

organisations should exist, but in Russia the situation was such that they had to ban all other parties.

In fact, though Social Revolutionaries and the Social Democrats in Russia supported the revolution right through the Civil War, Lenin still insisted in wiping them out.

When the Party took power, they made the other parties illegal. They would not give them a press, meeting places. They ran the type of regime you had in Italy. Mussolini and Hitler learned from the Bolshevik Party.

No, the alternative to the revolution was a democratic state. Do not forget that the Soviets were not part of the Provisional Government, which was established by the revolution, in February, and in which the Bolsheviks did not participate.

The Soviets were a type of workers' organisation. They had a certain legitimacy. They were part of the dual power. But they were not a substitute for democracy, for the right to speak, to write freely, to have your own press and meetings.

It was only for a short period of time after October, before the state had settled, that there were still limited rights.

Lenin's hatred of the Mensheviks was extreme. And the Mensheviks were revolutionaries every bit as much as the Bolsheviks. They were not against the violent overthrow of the Tsarist government. They helped the overthrow of the Tsar in February 1917.

And Martov's party supported the Soviet regime. Martov was a friend of Lenin. He had to leave the country after the Bolsheviks took power. It was through Lenin's intervention that he was allowed to leave. If he had not done so, he would have been dead like Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev.

What does social democracy mean? It means a constant defence of democracy and the rights and living standards of the workers against the exploiters. Right here, in the US, being a social democrat means allying yourself with the labour movement.

Democracy, of course, extends to industry. Workers must have rights in the workplace and over the policies of industry. We must fight to keep the gains we have made despite the deep depression in the US. They want to make the workers pay for the crisis.

As a first step, workers must share in management. I do not think they should be subordinated to the decisions of individual managers.

But democracy is important. The American SWP now supports the Cuban dictator!

The idealistic elements of socialist theory do not square with supporting people like Castro. You have the same thing in the USSR. The inhuman aspects of communism are the most striking feature about it: the purges, the murders, the killing of the Party leaders.

Revolutionary socialism is dead

By Fred Halliday

Fred Halliday is a professor at the London School of Economics. Author of many books, he also edited *Russia, China and the West 1953-66*, a collection of Isaac Deutscher's writings.

What is happening in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is that the attempt to create an alternative path to that of capitalism has foundered — after 70 years in the Soviet Union, less in Eastern Europe.

These countries have been forced not only to return to the path of capitalist development, but to return to the semi-peripheral conditions which all of them except Czechoslovakia found themselves in prior to the establishment of Communist regimes.

It is very clear in terms of their financial conditions. They are now probably lower down the ladder than Latin American countries.

There are numerous problems attached to the project of transition. But there is no strong agency capable of resisting the transition — neither the old bureaucracies nor the working classes.

Part of the problem is that, say, in the Soviet Union a lot of political energy is going in a different direction, into ethnic and national conflicts.

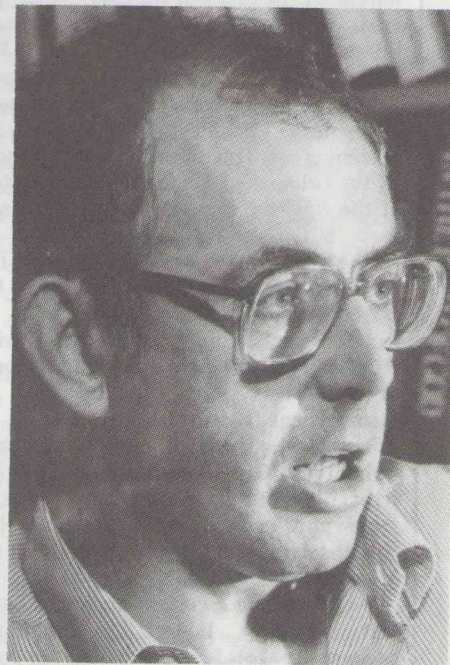
What are the possibilities for authoritarian regimes in these states? They may be pushed in that direction. On the other hand, I think that the world historical conjuncture which these states find themselves in is a different one to the one that existed between the wars.

It is too early to say that these democratic regimes will be stable and be able to solve social and economic problems. But it is ahistorical to say they will revert to the previous authoritarian type.

Russia is a different matter. It is not clear what will happen there.

In general, the crisis took place because these states were unable to compete successfully with the West — not even in military terms, not even in economic terms. They fell behind not only in terms of consumer goods, but also in broader industrial, agricultural and technological indicators. Of course, above all, politically they were not seen to be competing. They did not establish an alternative to bourgeois democracy, a more advanced socialist democracy, let alone do so in conditions of relative material wealth.

The regimes did not fall because of



Fred Halliday

mass revolt from below, except to some extent in Poland, and that was contained. They did not collapse.

They did not fail in world historical terms. Their economic and social achievements over 30, 40, 70 years were quite substantial. In some respects they were more advanced than the West, for instance, in some countries, provision of social welfare.

But, overall, they failed to compete with capitalism. The populations were becoming more disaffected, but also the leadership was itself disaffected. The leaders, including Gorbachev and others in Eastern Europe, gave up.

Where you have Third World regimes, who perhaps have material problems as great, but have a different ideological background — Cuba, China, Vietnam and Korea — their leaders have not given up. They have more of an indigenous basis, although they are not democratic.

The popular basis, for instance in Cuba, has been squandered by the regime. The key point, however, is that the leadership has not given up.

Why did things move so quickly? For the same reasons that the European empires crumbled so quickly in a different political context: the cracking of a hegemonic will.

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The left had three kinds of illusions in these systems. The maximum illusion was that these societies were, if not paradise, greatly superior in overall terms to the West; and that they were more democratic. That was never the case and the majority of the left gave up at some point after the Second World War, although they were certainly wrong to hold these views before the war.

