

The U.S.S.R. and Leninism:



***This
Is Not
Socialism***

World Socialist Party U.S.
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Introduction

The following articles are from World Socialist Movement publications.

Founded in 1904, the WSM has presented a consistent vision of socialism being a democratic movement to establish a society based on free access as opposed to the market system.

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State Capitalism

Alfred P. Sloane, who once ran General Motors, is reported to have said: "It is the business of the automobile industry to make money not cars" - and what he was saying applies generally to production in the modern world. It takes place first and foremost with a view to making monetary profit and only incidentally with a view to producing goods or services. There's no difficulty in seeing this in what's called the "private sector". It's clear that an employer will only carry on a business as long as it is making a profit or there's a prospect of profit. If profit stops being made, the business will either try to cut costs (usually by reducing its workforce) or, if this is impossible, will close down.

We can see this process together with its human toll in insecurity and unemployment going on all the time. And we can see it not just in the private sector but in state-owned industry too, as in the closure in recent years of so many British coal mines. Yet it's still widely thought that in state owned industry profit is not paramount and that in countries such as Russia, where virtually the whole of the production process is state controlled, "planning" and not the profit motive prevails. In the West, because many of the state-owned industries have been concerned with providing essential goods and services (such as energy and transport) it's been widely believed that they somehow belong to us all, that their purpose is to serve the community and they do not have to run at a profit.

This belief was particularly widespread in Britain in the years immediately following the second world war when the Labour government introduced large-scale nationalisation measures. The old lady who went down to the pithead with her coal bucket to collect some of what she thought was her coal had just this kind of optimism. She had been told that now the mines were nationalised they belonged to the people. In fact she was greeted with delirious laughter and told to go and buy her coal from the coal merchant as before. Many other people have been similarly disillusioned when confronted with the failure of nationalisation to bring

about the shared prosperity of a new social order. And so unpopular has it now become that the present-day Conservative Party is able to gain electoral advantage by bringing in sweeping privatisation measures.

It's often said that this failure of state-run industry to give people a better life shows that socialism has been tried and failed. This is true only if you regard socialism as synonymous with state ownership (and by extension capitalism with private ownership). But another way of looking at it is that state ownership is simply an alternative to private ownership of capital and of running a capitalist economy. No matter who handles capital - the state or private investors - the majority of people, all those who have to work for a living, continue to have only the limited access to the wealth of society which their wage or salary gives them.

State industries

This is an approach adopted in a new book by Adam Buick and John Crump called *State Capitalism: the Wages System Under New Management* (Macmillan, 1986, 157pp.) Buick and Crump argue that state-run production is just as much concerned with profit as private enterprise and present convincing evidence that, when it comes to making profit, nationalised industries in Britain and other Western countries have on the whole been extraordinarily successful. They do not deny that state-run industries such as coal and transport necessary for the overall profitability of production have sometimes been run at a loss with the aid of government subsidies. But this has been the exception rather than the rule and in general nationalised industries, which have a statutory legal obligation to try to run at a profit, have not been allowed to continue to run at a loss. The cut-backs in the coal and iron and steel industries over the last 20 years by both Labour and Tory governments are evidence of this and on the whole anyway, despite popular myth, subsidies have not been needed for nationalised industries. They have generally produced not only enough profit to accumulate new capital but also enough to provide a property income for the private individuals who originally owned the nationalised industries. For the old private

owners nationalisation meant a change in the form of ownership from private shares to interest-bearing government bonds, while some chose to receive payment in cash from the state to the full value of what was being purchased from them.

What this shows is that nationalisation does not dispossess private capitalists but simply changes their property titles. And what Buick and Crump go on to illustrate with many practical examples is that historically state intervention in industry (or "state purchase" as it used to be called) has taken place not for ideological reasons but to protect the interests of the private-owning class as a whole so that individual or groups of capitalists could not, by their monopoly of an essential good or service, hold the rest of the capitalist class to ransom.

The depth and sophistication of the authors' analysis makes their conclusions irresistible - nationalisation is essentially a buying and selling transaction involving haggling over a purchase price and represents no more than an institutional arrangement, a change of formal ownership which leaves intact the basic social relation of wage labour to capital. It is of no concern therefore to the majority of us in society, who receive in return for selling our energies to a state or private employer a wage or salary of smaller value than what we have produced. And like private capitalists or the managers of a private enterprise, the professional managers appointed by the state to run the nationalised industries are, as the authors put it. "the mere agents of market forces, interpreting, more or less successfully, the dictates of the market and exploiting, more or less successfully, the labour power purchased". But what about countries like Russia and China where there is blanket state ownership and no distinct privately-owning capitalist class? Here Buick and Crump show that the party bosses and bureaucrats who govern Russia also effectively own the wealth of that country, by virtue of their control over production and the productive machinery. The privileges they draw from ownership are expressed in the massively higher living standards they enjoy compared with the majority of Russians. Like the private capitalists in the West they derive their wealth from the surplus value produced by the wage

and salary earners. But instead of, as in the West, receiving this wealth directly in the form of profit due to them legally as a return on investment, they receive it in the form of enormously bloated "salaries", bonuses and payments in kind of various types - holiday villas, travel abroad, access to special shops and so on.

Socialist analysis

Not that Buick and Crump claim to have discovered anything new in this. In the detailed and wide-ranging account they give of the idea and history of state capitalism, they point out that since the 1920s the Socialist Standard has argued that Russia has a capitalist class and that the system there is not socialism or communism but a form of capitalism -state capitalism. They point out too that in recent years other observers and political currents have been driven to a similar view, usually without even knowing about the pioneering work of the Socialist Party. Unlike the Socialist Party, however, most of them have argued that if Russia is now a class society in which the party leaders and bureaucrats have become a new ruling class on the basis of the wages system, it was not always so. The Russian revolution of 1917, the arguments run, was a socialist revolution which overthrew capitalism for a while until it was restored at a later date by Stalin, Krushchev or whoever. But, as Buick and Crump remark, wherever the date of capitalism's "restoration" in Russia is fixed, all the elements which are cited as evidence of capitalism's existence subsequent to that date were also in existence previously.

The point here is that the difference between capitalism and socialism is seen as a difference between the politics of those controlling the state and not as a different form of social organisation. And what the authors show, in their chapter entitled "The Revolutionary Road to State Capitalism", is that a different form of social organisation on a socialist basis of production for use, voluntary cooperation and the abolition of the wages system never existed at any time in Russia. The Russian revolution from the very beginning was aimed not at abolishing capitalism and making the means of living into the common property of the whole

community but at a takeover of the state by a minority group whose purpose was to centralise capital in the state with a view to speeding up industrial development - and all this behind a smokescreen of socialist declarations.

How has this centralisation of capital in the hands of the state worked out in practice? The answer to this question is the area in which Buick and Crump are at their most original. What they do is to analyse in detail the mechanics of production in Russia and other such countries (but in particular Russia) to show precisely how and why production, even under almost total state control, takes place - and indeed must take place - with a view to making profit and not to satisfying people's needs. Not to concentrate on profit, they point out, would be to ignore the pressure arising from the international rivalry of competing capitals, the pressure to compete both militarily and commercially, and therefore to accumulate capital. And the penalty for such ignorance would be economic and political collapse. So Russian "planning" is not aimed at satisfying the needs of consumers but at extracting surplus value from Russian workers as effectively as possible - making them produce greater value by their labour than they receive in wages or salaries, just like workers in the West. Not that, under the profit imperative, "planning" and its production targets are a particularly precise, reliable or long-term instrument for economic organisation. They must of necessity be short-term, piecemeal and subject to constant revision - as indeed they have always been in Russia - as the nature and amount of the goods that can be sold on the market at a profit constantly changes.

Russian capitalism

Shades here of Western "market forces". And indeed perhaps the most penetrating insight of this book is that an effective market and the forces of competition that go with it do exist in Russia:

The "plan" does not abolish exchange relationships between enterprises but merely attempts to quantify the exchanges in advance.

In other words the state has to devise

mechanisms of a market kind and "the pressures which act on the state and its economic planners in the state capitalist countries are identical to the pressures which act on their private capitalist counterparts via the market". And these pressures, the need to make financial calculations in order to realise profit and accumulate capital indicate, over and above any differences of detail, the essential similarity of the economic systems of East and West. Nor does "planning" remove the element of competition from Russian production. Competition remains an essential and ever-present feature. There is competition between enterprises producing different goods where financially accountable enterprise managers are anxious to achieve their targets ahead of other enterprises. There is competition between enterprises which produce the same goods, with planning specifications, which are necessarily vague and approximate to allow individual managers latitude to adapt to rises and falls in spare capacity and consumer demand, have brought about a situation where a number of different enterprises may be producing, say, refrigerators at the same time in competition with one another. There is, above all, because of the pressure on managers to reach production targets, competition among enterprises for the skilled labour power available: Such is the intensity of competition for scarce grades of labour power that even the Russian authorities admit that almost one-third of labour recruitment by-passes official channels, while many Western scholars believe that, with certain exceptions, "the immense majority of workers and employees is recruited at the factory or office gates".

All this knocks sideways the arguments of those who say that what exists in Russia is not state capitalism but some form of socialism, or at least a fundamentally different economic system than in the West. The view of Trotsky, Trotskyist theoreticians like Ernest Mandel and Trotsky's followers in many of today's left-wing organisations, that Russia does not operate on capitalist principles but is a "deformed" or "degenerate" workers' state where production takes place at least partly for the benefit of workers is shown to be based on excessive attention to legal forms and official ideological pronouncements rather than on how the economy functions in

practice. Likewise, those who, identifying socialism with fullscale nationalisation, refuse to see Russia as capitalist because it has no privately-owning class are shown wrong through overestimating the importance and effectiveness of "planning" and seriously underestimating the role of prices, profit and money. Often of course such Western observers have an ideological point to prove but in this they are no different from the official ideologists of the Russian state who must also insist on qualitative differences of organisation and lifestyle between "socialist" Russia and the "capitalist" West.

But if Russia's state propaganda calls the society there socialist, what it claims to be moving towards as the ultimate realisation is "communism ". And what it is widely thought to mean by this is a classless, stateless society based on the principle "from each according to ability, to each according to need". But in their final chapter, "The Alternative to Capitalism", Buick and Crump examine closely the wording of official Russian pronouncements on future society and find that what is actually being advocated is not a classless society of free access at all but a society of "free distribution", one in which a minority will still rule and a majority will still work for the rulers receiving in return for their work payment in kind of the things the rulers consider they need. Such a society would still be a form of wages system and in any case not a society based on the self-determined satisfaction of needs.

Alternative society

The alternative the authors offer to replace all the different forms of wages system examined in the book is just that society of free access which Russian state ideology denies. It is a society without money and wages and without buying and selling. It cannot, they insist, be brought in gradually by some kind of transition process but only as a rupture, a clean break with the present system - if for no other reason than the total difference in the form that wealth takes in the two societies. In the one (socialism or production for use) it appears in its natural form for the purpose of satisfying human needs; in the other (capitalism or production for profit) it appears in the form of exchange

value for the purpose of being sold on the market at a profit. And the two are mutually exclusive. In socialism, as the writers put it: Goods would simply become useful things produced for human beings to take and use . . . people would obtain the food, clothes and other articles they needed for their personal consumption by going into a distribution centre and taking what they needed without having to hand over either money or consumption vouchers.

And they go on to suggest how it could be organised in practical terms. Such arrangements are possible today, they conclude, because our resources, technology, skills and knowledge are sufficient to allow us to produce a massive abundance of all the goods and services we need in order to live comfortably on a worldwide scale. But if this is to be achieved then we must organise ourselves democratically on the basis of voluntary cooperative work instead of forced wage labour and through production for use instead of profit - and all this in a society without states and frontiers, without rulers and ruled, without leaders and led.

Some might find these recommendations require too great a leap of the imagination, but they should not be deterred from reading this excellent book. It is a landmark in the study of modern society to which no short account can do justice - and it is thoroughly readable. It will find its way on to the bookshelf of socialists but it will also be read by, and change the thinking of, many non-socialists.

