Chen Tu-hsiu was the founder of the May 4th movement in 1919 that campaigned for democracy and science. The people who joined him in the early party were formed by that experience and the CCP have always retained elements of a commitment to democracy, feminism and internationalism, for example, the Yanan opposition of 1942, the cultural revolutionary opposition of 1967-8, the movement at Democracy Wall in 1979, and the Peking Commune of 1989. In all these instances distinguished and respected veteran communists have sided with people out to sweep away the political tyranny. Marxism in that sense is not discredited in China as it is in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Some of the doyens of democratic dissent in China are long-standing communists. This is an important difference between Russia and China. In 1989 when millions of people were demonstrating on the streets in Peking it was rather hard to find a large number of people committed to the restoration of capitalism. I don't think the agenda of China's dissidents in 1989 bore more than a superficial resemblance to that of the now-victorious opposition in the Soviet Union. The main target in China in 1989 was corruption in the party, which is why Gorbachev was such an important symbol for them in a way that Bush and Reagan could never be. Gorbachev seemed to represent to youngsters in the square the possibility of reform within the system. His presence in 1989 in Peking was one of the main factors in the spreading and deepening of the movement. Obviously in the course of the movement new layers of young people

came to the fore. People like Wuer Kaixi and Chai Ling, now famous in the West, together with their high-level supporters behind the scenes, would like to change China in a capitalist direction. The Americans put a lot of work into creating a mood, and cohort of people to embody that mood, in favour of free enterprise.

"China is now a post-capitalist society with some elements of socialism, distorted by a hideous political system. There are elements of socialism in the economy and the cities in particular".

But the credibility of these latter-day heroes of the Square has been destroyed since 1989. If the movement revives the older layer of left wing dissidents will reassert themselves in China. Economic reform was carried out in China several years before it was even seriously mooted in the Soviet Union. Chinese workers have a long experience of the effects of economic reform on their pockets. This is one reason why some of the panaceas proposed in the Soviet Union don't find the same adherence in China, where people are disenchanted by the attempts to sweep away their securities. These securities, particularly in the cities, are one of the main reasons why the system remained stable for so long in China. The Chinese revolution did not create a paradise, but it did create a place where workers could feel safe and at least relatively equal, and where their basic needs were looked after. So I'm not so pessimistic about the future of democratic dissent and politics in China as I am about Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

China is now a post-capitalist society with some elements of socialism, distorted by a hideous political system that bears no resemblance to socialism. There are elements of socialism in the Chinese economy and in the cities in particular.

Are the ruling elements of the CCP a ruling caste rather than a class? I'm no longer really concerned with that debate. The ease with which the CP was squeezed from power in the Soviet Union would seem to suggest it was a thin veneer on society rather than a new class. It's not something I've given much thought to, and I can no longer see so clearly the practical implications anyway of one definition or the other.

Democracy and democratic revolutions

took over 800 years to mature and even now they're flawed in many ways. Not until 1919 did we have full suffrage in this country and even now there are all sorts of problems with it. Socialism is a very new idea, and one can't expect miracles so soon. I think that if you look at China now and the social forces, a level of enlightenment exists that didn't exist in 1949. In 1949 the working class, the factory proletariat in China, numbered something like three million people. Now Hong Kong alone has three million workers. The factory proletariat is educated, literate and politically aware, far more so than it ever was in the past. China now has an educated sector from high schools and universities far greater than in the past. These are the people who have time to think. These are the people who spearheaded the movement of 1989. There is an element of elitism in this group, but in the course of the revolution of 1989 students began to realise that it was important to admit workers into the square, to encourage workers to organise themselves. This was a tremendous achievement of the movement of 1989, a realisation by large numbers of students that alone they can do little and that they do need support from wider sections of society. The lesson wasn't entirely learnt but I'm still quite optimistic. The ground exists for discontent and a body of theory and ideas exist in China that can envisage non-capitalist reform of the system. The experience now in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is strengthening some Chinese in their determination not to go that way and not to allow that sort of instability and crisis, which would be far greater in a country with China's level of economy and production than in the richer countries in Eastern Europe.