The second illusion was that, although the system was clearly less successful economically, and more repressive politically than the bourgeois West, nevertheless it had the *potential* to develop. In other words, if the leaders changed their policies the societies could realise the possibility of an alternative society. This illusion reached its zenith particularly during the Krushchev period. It rested on the belief not only that the system would produce a leadership capable of reforming — which of course in the end it did — but also that the system *could* be reformed, “socialism with a human face”.

Even with a liberal leadership they could not out-perform the West. But it rested on a key illusion: it assumed that the Communist Party could still retain a monopoly of power. But if coercion is ended, against the background of the capitalist world, free elections will be demanded.

Had Dubcek remained in power he would have run up against exactly this problem.

“Socialism with a human face” — keep the communist revolution but make it nicer — was never going to work. When Gorbachev came along it was not just that he was too late, which of course is the nice

view, the cop-out view.

The third illusion was that, we know they are less successful than the West, but they will be there for a long period. In my case, I underestimated their fragility.

I thought we would be living with a Cold War for the foreseeable future. That was a mistake. Much of the efforts of the left in the early '80s went into minimising the might of the USSR and overestimating the might of the West. Having said this, I

**“The world that
capitalism is creating is
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that was created in the
early part of this century:
north and south, within
our society.”**

did not expect these regimes to crumble as they did.

My feelings about the Bolshevik revolution is that, quite bluntly, it could never have succeeded. The model of political and economic development it postulated was unable to compete with capitalism.

It is another way of saying that the greatest mistake of socialism of this century is to underestimate what capitalism can achieve. We should look at “actually existing capitalism”. Capitalism

has introduced universal suffrage in all the advanced countries. That is enough to be a benchmark.

Capitalism has greatly developed the productive capacity of society and has provided an improved, and for many people reasonable, standard of living for two-thirds of the population of the major capitalist states. This is something that no-one expected.

It is this with which the Bolshevik revolution is competing.

We are now at a period of immense historical transition. It is easy to overestimate the importance of the present. But the present in this case is *important*.

The project of revolutionary socialism has foundered. There is no point in thinking it can be revived. Secondly, the whole idea of history moving along certain rails towards revolutionary transformation, from one mode of production to another, has got to be clearly rejected.

Thirdly, one of the major motors of international conflict in the 20th century — war between capitalist states — is also over, for the first time since the 1890s.

Having said this, the world that capitalism is creating is more unequal and polarised than the world that was created in the early part of this century: north and south, within our society.

The experiences of France '68, Chile '70-'73, Portugal, Iran and Poland are not the embryos of future experience. They have been the breeding ground of illusions. May '68 was followed by June '68, and the electoral triumph of the French bourgeoisie. The Iranian revolution was captured by proto-fascist clergy. The Portuguese revolution was actually engineered by right-wing generals who then reaped the benefits of it later on.

There have been successful struggles and of course these will continue. But to see this as part of some broader, historical, unified trend is just revolutionary mysticism.

The fact is that capitalism is generating contradictions. But the idea that there is something that is moving forwards is wrong. What is left now is the possibility of realising the potential of the bourgeois revolutions. Indeed, this means moving forward to more radical forms of democracy, more equitable international distribution and the banishing of war between states. These are classical goals of the revolutionary movement, without the mysticism and determinism of the communist tradition.

The epoch opened by 1789, the belief in the inevitable process of historical change and in revolutions as the gateways — as this epoch has come to an end.

There is much from that tradition which is still valid. But it will not be recuperated by overstating the socialist potential in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, or by myths about how things could have been done differently in the '60s, or the importance of '68.

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Jim Kemmy

No blueprint now

By Jim Kemmy

Jim Kemmy is an independent socialist from Limerick in the Irish Parliament.

Stalinism was definitely a repressive system. But now I see a danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

A lot of idealism went into setting up the Soviet Union. This idealism is all forgotten about now.

Every country needs a strong labour movement whether a Labour government is in power or not. The difficulty now is that there is a stampede in Russia in which socialism and the labour movement could be trampled on.

The trade union movement in the Soviet Union has been eclipsed. Nothing has replaced the Communist Party. The sad thing was that Gorbachev was not able to democratically reform the CP.

The Russian Revolution was developing

for years before 1917. Tsarism was the most backward, vicious, repressive regime where there were great concentrations of wealth. It was inevitable that there would be a reaction.

Russia leapt from Tsarism to Communism almost overnight. Looking back on it, that was unfortunate.

Marx and Engels had not envisaged socialism being founded in a society like Russia. They thought it would come out of a society like Britain. They thought it would come about in a society where democracy had prevailed for a while. I think, with hindsight, it would have been better to have had a democratic stage first and a socialist stage later on.

I think the other fact to remember is that the Russian Revolution emerged into the world and was attacked by foreign armies. They made the situation worse.

Do not forget that, with all its flaws, the Soviet Union did break the back of fascism in World War II. Survival was at stake. Stalin was brutal, but a great war general. He tried to harness the different religions and nationalities behind the war effort. They lost over 20 million people in Russia.

Without forgetting the lack of political liberty in Russia, do remember the achievements that were made in areas like space technology.

It was not that we did not want to look at the problems of the system, but in Britain and Ireland, where there were plenty of anti-socialist critics, there was no point in us adding our voices to the chorus. Obviously there were flagrant abuses which it was hard to defend. It was pointless to add your small voice to the shouts of the Tory Party, the bosses or, in Ireland, the Church.

I think the left should have been more independent.

I think it is important to have a balanced attitude towards the Revolution.

The West European left is demoralised and to some extent it has lost its ability to think. It has lost its analytical attitude to society.

Marxism still remains useful as a critique of capitalism. But Marx lived over 100 years ago — and the world has changed a lot since then.

There is no blueprint now and we must all look again at society. There is a need to update socialism and to make it more relevant.