Howard Moss



Shortly after this photo was taken, Mao aided Nixon and the CIA to destabilize the Chilean Government of Salvador Allende

Marx and Lenin's views contrasted

Marx and his co-worker, Engels, consistently argued that socialism (or communism, they used the terms interchangeably) could only evolve out of the political and economic circumstances created by a fully developed capitalism. In other words, production would have to be expanded within capitalism to a point where the potential existed to allow for "each [to take] according to their needs". In turn, this objective condition would have created the basis for a socialist-conscious majority willing to contribute their physical and mental skills voluntarily in the production and distribution of society's needs.

With the extension of the suffrage, Marx claimed (in 1872) that the workers might now achieve power in the leading countries of capitalism by peaceful means. Given the fact that socialism will be based on the widest possible human co-operation, it need hardly be said that Marx consistently emphasised that its achievement had to be the work of a majority.

Again, given their understanding of the nature of socialist society, Marx and Engels saw socialism essentially in world terms: a global alternative to the system of global capitalism.

In the very first sentence of his monumental work, *Capital*, Marx wrote that "the wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails presents itself as a vast accumulation of commodities". He then went on to define the nature of a commodity in economic terms as an item of real or imagined wealth produced for sale on the market with a view to profit.

Marx claimed the wages system was the quintessential instrument of capitalist exploitation of the working class. He urged workers to remove from their banners the conservative slogan of "A fair day's pay for a fair day's work" and to inscribe instead "Abolition of the wages system!" Throughout his writings, he repeats in different form the admonition that "wage labour and capital are

two sides of the same coin".

Marx considered that nationalisation could be a means of accelerating the development of capitalism but did not support nationalisation as such. On the contrary, he argued that the more the state became involved in taking over areas of production, the more it became the national capitalist.

Marx saw the state as the "executive committee" of a ruling class. In a socialist society, he affirmed, the state, as the government of people, would give way to a simple, democratic "administration of things".

Marx's vision of a socialist society can be fairly summed up as a worldwide system of social organisation based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by, and in the interests of, the whole community.

In other words, a universal classless, wageless and moneyless society wherein human beings would voluntarily contribute in accordance with their mental and/or physical abilities to the production and distribution of the needs of their society and in which everyone would have free and equal access to their needs.

Lenin's distortions

Post-Czarist Russia was a backward poorly developed and largely feudal country where the industrial proletariat was a relatively small minority. To suggest that Russia could undergo a socialist revolution (as Lenin did in 1917) is a complete denial of the Marxist view of history. Indeed, following the news of the Bolshevik coup, the *Socialist Standard* (official organ of the Socialist Party of Great Britain) wrote:

"Is this huge mass of people, numbering about 160 million and spread over eight and a half million of square miles, ready for Socialism? Are the hunters of the north, the struggling peasant proprietors of the south, the agricultural wage slaves of the Central Provinces and the wage slaves of the towns convinced of the necessity for, and equipped with the knowledge requisite for the establishment of the social ownership of the

means of life? Unless a mental revolution such as the world has never seen before has taken place or an economic change immensely more rapidly than history has ever recorded, the answer is 'NO!'"(August 1918).

Lenin persistently rejected the view that the working class was capable of achieving socialism without leaders. He argued that trade union consciousness represented the peak of working class consciousness. Socialism, he affirmed, would be achieved by a band of revolutionaries at the head of a discontented but non-socialist-conscious working class. The Bolshevik "revolution" was a classic example of Leninist thinking; in fact it was a coup d'état carried out by professional revolutionaries and based on the populist slogan, "Peace, Land and Bread". Socialism was not on offer, nor could it have been.

It is true that Lenin and his Bolsheviks wrongly thought their Russian coup would spark off similar revolts in Western Europe and, especially, in Germany. Not only was this a monumental political error, but it was based on Lenin's erroneous perception of socialism and his belief that his distorted conceptions could be imposed on the working class of Western Europe which was, generally, better politically organised and more sophisticated than the people of Russia.

Probably for practical purposes ? since no other course was open to them ? Lenin and his Bolsheviks could not accept the Marxian view that commodity production was an identifying feature of capitalism. Following the Bolshevik seizure of power, the production of wealth in the form of commodities was the only option open to the misnamed Communist Party. Commodity production continued and was an accepted feature of life in "communist" Russia, just as it is today following the demise of state-capitalism in the Russian empire.

Back in 1905 Stalin, in a pamphlet (Socialism or Anarchism), argued the Marxian view that "future society would be . . . wageless . . . classless . . . moneyless", etc. In power the Bolsheviks proliferated the wages system making it an accepted feature of Russian life. Wage differentials, too, were frequently greater than those obtaining in western

society. Surplus value, from which the capitalist class derives its income in the form of profit, rent and interest became the basis of the bloated lifestyles of the bureaucracy. A contrasting feature of state-capitalism and "private" capitalism is that, in the latter, the beneficiaries of the exploitation of labour derive their wealth and privilege from the direct ownership of capital whereas, in the former, wealth and privilege were the benefits of political power.

There is a wide chasm between the views of Marx and those of Lenin in their understanding of the nature of socialism, of how it would be achieved and of the manner of its administration. Marx sees socialism as the abolition of ownership (implied in the term "common ownership"). His vision is a stateless, classless and moneyless society which, by its nature, could only come to fruition when a conscious majority wanted it and wherein the affairs of the human family would be democratically administered. A form of social organisation in which people would voluntarily contribute their skills and abilities in exchange for the freedom of living in a society that guarantees their needs and wherein the poverty, repression and violence of capitalism would have no place.

Lenin's simple definition of socialism is set out in his "The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It" (September 1917): "Socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the whole people". Lenin knew that he was introducing a new definition of socialism here which was not to be found in Marx but claimed that there were two stages after capitalism: socialism (his new definition) and communism (what Marxists had always understood by socialism: a stateless, classless, moneyless, wageless society). However, so new was this definition that other Bolshevik publications of the same period still argued that "socialism is the highest form of social organisation that mankind can achieve".

Marx would obviously have concurred with the latter claim but, as has been shown, would have rejected completely the suggestion that socialism had anything to do with nationalisation or that it could be established over the heads of the working class.

Obviously Lenin was being consistent with his "nationalisation" theory when, in "Left-Wing Childishness" (May 1918) he proclaimed the need for state capitalism. It is true, of course, that the situation in Russia left the Bolsheviks no alternative to the development of capitalism under the aegis of the state. The fact is, however, that the concept of state capitalism is wholly consistent with Lenin's misunderstanding of the nature of socialism. State capitalism achieved a permanent place in the Russian economy and Communist Party propaganda exported it as being consistent with the views of Marx.

The contrast between Marx and Lenin is demonstrated most strikingly in Lenin's view of the nature and role of the state. Whereas Marx saw the state as a feature of class society that would be used by a politically-conscious working class to bring about the transfer of power and then be abolished, Lenin saw the state as a permanent and vital part of what he perceived as socialism, relegating Marx's abolition of the state to the dim and distant future in communism while in the meantime the state had to be strengthened. The Russian state and its coercive arms became a huge, brutal dictatorship under Lenin, who set the scene for the entry of the dictator, Stalin.

That Lenin approved of dictatorship, even that of a single person, was spelt out clearly in a speech he made (On Economic Reconstruction) on the 31 March 1920:

"Now we are repeating what was approved by the Central EC two years ago . . . Namely, that the Soviet Socialist Democracy (sic!) is in no way inconsistent with the rule and dictatorship of one person; that the will of a class is at best realised by a Dictator who sometimes will accomplish more by himself and is frequently more needed" (Lenin: Collected Works, Vol. 17, p. 89. First Russian Edition).

This statement alone should be enough to convince any impartial student of Marxism that there was no meeting of minds between Marx and Lenin.

Russia, after the Bolshevik coup and the

establishment of state capitalism became a brutal, totalitarian dictatorship. The fact that its new ruling class exploited the working class through its political power instead of economic power meant that the workers were denied the protection of independent organisations such as trade unions or political organisations.

The western media, particularly oblivious to the implications of communism even as defined sometimes in their dictionaries, frequently drew attention to the poverty of the Russian workers. Conversely, and correctly, it also drew attention to the privileged and opulent lifestyles of the "communist" bosses. The same media, apparently without any sense of contradiction, was telling the public in the western world what the "Communist"-controlled media were telling workers in the Russian empire: that Russia represented the Marxian concept of a "classless" society.

The litmus test of the existence of "communism" for western journalists was recognition of the claim, by a state or a political party, that it was either "socialist" or "communist". Similar claims by such states and parties to be "democratic" was never given the slightest credibility. It might be argued that those who rejected the "democratic" claim knew a little about democracy whereas they appear to know nothing whatsoever about socialism.

The contradiction between the views of Marx and Lenin set out above relate to fundamental issues. Inevitably, however, they formed the basis for numerous other conflicts of opinion between Marxism and Leninism. In the light of these basic contradictions, it is absurd and dishonest to claim that there is any compatibility between Marx's concept of a free, democratic socialist society and the brutal state capitalism espoused by Lenin. Journalists, especially, should be in no doubt about the interests they serve when they promulgate the lie that Marxism or socialism exists anywhere in the world.

Quotes From the Socialist Standard on the USSR

1924

The Bolsheviks will probably remain in control for the simple reason that there is no one in Russia capable of taking their place. It will be a question largely as to whether they will be able to stand the strain, for the task is a heavy one, and they are by no means overcrowded with capable men. But this control will actually resolve itself into control for, and in the interests of, the Capitalists who are willing to take up the development of raw materials and industry in Russia. The New Economic Policy points the way.

(The Passing of Lenin, Socialist Standard, March 1924.)

1928

Trotsky presents a long list of remedies which serve only to confirm what we have always said as to the necessity for Russia to go through capitalism. Trotsky does not admit this in so many words. In fact, he vigorously denounces Stalin's 'capitalist tendencies'. But when we examine his programme we find that it is all based implicitly on the continuance of capitalism in Russia until such time as a developed capitalist industry and a Socialist revolution outside Russia make Socialism possible.

Most of his proposals might have been lifted out of the programme of any trade union in Germany or England: 'Equal pay for equal work', less overtime; more unemployment pay; no more Government faking of labour and industrial statistics; retail prices to be brought down to the world price level; no profiteering by capitalist middlemen; no increase in the rents of working class houses; every effort to be made to lower the cost of production in order to promote the growth of industry; more taxes on rich peasants; abolition of the State sale of Vodka, etc. A

long programme of reforms, but no mention of the abolition of capitalist farming, capitalist trading and capitalist investment. Both Trotsky and Stalin draw up their programmes within the framework of state and private capitalism which prevails in Russia.

(Trotsky States His Case, Socialist Standard, December 1928.)

1930

The facts given in this Year-Book sufficiently illustrate how illusory the communist dreams have been. Like many pious hopes embodied in the official documents and constitutions of the rest of the capitalist world these phrases have no relation whatever to the actual facts. Russian capitalism, although administered by the Communist Party, reproduces almost down to the last detail the paraphernalia of the capitalist world as we know it here. The lesson of this is the one we have tried to drive home for so many years, that it is not possible for a minority to impose Socialism upon a majority who are hostile or indifferent; nor is it possible to remedy backward economic development by means of fine-sounding but ineffective decrees, issued by dictators. Russia: Land of High Profits

(review of Soviet Union Year-Book 1930), Socialist Standard, September 1930.

1934

As Russia has not established Socialism and is not doing so in spite of the repeated statements of Communists, it has to carry on its work and build up its industries on lines similar to normal capitalist countries; it must therefore enter into normal trade relations with the rest of the world, and it does so.

(. . .)