Don't try to save the term "socialism"

By Cornelius Castoriadis

Cornelius Castoriadis was one of those, alongside C L R James and Raya Dunayevskaya, who argued in the Trotskyist movement in the 1940s for a shift to seeing the USSR as "state capitalist". Later he launched the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group; today he no longer calls himself a socialist. He has written under the names "Chaulieu" and "Cardan". He lives in France, and has also written extensively on questions of psychology.

The Bolsheviks used a surplus of repression



By Robin Blackburn

Robin Blackburn is the editor of *New Left Review*. He was formerly for many years associated with *The Week* and the International Marxist Group.

I think that a whole current on the left identified — from the very beginnings of Stalinism — that the denial of workers' democracy would create appalling problems.

The problems became greater in the most recent period because the Stalinist model of command economy fell far behind contemporary capitalism. Its economic failure gave the Soviet Union no room for successful political experiment or genuine democratisation.

I would point out that the term 'Stalinism' would apply to the Soviet-type models. There is another type — the Chinese variety. While this second type has been quite repressive politically, it has been economically more dynamic.

The Stalinist systems did not develop a type of economic organisation superior to capitalism. I think we have seen an at-

tempt to control the market and the accumulation process through the power of the State and of social mobilisations. When that power of social mobilisation was at its height — immediately after the October revolution in Russia, or straight after the Second World War in the Soviet Union and parts of Eastern Europe — it was possible for a time to achieve things that were not possible for capitalism — at least in backward states.

So there were social gains in those states and some of the post-revolutionary states such as Vietnam, Cuba and China.

But the existence of these important social gains did not mean there was a transcendence of capitalism, and especially of the models of advanced capitalism.

While it is clear that the bureaucracy itself provided the main social character of the state, the ruling bureaucracies have always tried to co-opt, organise and even buy off the direct producers. This has taken place by offering them special access to consumer goods or special trade union-organised holidays. But obviously, the capacity of the bureaucracy in the USSR to offer material improvements to the mass of direct producers has become sharply reduced in the last twenty or thirty years.

Were those states in some sense working class states? I think it true, but awkward and unwelcome as a fundamental sociological insight. But I think it has to be understood far more literally than is normally the case.

These societies were certainly not workers' democracies; they were not the type of workers' states we hope to see in the socialism we are looking to. But I think that it is the case that the ruling institutions, centrally the Communist parties, were normally made up of 50% industrial workers or collective farmers. If these Parties had not had these people, they could not have ruled.

So there was a sort of sociological reality to the idea of working class states. Then, to the extent that the support of people on the shopfloor and in the farms waned, these so-called ruling parties actually ceased to rule.

Looking back at the Russian Revolution, I believe it was largely doomed when it proved unable to link up with social-revolutionary currents in the advanced countries. If it had done this, its isolation would have been broken and the new conditions would have allowed a different development.

The Bolsheviks themselves compounded many of the problems. They us-

ed a surplus of repression. Finding they were more isolated than they hoped, they then had recourse to, for example, the falsification of the results of Soviet elections. They also banned other, pro-Soviet parties — or harassed, at the very least, these parties.

These were the roots of Stalinism.

In 1921, we saw the repression of Kronstadt and of Makhno's partisans — both by purely military means.

Although Kronstadt and Makhno were real threats they should have been handled politically, not militarily.

Looking forward — history itself, through social struggles, has brought about what claims to be a bourgeois-democratic revolution in the former Communist countries.

It was nipped in the bud in China, partly, as I said, because the Chinese model has proved itself very dynamic due to the scrapping of the command economy model not ten years ago, but twenty years ago.

China was able to adapt itself to the world market. The other states failed to make that adaptation. They condemned themselves, as Trotsky said they would in the debates in the 1930s, to stagnation. The conditions were created for a bourgeois revolution in Eastern Europe and then the Soviet Union.

There will be attempts to take the new, hard-won democratic liberties away. Suppression will be attempted in new ways.

I think now, in a world more than ever dominated by capitalism, where there is grotesque inequality, above all between the First and Third Worlds, where we see the possibility of ecological catastrophe and increased militarism and chauvinism, the ideals of socialism are more valid than ever. I think this will include attempts to rehabilitate notions of public intervention.

But I think that residual faith in statism, whether of the Fabian or Stalinist variety, has to be firmly rejected.

Socialism must take a much greater interest in ideas of workers' social management. We need an understanding that the sort of socialism we would like to see can not be orientated according to the dictates of a command economy.