Socialism in one country is no good anymore. The employers are organised internationally in the European Community. We have organised very weakly, very nationally.

The weakness and fragmentation of the left is very pronounced; it must be overcome. We must combat the injustices of capitalism and propose, in place of capitalism, an efficient, democratic socialism.

Bureaucracy was implicit in the Marxist conception

By Ernesto Laclau

Ernesto Laclau is a writer of Argentinian origin now living in Britain, a contributor to *Marxism Today* before it folded, and author notably of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (with Chantal Mouffe).

We have to differentiate between Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. In the case of Eastern Europe the Communist regimes were largely the result of the Red Army occupation after World War 2. There were no indigenous roots for this development.

At the moment when the Soviet power began to weaken itself, it was obvious opposition movements would emerge.

In the Soviet Union the process was more complicated. But what is clear from the general pattern of the transition was that one of the main achievements of the Soviet Union was to postpone for over 70 years the disintegration of the Tsarist empire. It had largely inherited a state apparatus and bureaucracy and established a firm dictatorship over many nationalities.

Even if the process in the former Soviet Union was different to Eastern Europe this is not *entirely* so: there were many oppressed nationalities integrated by force.

I think the meaning of the process is the end of bureaucratic socialism. What has failed is a conception of socialism in which bureaucratic centralisation and control of economic life exclusively by the state were the basis of the social and economic system.

In fact this conception was always implicit in the Marxian concept of society. The problem was how a limited historical agent could assume a universal historical

task — the social management of the productive process.

The historical answer, in the case of the Soviet Union, was that this task was assumed by a corrupt bureaucracy. Therefore, what has failed in the Soviet Union is something much wider than a particular political regime. The whole conception of socialism founded on centralised bureaucratic control of the productive process has failed.

There are two main brands in the socialist tradition: communism and social democracy. These strands share a basic confidence in bureaucratic centralised planning. This idea is at the core of Marxism.

The Marxist conception is linked to the withering-away of the state. The state as a bureaucratic mechanism would become redundant. The proletariat had the role of the universal class which would represent pure human essence.

A historical subject would emerge which would represent the universality of the species. Without this emergence there would be no withering away of the state.

In fact, what has happened, far from the emergence of a homogenous, unique social agent which could represent the universality of the species, what we have is a plurality and fragmentation of many social actors.

I see a proliferation of many historical actors who have the right to have some say in decisions affecting the productive process.

What about France 1968? Iran in 1979 or Poland in 1980? These were not class

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Bureaucracy was implicit in the Marxist conception

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movements in the least.

1968 represented the *end* of class politics. In France, forms of protest did not depend on the position of actors within the productive process. We saw new student mobilisations.

Today we see a proliferation of new identities which cannot be seen as unifying around a class base.

Looking back at the Russian Revolution, with the advantage of hindsight, we can see that the real democratic revolution was the revolution of February. Retrospectively, the suppression of the Constituent Assembly by the Bolsheviks was a profound mistake.

The October revolution was partly a democratic revolution with a non-democratic outcome. Would a democratic outcome have been possible given the conditions and relation of forces? That is difficult to say.

In Britain now we should struggle for democratic socialism. This means increasing the constituencies which have a say in collective decisions.

Even if bureaucratic Stalinism has failed in its classical form we should also note that regulation by pure market mechanisms has also failed. It is not a matter of returning to the "virtues" of the market. We need a type of mixed economy in which social control of the productive process and private property are combined.

This is a formula which can mean many things. For instance, for a radical democracy should mean that many groups at local level would have a say in the regulation of economic life. And economic life is not the only aspect; there is a plurality of subjects and social agents which have to have more control in a much more democratic society.

Concepts such as "class state" and "capitalist state" must be re-examined. Certainly, the British state is not a class state if "class state" relates to a particular group. The British state is simply the result of the relation of forces between different groups in society.

Our task is to allow progressive forces to control more and more of the state's mechanisms.

If we do not attempt this the struggle is lost before we have begun. Marxists have had the contradictory approach of, on the one hand, relying on increasing state intervention to advance social aims and on the other hand asserting that the state was the instrument of the dominant classes.

Whether the British state is going to become a class state, or become something else, is not decided in advance. This is decided in struggle.

They lost the economic battle

By Livio Maitan

Livio Maitan is an Italian Trotskyist, a long-time comrade of Ernest Mandel in the leadership of the Fourth International (United Secretariat), and author of *Party, Army and Masses in China* and other books.

The question of how to evaluate the crisis in the ex-USSR and eastern Europe cannot be separated from an assessment of the class character of these states, which in turn involves an historical balance sheet of the Russian Revolution and its aftermath.

I continue to defend the Trotskyist view that the Russian Revolution was the world's first successful conquest of state power by the working class; the actions of the Bolsheviks and their allies in seizing state power remain historically justified. But the degeneration of the revolution was to some extent inevitable once the European revolutionary wave of 1917-23 was defeated. That is to say it was inevitable that isolated revolution in a backward country should suffer

bureaucratic deformations. It was not inevitable that a bureaucratic caste would usurp power. That was a consequence of the political defeat of the struggle of the Left Opposition in the 1920s, itself conditioned by the profound weakness of the Bolshevik old guard in relation to the danger of bureaucratisation, as well as the well-known atomisation of the Russian workers' vanguard, a consequence of the civil war and its aftermath.

Without the extension of the revolution, a workers' state in most countries would have been quickly overthrown. But it survived in the Soviet Union thanks to the immense reserves of natural resources and labour power. This enabled the bureaucratised economy to carry out the tasks of basic industrialisation in a relatively autarkic way, albeit using terrorist-police methods. Despite the relatively long-term survival of the bureaucratically degenerated workers' state, Trotsky's prognosis — either successful political revolution and the extension of the revolution, or alternatively

Stalinist communism was never socialism

By Ronnie Macdonald

Ronnie Macdonald is a leader of the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee, which represents workers on the North Sea oil rigs.