When, in 1924, the Bolsheviks decided to throw overboard the 'world revolution' (except as a mere phrase to give lip-service to) and to concentrate on building up the internal resources of the country on the plea that they were building up Socialism in a single country (a complete reversal of their former views), the Communists of the world, who take their policy from Moscow, have simply been used to

help on this object. The foreign policy of Russia is aimed at living more or less amicably with the rest of the capitalist world, and they can only do this because they are building as the capitalists do.

Socialism is a system diametrically opposed to capitalism and impossible in a predominantly capitalist world. It is impossible in one country alone, owing to international economic interdependence. It is international not national. The extravagant claims held out of the success of Socialism in Russia have one by one been proved by time to be groundless and Russia is rapidly approaching the stage of taking its place as a first-class capitalist power.

(Changing Russia, Socialist Standard, September 1934.)

1937

Russia is not a Socialist country --its low industrial productivity and the non-Socialist outlook of the vast majority of its population do not bring such a thing within the realms of present possibility. It is based on various forms of State capitalism. Goods are produced, not for use only, but for sale at a profit. Industry is carried on largely on lines familiar to us in the Post office and other State-capitalist organisations outside Russia. The Russian Government borrows from investors (mostly Russian citizens) hundreds of millions of pounds for investment in industry, and pays them a high rate of interest on their investments; this payment to the investors being the first charge on industry. Inside the industries there are the same kind of gradations of pay as in capitalist industry generally from the mass of workers on or about the bare subsistence level at the bottom up through numerous grades to the very favoured few at the top who can enjoy the most pleasant and interesting work and live on a high standard of comfort and luxury.

(The New Russian Constitution, Socialist Standard, January 1937.)

1943

Certainly Russia has its privileged section of

the population and they will buy (because they can afford to do so) the bulk of the luxury articles which the average worker cannot afford. These privileged people are the party officials, technical experts, writers, doctors, lawyers, etc. Some of these people receive incomes a hundred times bigger than that of the average worker. With the legality of inheritance in force, accumulation of wealth is today bound to be taking place in Russia among the wealthy. They are the exploiters, and the Dean is wrong when he says (p. 282) 'exploitation of man by man is entirely abolished'. They can obtain their big incomes only out of the wealth produced by the workers.

(Is Russia Socialist? Review of The Socialist Sixth of the World by Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Canterbury, Socialist Standard, July 1943.)

1948

The reader of these reprinted articles will have seen that the attitude of the SPGB has been consistent from the start of the Bolshevik regime. We said then as we say now, that it is impossible for Socialism to be imposed from above even if the minority who hold power genuinely have that as their object. The articles are important also to help to combat the efforts of various political groups which seek to discredit the Socialist movement by holding up Russia as a proof of the impossibility of abolishing capitalism. It is not true that Marxian Socialists at first approved of the Bolshevik dictatorship and Bolshevik policy and only later discovered that Socialism would not be the outcome. As these articles prove, the SPGB foresaw from the first that the attempt must fail.

Nor is it correct that the failure in Russia has been the failure of the men in control -- though dictatorship inevitably corrupts those who wield it-- it has been the failure of the whole mistaken policy of the Bolsheviks. Had Lenin lived or Stalin died the result would not have been appreciably different.

(Postscript to Russia Since 1917 pamphlet, 1948.)

1963

The 1917 Revolution overthrew Tsarist Absolutism and allowed nascent capitalist industry to develop more freely and rapidly, but only at the expense of submitting the country to a more barbarous absolutism, the Stalinist regime. Now this absolutism has in its turn become a fetter on capitalist expansion and is being cast aside.

(. . .)

Russia now has the productive forces of a developed capitalist country yet still the political regime of a developing country..... Russia is rapidly approaching the stage of taking its place as a first-class capitalist power.

(Changing Russia , Socialist Standard, September 1963.)

1963

Russia is not a Socialist country --its low industrial productivity and the non-Socialist outlook of the vast majority of its population do not bring such a thing within the realms of present possibility. It is based on various forms of State capitalism. Goods are produced, not for use only, but for sang' circles. History, by destroying the illusion that Russia is Socialist, will once again have done our work for us.

(Changing Russia, Socialist Standard, August 1963.)

1967

The social system in Russia can be described as capitalist since the essential features of capitalism predominate: class monopoly of the means of production, commodity production, wage-labour and capital accumulation. (. . .) A class is made up of people who are in the same position with regard to the ownership and use of the means of wealth-production and distribution. One class has a monopoly over these means of production if the rest of society are allowed access to them only on terms imposed by the group in control. This monopoly does not have to be legally recognised though in fact,

as in Britain, this is generally so. Here the privileged minority, the capitalist class, have titles backed by law to the wealth they own. In Russia the ownership of the privileged minority is generally not given formal legal backing, but, as in Britain, they maintain their monopoly through control over the machinery of government. They occupy the top posts in the party, government, industry and the armed forces. Their ownership of the means of production is not individual but collective: they own as a class. Historically this is not a new development as is shown by the position of the Catholic church in feudal times. The privileged class in Russia draw their 'property income' in the form of bloated salaries, bonuses, large monetary 'prizes' awarded by the government, and other perks attaching to the top posts.

(Capitalism in Russia in Russia 1917-1967)

1988

If it is implemented --and it remains to be seen whether or not this reform will suffer the fate of previous ones-- perestroika will represent a fundamental change in the form of capitalism that has existed in Russia until now. It will represent a transition from centrally planned commodity- production and exchange to a more competitive system in which the competing units would be, as in the West, legally and economically autonomous enterprises. The economic laws of capitalism will come to operate in Russia through competition rather than through the State which (. . .) has proved to be an inadequate substitute.

(Where Is Russia Going, Socialist Standard, September 1988.)

1990

It is the longer-term implications of the decision to abandon the Leninist principle of one-party dictatorship that could prove to be the most significant though, as this could herald a change in the way the means of production are monopolised in Russia with the ruling class there changing itself from a class of collective owners into a class of individual owners as in the West...

The transformation of the Russian ruling class from a collectively-owning state bureaucracy into a class of private capitalists with private property rights vested in them as individuals certainly won't take the form of the present members of the nomenklatura abdicating and handing over their power and privileges to the small group of privately-owning capitalists who have always led a precarious existence on the margins of the Russian state- capitalist economy. Nor would it need to take the crude form of them simply dividing up the presently state-owned industries amongst themselves. It would be more likely to take the form of the Russian government gradually introducing more and more opportunities for private capitalist investment -- which only those who have already accumulated wealth would be able to take advantage of. Most of these will inevitably be individual members of the nomenklatura as the group which for years has enjoyed bloated salaries, cash prizes and opportunities to speculate on the black market (. . .). Gorbachev (. . .) realises that it is now no longer possible for the nomenklatura to rule in the old way and that some sort of flexibility is called for, if only to be able to push through perestroika without provoking a workers' revolt. He probably isn't consciously working towards ushering in a Russia where the nomenklatura has disappeared as such and has succeeded in converting itself into a class of Western-type privately-owning capitalists, but it is in this direction that his reforms can now be seen to be leading. (Russia and Private Property, Socialist Standard, April 1990.)



World Socialist Party U.S.

The Russian Revolution Where it fails

By far the most important event in the social sense, which has occurred during the world war has been the upheaval in Russia, culminating in the revolution of March and November, 1917. For the working class these events are of supreme interest and worthy of close and deep study, not only for the purpose of keeping in touch with events as they occur, but also for learning the lessons these may impart.

Just here, however, the working class of Great Britain are faced with a most formidable obstacle in the way of their gaining even a slight knowledge of the happenings, or reaching a position where a full consideration could be given to the facts of the revolution. This obstacle is the Defence of the Realm Act.

By operations of this Act the master class sift all news coming into the country, by either Press or post, and take care that only matters allowed to be published are those that suit the interests of this class in one form or another. Thus, quite apart from their ownership of the General Press, they are able to prevent groups or individuals in this country obtaining information that might be useful to the working class. In other words, the only information or statements anyone outside of government circles can obtain here is just what it suits the master class to allow them to have. In spite of this simple and glaring fact the I.L.P. have not hesitated in to denounce the action of November, usually called the "Bolshevik Revolution," while the S.L.P. has acclaimed it as a great Socialist revolution.

Point is added to these facts by the appearance of two pamphlets written not only by Russians, but by men claiming to be Bolsheviks. Here, if anywhere, one might imagine, will be found useful information,

The U.S.S.R. and Leninism: This Is Not Socialism

concrete facts, detailed accounts of events, that would be useful in guiding us to a sound judgement.

Unfortunately, nothing whatever is told in either pamphlet, apart from expressions of opinion, except the statements already given in the capitalist Press, which for the reasons above must be taken with the utmost caution.

The first pamphlet is entitled: "War or Revolution," is written by Leon Trotsky, and is published by the S.L.P. at Glasgow. No date of its writing is given, but from internal evidence it was seemingly written in 1915—before the fall of the Czar—and appears to have been originally published in America.

While claiming to be a Marxist Trotsky appears surprised at the actions of the so-called Socialist International in voting war credits and supporting the war. To any serious Marxian student this was only to be expected. The Socialist Party stands firm and solid on the line of the class war. Only here is he impregnable. Only on this basis can the workers organise successfully for the overthrow of capitalism. For years past the S.P.G.B. alone in this country, and the Marxist groups in other countries, have pointed out that sections from England, France, Germany, Italy, Austria, etc., that formed the majority of the International, either had abandoned, or had never taken up, a stand upon the class war, and were therefore really not Socialists in the proper sense of the word. Their actions when the war began and since have simply emphasised the truth of our former case. That it took this world-slaughter to enlighten Trotsky as to the real position of these sections shows how little he grasped their actual attitude before. He is equally mistaken in his judgement of events in England, for on p.16 he says: "In England the Russian Revolution [1905] hastened the growth of independent Socialism."

Quite apart from the fact that the 1905 upheaval in Russia was a capitalist and not a Socialist movement, this statement is absolutely incorrect. A movement that is not independent cannot be Socialist, and the Russian episode had no measurable effect upon either the Labour or the Socialist movement in this country. The real break with

the old compromising policy that had saturated the movement in England, took place in 1904—a year before the Russian outbreak—when the Marxists formed up in the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

Equally mistaken is Trotsky's statement on the same page that "six or seven years ago [that is six or seven years before 1915] in England, the Labour Party, after separating from the Liberal Party, entered into the closest association with it again." As every student of the history of the Labour Party knows, that party has never been out of the "closest association" with the Liberal Party since the day it formed. Just as incorrect is the phrase in the concluding section (p.27) where the author says: "Socialist reformism has actually turned into Socialist imperialism."

Reformism and Imperialism are capitalist, and can by no stretch of the imagination be called Socialist. Such misuse of the latter word, especially by one claiming to be a Socialist, is a direct assistance to the master class in their endeavours to further confuse the minds of the working class by misrepresentation of various kinds.

The second pamphlet was written by M. Litvinoff in March 1918, but it adds nothing to our knowledge of affairs in Russia, as it simply consists of a selection of the statements that have appeared in the capitalist Press of this country. In some instances these statements are exceedingly useful against agents of the master class like Kerensky, and we have used these admissions ourselves in the *Socialist Standard* when Kerensky was in power. Some of the other statements are significant in their bearing on the actions of the workers in Russia in a manner unsuspected of Litvinoff. One feature of extreme and peculiar importance in these movements is treated by both the above writers in exactly the same manner, i.e., with silence. This feature is the economic and social position of the working class in Russia. For a matter of such importance to be neglected by both writers, shows either a lack of knowledge of the Russian situation or a deliberate attempt to conceal such knowledge from their readers.

As two such Russians are either unable or

unwilling to supply this information the only thing left is to take that available before the war and try to apply it to the solution of the present situation. Clearly this can only be a provisional judgement while awaiting reliable news of the revolutions and of the present position of the workers in Russia.

Even to-day Russia is largely an agricultural country, some authorities stating that 80 per cent of the population are engaged in that calling. Their system, however, has certain peculiar features that would take a large volume to describe.