Socialism means public agency and intervention but it can not mean a single plan imposed on the whole of the globe.

The phrase we have been using in *New Left Review* to encapsulate these ideas, is that the goal should be, in the first instance, a socialised market.

The downfall of the Stalinist tyranny in Eastern Europe and the USSR happened in a curious way, with the self-destruction of the ruling class. The Communist bureaucracy attempted reforms under Gorbachev but could never succeed, because the system was irreformable.

What will happen now is another matter. The situation is quite chaotic, even in Eastern Europe, and much more so in Russia itself.

The heartening aspect of the downfall of the Stalinists was that in East Germany and Poland the people struggled against the Communist tyranny. The disheartening aspect was that as soon as the Stalinist regimes collapsed the people went home and stopped their activity.

There have been lots of illusions. People believed that as soon as they got rid

Solidarnosc was not a genuine trade union

By Tony Chater

Tony Chater is the editor of the *Morning Star*, the daily paper associated with the Communist Party of Britain.

I think that the old model of socialism has collapsed. This was probably inevitable.

Now we see a form of Third World capitalism developing.

The old systems became ossified. In order to reform them the reformers — like Gorbachev — needed the full support of the Party and the trade unions. He needed to work out a practical reform programme which could also have the support of the people as a whole, so the people could be mobilised.

But the Party and the unions were so integrated into the centralised, bureaucratic structures that they had passed the point of no return. The moment they passed from generalisations about reform to action and decisions, the Party split into different sets of élites. In the sense that it was part of the system, it was difficult to use it to change the system.

The process of ossification began in the mid-'20s. A whole series of measures began to be taken. That meant the gradual restriction of democracy.

The situation had developed for revolution in Russia. Lenin led that revolution. The imperialist powers intervened and there was terrible destruction. Lenin then initiated the New Economic Policy which in a sense was a controlled form of capitalist development within a workers' state and in a situation where the commanding heights of the economy were nationalised. Lenin wanted to develop the productive forces to a level where socialism could begin.

That process began to be arrested in the mid-'20s. I do not think you can blame Lenin for Stalin. Stalin was just an individual, it is not possible to explain what is happening by the actions of individuals.

I do not agree that the Communist Party in Britain took its policies from the Soviet Union.

From 1950 onwards, the Communist

Party started to develop a strategy for socialism in Britain based on British conditions and traditions, "The British Road to Socialism". We were opposed to the treatment of dissidents in the Soviet Union and to the intervention in both Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan.

Our programme was based on the utter inseparability of socialism and democracy. Democracy is not an added extra — it is the body and soul of socialism.

I would not call Hungary 1956 an invasion: the Soviet Union was already there.

The problem was that from 1948 onwards, attempts were made to impose a Soviet model on the countries of Eastern Europe. This was the root of the trouble. It led to difficulties, in Hungary from around 1953 leading to 1956.

I do not believe that Solidarnosc was a genuine trade union. I think it was a political movement in which the Catholic Church — particularly the reactionary elements — were heavily involved. We can see the fruits of this development at the present time. There is a right-wing government in Poland and the development of capitalism.

Is socialism possible in one country? Yes, but in practice these developments will probably take place on a much wider scale.

Don't try to save the term "socialism"

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of Communist rule there would be a rich, abundant consumer society. They wanted their image of what the West was like. Of course, the situation did not allow this — especially not in Russia itself.

I do not see that the change will inevitably be to capitalism. In some countries that is quite probable; in Russia, I am not sure.

Why did the old system collapse? It was crazy from the point of view of instrumentality. Almost half the resources in the old USSR were devoted to military expenditure. Russian economists say that this spending is still 30 per cent of GDP. If we assume that 20% of GDP is for non-productive consumption of the bureaucracy, and at least 20% for investment, that leaves little for people to live on.

Then, there was always the passive resistance of the people. And there were two great external shocks to the system in the 1980s: the Polish revolt and the Afghan resistance.

It was not mechanically certain that they would not go on. But we have the conjunction of unpredictable — not ac-

cidental, but contingent — factors in history: a small group of people under Gorbachev undertook to change part of the system, they pulled the thread, and everything began to unravel.

The system was a bureaucratic totalitarian capitalism which came about because of the totalitarian Bolshevik party. The organisation of the Bolshevik party — so-called "democratic centralism" — was the rule of a small bureau. The Bolsheviks took power in a military putsch. October was not a revolution. The idea that it was a revolution is a lie.