I have mixed feelings about the transformation taking place in Eastern Europe and the ex-USSR. Clearly, I am pleased that the totalitarian governments were defeated. They were overturned with quite remarkable ease. It shows what happens when the people refuse to admire the king's new clothes.

But delight must be tempered with some caution. We are seeing the resurgence of very reactionary forces. Religious and nationalistic groups are organising and they present a real danger.

A second factor in the collapse was the existence of an over-centralised, bureaucratic state. Planning was not carried out democratically. In the end the system ground down to a standstill.

Thirdly, we saw incredible spending on arms. The Soviet Union's resources were wasted on the building of a massive military machine.

This arms spending attenuated the growth of material wealth in the society as

a whole.

The US is now suffering from the same symptoms of wasteful spending on armaments. But they are caught up in a bind. Massive cuts in military spending will have a catastrophic effect on the West.

The Western recession is caused by essential contradictions of capitalism. The unviability of both the East and West emanate, in the final analysis, from the same reasons: the inability of the economies to deliver.

I have never involved myself in the "did Lenin lead to Stalin" discussion. I have always taken it as read that the Russian Revolution was a necessary and a good thing. No-one should question the legitimacy of the first years when Lenin led the government. It was only in the mid-1920s, under Stalin, that things went badly, drastically wrong. Stalin's forced collectivisation and the beginnings of totalitarianism signalled the real break with the ideals of the October revolution.

The OILC symbol is taken from the Solidarnosc logo. There are remarkable similarities between the rise of the union in the Polish shipyards and our own

STALINISM

capitalist restoration — remained valid.

The roots of the present crisis of the eastern bloc are that the bureaucratic command economy lost the economic battle with world capitalism. The system reached the limits of its capacity to expand, without a successful workers' revolution which could have renovated the economy and opened the possibility of an extension of the revolution to more advanced industrial states.

Gorbachev's reforms represented an attempt, ultimately utopian, to maintain the bureaucratic system by modifying it.

Marketisation of the bureaucratic economy combined with a limited democratisation proved inherently unworkable.

Attempted reform from above created the space for mass rebellion from below, especially in eastern Europe. The revolt of the workers was completely justified and deserved our full support. But its ultimate social outcome is not yet determined. Given the complete discrediting of socialism in these countries by decades of Stalinism, the relationship of forces up till now is very unfavourable. In all the eastern European states, there are now governments aiming at rebuilding capitalism. Restorationist tendencies are prevailing on the ideological and political field also in the ex-USSR. Nowhere has the working class conquered political independence, not even to the extent of for-

unionising activity, although I should stress that we are a bit nervous of some of the other connotations.

We chose the symbol because, during the month in which the Committee took off, Thatcher was in Poland, talking about the need for freedom and free trade unions! We said: well, Maggie, we are for that too!

I have heard it said that if you were not a Communist at 19, you had no humanity; if you were still a Communist at 30 you had no sense. Many — I was not amongst them — did take this road and considered the Communist Party only to reject it because they could not envisage living in a society where trade unions and trade unionists had to utterly subordinate themselves to the state.

I never equated Stalinist communism with any type of socialism. Communism was never socialism. Hopefully, now it has gone we can begin to set the record straight.

From now on we must present the socialist case in democratic terms. We can win people by the strength and quality of our argument. I am confident we will win these arguments.

In the OILC we are putting together an effective fighting machine which can work for offshore oil workers. For the foreseeable future we will see a stand-off between the working class and capitalism.

We need to ensure that the socialist forces are strong in their opposition to capital.

ming mass independent trade unions.

If the outcome is the final restoration of capitalism, in eastern Europe and in the ex-USSR as well as in China and Cuba, it will constitute ultimately an historic defeat for the world working class, the victory of counter-revolution. The very existence of the Soviet Union and other non-capitalist states was a formidable factor in the world relationship of forces, despite the crimes of bureaucratic rule. The restoration of capitalism would free the hands of international imperialism; the Gulf war was a first sign of the potential consequences. Obviously, the task for revolutionary socialists today is to maximise their efforts to aid the construction of independent workers' organisations

"We must continue to defend the project of a socialised economy".

and socialist forces. Socialists, revolutionary people in these countries must simultaneously fight all attempts at marketisation and privatisation, but also any attempt to reimpose or recycle bureaucratic rule.

As to the question of the future of socialism, two basic things have to be said. First, we are in a very difficult international situation with world capitalism on the offensive against the working class. Because of the wide association of Stalinism with socialism, many doubts about the viability of socialism are being expressed, not only in intellectual circles but in the workers' movement in many countries. Second, of course, Stalinism was not socialism; the democratic and emancipatory content of socialism has to be re-stressed in this situation.

The political profile and tasks for revolutionary marxists is a long discussion which cannot be fully elaborated here. But I would stress that we must continue to defend the project of a socialised economy as against illusions in the capitalist market, while making it very clear that socialisation and workers' control do not equal bureaucratic nationalisation on either the Stalinist or social democratic model. And that while socialists defend all democratic rights, including those achieved under bourgeois democracy, our conception of socialist democracy is something qualitatively different. Workers' self-management is simultaneously an economic and democratic concept.

Finally, socialism today has to highlight the emancipatory potential of struggles against all oppressions — women's oppression, racism, the oppression of lesbians and gay men, national oppression — and really integrate these issues into our perspectives and action.

Socialism or barbarism remains the choice facing humanity. The challenge for revolutionary marxists is to turn the collapse of Stalinism to our advantage, rather than allowing it to be used as a weapon against us.