In the main the agricultural population is divided up in village groups or communities largely based on what is called the "Mir." Each peasant is allotted a certain amount of land, depending on the number of his family. The holdings are changed periodically so as to prevent any one individual retaining the best land. If the population increases beyond the limits of the land controlled by the "Mir," a group forms up and moves out to new lands in a manner so well described by Julius Faucher in his brilliant essay on "The Russian Agrarian System." As this group is related to the old "Mir," communication and intercourse are kept up and a division of a race may have a whole series of villages spread out over a certain area, and having a more or less loose connection with each other. The land, however, is not *owned* by the village group. In the ultimate it is owned by the Czar in his capacity as "Father of the People" though large numbers of estates have been granted to the Nobles for their military and other services rendered to the Crown.

This ownership, whatever particular form it may take, is admitted by all the "Mir" by the payment of a charge for the land, usually termed a tax. This tax is paid to the Noble where he holds an estate and to the Czar where the latter is personal owner.

Into the developments, complications, abuses and rogueries that have resulted from this system we have not the space to go. One illustration can be found in Carl Joubert's *Russia as it really is* and Stepaniak in his *Russian Peasantry*, has given a masterly description of its workings. It will be sufficient to point out that apart from minor

modifications three broad divisions have developed.

In the wild forest regions of the North, the people are still in the upper stage of Barbarism, being a mixture of hunters and pastoral workers, who know practically nothing of the affairs of the outer world.

In the middle regions the spread of the use of money and the effects that follow have resulted in more modern methods of working the estates. Owing to the heavy tax imposed large numbers of peasants have been unable to pay this charge after a poor season, with the inevitable result that they fall into the hands of money-lenders—who in numerous cases are actual members of the "Mir"—or they have to give up their holdings and either work for the money-lender or drift into the towns in search of work.

In the South or "Black Belt" region, largely owing to the fertility of the soil, old-fashioned methods still persist and the peasants make desperate struggles to retain their holdings, but were slowly losing their grip before the war.

The abolition of serfdom on private estates in 1861 and on the Czar's estates in 1871, was loudly announced as a great emancipation of the peasants. Under these decrees the peasants were supposed to be placed in a position where they could purchase their holdings, either individually or as a village group or Mir. The Nobles, of course, still retained the bulk of the estates granted to them, and it was intended that the big landlords would be balanced in the social system by the large number of small owners or peasant proprietors that would be sure to follow the great act of "emancipation". In the vast majority of cases, of course, the whole thing was a fraud and the landlords and moneylenders being the only ones, as a rule, able to purchase land, we have the paradox that the measure introduced to extend peasant proprietorship has resulted in the concentration of large estates in fewer hands than before. This has increased the number of landless peasants which recent estimates have placed at about one-third of the agricultural population, while even those who favour the system do not claim that more

than another third have become owners of the land, either individually or through their village groups.

The local affairs of the Mir are managed by the open general meetings, and these meetings elect the Elder or Mayor, who is the spokesman and delegate before the authorities. As stated above, the moneylender of the village is often a member of the Mir, and owing to his economic hold on the peasants he is often elected as the Elder.

It was, and is, people of this type that Kerensky represents. The Mir, of course, is under general Government control, usually through a "superintendent" or police officer.

In the Western area and the Southern Oil Belt industrial towns of the usual capitalist type, have developed in late years, and contain a number of genuine proletarians or wage slaves.

Is this huge mass of people, numbering about 160,000,000 and spread over eight and a half millions of square miles, ready for Socialism? Are the hunters of the North, the struggling peasant proprietors of the South, the agricultural wage slaves of the Central Provinces, and the industrial wage slaves of the towns convinced of the necessity, and equipped with the knowledge requisite, for the establishment of the social ownership of the means of life?

Unless a mental revolution such as the world has never seen before has taken place, or an economic change has occurred immensely more rapidly than history has recorded, the answer is "No!"

And it is extremely significant that neither Trotsky nor Litvinoff say a single word on this aspect of the situation. In fact, as far as one can judge, the best, but all too brief, account of the present position in certain parts of Russia is given by Mr. Price in his articles in the *Manchester Guardian* during November and December, 1917.

Leaving aside the subsidiary differences in the economic positions of the different provinces, the one great fact common to the mass of the peasantry is their desire to be rid

of the burden of the tax they have to pay for their land, whether to the local lord or to the Government, so that they may gain a livelihood from their holdings. This applies to both the individual and the group holders. Hence the peasants' movements are not for *social ownership*, but merely for the abolition of the tax burden and their right to take up new land as the population increases. In other words, they only wish to be free the old system of individual or group cultivation from governmental taxes and control.

The agricultural and industrial wage-workers would be in a similar position economically as the same class of workers in Western Europe, if allowance is made for the lesser capitalist development of Russia.

What justification is there, then, for terming the upheaval in Russia a Socialist Revolution? None whatever beyond the fact that the leaders in the November movement claim to be Marxian Socialists. M. Litvinoff practically admits this when he says (p.37):

"In seizing the reigns of power the Bolsheviks were obviously playing a game with high stake. Petrograd had shown itself entirely on their side. To what extent would the masses of the proletariat and the peasant army in the rest of the country support them?"

This is a clear confession that the Bolsheviks themselves did not know the views of the mass when they took control. At a subsequent congress of the soviets the Bolsheviks had 390 out of a total of 676.

It is worthy of note that none of the capitalist papers gave any description of the method of electing either the Soviets or the delegates to the Congress. And still more curious is it that though M. Litvinoff says these delegates "were elected on a most democratic basis", he does not give the slightest information about this election. This is more significant as he claims the Constituent Assembly "had not faithfully represented the real mind of the people".

From the various accounts and of the capitalist Press (and, as stated above, M. Litvinoff does not supply us with any other information) it seem the Bolsheviks form the

driving force, and perhaps even the majority, of the new Government, sometimes called the Soviet Government and sometimes the "Council of Peoples' Commissaries". The Soviet Government certainly appears to have been accepted, or at least acquiesced in, by the bulk of the Russian workers. The grounds for this acceptance are fairly clear. First the Soviet Government promised peace; secondly they promised a settlement of the land question; thirdly they announced a solution of the industrial workers grievances.

Unfortunately various and often contradictory accounts are given of the details of this programme, and Litvinoff's statements are in vague general terms that give no definite information on the matter. Until some reliable account of the Soviet Government's programme is available detailed judgement must remain suspended. That this mixed Government should have been tacitly accepted by the Russian workers is no cause for surprise. Quite the contrary. They (the Soviet Government) appear to have done all that was possible in the circumstances to carry their peace proposals.

And we are quite confident that if the mass of the people in any of the belligerent countries, with the possible exception of America, were able to express their views, free from consequences, on Peace or Continuance of War, an overwhelming majority would declare in favour of Peace. As is admitted by the various sections of the capitalist Press, the Soviet representatives at the Brest-Litovsk Conference stood firm on their original proposals to the last moment. That they had to accept hard terms in the end is no way any discredit to them, but it was a result of conditions quite beyond their control. If they had done no more than this, if they had been compelled to give up office on their return, the fact that they had negotiated a stoppage of the slaughter and maiming of millions of the working class would have been a monument to their honour, and constituted an undeniable claim to the highest approbation of the workers the world over.

Of course the capitalist Press at once denounced the signing of the Peace treaty as "dastardly treachery", and so on. We can quite easily understand that the agents of the

foulest and most hypocritical ruling class the world has ever seen, steeped to their eyes in their own cruel treacheries, should have been astounded at the Soviet Government keeping its pledge to the Russian people, instead of selling them out to the Allied Governments. Then follow the usual stereotyped "outrages" and "crimes" that the master class agents never fail to provide when an opponent dares to stand in their path. Unfortunately for these capitalist agents, their own correspondents are allowed to move freely over the country, and often "give the game away" by describing improvements both in ordinary administration and economic conditions under the new rule. And Mr. Litvinoff scores neatly here over the capitalist Press by comparing the alleged "outrages" with the actions of the master class against the workers after the fall of the Paris commune. A still more striking illustration is given by the Mr. Price from Russia itself, in his article in the *Manchester Guardian* for November 28th, 1917, where he describes the cold-blooded slaughter of 500,000 Khirgiz Tartars by the Czar's Government in 1916. And he caustically remarks: "While Western Europe has heard about Armenian massacres, the massacre of the Central Asian Moslems by the Tsar's agents has been studiously hidden."

Indeed, if the Soviet Government *were* to start on a campaign of deliberate slaughter, it would take them many busy years to even approach the huge number of victims of the last Czar's reign. But so far all the evidence points to the allegations of Bolshevik butchereries being but a tissue of lies fabricated to suit bourgeois purposes.

And what of the future? It is impossible to offer any close forecast in the face of our lack of knowledge. We do not know what the Soviet Government has promised the peasants. We are ignorant of what measures they are putting into operation to solve the complicated land question. Despite the existence of the Mir organisation it will be easier for the Russian government to arrange for the management of the factories and industries of the towns than to settle the various and widely divergent, detailed demands of the peasants of the different provinces. There is no ground whatever for supposing that they are ready or willing to accept *social* ownership of the land, along with

the other means of production. Are the Bolsheviks prepared to try to establish something other than this? If so does it not at once flatly contradict M. Litvinoff's claim that they are establishing Socialism?

And grim shadows are spreading from both sides. On one side the Germans are trying to exploit and plunder as much as possible why they have the chance; on the other side the Japanese, assisted by British and American forces are entering on an exactly similar expedition, with the same objects in view. Also it has been reported that the Allied forces landing on the Murman coast are either under the command of or are accompanied by a notorious Czarist officer, General Gourko, who is working hard for the restoration of the Romanoffs.

With the mass of the Russian people still lacking the knowledge necessary for the establishment of socialism, with both groups of belligerents sending armed forces into the country, with the possible combination of those groups for the purpose of restoring capitalist rule, even if not a monarchy, in Russia, matters look gloomy for the people there. If the capitalist class in the belligerent countries succeed in this plan, the Soviet Government and its supporters may expect as little mercy as—nay, less than—the Khirgiz Tartars received. It may be another Paris Commune on an immensely larger scale.

Every worker who understands his class position will hope that some way will be found out of the threatened evil. Should that hope be unrealised, should further victims be fated to fall to the greed and hatred of the capitalist class, it will remain on record that when members of the working class took control of affairs in Russia, they conducted themselves with vastly greater humanity, managed social and economic matters with greater ability and success and with largely reduced pain and suffering, than any section of the cunning, cowardly, ignorant capitalist class were able to do, with all the numerous advantages they possessed.

(August 1918)

The Super-Opportunists: A criticism of Bolshevist Policy

A Fatuous Policy

The Bolshevik leaders are opportunists. They start out with a definite programme and policy but change it completely when they find the world's workers do not support them. Lenin, Trotsky, Radek, and the other officials denounced Kautsky, Henderson, Longuet, and others for their reformist policy, but we now have Lenin and Zinoviev advising the Socialist workers of England to take parliamentary action and join the Labour Party.

The report of the Executive of the Communist Party of Russia to the 1920 congress of the Third International lays down the position that we should get inside the Parliamentary Labour parties. This advice is anti-Socialist, as anybody with a knowledge of the history and composition of the Labour parties know.

The Bolshevik leaders told us that the workers of the world were ripe for revolution and their support of Bolshevism was expected and depended upon. Now that it is plain that workers do not understand socialism and fight for it, Lenin is pandering to the ignorance of the world's workers. In defence he says that by supporting the pro-capitalist Labour Party and helping to establish a Labour Party government, the workers will learn the uselessness of the Labour parties.

The Logical Conclusion

If that policy is to be adopted, then it is necessary for the workers to follow every false road, to support every reactionary measure, and to join every movement and learn from their mistakes—in other words, exhaust every possible evil before they try the right road. If this policy is right why did not Lenin support Kerensky's policy of capitalism for Russia and

let the workers painfully learn its uselessness? Such nonsense as supporting parties and Governments to gain power to learn their misdeeds is not the road to Socialism, it is the path to apathy and despair, and lengthens capitalism's life.