The Bolsheviks dissolved the Constituent Assembly where they had only 25% of the delegates. They imposed their own control on the Soviets, which became more and more a mask. They suppressed the Kronstadt revolt.

The bureaucratic dictatorship already existed in Lenin's time.

The greatest blow against the workers' movement, against socialism, and against freedom in general, was not accomplished by capitalism or by the Nazis. It was done by Communism. If you go to Eastern Europe and talk about socialism, you will probably be lynched. The people there will not hear a single word about socialism from now on. This also goes in Western Europe. That is the result of Communism.

The revelations coming out now about the Stalinist systems — though for me they were not new facts — enable people to say: socialism was *that*!

Totalitarianism! Any other regime is preferable!

The prospects now are not very rosy. These feelings will hang over for a long time. People need time to digest the fact that capitalism is not a democratic regime, it is not economically fair, and it produces ecological catastrophes. People need time to discover that they can *do*

"Workers are only 20% of the population. We cannot have 20% of the population running the whole of society — unless it is done by totalitarianism".

something about capitalism. People need time to discover that doing something about it does not necessarily mean ending up with a Bolshevik party on their backs.

I do not use the word "socialism" any more. I am not trying to save the term "socialism". What I aim at is an autonomous society where the collectivity is autonomous and makes its own laws and where individuals are autonomous. This means that individuals are free within the limits of

A socialist society will need the market

By Ken Coates

Ken Coates is a British Labour member of the European Parliament. He was formerly associated with *The Week* and the Institute for Workers' Control.

I would separate the countries of Eastern Europe from those in the ex-USSR. The logic of developments is quite different. Eastern Europe was an occupied territory. The Soviet Union had been formed through a process begun by their own revolution.

In Russia and the other republics of the old USSR the collapse of the economy has resulted from the impasse reached by Gorbachev's attempt to restrain the military-industrial sector of the economy. Gorbachev largely failed to do this. He tried to achieve disarmament because he knew that the proportion of the Soviet national product eaten up by the military sector was unsustainable. It was denuding the consumption sector of the economy and undermining the previously more effective

laws that they make themselves. People are educated to be free and responsible.

I would not call this socialism because the term is irretrievably prostituted by the history of the last 70 years, both the history of Communism and that of the so-called social democracies in the West.

We have seen Mitterrand in France. In Britain you have had the Labour Party in government. Then you had the Tories. You may have Labour again. This is some sort of national football game, of no general interest for humanity.

People must create new organs of power in order to take over. These organs must be collectively run, with direct democracy. Federated across countries, these organs would form national instruments of power.

I talk of *people* rather than *workers*. Workers are only 20% of the working population in the US. The working class will also be reduced to this proportion in the other industrial countries. We cannot have 20% of the population running the whole of society — unless it is done by totalitarianism.

The Polish general strike of August 1980 was run through factory strike committees. That was possible because Poland was a *backward* country. Poland still has 40% industrial workers, and so, by definition, it is a backward society.

I think that every member of the population, except for a small layer of three or seven per cent at the top, has an interest in change.

welfare sector. There was a crisis.

After six years of glasnost in which many areas were opened to debate it is still impossible to find out the proportion of GNP devoted to military expenditure.

There has been some debate about the term "military industrial complex". I do not want to quibble about words. But they could not sustain the effort of trying to match the US.

The military expenditure was *insane*. Some figures quoted suggest 50% or 70% of GNP was spent. I think more accurate figures say 20-25% of Soviet GNP went on arms spending. Compare this with the West. Massive Western military machines have been built at a cost of 5% of GNP.

I think Gorbachev's manoeuvres between left and right can best be explained by his attempt to find purchase on the military-industrial complex and rein it in.

Gorbachev's policies were always ambivalent, but I will not join those who knock his domestic record. I feel he was up against overwhelming forces.

Gorbachev did not make the crisis — he inherited it from the architects of the autocratic USSR. Did he attempt to reform in the interests of the rulers? Well, that question falls several ways. The nomenklatura felt very threatened by Gorbachev. They now appear as liberals, or entrepreneurs, and *also* as defenders of social provision.

A peak was reached during the coup attempt of 1991. The economy entered a period of open collapse and the break-up of the USSR is a direct result of this impasse.