The USSR used to work

By Ralph Miliband

Ralph Miliband is a lecturer at the London School of Economics. Author of *The State in Capitalist Society*, *Parliamentary Socialism* and other books, he has been associated with the Socialist Movement.

I think the way to look at the current crisis is to see Perestroika as a great failure and Glasnost as a great success.

Perestroika has failed because it was begun without a clear view of what had to be done, not knowing how to go about reform. Cross-currents contradicted each other and meant that some did not want to give up the command system altogether; others did. Gorbachev, as he says himself, was a victim of the incoherence.

Gorbachev could not go straight back to capitalism. But he did not have a clear alternative.

I think Eastern Europe is rather different. The major currents were the discredited Stalinist old guard and the pro-capitalist liberals. The system was so much less entrenched there than it was in the USSR that once the Russians said they would not help the old guard, the systems broke down. There was not a basis for the old guard to hold on. Ceausescu tried and failed.

These were not legitimate regimes. They were mostly propped up by the Soviet Union.

What underlay much of the crisis in the Eastern European states was economic failure. This is remarkable because up until the 1960s, some very anti-Communist politicians and economists thought that these states would overtake the West. Indeed, they were not doing that badly. In terms of economic growth, modernisation, industrialisation, the drop in infant mortality, the 1950s and 1960s were not bad decades. They compared favourably, at least, with the equivalent countries in the Third World.

There are a number of explanations. The overriding one is that a system which is so bureaucratically imposed from above and so totally unwilling to accept dissent will not get people's cooperation. This is particularly true in Eastern Europe.

There was an impetus in the 1950s and '60s which worked up to a point. Beyond that, the system showed itself incapable.

I make a distinction from the USSR. These factors hold for the Soviet Union, but from the '40s through to the '60s, there seems to have been a good deal of legitimisation, a sense that life was getting better. Their immense reserves were called upon for extensive modernisation. But, after the 1960s, they were required to go in for more intensive modernisation.

They were not equipped to develop, for example, information technology. Innovation was not possible. It should be remembered that the Brezhnev era, usual-

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A revolution from above

By Alec Nove

Alec Nove is an emeritus professor at Glasgow University. He is the author of *The Soviet Economic System* and of *The Economics of Feasible Socialism*, in which he advocates a species of "market socialism".

I am quite pessimistic about the situation in the Soviet Union. Whatever plans and programmes are taken up, the political

system, as it now stands, is incapable of implementing them.

For example, when it is said that some sort of authoritarian regime is extremely probable, it is because a power vacuum exists. There has to be some type of authority.

The old Marxist-Leninist doctrines have been thoroughly discredited. The alternative is nationalism: this has already con-

tributed to the break up of the Soviet Union. The difficulty is that the nationalist ideologies are inclined to be conservative. But the nationalists are split on the question of the market. Some are in favour of Chicago and Thatcher. Others have a Russian-style neo-Slavophile conservatism. Some are neo-fascists, and pro-Pinochet.

Then there is the question of the

The USSR used to work

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ly thought of exclusively as a period of stagnation and corruption, did also see some development.

There was something resembling a consumer revolution in the Brezhnev era. It was an awful regime but, at the same time, the Soviet working class was not doing too badly.

In relation to what is happening now it is worth remembering that in the '70s the system was functioning. The distribution was awful, but it was functioning. There was bread in the shops. With Perestroika, one system came to an end with nothing to replace it.

One factor that should be added is that they desperately attempted to keep up in the arms race and just could not manage it.

In the end, the system could not call upon people in a way which was efficient. The joke of the workers was: they pretend to pay us and we pretend to work. People could see the corruption and the waste.

People have characterised the Soviet Union in very different ways. I never thought these regimes were capitalist. I do not think that "degenerated workers' states" is very apt, either.

Bureaucratic collectivism comes closest of all. This is a very specific system, not totally unknown in history, but fairly well on its own.

A few years ago, I wrote that this system was 'despotic collectivism' and, who knows, it could become a 'democratic collectivism'. That was an illusion.

The bureaucracy, or class, or ruling strata was in any case very divided and uncertain. They wanted to preserve privileges and resented people like Yeltsin who attacked them. Gorbachev became an agent of dissolution; once the system was touched it became brittle and broke.

There is something in the strict Trotskyist notion of a bureaucracy deciding to revert to private property and operate its own thermidor, as Trotsky described it in *Revolution Betrayed*. It is true after all that a lot of Party people saw their chance in privatisation to become the new capitalists.

One fact which is significant and deeply depressing is that those who wanted to replace the old regime not by

capitalism but by some sort of socialist democracy — these people are not going to make it.

I am certain that there are millions of people in the Soviet Union and East Germany who want socialist democracy.

In the ex-GDR, there was a genuine socialist culture. A lot of people hoped that the alternative to the old regime would be socialist democracy. They are now paying the price for this in the current witch-hunt taking place in East Germany. I was in Czechoslovakia in 1990 and people there were being persecuted for being Communists.

I am now impressed that both the right and the social democratic left believe that socialism is over. I have even heard

"There is something in the strict Trotskyist notion of a bureaucracy deciding to revert to private property and operate its own thermidor, as Trotsky described it in *Revolution Betrayed*. It is true after all that a lot of Party people saw their chance in privatisation to become the new capitalists."

social democrats say that social democracy has achieved all that is possible. It has reached the end of the road.

They are saying that the best that can be hoped for is "capitalism with a human face" because the only alternative is totalitarianism.

Our problem is a double one. On the one hand, saying there is a radical alternative. At the same time, not falling back into mere slogans and formulae without thinking through our project. This will be very difficult. It will take some years.

I also think that we should avoid unrealistic ultra-leftism. The Leninist or Bolshevik model has gone.

The model says that it is quite inconceivable that anything resembling a socialist society can be achieved or even

begun within the current constitutional framework. The bourgeois state can not simply be inherited, it must be smashed.