The Opportunist Weathercocks

After spending much ink and eloquence in denouncing parliamentary action Lenin tells us in his interview in the *Manchester Guardian* that it is necessary in modern capitalist countries.

In his telegram to the British Socialist Party Lenin calls upon them to support parliamentary action by means of a Labour party. After all the attempts of Lenin to show that Marx and Engels believed in smashing the State power, Trotsky tells us in *A Paradise for the Workers* that we have to get control of the State power and use it instead of abolishing it. Radek, in his *Communism—From Science to Action*, denounced parliamentary action and majority rule, but in a recent letter to a German Communist he completely changes round and advises parliamentary action.

Lenin, in his letter to the German party, supports Parliamentary Action and the winning of the masses in defiance of all his previous advice and previous praise of the Spartacan minority action. The Amsterdam Bureau of the Third International was abolished because it told the English Socialists not to engage in Parliamentary Action or to support the Labour Party. All this demonstrates the absence of any principle and simply to veer with the changing winds.

We have been denounced for our attitude of insisting upon the need of Socialists making a revolutionary use of parliaments. Our position, however, was based upon Socialist principles and a recognition of the facts of history, not a desire to pander to popular prejudices such as support of a dangerous and fraudulent Labour party.

We have opposed Kautsky's reformism and opportunism because it is not Socialism and is against the principle of the Class Struggle. We are equally opposed to dangerous

teachings if they come from Lenin, Radek, or any other man who sets himself up as a teacher of socialism. Our position is that taken up by Marx and Engels and made plain by them in their writings. Engels says in his last (1890) preface to the *Communist Manifesto* that we must gain the minds of the masses. Bolshevism, however, has depended for its triumph upon the minority, who ignored the majority of workers. So true is this that Radek in his pamphlet ridicules anything else in minority action for Socialism.

Bertrand Russell, who accompanied the Labour delegation to Russia in June, records his interview with Lenin in the *Nation* (July 10th and 17th), and Lenin there admits the opposition of the peasantry. Lenin in reply to Kautsky (*The Dictatorship and the Betrayer Kautsky*) does not attempt to deny Kautsky's charge that the Menshevik and Social-Revolutionary delegates to the Soviets were suppressed in order to maintain Bolshevik majorities. Russell states the Soviets are moribund and that any other delegates than Bolshevik ones are denied railway passes and so cannot attend the Soviet meetings. He also says that the All Russian Soviet meets seldom, that the recall is exercised for minor offences, such as drunkenness, and that the delegates continually ignore their constituents. We do not accept Russell as an authority, but much of his report agrees with Bolshevik writings.

We have always contended that the Bolsheviks could only maintain power by resorting to capitalist devices. History has shown us to be correct. The January 1920 Congress of the Executive Communists in Russia abolished the power of workers control in factories and installed officials instructed by Moscow and given controlling influence. Their resolutions printed in most of the Labour papers and the *Manchester Guardian* here show how economic backwardness has produced industrial conscription with heavy penalties for unpunctuality, etc. The abolition of democracy in the army was decreed long ago, but now that the army is being converted into a labour army it means rule from the top with an iron hand.

Russia has agreed to repay foreign property-owners their losses and allied Governments

their “debts.” This means continued exploitation of Russian workers to pay foreign exploiters.

With all the enthusiasm of the Communists they find themselves faced with the actual conditions in Russia and the ignorance of the greater part of its population.

There is no easier road to Socialism than the education of the workers in Socialism and their organisation to establish it by democratic methods. Russia has to learn that.

(August 1920)

Lenin to Stalin

Although Stalin is dead there still lingers about him a larger than life aspect, This is hardly surprising when we consider his antithetical role of an angel of light and prince of darkness. While such a black and white study might serve as a popular form of entertainment it reveals nothing about Stalin as a man and politician. For our part we are prepared to remain on ground level and try to evaluate Stalin by examining the social and economic soil from which he grew and – if we may use the word – flourished.

One cannot, however, begin to understand Stalin without bringing in Lenin and the Bolsheviks who for many years formed a section of the Russian Social Democratic Party. Indeed that body of dogma, eclecticism, opportunism, and self-contradictory ideas which goes under the name of Stalinism is in essence a more explicit form of what was always implicit in the theories and tactics of Lenin and his Bolshevik Party. While Stalin in his self-appointed role of Philosopher-Statesman sought to extend and amplify Leninism – the alleged Marxism of the 20th century – he never attempted to infringe his master's copyright on the subject.

Stalin himself was an old Bolshevik and not

one of the least that Lenin led and inspired. He formed with Lenin a vital link in a chain of political ideas whose first phase culminated in the 1917 Russian Revolution. Certainly Stalin was more attuned to the intellectual and political atmosphere of the disciplined and conspiratorial Bolshevik Party than ever Trotsky was, a fact no doubt of crucial value in his struggle for power with the latter. Leninism as a political creed was itself born out of the leadership notions and essentially undemocratic ideas of the early Bolsheviks. Stalinism was its inevitable and tragic fulfillment.

Yet when the Bolshevik Lenin first appeared on the Russian political scene he accepted the views of people like Plekhanov – whose acknowledged pupil he was – Axelrod, Deutsch and others. Lenin's first important work, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, published 1899, put forward the view that Capitalism was developing in Russia and nothing could stop its continuance. This development he argued was historically progressive in relation to the then existing semi-feudal economy of Russia. While one could not oppose this development he said, nevertheless workers should organise to resist its evils and steps should be taken to prepare for its eventual supercession.

Lenin's book was part of an ideological campaign which the Russian Social Democratic Party were waging against the Narodniki (Populists) who maintained that Russia had a social development which was peculiar to itself and therefore did not have to pass through a normal and full capitalist development which other countries had experienced. In fact they averred that Capitalism was a kind of Western disease against which the people of Russia could and should be inoculated. Let us, they said, get rid of the tyranny of Czarism and we can, on the basis of our rural collectivism (the Mir), establish Socialism, i.e. free peasant communes and cooperatives of workers.

“Socialism in one Country” has then a much longer history than the Stalinist formulation of it. It is an ironical footnote on the earlier activities of Lenin and Stalin that the very theory they sought to combat was the one which in the end they made their own.

In fact it was Lenin who after the meagre achievements of "War Communism" re-introduced the idea of a homegrown Russian Socialism when he announced his "New Economic Policy." It was the "Marxist" Lenin who proclaimed the myth that State Capitalism although a step backward from the earlier Bolshevik aims had in it, nevertheless, socialist implications. It was Lenin who repeatedly put forward the view that a Soviet State could be both the means and guarantee for realising Socialism in one country, and the further myth shared by both Stalin and Trotsky that what was taking place in Russia then was different from anywhere else in the world.

Lenin's own views on Marxism had through the years undergone considerable change from his earlier standpoint. How much so could be seen in the attitude he adopted in the closing years of the 1914-18 war. Lenin had come to believe more and more that Capitalism was doomed. that it would be unable to finish the war it had started. Peace was to come by a victorious proletarian revolution in the advanced capitalist countries. For that reason the traditional difference between bourgeois and proletarian revolutions had for him lost significance. Given the right leadership in Russia a socialist revolution not a bourgeois one would be the order of the day. At the first All Russian Congress of Soviets, of which his party was only a small minority, he declared their willingness to take over immediately. In the August of that year he flatly asserted that "majority rule was a institutional illusion."

Lenin's predictions of what was going to happen to capitalism were falsified by the actual events. The capitalists did finish the war and no proletarian revolution took place. So Lenin's main justification for a socialist revolution went by the board.

It is true the Bolsheviks did come to power in Russia. But it was neither with the acclamation nor assent of the Russian people. It was in the quiet of the early hours of the morning of November 7th that Bolshevik military cars occupied the centres of business and communication in Petrograd. This sealed the fate of Kerensky Provisional Government and assured the Bolsheviks of political power.

Thus did the population of Petrograd discover when they woke a few hours later that their "Proletarian dictatorship" was an accomplished fact.

That the Bolsheviks concluded peace with Germany, dispossessed the private capitalist and against their own judgment gave the land to the peasants is a matter of history. They were successful because in war-weary, exhausted Russia they conceded to the inevitable. Behind the facade of their concession they planned however a new discipline and developed the latent forces for a new social order – new to Russia – but, in its exploitation based on wage labour. as old as capitalism itself.

Nor was the undemocratic seizure of power by the Bolsheviks merely the fortuitous result of filling the vacuum caused by the indecision and incompetence of Kerensky's Government. Such action by the Bolsheviks was in keeping with their political ideas which the circumstances arising from the collapse of Czarist Russia enabled them to exploit.

The Bolsheviks, mainly recruited from the Russian bourgeois intelligentsia, had long regarded themselves as the born leaders of the Russian people, an illusion they shared with the Fabians and other reformist parties. By identifying themselves with the aims and aspirations of the non-socialist mass and securing their confidence the Bolsheviks believed that, with such backing, they could ride to political power at an opportune moment.

Because they believed themselves to be the commanding officers of the politically less conscious majority it is easy to see why the spreading of socialist ideas was subordinated to the preoccupation of tactics, unity of command and the strict discipline of party organisation. Within such a party it was obvious that freedom of individual action and opinion were gravely limited. Ideas for them were not something to be accepted because of their integral and logical structure but as an ideal means for successfully waging political struggles. Theory for the Bolsheviks, as it became later for the various Communist Parties meant a creed a dogma to be inflexibly held against all comers.

That the Bolsheviks adopted Marxism not only saved them the trouble of formulating theories of their own but as a well-established doctrine, it provided an admirable ideological basis to which changes and shifts in policy could be ultimately referred and by which they could be justified. This is the true significance of Lenin's oft repeated phrase, echoed and re-echoed by Stalin, "Theory is a guide to practice." For the Bolsheviks these dogmas set the limit to and decided the nature of freedom of discussion. Whatever differences may exist between Roman Catholicism and "Communism" there is at least this much in common.

It is from the mental and political outlook of the Bolsheviks we can trace the evolution of that pernicious scholasticism by which Stalin and his party not only conducted their purges but sought to hide from the world and perhaps themselves what was really taking place in "Socialist Russia."

It would also account for the reason why men like Lenin and Stalin were at one and the same time, rigid doctrinaires and flexible, opportunistic politicians. Perhaps for dictators there is an emotional need for dogma. Many tyrants have justified their evil work on the assumption that it was ultimately for the good of mankind. Even Stalin explaining that Soviet Russia is not exempt from economic laws indulged in turgid Marxist phraseology and quotes from Engels who it appears plays a similar role in Soviet theology to that once played by Aristotle in the Catholic Church.

In such an organisation as the Bolsheviks it is not surprising that the dictum, the end justifies the means, was raised to a ruling principle. Long before the revolution they held that any means were permissible against political opponents; after the revolution it was but logical step to ensure that all means were justifiable.

The Bolsheviks themselves however became the victims of their own anti-democratic pressures. From "all power to the Soviets" it passed to "all power to the Communist Party." The checks and balances of ordinary democratic procedure were absent. The struggle of rival groups had to be carried on within the Communist Party. Intrigue and

plotting under ideological disguises became the effective means for realising political ambitions. Because of years of unbridled power the Communist Party was mentally and politically incapable of resolving the struggle by democratic means. Maintenance of power at any price became for them a matter of life and death. On a chequer board of political tactics the old Bolshevik "moved, mated and slayed" until the assumption of power rested in one man - Stalin; which compelled the fashioning of a mighty repressive machine to ensure his own preservation and that of the ruling faction which he represented.

While Stalin was prepared to make concessions to the Russian people and even grant a "New Constitution" he was incapable of granting them political freedom. Whatever may have been Stalin's claims for what he achieved in Russia he was never prepared to submit them to normal political competition. For Stalin that would have been the end of Stalinism.

It was Stalin who completed the work begun by Lenin, the turning of Marxism, a revolutionary doctrine into its opposite an authoritative ideology of State Capitalism on a par and at times competing with other state ideologies, i.e. Hitler's National Socialism and Mussolini's Corporate State.