The military-industrial complex is being disassembled by the process of republican secession.

Who would I blame for the current mess? Well, blame is not very useful. But, of course, some responsibility must lie in the early period of the Russian revolution. But here we also find different roots, which did not develop because they were cut back.

Then the question should be asked: why did these roots not develop? The reason was the succession of Stalin, Stalin's adjustment to international competition and the threat of war.

Planning which is not democratic is liable to produce results of this type. Undemocratic planning also takes place in capitalism. Planning by major corporations often mess up social choices about the environment. It is not possible to organise complex modern societies without planning. Socialist parties which try to ignore this are leaving their reason for existing behind.

But also, I have worked in the na-

tionalised mines. I know that this type of bureaucratic management does not meet the needs of our people.

The point is that a *socialist* society in the modern world will need large elements of production for the market. It is not worth the sweat to try to sort out large parts of the economy which will be better nourished if they are informally organised.

Who wants to organise all plumbers into a central syndicate? It is not part of the socialist project to eliminate the market in a wide range of small production and services.

But, having said this, the ex-Soviet Union cannot avoid wholesale collapse and possible colonisation if they try to reanimate their industries by putting them all on the market. Firstly, in the

"Undemocratic planning also takes place in capitalism. Planning by major corporations often messes up social choices on the environment. It is not possible to organise without planning. Socialists who ignore this are leaving their reason for existence behind".

international marketplace, most would go bust.

Secondly, even the military sector — the most advanced sphere — could not be privatised to the advantage of anyone in Russia.

The only rational way for the Russian economy to develop is through a very large sector of public enterprise, which should be democratised. We should not see that process of democratisation dogmatically. Democratic control should come from two directions: worker involvement and social management.

Worker involvement will not suffice. The workers are in too defensive a frame of mind — they actually are on the verge of starvation. No-one has time to see the social objectives. So the classic model of workers rising up to defend their social gains has little relevance.

If you have a functioning economy and full employment, workers can involve themselves creatively in management. In the mess of Russia it is not so easy.

The main issue now is to maintain the public sector.

Who exactly will do this I am not sure. The present government of Russia is likely to preside over an increasing mess while stimulating xenophobia.

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Lenin overestimated the possibilities in Western Europe

By Vladimir Derer

Vladimir Derer is secretary of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, and has been active in the East European Solidarity Campaign. The son of a pre-war Czech socialist MP, he has lived in Britain for 50 years.

The much-mentioned left prognosis that Eastern Europe is turning into capitalism has not been really substantiated. Capitalism can not exist without a bourgeois ruling class, and it is doubtful whether the racketeers who are doing well at the moment will be able to turn into a ruling class.

Unless the ex Soviet Union is going to be turned into a part of the Third World, the personnel of the bureaucratic apparatus — as distinct from the personnel of the party — may have to fall back on *administering* the economy. The reforms introduced by Yeltsin are not going to work.

I accept that there is a basic difference between the countries of Eastern Europe and the ex-USSR. The transition to capitalism is quite possible in countries like Czechoslovakia and Hungary. But even there, Western capitalists are not really moving in. The bourgeoisie also have problems. The investments necessary to make the major industries much more productive are just not present. Buying industry in Eastern Europe is not generally a commercial proposition for the Western capitalists, because it implies considerable investment.

The only place where the full introduction of capitalism is likely is East Germany. That is entirely because the West Germans will finance the change.

If capitalism is not introduced, the other possibility is that the managers of state concerns may have to reconsider their current capitalist orientation.



We should not overestimate the extent to which the ex Communist Party members are doing well as new employers and entrepreneurs. In Czechoslovakia, there is a distribution of ownership via coupons rather than to a narrow section of society. This means wider ownership, but will not lead to investment, which is what the modernisation of industry requires.

The reason for the collapse was that the Soviet Union was acting as a substitute imperialist power, trying to keep up with America. They could not do that on their narrow material base. The consumers were starved.

The ideological disintegration of Stalinism did not happen by systematic propaganda from another class, undermining the ruling class, as in the 18th century in France. The collapse happened because the rulers realised that they had to reform the economy, but they did not have the means to accomplish reform. People simply ceased to believe in a system which had discredited itself.