This view of the state may be true. It is an imponderable. But I am certain that given the existence of capitalist democracy, it is possible to work within the system, engaging in electoralism and parliamentarianism.

Although there is such a thing as parliamentary cretinism, the danger is of falling into an anti-parliamentary cretinism.

It is now possible to conceive of a socialist government coming to office, even to power, and then facing a war of attrition from the capitalists.

The working class remains a basis of support for anything resembling socialist transformation. But we need to examine the sectional, race and gender divisions in the working class. The question becomes: how do we put together a "historic bloc" which could constitute a political majority as well as its current sociological majority?

We should underline that our socialism involves predominant public ownership. If people talk of the "mixed economy" I have no problems; the problem is that today's mixed economy has the wrong mix, with far too great a private sector.

We need to rehabilitate the notion of public ownership.

Finally, the left is not only recoiling from public ownership, but is also anti-statist to a degree which is wrong. It is essential that a socialist enterprise has a strong state.

I am not a statist. We must make our state democratic. I do not want to see a new tyrannical state replace the old one. But we must have a directing executive which is controlled and restrained but also has room to work.

Lenin's *State and Revolution* talked about the dictatorship of the proletariat as the people under arms in democracy. The state, if not destroyed, has become an administrative organ. I think Lenin approached anarchism here. Frankly, this is not realistic, as indeed the Bolsheviks soon discovered.

We would inherit a bourgeois state which would have to be democratised to become socialist. We would change its personnel. We would review the relationship between the legislature and executive. Although Marx wanted to merge these two elements, I do not believe this is possible.

STALINISM

economy. It is in a terrible mess. There is a good case for freeing prices in the sense that if people are going to earn and spend money, prices must have some type of rationality behind them. The alternative is universal rationing.

But reform has been left so late. Shortages are severe; inequalities have grown enormous; it is sufficient for anyone to find a means of acquiring hard currency to buy up everything they want. There are lots of businessmen playing the extremely corrupt markets which do exist. They can quickly become millionaires. The pensioners and the poor are in a terrible position with the price increases.

But where is the money with which the government can pay the pensions and relief which is needed? Revenues are not being effectively collected. The new tax system is not yet in place.

A VAT of 28% has been introduced. They have never had VAT; it is difficult enough to operate it here.

There is now a great chance of disorder, followed by an authoritarian crackdown.

What are the roots of the crisis? There are different ways of looking at this question. The system inherited from Stalin could be called totalitarianism. The Communist Party full-time functionaries ran the country. Under Gorbachev this system was weakened, although not abolished. But nothing replaced their rule.

This is as true of the politics as it is of the economics. The only alternative was some sort of market. The Chicago marketeers who believe that all that has to be done is to adopt the principles of their textbooks and everything will turn out right are wrong and naive. But the point is that there is a logic to a market economy and, alas, it is very difficult to do without.

Some steps needed to be taken towards the market. But there were many problems — lack of experience, institutions, market culture and legal framework. A lot of genuine opposition came from ordinary people bothered about large price rises.

This was a revolution from above where Gorbachev sought support from below. A lot of the initiatives were from above. Many of the political struggles which took place were between different groups in the *nomenklatura*.

Perhaps this was inevitable. People would be brought out onto the streets to demonstrate, but alternative political structures did not emerge. To this day, in Russia, there are a lot of new parties but not a single one could be described as a serious political force.

Add to this that they made grave economic errors — including the destruction of the currency. Budget revenues fell because of the fall in the price of oil, and because of their campaign against vodka (which provided a lot of revenue). Expenditure increased. Military spending remained very high. They made desirable decisions to increase expenditure on appallingly underfunded medical services and build more houses. They covered the

gap by printing money.

On top of this you had the various nationalities pulling in different directions and thus you had an increase in economic confusion.

Supplies no longer arrived. Production was halted without supplies.

Thus we saw a cumulative effect. People no longer trust money. Managers go in for barter to get materials, citizens barter in order to get anything for themselves.

What is the substitute for what in the West is the profit motive? It is the plans laid down from above. To keep the whole thing together, save it from breaking up into a series of competing interest groups, there was a system of "administrative competition". Not economic, but administrative competition. We had various administrative units competing for resources not because of need, but based on the amount of influence they could

"I am in favour of workers' self-management in the context of a competitive economy. But, certainly, a group of workers who run an enterprise which happens to be a monopoly could very well exploit their position."

wield in the bureaucratic system.

Under Brezhnev, especially the ageing Brezhnev, the system started going rotten.

Now what was the relationship between Stalin and the Russian Revolution? Was Stalin the executor of Lenin's plans, or the executioner of Lenin's comrades? He can be seen as both!

Clearly there is a lot in Stalin which would have outraged Lenin. And yet he built on something which Lenin began to make — the one-party state.

Lenin began by seizing power in a peasant country and changing it from above, disregarding the wishes of three quarters of the population who were peasants. This had an oppressive logic of its own.

Thirty-three years ago I wrote a piece called "Was Stalin really necessary?" The argument was that, given the Bolshevik Revolution had occurred, isolated in a hostile world, the emergence of a tough leader was to some extent predestined.

I could now quote Roy Medvedev saying there was a historical logic in the triumph of the cult of personality, but once established a lot depended on the personality. Therefore it did not in the least follow that such and such a number of peasants must die, or thousands must be shot.

I have seen archive figures which sug-

gest 375,000 people were shot in 1937.

I wrote the *Economics of a Feasible Socialism* ten years ago. One of its objects was to say that the Marxist as well as the Soviet view of socialism has no future. These views could only discredit socialism. If it has a future it must look different. Not only must it be democratic, but the notion of eliminating market forces after a transition period is simply wrong.