The Bolsheviks in spite of their Marxist language and at times idealistic phrases were never socialists. They served instead as spokesmen of a new ruling class in Russia, a class itself the outcome of the very economic tendencies existing in Russia, the tendencies towards State Capitalism. In the furnace of the Russian Revolution the Bolsheviks were themselves forged into an instrument of class domination. In that sense was Joseph Djugashvili a man of steel.



Lenin and Stalin
spending some
quality time
together

1922

Solidarnosc and the crisis of Polish state capitalism

The crisis in Poland is not a crisis of socialism. They are not socialist military dictators who have formed a junta to coerce the Polish workers into what the Western press sickly calls "moderation". They are not socialist banks that are banging on the door of the Polish Politburo, demanding the repayment of financial loans. They are not socialist journalists who compose the propaganda which the Polish media pours out in order to blind workers to their real interests. They are not socialist bureaucrats who sit in luxurious offices in the Kremlin and applaud every measure by the Polish rulers to subdue and humiliate the workers whom they exploit. It is not socialism which has been tried and found wanting; the social system which has led to misery for millions of Polish workers is STATE CAPITALISM.

The crisis of Polish State Capitalism has its immediate origin in the investment boom of the early 1970's. In 1973 Poland had the third fastest national growth rate in the world. To pay for this investment it was necessary for the Polish government to borrow from the Western banks: in 1971, Poland's foreign debt stood at 700 million dollars. By 1975, when the boom was in full swing, the debt had reached 6,000 million dollars. The interest owed on the loans was so great that the Polish government had to borrow more from the Western banks in order to pay its previous debts: by 1980, Poland owed approximately 27,000 million dollars to Western capitalists. Because of the need to pay off these debts, industrial organisation contracted. With less consumer goods on the market, Poland's private farmers—who own 80% of all agricultural land—refused to sell their produce for money which could not buy them what they needed. The scarcity of agricultural produce—meat in particular—led to price rises. The Polish workers, having been pushed to breaking point in a productive drive to produce enough profits to pay off their masters' debts, regarded the increase in the cost of already scarce food as the final straw. All of these problems were direct consequences of World Capitalism: the farmers could produce enough food to feed everyone; the industrial workers could produce consumer goods and have plenty to eat; but under capitalism, financial debts come before food (profits before needs), and that is why the military has attempted

to crush the working-class organisation, Solidarity, while the wealth producers of Poland are suffering, many on the verge of malnutrition.

The distortion of the idea of socialism has been one of the greatest political crimes of our age. So-called socialists who were once praising Lenin from the distance of Western Europe are now claiming to support Solidarity, even though many of them have not repudiated their Leninist sympathies. Yet as early as January 1918, the Leninist attitude to Trade Unions was clearly expressed by Zinoviev: "trade union independence is a bourgeois idea . . . an anomaly in a workers' state". In November 1920 it was Trotsky who proposed the sacking of the elected leaders of the Russian railway union so as to "replace irresponsible agitators . . . by production-minded trade unionists". Even in the midst of the great strikes of August 1980, the New Communist Party's paper referred to Solidarity as "the Gdansk wreckers" and stated that "irresponsible individuals, anarchic and anti-socialist groups are attempting to exploit work stoppages . . . for their own ends". In the 1930's the Socialist Party had to expose the anti-socialist activities of their hero, Stalin. Today, in 1982 we are still as hostile as ever to the pseudo-socialists of the Left who advocate State Capitalism.

The only alternative to the system which oppresses the workers of Poland and all other lands is WORLD SOCIALISM: a society without frontiers, classes, property or rulers. Only democratic political action by the working class, without leaders or dogmas, will lead to the creation of a socialist society. By their principled and democratic actions, the workers in Solidarity have won the admiration of socialists, even though we strongly oppose their nationalist and religious illusions and even though we recognise the limitations of trade union action. Having defied their masters and combined together, the next step which the Polish workers must take is to organise a classconscious, democratic political party, to aim for the common ownership and democratic control of the means of wealth production and distribution. To this end, the Socialist Party of Great Britain offers support to our fellow workers in Poland.

(January 1982)

The class struggle in Poland— A socialist statement

The Socialist Party of Great Britain applauds with sympathy and admiration the courageous stand of the Polish strikers in their struggle to independently organise and negotiate over their wages and conditions. Their action bears out what we have constantly claimed and what no amount of repression, censorship, and pretence can indefinitely conceal. Poland is no “workers’ state on the road to socialism”, but a state capitalist, one party regime, where the working class inevitably comes into conflict with those who control the means of wealth production and distribution. The unity and determination of the Polish workers and the way they have handled their strike does them credit, and shows that their earlier clashes with the Polish leadership have taught them much. Their fight echoes the struggle of British workers in the nineteenth century to organise Trade Unions. They too could not be suppressed despite the Anti-Combination Laws and employers and governments since have been forced to acknowledge and negotiate with them.

The Polish strikers’ actions is being reported in the British Press and on television in a manner which is in marked contrast to the way the media reacts to strikes by British workers. We hear the same whining about “economic difficulties” and the “national interest” that the Polish government is now invoking. But workers have no national interest. All over the world we have a common class interest with each other.

In every country where capitalism develops it can easily be recognised by wage labour, buying and selling, and production for sale and profit. Those forced to sell their mental and physical energies for a wage or salary—the WORKING CLASS—will come into conflict with those who own and control the land, mines, factories, docks, means of transport, etc—the CAPITALIST CLASS—because their interests are opposed. This

happens whether ownership is bound up with individuals, companies or the State. State ownership provides a facade behind which the privileged class extracts its profit. In Poland, Russia, and similar countries that class is the ruling clique of the misnamed Communist Party.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain looks forward to the working class winning independent trade unions wherever they do not exist. Workers will find that trade unions can best defend their interests on the industrial front by insuring that their officials are subject to the control of the membership, that links with political and non-union organisations are avoided, and decisions made democratically. Over 60 years ago Rosa Luxemburg wrote contradicting Lenin to tell him that trade unions without democracy dominated by communist party leaders would become mere empty shells. Luxemburg was right, Lenin was wrong.

Necessary and inevitable though workers’ struggles are, their results are limited. Whether promises of economic reform are made with sincerity or cynicism, while capitalism exists workers will find that a system based on their exploitation can never be made to operate in their interest. The next step is for workers to organise a class conscious democratic political party which stands solely for the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution and rejects action for reform legislation. Such a party must work for the political objective of gaining control of the state machine as a result of majority consciousness for world socialism. No longer will minority ownership of the means of living stand in the way of the general welfare. No wages system between producers and the means of production and distribution. No market standing between people and products. Socialism will be a democratic co-operative system where production takes place for the benefit of the whole community.

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES UNITE WITH US
FOR WORLD SOCIALISM!

(1980)

Leftist Wonderland: Militant in Liverpool

For those of you who are confused about what's been going on at Liverpool City Council, here are the facts:

Militant is a newspaper. The people who sell it are members of the Labour Party, although they don't support it, and supporters of Militant (the tendency, not the newspaper) although they are not members of it. The Labour Party leaders are neither members nor supporters of Militant (the tendency), and neither do they sell Militant (the newspaper), although you can never be sure since Militant newspaper sellers are notoriously shy about coming out.

The Labour Party leaders want to expel Militant supporters from the party since they think that they are wrecking Neil Kinnock's chances of moving into Downing Street after the next general election. They claim that Militant (the tendency) is in breach of the Labour Party's constitution since they operate as a party within the Labour Party, with different aims and objectives. But Labour's leaders are worried that to expel Militant might upset other Labour supporters and also, presumably, damage Neil Kinnock's election chances. So instead of expelling supporters of Militant, they have suspended the whole of the Labour Party in Liverpool—home of the Tendency's most vociferous spokesperson, Derek Hatton, who they especially want to get rid of. (There are rumours that at least some supporters of Militant are no longer so keen on supporting Hatton, but maybe we shouldn't make this any more complicated than it already is.)

Militant in Liverpool are very upset that the Labour Party is treating them in this way and assert that they, unlike the Labour leadership, are the real guardians of Labour Party conference decisions since they are resisting "Tory cuts" and fighting to "save the jobs and services for the people of Liverpool",

and want to institute Clause Four of the Labour Party's constitution (the one stating that the Labour Party is committed to nationalisation). The Labour Party conference is supposed to be the main policy-making body of the party, but the leadership ignores conference decisions when they don't like them. So, just to recap, Militant, which doesn't agree with the Labour Party, is upholding its constitution and decisions made at conference, while the leadership, who do support the Labour Party, are ambivalent about nationalisation and Kinnock has said that he will ignore conference decisions if he doesn't agree with them. But it is Militant that looks set to be thrown out of the Labour Party for a breach of the constitution, while Kinnock is increasingly regarded as the party's saviour.

The Militant leaders of Liverpool City Council, as already mentioned, claim that they are fighting to preserve jobs and services. As part of their strategy to do this they sent out redundancy notices to 31,000 local authority workers and looked set to close down council-run facilities like day-care centres for the elderly and handicapped, children's homes, libraries, sports centres and swimming pools. Their concern for the workers of Liverpool was such that they asked them to work for nothing after they received their redundancy notices. The workers however could not understand how this was helping them (not surprising, Militant would say, since to them workers are too stupid to recognise their real interests and so need leaders like Militant to protect their interests for them). Teachers in Liverpool took the City Council to court and managed to get an injunction against the redundancy notices. But it wasn't just the teachers who were too stupid to understand that Militant were looking after their interests; just about every trade union with members working for the local authority have also shown signs of "stupidity" by expressing their hostility to the leadership.

Militant also claims to be working for racial harmony in Liverpool and to that end they appointed a community relations officer. That appointment has resulted in almost every community group representing black people in Liverpool refusing to have anything to do with either the council or the community relations officer and trade unions have advised their members not to co-operate with him. So much

for racial harmony and community relations.

Finally, Militant claims to be "socialist". Apart from the doubt cast on this idea by their membership of the anti-socialist Labour Party, their support for state-capitalism, their undemocratic organisation, their patronising attitude to their fellow workers, besides all that, this "socialist" tendency has just accepted 30 million from those well-known supporters of socialism, the Gnomes of Zurich, to bail them out. So, to sum up: Militant are members of the Labour Party although they don't agree with the Labour Party. Labour's leaders want them out because they are in breach of the party's constitution even though the leadership itself does not honour decisions made at the party's conference. Derek Hatton and his fellow Militants on Liverpool City Council claim to be acting on behalf, and in the interests, of the working class of Liverpool and demonstrate this by threatening workers with the sack or asking them to work for nothing. They claim to be "socialist" but are quite happy to take money from a bunch of capitalist financiers who are no doubt rubbing their hands with glee at the prospect of making a financial killing from all the interest they are going to receive on this loan.

Still confused? So you should be!

(January 1986)

"We must raise the question of piece-work and apply and test it in practice... we must make wages correspond to the total amount of goods turned out."

Lenin

Leninist State vs. World Socialism

What can one say about the Socialist Workers Party except that they do quite rightly respond with indignation to the iniquities of capitalism and they do understand that there is a class struggle going on - even if their idea of the working-class is hopelessly narrow, including mainly manual workers rather than an people dependent upon selling their labour power in order to survive. The SWP is a radical party, in the old sense of not liking society as it is and wanting something to be done. This "something" they call socialism but despite their claim to be a socialist party, their speakers are conspicuously silent on, and their literature notably empty of any definition of socialism.

The Socialist Party has a clear definition of socialism; it will be a society of common, not state or private, ownership of the means of wealth production and distribution; there will be democratic and not minority control of social affairs; production will be solely for use rather than for sale or profit; there will be free access by an people to an goods and services, without the fetters of the money economy. All of that is clear and anyone who cares to go back to 1904 will find all of our literature advocating the same principled and unequivocal socialist aim.

What sort of society is the SWP aiming for?