We should make a distinction between the Communist bureaucracy and the bureaucracy as a class. The Communist Party became the major brake on the development of the means of production. That is why it was so easy to close it down.

The personnel of the Communist Party were grouped by their compliance with the dominant ideology. In many respects they were inferior people, yet they were in control. The burgeoning middle classes and professional strata saw these people as incompetent. This was most clear in Eastern Europe, where the regimes were imposed from the top. People *complied* with the regimes, but did not *believe* in them.

The havoc which Stalinism brought with it is not yet over. Socialism has been discredited practically everywhere. On the other hand, there is still a lot to learn from the Russian experience.

Before the 1914-18 war there was a certain amount of justification for Lenin's strategy that the Russian revolution would trigger off a chain of revolutions. My own assessment is that Lenin did not quite appreciate the differences between Russia and Germany. He grossly overestimated the possibility of building Communist Parties in Europe. The simple mechanical transplant of the Russian party model attempted in the first years of the Comintern was obviously not possible.

Whether they would have embarked on the Russian revolution if they had known this is an open question. In retrospect, they made an error.

Lenin, in *What Is To Be Done?* and *Left-Wing Communism*, did not realise the difference between the Bolshevik party and the Social-Democratic parties of Europe. In 1914 he initially believed that the issue of *Vorwärts* which came out in support of the war was a fake. When Lenin wrote *What Is To Be Done?* he believed that he was reproducing on Russian soil the model of German Social Democracy. He quoted Kautsky as an authority.

The specificity of the Russian situation gave Lenin the opportunity to build a party capable of winning power. His assumption was that revolutionary parties in Europe could be created out of Social Democracy, simply on the Russian model.

It is true that the working class can only develop its own ideology outside the immediate class struggle, but in Western Europe the only way in which an organisation which seeks to do this can be built is by the closest contact with the labour movement. In Russia there was no *separate* labour movement. Trade unions hardly existed.

This different situation in Russia is repeated to some extent in the case of oppressed nationalities, where the socialist party can fully identify itself with the struggle of an oppressed nation and can win the leadership. In the case of Russia, the Bolsheviks won the leadership by becoming the voice of the oppressed.

In Britain, the socialists have been unable to do that. They have kept themselves outside of the mainstream of the labour movement. That is true of the early Communist Party, and it began with the Social Democratic Federation. A sectarian existence apart from the labour movement does not get socialism very far.

A socialist society will need the market

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The Western left needs to support any socialist forces which emerge in these states. And we must do so in a non-sectarian spirit.

It is absurd just to look for people with corresponding views.

Thinking people need to take stock of the new situation. We need to do this, and the left in the ex-USSR is doing it under even greater pressure.

The socialist opposition will include vast numbers of former Communist Party members who were never part of the apparatus. These people were certainly not critical enough but nevertheless represented a tremendous social effort.

These people range from those who staffed the unions to those who ran the local chess club. This was the forum where voluntary social organisation happened in Russia.

Yes, it is true that to get a better job you joined the party. But it is also true that the party maintained a great rhetoric of socialism. People could express themselves and do socially valuable work at the base. Then there were the socialist oppositionists.

We must do whatever we can for these people. They need fax machines, money and resources. It would be premature to just look around and only help the ones and twos we can find that exactly agree with us.

The real left has no need of apology

By Terry Eagleton

Terry Eagleton is a professor of literature at Oxford University and author of many books on literature and ideology. Formerly associated with *Socialist Press*, he is a member of the Advisory Editorial Board of *Socialist Organisation*.

Socialists in the West can not be disillusioned about events in the East unless they had illusions in the first place.

It has not been since the 1930s that Western Marxists — aside from the Communist Parties — have in any great numbers allied themselves with the Stalinist cause. Almost all of the major interesting Marxist developments in the West, from Trotsky to the Frankfurt School, have been resolutely anti-Stalinist.

The Western liberals woke up to the issue only around the time of Tiananmen Square. But we have pushed against Stalinism for well over half a century. The most abrasive and analytical critique of Stalinism has come from within Marxism, not from outside it. We have far outstripped the feeble moralism which, sometimes, was all the liberals could summon.

Far from being apologetic, we should point out that we have developed not only the most historically grounded criticism, but also the most politically combative analysis of Stalinism. The kind of reforms on defence of individual liberties which Western liberalism engaged in, however important, have for us just not been good enough.