Marx's vision of socialism was utopian romanticism. We have to start by saying what is wrong with capitalism, and pure individualism. What is important about socialism is that it is *social*.

When Erhard introduced the market into Germany in 1948 he called it the "sozialmarktwirtschaft" — a "social market economy" which emphasised both democracy and the social. The market is central in some spheres and quite the wrong thing in others — health, education, or London Transport. This view must be cleansed of its association with Marxism-Leninism.

What is the relationship between the state and democracy and the market? Well, first, take London Transport. Mrs Thatcher abolished local democracy in London. If we followed the example of the Paris region, then we could have a democratically elected local government spending money without being ordered not to by our extraordinary Thatcherite fanatics. Public transport in Paris is subsidised. There are good reasons for this subsidy.

But we must have democratic voting to decide how local or national taxes are spent.

The problems of the Marxist view are obvious. For instance, are the railways run for the benefit of the railwaymen, or the passengers? What is workers' control? A group of workers can exploit other workers. There are many examples of this. For example, South African white workers are quite viciously against training blacks because black workers would then be able to compete with them for jobs.

I am in favour of workers' self-management in the context of a competitive economy. But, certainly, a group of workers who run an enterprise which happens to be a monopoly could very well exploit their position. If the industry is a "natural monopoly" which, for instance, London Transport ought to be, we need an authority *not* elected by the transport workers to ensure they *do not* exploit others.

How deep have the blows against socialism, caused by Stalinism, gone? The wounds are particularly deep in those countries which have been run by Stalinists. Stalin was able to quote Marx. Look at Poland: communism was not only terrible, it was also imposed by an external power.

Things are better in Western Europe. Mitterrand can still call his party the Socialist Party without damage.

Socialism is the most profound form of democracy

By Michel Pablo

Michel Raptis (Pablo) is a Greek socialist. He was the foremost leader of the mainstream Fourth International from the 1940s to the early 1960s, especially in the period when it developed the thesis that the East European, Chinese and other systems were "deformed workers' states". He ceased to be a "workers' statist" 20 years ago.

I think we have seen the fall of Stalinism, not the fall of socialism or Marxism. The collapse was inevitable. The only astonishing thing was the way the collapse happened.

I think we have entered a new historic period. We must rethink many issues. We must reject Stalinism and reclaim the basic ideas of Marx and Lenin and Trotsky.

I think we have before us a long

period where these states move from Stalinism — bureaucratic statism — towards a kind of bourgeois state again.

We have a long historical period ahead.

We must remember that the state of capitalism is not so stable.

We have now America, Mexico and Canada as an enmeshing trade bloc; Europe where we do not know even how many states there will be; and the Japanese empire. Japan in the next few years will become the major economic power in the world.

These three major blocs will have antagonistic relationships — as in the past. Of course, we do not know what will happen. I am now a very old man — perhaps I will not find out!

But, anyway, capitalism is not stable.

Now more than ever, this prehistoric barbaric world needs a radical social transformation. The subject of this change will not only be the workers but also many other strata.

I think, as I have said, that the crisis in Eastern Europe was inevitable.

I will explain why. It has only been during the last thirty years that humanity has possessed the ability to establish the Utopia. It has only been during this period that it has become possible to give everyone the same level of life and to shorten considerably the necessary time of social work and to permit everyone to develop themselves. This fact is new. It is only during this latest period that we have possessed the material and cultural level necessary for the socialist Utopia.

For many years, I said that the states

Leninism and the party

By John Palmer

John Palmer is European editor of the *Guardian*. He is active in the Socialist Movement, and was for many years until 1975 a leading member of the International Socialism group (forerunner of the SWP).

The passing of Stalinism now opens tremendous opportunities for us.

I am a state capitalist. I do not take the *New Left Review* — stalinoid — view that these were deformed but progressive modes of production whose defeat is a defeat for the working class.

This is not to say that what takes their place presents less of an obstacle. We are seeing the growth of nationalism and anti-semitism. These are filling the ideological vacuum, and among the most dispossessed too. We have witnessed not only the death of Stalinism but also the chronic decline of social democracy.

I take a more orthodox position on the Bolshevik revolution than I take towards Bolshevism today. That is to say, whatever the relevance or irrelevance of Bolshevik forms of organisation (something, in fact, I increasingly question), to jog backwards in history and to delegitimise the Bolshevik revolution is grotesque.

I agree with the position in Sam Farber's book *Before Stalinism*. Farber is an ex-ISer and came originally from the Shachtmanite YPSL. His book is important because it gets away from the crude alternatives that either Leninism led to Stalinism or there was no continuity at all between the two.

The truth is that many of the Bolshevik practices prefigured and facilitated — although did not make inevitable — the Stalinist degeneration.

Farber talks about the internal debate in the Party over industrialisation, the unions, and about factional rights inside the Party. He gives importance to the battles for democracy by people like the Workers' Opposition, the loss of which weakened the resistance in the immune system of the Bolshevik revolution to Stalinism.

This is not to say Leninism led to Stalinism. But I do not accept the view that the two were antithetical. Real life was much messier.

Something better than Stalinism was possible, and that was best fought for inside the Bolshevik movement.

On the question of the party in today's Britain, it is possible to both overstate the case and the opposition to the case.

The nature of the 'party' covers a multitude of possibilities. The Bolshevik Party of *What Is To Be Done?* is utterly different to that of *The State and Revolution*.

When Trotsky wrote as a Menshevik — something I would not have been; I would have been a Bolshevik — that the Bolsheviks had a low cultural level and suffered from Jacobinism, he was right.

It would be un-Marxist to pretend that the economic transformation of the industrial world has not produced enormous cultural changes, including changes in the culture of the working class itself. These changes affect the

balance between pluralism and democratic centralism. For example, a workers' revolution must be pluralist from the start. Pluralism does not necessarily exclude non-proletarian parties. And this is in fundamental contradiction with historical Leninism.