The so-called socialist aim of the SWP has always been obscure. They regard the Bolshevik coup d'état in Russia as an example of a successful socialist revolution, yet they argue that after ten years of its happening Russia had become a state capitalist country which should be opposed by socialists. They have told workers to elect Labour governments whenever elections have taken place but they argue that Labour governments are anti-socialist. They have tried the opportunist policy of supporting courses of action and then dissociating themselves from the inevitably unpopular consequences. But now, after years of refusing to tell anyone what socialism means

to them, the SWP has published a pamphlet, The Future Socialist Society in which all is explained. They would have done themselves a favour to have kept their confusion a secret. They have done us a favour, for now we can see quite clearly that the SWP does not stand for socialism, but for a Leninist state - which should be resisted by all workers.

The Socialist State

There will be no state in a socialist society. The state is the body which has existed for as long as property society has existed, in order to defend the propertied ruling class against the propertyless majority. Socialism will be a classless society, without exploiters and exploited, rulers and ruled, coercion and submission. Not so, according to the SWP: . . .the working class will have to create its own state. This state, like any other, will be a centralised organisation exercising ultimate authority in society and having at its disposal decisive armed force (p.8)

There is no point in having a state unless there are people to be bullied and coerced. According to the SWP, the new state will be bullying and coercing the capitalists - the exploiters who live by robbing the working class. But if the workers can dominate the capitalists with a state, why allow them to continue exploiting and robbing the workers? Why not immediately dispossess the parasite minority? Once the capitalists have been stripped of their power to exploit workers economically there will be no need to control them with a state: there will be a classless society without the need for a body of class rule. The SWP argue the absurd case that this all-powerful workers' state will "exercise ultimate authority in society" but for the authority over the most crucial aspect of society in which the capitalists will still be having power. In order to have authority over the exploiters on behalf of the exploited - it is like a proposal for the prisoners to be given control over the screws - there will need to be a new "socialist army": The old capitalist armed forces. , .will be replaced with organisations of armed workers - workers' militias, (p.8) Conscription will be re-introduced:

. . . service in the militia will be on a rota basis

so as to train and involve the maximum number of workers in the armed defence of their power . . . (p.9) We do not know whether the SWP would allow conscientious objectors to refuse military service under the new state or whether such dangerous subversives would be sent to "socialist prisons". The new militia will not only be an army but a police force also - a military police, in fact: The militia will also be in charge of everyday law and order . . . they will perform far more effectively than the capitalist police, (p.9)

No more getting away with breaking state-imposed laws under the new state: the crime detection rate of the "socialist police" is already guaranteed to be better than at present. There will be officers in the militia - no doubt they will have little red stripes on their uniforms to show us that they are "socialist" super-thugs, and "All officers in the militia will be elected . . ." (p.9).

So, there you have it: establish SWP-style socialism and you get to vote for the Chief Inspector at your local nick.

The new state will have a "socialist government" which will probably be run by "the party which has led the revolution"(p.9). But not everyone will be allowed to vote for the government:

There will not be complete universal suffrage because the nature of the system will exclude the old bourgeoisie and its main associates from the electoral process.(p,10)

So capitalists will not have the vote. If there are still capitalists in the SWP's "socialist society" they would not need to vote, for capitalists have economic power already and the only use which voting performs is to get hold of that power. If the capitalists are abolished as a class, then firstly there is no need for a state - because there will be no contest between classes - and secondly it would be stupidly anti-socialist to deny votes to ex-capitalists who are now equal members of a classless society. Worse still, the SWP proposes to deny votes to the "main associates" of the old capitalists. Does that mean that all previous supporters of capitalism will have no right to vote? Or will

the right to vote be denied to active anti-SWPers - including The Socialist Party, which would be working actively to democratically overthrow the new state? The Socialist Party need be in no doubt about our place in this horrific new state, for we are told that political parties will only be allowed to operate freely "providing they accept the basic framework of the revolution"(p.9). Quite simply, the new state will be undemocratic - and once there is a state of such power anyone can be placed in the role of one of the enemies of the state, denied the right to vote or to oppose the regime. All too often the first people to be persecuted by new states are the ones who helped to create them. Take the example of the SWP "promise" about the freedom of artists: There will be no repetition of the disastrous Stalinist policy of proscribing particular artistic forms or proclaiming that only one style of art . . . has validity. Apart from reserving the right to prohibit direct counter-revolutionary propaganda, the revolutionary government will promote the maximum freedom in this area. (pp.33/4)

Let us consider a practical case. Suppose there is a socialist film-maker under the new state who makes a good movie about the way in which life under a militia is not freedom but just another form of oppression. At the end of the film there is a scene in which a socialist makes a speech against the new regime, pointing out that wherever the state exists there is an absence of freedom. The new state bosses might conclude - quite rightly - that such a film could turn workers against the state, make them feel unfree, make them ungrateful to the government which had led them to supposed freedom, incite revolutionary activity which the state would regard as counter-revolutionary. The film would have to be banned, or parts of it censored. These are the inevitable requirements of running a coercive state. As the SWP tell us now, before we could be foolish enough to grant them such power.

. . . it has to be frankly stated that some repression, some use of direct force, will be necessary not only to overthrow the capitalist state but also after the revolution to maintain workers' power.(p.11)

As they say of their heroes, who established a

previous "socialist state": "The Bolsheviks had no choice but to introduce a highly authoritarian regime" (p.12). All of these absurd ideas about socialism are based upon three basic errors. Firstly, that "The class struggle does not come to an end with the victory of the revolution"(p.11). For the SWP, socialism is a class society in which one class rules over another. In fact, once workers gain control of the state our one simple task will be to abolish both classes and the state by means of the immediate dispossession of the capitalist minority. This will put an end to the class struggle forever. Secondly, that workers can take power in one country alone. The only action a socialist majority in one country can do is to use all its might to hasten the process of developing class consciousness of workers across the world. It is not possible to do that by setting up a so-called workers' state which would be forced to run capitalism in one country - state capitalism - and in doing so would set back the development of socialist ideas in other countries as workers looked on to see the failures of the "new socialist state". The SWP states that ". . . a workers' state cannot survive indefinitely in one country"(p.17). In fact, it would be fatal for workers ever to take responsibility for running a state in any country. The sole task of the workers against whom the state is used is to use the state for one purpose and then get rid of it.

Thirdly, the SWP accepts the ideas of Lenin about revolution as an act of leaders taking the majority who are led to a new social order: Such an authoritarian revolution could only be like all previous revolutions in history, ending in the domination of the leaders, forming a new state over the led. So it was that the Bolsheviks promised to set up a dictatorship of the proletariat but in fact constructed a dictatorship over the proletariat. The SWP aim to do the same thing, with their own pathetic band of leaders in the 1980s role of the Lenins, Trotskys and probably plenty of Stalins. This is not a socialist vision, but a nightmare of Leninist state dictatorship which workers should not be tempted by but should resist.

The New Economy

Most of the SWP's pamphlet is devoted to

describing the role of the new state. Conspicuously little is said about the economic arrangements under "the workers' state". It is admitted that "Socialism cannot be built in one country"(p.17). But the new state will exist in one country. So we must assume that it will be running capitalism - state capitalism. There is plenty of evidence in the pamphlet to suggest that this is what the SWP has in mind. We are told that "The formal mechanism through which economic power will be established is a familiar one, namely nationalisation"(p.14). Indeed, it is all too familiar:

nationalisation can be simply translated as state-run capitalism. Not all of the means of wealth production will be nationalised: ". . . the working class will immediately . . . take into its hands all the major means of production in society" (p.14). Only the major ones, included among which will be . . . nationalisation of the banks and the imposition of strict exchange controls backed by other revolutionary measures to prevent the inevitable attempt at a flight of capital abroad.(p.14)

So, there will still be banks and capital under the SWP's "socialism". But some capitalists will be spared from being taken over by the new state capitalist: "Small businesses employing only one or two workers can mostly be left to later" (p.14).

Take note of that if you are currently working in a shop or sweatshop. Workers will continue to be in the working class, selling their labour power. Therefore they will need trade unions and the trade unions will also retain the right to strike, since even under a workers' state sections of the working class may need to defend their interests against abuse and should keep this ultimate weapon. (p.13) Incidentally, after the so-called workers' state was formed in Russia Trotsky told the workers that their trade unions could only be used to make the state-run industries more profitable and we have no guarantees that the new state rulers would not do the same if they had power.

If you are a "technical expert" who does not support the new state the SWP has some bad news for you:

. . . they will simply work for and under the direction of the factory or industrial council just as today they work for the bosses. . . If absolutely necessary they will have to perform with workers' guns at their heads . . . (pp.15/6)

We are referring here to scientists, auditors, architects, surgeons - all of whom are now workers - people forced to sell their labour power in order to live. They are being told that life for them will be "Just as today", working for bosses and possibly having to do so with guns pointed at their heads. Workers will still be wage slaves, dependent on wages or salaries: .

. . . the supply of goods will remain limited and workers will still work for money wages which in turn they will use to purchase these goods. (p.21) So the workers under the new state will still have to buy the goods and services which they produce. From whom will they buy them? From the state which, like any other capitalist, produces nothing and sells what the workers produce to the workers.

A socialist society, based on the common ownership of all resources by all the people, would have no resemblance to what the SWP describes. There will be no classes, no banks or exchange controls or capital, and no money - for what use could money have in a society where everything belongs to everyone? The SWP simply do not understand this conception of a moneyless society of common ownership. Instead they offer confusing notions, such as that In order to move, people will either transfer to vacant accommodation or exchange houses instead of buying and selling them. (p.22)

The SWP is proposing the establishment of a system of barter to replace the buying and selling system. But it gets worse. Rather than the abolition of wages and money, which Marx pointed out is essential to socialism, they propose the gradual abolition of wages and money:

Buying and selling will fade away. Money . . . will steadily lose its usefulness to the point where it can be dispensed with altogether. (p.22)

Now, either society is based on property in

which there is buying and selling and a need for money or on propertyless common ownership. The two conditions are mutually exclusive: you can no more have a bit of both than you can be a bit pregnant. The SWP pamphlet writers know, because of their reading of Marx and their knowledge of The Socialist Party, that it would be a major mistake for them to try to describe a socialist society without mentioning the abolition of money and buying and selling. But they are petrified by the thought that this would make them appear utopian. After all, they are always telling The Socialist Party that although they know we are right in stating that socialism will be a moneyless, wageless, classless society it is folly to tell the workers that because they will reject socialism. That is Leninist arrogance: only some people - the leaders who monopolise theory - can be told the truth: for the workers it is better to offer palatable nonsense. That is why the SWP, in a confused and embarrassed manner, have inserted a few words alluding to the abolition of money, buying and selling - but only the gradual abolition, with money fading away - presumably one tenpenny piece at a time.

The SWP's picture of socialism would be a joke if the future of humanity was something to laugh about. In fact, given the supreme urgency of the need for socialist transformation of society, the nonsense being sold as socialism by the SWP is an insult to the intelligence of those who read it and a sinister picture of a Leninist state under which no worker should want to live.



Socialism has not failed

"Crumbling Communism", "Failure of Socialism", "End of Marxism" these are the terms to which the media have echoed as the events in Eastern Europe have unfolded. Something certainly has crumbled in Eastern Europe but it has not been socialism, communism or Marxism. For this to have happened these would have had to have existed in the first place, but they did not. What did exist there—and what has crumbled—is Leninism and totalitarian state capitalism.

The Russian Empire

After the last war Russia extended its frontiers westwards by annexing parts of all its pre-war neighbours. At the same time it established a huge sphere of influence in Eastern Europe stretching from the borders of Sweden in the North to those of Greece in the South and embracing Finland, Poland, the eastern part of Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, Yugoslavia, Albania and Bulgaria.

In all these countries except Finland, identical regimes were installed to the one which had evolved in Russia after the Bolshevik coup of November 1917: a bureaucratic state capitalism where a privileged class, consisting of those occupying the top posts in the Party, the government, the armed forces and industry and known as the *nomenklatura*, ruled on the basis of dictatorially controlling the state machine where most industry was state-owned, a situation which gave them an effective class monopoly over the means of production.