Although no Western socialist can take heart from the reversion to capitalism in the East, at least we can say that just at the point where many cynical, often erstwhile radicals in the West were denouncing the whole concept of revolution as irretrievably outmoded and idealist, then events broke out with a bang in Eastern Europe, in the place where they least expected it.

Whatever came after, those events can be read as being all the things that a jaded Western post-modernism has rejected. There we had a collective popular subject, an insurrection against the state and to some extent a change of rulers.

Those in the West who have been so cavalier about the "old-fashionedness" of the concept of revolution, it is *they* who should be doing the apologising. We can say this without detriment to the concerns we have about where those revolutions will lead. But we can see as fact the possibility of this type of radical change.

We should forcefully remind people that Marx's political writings are democratic to the core, to the point where democracy is



"The most abrasive and analytical critique of Stalinism has come from within Marxism, not from outside it."

not an optional extra for socialists. Socialist structures must genuinely enable mass participation at every level.

Democracy is at the very heart of socialism. Or, alternatively, socialism, in the end, is political rather than economic. The economic is a necessary condition, of

course, but it is not a sufficient condition.

In fact, it is capitalism rather than socialism which is obsessed with the economic. Some socialists have perhaps also made this mistake.

Socialism is obviously about a change of power. But, in the end, we can only identify a genuine change of power, rather than a new group of rulers taking over, if the very meaning of power has also changed. That is the whole point of Lenin's *State and Revolution*. It is not just a matter of a new set of people, but a change in the very concept of power. This is the ultimate marker for a post-Stalinist socialism.

The concept of revolution has been so misused it may be difficult, strategically, to use it. It has been diluted and bastardised. On the other hand, if we were debating with a serious, decent liberal we could say we agreed with their basic values. If we said: could your values be achieved without a massive global transformation?, and they answered "no", they would be in flat contradiction with themselves.

We should stress that massive change is a realistic perspective. Anyone who thinks that a few more bags of grain and a bit more parliamentary democracy will answer all our needs is flatly wrong.

It is hard to say yet how much damage the death of Stalinism has done to socialism.

Socialism has a claim to be the greatest and largest reform movement in history. It has therefore inevitably encountered a lot of setbacks. But I am very confident that the socialist idea — despite what is currently happening in Eastern Europe — is as viable as ever and will survive.

One of the more invisible crimes of Stalinism was to discredit the idea of socialism in the eyes of the Western working classes. At least this is no longer on the agenda. At least we can now clear away the monstrous mystifications of socialism which have so alienated people to whom it would have been beneficial.

This system was regressive

By Mike Farrell

Michael Farrell is a leader of the Irish Trotskyist group *People's Democracy*. He lives in Dublin and is the author of *The Orange State* and other books on Irish politics.

In the 1960s, the Soviet Union appeared to us to be keeping up with the West.

The most striking thing for me is the complete falsity of the claims which were made for Soviet society. In fact, in many ways, the system was regressive against the West.

Clearly, it did not go beyond capitalism. It was a backward economy in the Soviet Union. The whole enterprise seems to have been misconceived — heavy industrialisation on top of an agricultural system which could not bear its weight.

Statistics were falsified

I still believe that some social advances were made in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe. Certain aspects of the system had something to be said for them — for instance, a fairly good social welfare system, fairly good for that type of society, bearing in mind their backwardness.

The period after October and before Stalin was a workers' society. But those who firmly maintained that these were workers' states of some type should see that after Stalin these were not workers' states in any sense.

Obviously, for those who did maintain some faith in the Eastern European societies, even though they may also have

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The 1917 revolution should never have taken place

By Al Glotzer

Al Glotzer is a socialist living in New York who for many years was one of Max Shachtman's closest comrades and co-thinkers.

The crisis in the Soviet Union was created by the economic failures of the successive regimes. It came to the point where there were no consumer goods, no food, no housing. This was practically a Third World country, economically speaking.

Of course, they had plenty of arms...

For many years, I have held that Russia was not a workers' state. I have held this view since the split in the American Trotskyist movement in 1940.

We had a long debate with Trotsky about whether this was a degenerated workers' state or not. We said no.

The Old Man made defence of the

Soviet Union the chief position of the Fourth International. We did not accept that position — we regarded the society as a new class society, and the bureaucracy as a new class. This was not a capitalist society.