We need pluralism because the working class will not homogenise this side of the final transformation. Different experiences will come together.

I also feel that the heterogeneity of the working class is not only a weakness, it is also a source of strength.

Is the case for a party that the working class is still dominated by bourgeois ideas? This argument is suspiciously one-dimensional. The working class is impregnated by all kinds of ideas coming from social forces outside its own formations. These are not necessarily bourgeois ideas. Look at Islamic fundamentalist ideas inside the Arab working class. That is not a bourgeois phenomenon — it is petty-bourgeois, even pre-bourgeois.

My own view is that there are transitional cultures for the working class short of socialism. For example, I think that during class struggle and in the new social movements, there are prefigurative social forms. The sort of prefigurative work around the GLC in London, highly questionable and certainly contradictory, nonetheless contained elements which will have to be developed by any serious left.

The programme will have to be a programme for an extended transition in and against the existing state.

in these countries were "bureaucratic states" with nothing to do with socialism. These "bureaucratic states" were in the hands of the new strata — I do not know if you can call it a class or a new social category — the state bureaucracy.

These states collapsed. Particularly after 1960 there was crisis. Before that time there was the possibility of economic expansion. After that time, the pressure of capitalism overwhelmed them.

Of course, it was necessary in these societies to have a political and economic reform. Trotsky also said that it was inevitable that the bureaucracy would try to

"We must go back to Marx and clearly say that socialism comes out of the developed countries".

do it.

But the bureaucracy have acted in the worst way. They lost control completely. They showed they were very little and incapable men.

What you had in Russia was not capitalism. What we are seeing now is how difficult it will be in these countries to create capitalism and a capitalist mentality. They will need a long, long period to do this. Theoretically, this means that what we had was a little different to capitalism.

In Russia, the bureaucracy represented a new stratum of people.

About Lenin and Trotsky. What they said in their time, globally speaking, was quite right. We must not forget that they began the revolution in Russia not to build socialism in Russia, but to help to expand, immediately, the revolution in Germany.

Of course, Lenin and Trotsky can be criticised for this or that point, but we must not completely reject them because we must understand the conditions of the time in which they were working.

Stalinism really was the worst thing for socialism. Of course, I have some sympathy for some of the old Communists. The old Communists here in Greece fought for years and years. Now they face big troubles because they do not understand what is happening.

But, truly, the worst thing for socialism was Stalinism.

In particular, we must assert that socialism is bound up with democracy. Socialism is the most profound form of democracy.

Looking forward, I think that we must remember that we are Europeans — that our view is slightly deformed. The big majority of humanity is in the Third World. There, the problems are now terrible. On the other hand, we must go back to Marx and clearly say that socialism comes out of the developed countries. We must help the Third World from Europe.

The October Revolution did not produce Stalinism!

By Jozef Pinior

Jozef Pinior is a leading figure in the Socialist Political Centre in Wroclaw, Poland. He was a prominent local leader of Solidarnosc in its underground years.

I believe that a main factor in the situation here is the fact of capitalism. There is very strong pressure from Western capitalists.

There is a lack of any real socialist alternative. In Poland there is a very deep demoralisation inside the working class and in more general society.

People feel defenceless against capitalisation. What is really on the agenda in Eastern Europe is the creation of some type of authoritarianism in order to introduce capitalism. There is a conflict or contradiction between the process of capitalisation and introduction of market reforms and, on the other hand, democratic freedoms, even parliamentary democracy.

In Poland, I think it will be very difficult to introduce further capitalisation through parliament. Authoritarianism is on the agenda. The form of authoritarianism could well be new — a mixture of military institutions and classical authoritarianism.

Is fascism possible? Well, when we talk of fascism we look for mass organisations. There are no such organisations in Eastern Europe right now. What does exist are the authoritarian state types like Walesa or Yeltsin in Russia.

The danger is that we will see a revolt movement — strikes and riots — without a politically clear alternative. In this process a strong right wing, fascist-style movement could well emerge.

The comrades here believe that Stalinism is dead in Eastern Europe. When we talk about Stalinism I think we must remember to differentiate between bureaucracies and political parties. For instance, in Poland, former Stalinist bureaucrats have been able to change themselves to a market-type bureaucracy. They vote for right-wing political parties, not for the former Stalinist Social Democratic Party. The Social Democratic Party is not useful for them.

In this situation it is possible for some ex-Stalinists, for instance from the Stalinist trade unions, to move to the left. The Social Democratic Party has a lot of contradictions, but there are left currents within it.

The Polish state is in a transition period. We have a government completely dependent on imperialism and the

International Monetary Fund.

On the other hand, we still have a very strong working class. The working class is still a very important class inside society. The capitalists must look to crush the working class. The state is still in transition towards capitalism, still under pressures from various classes.

My view is that the 1917 October Revolution was a real working-class revolution. After 1917 there was a type of workers' state. Stalinism was a movement against this state and against the working class. There is no relation between the October Revolution and Stalinism. Stalinism was a kind of counter-revolution.

From Stalinism to Gorbachev there was a period full of contradictions. There was a struggle between the working class, the bureaucracy and imperialism. The bureaucracy wanted to become a ruling class. But this was not possible for them. In fact, they were too weak. The bureaucracy was between the working class and the world capitalist ruling class.

"We still have a very strong working class. The working class is still a very important class inside society. The capitalists must look to crush the working class. The state is still in transition towards capitalism, still under pressures from various classes."

This project was to introduce market programmes against the working class. There were no political forces to defend a socialist programme.

The working class had disintegrated after years of living under the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy had not got a serious alternative programme.

The situation now is not easy. There is a crisis of socialism on a world scale. But we still have to face the contradictions inside capitalism. Capitalism cannot resolve the

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