Finland was the exception in that, after directly annexing a large chunk of what had previously been Finnish territory, the Russian ruling class refrained from installing bureaucratic state capitalism in what was left. Instead, in return for Finland giving up the possibility of pursuing a foreign policy that conflicted with Russian interests, a parliamentary regime and a private enterprise economy similar to that in Western Europe

was allowed to develop.

Finlandisation

The satellite regimes installed by the Russian army after 1948 were maintained in power essentially by the threat—and in East Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 by the reality—of Russian intervention. At no time did the ruling class in these countries enjoy any degree of popular support; in fact what has been happening there could have occurred at any time since 1948 but for this threat. The reason it has happened in 1989 and not before is that, faced with internal economic and political difficulties, the Russian ruling class under Gorbachev has had to dramatically revise its policy towards its empire in Eastern Europe, and decide that it will no longer use its troops to prop up the puppet regimes there. Instead, it has informed the ruling class in these countries that they are now on their own and that they had better make the best deal they can with their subjects.

This is not to say that Russia is prepared to let these countries escape from its sphere of influence, but only that it is now prepared to allow the “Finnish solution” to be applied to them too; in other words, considerable internal autonomy going so far as a parliamentary regime and private enterprise capitalism in return for giving up the right to pursue an independent foreign policy by accepting Russian hegemony over the area.

Welcome advance

This is a startling development whose speed shows just how fast things can change and how the change to socialism could become a prospect sooner than many think. Who would have believed a year ago that by 1990 Poland, Hungary, East Germany and Czechoslovakia would have a limited, but real, degree of political democracy and would abandon state capitalism for private capitalism (or, rather, for the same sort of mixed private and state capitalism that exists in the West)?

We welcome the fall in these countries of the dictatorial regimes which have dragged the names of socialism and Marx through the

mud by wrongly associating them with one-party rule, a police state regime, food shortages and regimentation and indoctrination from the cradle to the grave. The coming of a degree of political democracy there is an advance as it extends the area in which socialist ideas can be spread by open means of meetings, publications and contesting elections and in which the working class can organise independently of the state to pursue its class interests.

Collapse of state capitalism

The fall of the bureaucratic state capitalist regimes in Eastern Europe and the demise of the ruling *nomenklaturas* there has relevance for another aspect of the socialist case. The events in East Germany and Czechoslovakia in particular confirm our longheld view that it is impossible for a tiny minority to hang on to power in the face of a hostile, informed and determined majority. Here hard-line regimes, once it became clear that they could no longer rely on the intervention of the Russian army, collapsed in the face of mass popular pressure—fuelled by a determination, born of years of oppression, to kick out those responsible. In theory the East German and Czechoslovak ruling classes, who had shown themselves to be ruthless enough in the past, could have chosen to use physical force to try to maintain themselves in power—there is some evidence that a section in East Germany did consider sending in the troops to should down protestors—but in practical terms this was never really likely. The rulers knew, through the reports of their secret police if not the evidence of their own eyes and ears, that up to 90 percent of the population was against them and that if they had ordered their armed forces to shoot all hell would have broken loose; the situation would have escaped from their control with a good chance of it all ending with them hanging from a lamp-post. So they decided to choose the lesser evil, as we can expect the capitalist class to do when faced with a determined, organised socialist majority, and negotiate a peaceful surrender of their power and privileges.

Private capitalism no progress

The ruling *nomenklaturas* in Eastern

Europe are on the way out. In agreeing to give up “the leading role of the Party” and submit themselves to elections which they are bound to lose, as well as to the privatisation of large sectors of industry, they are giving up the means through which they exercised their monopoly control over the means of production. They are becoming mere politicians in charge of a capitalist state without the privileged control over production and the privileged consumption they previously enjoyed as members of a collectively-owning state-capitalist ruling class. Some of them may survive as politicians—given the tacit deal about doing nothing to harm Russian foreign policy interests there will still be a place for some pro-Russian politicians; others may be able to use the private fortunes they have accumulated to convert themselves into private capitalists, the group who are hoping to take over as the dominant section of the privileged owning class in these countries. But a change-over to private capitalism would be no advance. There would still be a minority in society enjoying big houses, privileged lifestyles and Swiss bank accounts, only these would be private capitalists instead of state bureaucrats. We therefore urge workers in Eastern Europe, if they are to avoid a mere change of exploiters, to go on and oppose the emerging private capitalist class with the same admirable determination with which they have opposed and defeated the old statecapitalist ruling class.

Socialism can only be democratic

As Socialists who have always held, like Marx, that socialism and democracy are inseparable and who denounced Lenin’s distortion of Marxism right from 1917, we vehemently deny that it is socialism that has failed in Eastern Europe. What has failed there is totalitarian state capitalism falsely masquerading as socialism. Socialism, as a worldwide society based on common ownership and democratic control of productive resources and the abolition of the wages system and the market with goods and services being produced and distributed to meet needs, has yet to be tried and more than ever remains the only way forward for humanity.

(January 1990)

World Socialist Party U.S.

The U.S.S.R. and Leninism: This Is Not Socialism

Trotsky and Stalin: rival leaders

Despite presenting themselves as mortal enemies, the camp followers of Leon Trotsky and Josef Stalin were competing government management teams operating under the same basic philosophy – that the workers could not, as a whole, come to socialist consciousness and bring socialism about for themselves.

Trotsky himself can be seen as being one of the main causes of Stalin's ascendancy. As Trotsky's hagiographer Isaac Deutscher points out in his *The Prophet Armed*, Stalin began his dominance of the Soviet government as part of “a special faction the sole purpose of which was to prevent Trotsky having a majority which would enable him to take Lenin's place.”

This faction was aided by the fear that Trotsky as commander of the Red Army (with a predilection for being seen in public in dashing military uniforms) could assume the role of a military dictator. Such fears would have been stoked by his support, in 1921, for the militarisation of labour (in effect placing the workers under his personal direct command).

Leadership worship

Trotsky was comprehensively out-manoeuvred by Stalin, and eventually driven out of Russia, whereupon he tried to position himself as head of the loyal opposition to the Bolshevik regime. His writings from 1929 onwards are full of criticisms of the leadership of the Comintern and their policies, especially regarding his own faction. Typically, he wrote: “Under the treacherous blows of the Stalinist bureaucracy, the Left Opposition [i.e. him and his followers] maintained its fidelity to the official party to the very end” (Trotsky, ‘The Tragedy of the German Proletariat: The German Workers will Rise Again – Stalinism, Never’, March 1933). The debates between Trotskyists and Stalinists always revolved around such questions of leadership – if only the leaders had acted in such-and-such a way, things would have turned out better.

Tactics, said Trotsky, should have been framed so as to win workers over from their Social Democratic leaders, under the command of the Communist Party: "We must understand how to tear the workers away from their leaders". According to Trotsky, the official Communist leaders would not follow his policies because they were constituted of "not a few cowardly careerists and fakers whose little posts, whose incomes, and more than that, whose hides, are dear to them" (Trotsky, 'For a Workers United Front Against Fascism', December 1931) .

Two years later the Stalinist leadership did adopt Trotsky's tactics – specifically of the "United Front" of labour organisations against fascism – but only by surrendering leadership of the movement to the leaders of Social Democracy. The issue remained one of leadership, backed up by a notion that the workers were incapable of developing broad socialist consciousness in anything like a majority, and so that the "Communists" would have to work with reformists in order to influence them, and draw off the active workers into their own ranks.

"Could the Communist Party succeed, during the preparatory epoch, in pushing all other parties out of the ranks of the workers by uniting under its banner the overwhelming majority of workers, then there would be no need whatever for soviets. But historical experience bears witness to the fact that there is no basis whatever for the expectation that...the Communist Party can succeed in occupying such an undisputed and absolutely commanding position in the workers' ranks, prior to the proletarian overturn" (Trotsky cited by John Rees in 'The broad party, the revolutionary party and the united front', International Socialist Journal, Winter 2002).

It is, John Rees claims in the article this quotation comes from, the "uneven consciousness" among workers that necessitates the need for leaders, and for an organisation that can bring it together with non-socialist workers in the name of immediate given ends, be those organisations trade unions, or – as above – workers' councils. Thus, the Soviets beloved of Leninists, and trade unions too, become locations for 'united front' work. This

admirably demonstrates that Julius Martov's accusation in his State and Socialist Revolution that Bolsheviks supported soviets in order to help seize power as a minority was acknowledged by the very leaders of the Russian coup d'état.

Reformists

For almost all of their existence, both Trotskyist and Stalinist organizations – thoroughly convinced that the workers could not come to understand and want socialism – have orientated themselves towards working with official reformist organisations. Instead of standing clearly and forthrightly for socialism, they ape the manoeuvres and sounds of official Labourism, seeking to influence non-socialist workers through tactical manipulation, rather than convince them to change their minds.

While Rees argues that "united front" work provides an opportunity for "revolutionaries" to discuss and convert reformists, he also states that "the immediate aim of the united front is to provide the most effective fighting organisation for both reformists and revolutionaries". That is, whatever front is going to be built must always give precedence to the struggle at hand, and its immediate success. This position stands in some contrast to the official Trotskyist doctrine of "transitional demands" – i.e. advocating reforms known not to work, in order to draw workers into "Communist" ranks through their inevitable disappointment.

Thus, we have the present example of the Stop the War coalition whereby Trotskyists are working with pacifists, CND and Submissionists ("submission": the English translation of "islam") to try and achieve their immediate aims. John Rees himself appears in the media as a "co-ordinator" for the coalition, his membership of the SWP never mentioned (at all other times he is generally introduced as the "editor of the International Socialist Journal"). Quite how he is supposed to bring people round to revolutionary politics by hiding his affiliation remains a mystery.

The reality is that these fronts can only attain any sort of success by hiding the

disagreements between their constituent organisations, specifically about means and motives. That is, they succeed by making demands that are supported by significant numbers of workers, meaning that any "revolutionary" content will be buried into the need for immediate victory. As such, it is small-c conservative, taking political consciousness as it is found, and seeking to manipulate it, rather than change it.

Such a tactic, however, affords the Leninists an opportunity to extend their influence. As a tiny minority, they get to work with organisations which can more easily attract members, and can thus be part of campaigns and struggles that reach out well beyond the tiny numbers of political activists in any given situation.

For example, in the 50s and 60s, many trade union bureaucrats were members of the stalinist Communist Party (just as today, a good number are former Trotskyists). Likewise, the SWP provide much of the material and personnel for organising the Stop the War Coalition. The salient fact remains, though, that despite providing all this assistance, the "revolutionaries" are incapable of taking these campaigns and trade unions further than the bulk of the membership are willing to tolerate.

Socialists have long argued that tiny minorities cannot, without force on their side, simply take control of movements and use them to their own ends. Without agreement between the parties to a project about what it is and where it is going, leaders and led will invariably walk off in different directions. That means, if the Leninists are right, and the majority of workers cannot achieve socialist consciousness, then they must be committed to using force against the recalcitrant majority in order to achieve their aims.

Nonetheless, the Leninists continue to attach themselves to larger movements in the hope of providing alternative leaderships and of being at the heart of the struggle. Hence, this is why Rees continues to argue that the official Labour Party remains "organically" linked to the working class through its individual members and the link to the unions. Only at the Labour Party conference

could a revolt over PFI occur, he claims, because of the link between the unions and Labour.

We argue, however, that since we are capable, as workers, of understanding and wanting socialism, and of going beyond mere 'trade union consciousness' as Lenin called it, we cannot see any reason why our fellow workers cannot do likewise. Further, since the majority are capable of actively building socialism, there is no need for a leadership to impose it upon them – and that the job of socialists in the here and now is to openly and honestly state the case, rather than trying to wheedle and manoeuvre within bigger parties to win a supposed "influence" that is more illusory than real.



Churchill, Truman, Stalin
Capitalism United