Now, after 70 years, the revolution has collapsed. My own opinion is that it should have never taken place in such a backward country. I think Lenin and Trotsky were wrong. Not only that, but they established a one-party state and produced Stalin.

In fact, in 1903, Trotsky predicted that Lenin's type of organisation would first produce a dictatorship of the party, then the dictatorship of the central committee, then, finally, a single dictator. This course was clearly followed.

In 1917, I believe that the correct policy would have been to set up a democratic state and allow a normal development of the economy. All socialist parties would

had have the right to be active. The country was not ready for socialist reorganisation.

The revolution did not succeed in any respect. It remained a backward country. We deluded ourselves, thinking this was socialism.

In fact, anyway, this was no revolution. It was a putsch of the Party. It was the Party's insurrection and the Party's plan. It had no support of the masses. Do you think a couple of hundred thousand supporters in a vast, backward country of over a hundred million is the support of the masses?

Industry was isolated in just a handful of cities. They could not provide for the people. And a socialist who can not raise the level of existence of the people is a failure.

This is why I am a social democrat. Without democracy we are lost. And the Communist movement never had any democracy. It did not believe in it. It attacked the conception. That was a big mistake.

democracy inside the Party, repeating what he wrote in *Revolution Betrayed*. He said it was not a principle that no other

I do not believe Trotsky's answer then to the question of where he stood on democracy was forthright.

He did not assert that he was a democrat. He said that he had been for

This system was regressive

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been critical of them, the total collapse in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union is shattering.

I am not *that* disturbed, although I am shocked at the level of corruption, brutality and repression taking place in those societies. I think it was worse than any of us imagined.

But if they were not genuinely socialist societies in any sense, their collapse does not discredit socialism. It may only discredit what some people saw as socialism.

As to the attacks on the Russian Revolution: the revolution was a tremendous progressive development in human history.

It would be foolish and unhistorical not to relook at the actions of the post-revolutionary government. We should not avoid the possibility that some of its actions helped the degeneration of the revolution and led to Stalinism.

This is *not* to throw Leninism out root and branch. *Mistakes* should not lead us to assume that the whole *project* was wrong.

The areas which should be looked at include the experience of the Cheka and questions associated with democracy — how we ensure bureaucracy does not grow and how we leave space for democratic discussion without threatening a revolutionary society.

We should look at these issues — partly because of the experience of Eastern

Europe. I have heard many wild and peculiar views expressed by people who have had no experience of debate. Political opposition would have allowed these people to thrash their views out.

We now face a period of pretty grim reaction, particularly in Eastern Europe. I have been quite frightened by some of the attitudes of Eastern Europeans. Yet their feelings are also understandable. They have been so disillusioned by Soviet society, that they have reacted violently against it and glorify the West. I am sure that will pass.

“In Western societies, there is a deep economic crisis with mass unemployment. People are looking for solutions. The left will regain support to the extent it is able to put forward both resistance and to appear to offer the prospect of building an alternative.”

These societies are heading for severe crisis as they try to introduce the market. The problems in these societies are insoluble by market solutions.

But it will take quite some time to rebuild socialist movements in these states

and for the left to regain lost confidence in the West.

In Western societies, there is a deep economic crisis with mass unemployment. People are looking for solutions. The left will regain support to the extent it is able to put forward both resistance and to appear to offer the prospect of building an alternative.

In Ireland, in some ways, the left is in bad shape. But I do not think that the crisis in Eastern Europe will have that much impact — other than on the Communist Party and the Workers' Party.

The Workers' Party was ultra-Stalinist. They are now facing particular problems. First, the collapse in the East and the discrediting of Stalinism has led them to want to disassociate themselves from regimes — like North Korea and Ceausescu's Romania — which they used to be identified with.

Secondly, they achieved considerable electoral success in the last election, winning seven seats in the Dail. They won these because of the virtual collapse of the Labour Party. Those who have been elected are very opportunist and they want to ditch most of the Party's ideological baggage. They want less control on them from extra-parliamentary bodies.

In addition, these people fear that the Labour Party is reviving and that their seats are becoming vulnerable. They want to move towards the social democratic centre to join or form a working alliance with the Labour Party. This is the background.

The collapse of Stalinism has demoralised and discredited the ruling group in the Party, who were diehard Stalinists.